The Defiled Imago Dei and Forgiveness: The Tensions Between Ethnicity and Humanity in the Image of God in the Context of the Ethiopian Churches

Wondimu Legesse Sonessa
Luther Seminary

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THE DEFILED IMAGO DEI AND FORGIVENESS
THE TENSIONS BETWEEN ETHNICITY AND HUMANITY IN THE IMAGE OF GOD IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ETHIOPIAN CHURCHES

by

WONDIMU LEGESSE SONESSA

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Luther Seminary In Partial Fulfillment of The Requirements for the Degree of MASTER OF THEOLOGY

THESIS ADVISER: GARY M. SIMPSON

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA 2015

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AACA</td>
<td>Addis Ababa City Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td><em>anno Domini</em>&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCE</td>
<td>before the Common, Christian, or Current Era.&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLCAA</td>
<td>Council of Lutheran Congregations in Addis Ababa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMCR</td>
<td>Committee for Mutual Christian Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DASSC</td>
<td>Development and Social Service Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deut</td>
<td>Deuteronomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr.</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECFE</td>
<td>Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EECMY</td>
<td>Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EOC</td>
<td>Ethiopian Orthodox Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPRDF</td>
<td>Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex</td>
<td>Exodus</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gen</td>
<td>Genesis</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNP</td>
<td>Gross National Product</td>
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<td>Is</td>
<td>Isaiah</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISIS/ISIL</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant</td>
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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Some view this terminology as being neutral and inclusive of non-Christian people.
LWF  Lutheran World Federation
Mat  Matthew
MTh  Masters of Theology
NRSV  New Revised Standard Version
Rev.  Reverend
RVOG  Radio Voice of the Gospel
USA  United States of America
WCC  World Council of Churches
WPE  Workers Party of Ethiopia
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Research Interest

The war that Africans must wage in the postcolonial era is a war against ethnocentrism. . . . The fact that colonialism has retreated into the background does not mean that its philosophical foundations have suddenly ceased to exist.¹

It has been almost 30 years since the groundbreaking work of assessing the church and state relations in Ethiopia was done by Øyvind M. Eide, who focused on the situation in Ethiopia from 1974-1985.² His work establishes what needs to be done within the current context to address the challenges of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ethiopia in which adherents of Christianity, Islam, and African Religions coexist in respect and peace. The growing external influences from fanatical Islamists and those with personal political agendas are using the new government policy regarding ethnic identity and religious affiliations as a divisive instrument. More than two decades have passed since the dictatorial military government of Ethiopia was displaced by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The denial of the religious freedom of the citizens was the core ideological self-expression of the government following the line of scientific socialism, which caused the severe persecution of the Christian church, particularly among Protestants. In those days, all protestant Christians


(including the Eritreans, who became a separate country in 1991) joined hands in prayer to resist the atheist government and see the war at the border end in peace. Once that prayer was answered, the church not only achieved the religious freedom it longed for, but it also faced the challenges of ethnic tension arising in political circles as a result of the nations’ increasing interest to revitalize their ethnic identities. This external influence has eroded the spirit of trust to the extent that believers of different ethnic origins, though they belong to the same church and communion together, started to see each other with suspicious eyes. Instead of considering each other as “brothers and sisters” who address one another in Pauline terms (“We are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building”), they tend to define those outside their respective ethnic circles as a potential threat. This situation is gradually pushing people to see each other through the lens of the imperial era, particularly the period of 1889-1974, which does not help to heal past wounds. This makes the investigation of key themes in theological anthropology that provide the footing for doing work similar to Eide’s significant.

It is important to consider forgiveness and reconciliation as better options for maintaining peaceful coexistence of the nations rather than pretending as if the evil practices that happen among nations from time to time under different rulers are holy and just actions. Therefore, this study is based on the following research question: How can theological anthropology (particularly the doctrine of the imago Dei and the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation) help the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus today to address the major challenges in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ethiopia? As a

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3 1 Corinthians 3:1. Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical citations are from the NRSV.

4 1 Corinthians 3:9.
member of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), which is the fastest-growing Lutheran church in the world, I feel the importance of engaging with this study so that I may add to the effort of the church to address the religious, political and ethnic challenges the multi-ethnic Ethiopian society is experiencing today.

**Brief Discussion of the Existing Scholarship on the Topic**

Biblical texts and commentaries are used to establish the biblical background for the tensions between ethnicity and the image of God in humanity. There are a number of significant scholarships on the subject matter of my thesis. In his *Systematic Theology: Reason and Revelation: Being and God*, Paul Tillich argues that the role of Christian theology is to interpret the eternal truth on which it is founded to the life and temporal situation of the receivers of this truth in the world today.\(^5\) Tillich’s argument is given due attention throughout the thesis.

Another significant work is Reinhold Niebuhr’s *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. His understanding of Christian realism, which goes beyond the acknowledgement of the pervasive rule of self-interest and power to specifying moral ideas and faith commitments as real and capable of grasping human beings, involves all of the realities at work in social change and conflict. Describing human beings as having always been their own most vexing problem, he underlines that every affirmation they make about their own statures is contradictory as a result of their insistence on being more than a child of nature, in

\(^5\) Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Reason and Revelation Being and God*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 3. The third volume of Tillich’s *Systematic Theology: Life and Spirit History and the Kingdom of God*, is very important for systematically addressing the existential estrangement of human beings. In his discussion of the existential estrangement of human beings, Tillich uses the phrases “the possible,” “the real,” and “the ambiguity of sacrifice.” He contends that all individuals have the same human potentialities, but do not have the same possibilities of actualizing them because of the difference in the limitedness of choices. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Life and Spirit History and the Kingdom of God*, vol. 3 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 42.
which curiosity and pretentions are combined.⁶ A feminist theologian and author of *The Bonds of Freedom: Feminist Theology and Christian Realism*, Rebekah L. Miles (who developed a feminist Christian realism through a critical and systematic engagement with the work of other realists, namely, Niebuhr (a Christian realist), Ruether (a naturalist and moral realist) and Welch (a political realist)) claims that her alternative work conjoins an appeal to human self-transcendence and divine transcendence with an affirmation of human boundedness and divine presence.⁷ A remarkable analysis of Niebuhr’s work appears throughout this thesis.

The discussion of concepts like the uniqueness of humanity, openness to the world, the image of God, and centrality and sin makes Wolfhart Pannenberg’s *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* a relevant scholarly resource for this thesis. In his analysis of the divine commission given to humanity as God’s image bearer to be the master of creation, he argues, “The master of nature to which human beings are called according to the account of creation in the priestly document must be exercised in

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⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. I (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 1-2. American sociologist Christian Smith claims that the social sciences alone have not been effective in human beings’ search for self-understanding as a particular kind of existent and acting being. In his analytical engagement with the reality of personhood, Smith combines critical realism with philosophical personalism and forms a model known as a critical realist personalism as an alternative to the extremes of the positivist sciences and relativism. His intention is to create a more comprehensive framework in which human beings gain self-understanding in a phenomenologically reasonable and morally restorative way. In Smith’s words, “In critical realist personalism we thus find a promising basis upon which to construct a coherent understanding of personal being, interpersonal relationships, social structures, the moral good, and human dignity. Fulfilling that promise would be a major achievement for the good.” Christian Smith, *What Is a Person?* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 1, 489-490.

⁷ Rebekah Miles, *The Bonds of Freedom: Feminist Theology and Christian Realism* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3-10. Miles argues that the fact that God’s transcendence is expressed most fully in *God’s immanence*, which is his presence in Christ (particularly the cross), provides human beings with a “transhistorical norm” to which she refers as the transcendent norm of agape love that not only surpasses human relationships, but also judges and inspires them.
awareness of the creator’s own dominion over His creation.” Pannenberg’s thorough analysis of the *imago Dei* and other theological themes makes a review of the first three chapters of his book (in the second chapter of this thesis) very essential. This review is accompanied with my reflection that brings African Religion’s perspective of divine-human relationship into dialogue. Black liberation theologian Dwight Hopkins also contributes to theological anthropology in his book *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion*, which is aimed at researching the ways to envisage being human in a manner supportive to human flourishing. I found Hopkis’s work highly relevant to the discussion of social justice in African context because of the particular attention he gives to the significance of compassion for and empowerment of people exposed to structural poverty.

Although more than two decades have passed since the democratic government system was established in Ethiopia, the question of social justice and human development still needs careful attention. The problems of social injustice and inequality that arise from discrimination and marginalization are addressed by Martha C. Nussbaum in *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Nussbaum devises a research question (“What is each person able to do and to be?”) in order to defend her argument


9 Dwight Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), ix. Hopkins’s research question reads, “How can we envision being human in a way that supports and enables human flourishing and provides ultimate orientation in such times” (ix). In response, he develops the following thesis statement: “As my response, through *Being Human* I claim that one becomes a human being by gearing all ultimate issues toward compassion for and empowerment of people in structural poverty, working-class folk, and the marginalized” (7). This claim serves as a springboard for his arguments throughout the book.

that the problems of the world’s poorer nations cannot be solved by increasing the Gross Domestic Product per capita (GDP). In her capabilities approach, which takes each person as an end, Nussbaum focuses on securing the quality of life and basic social justice in a nation.\textsuperscript{11} The similarity of life situation between the context for Nussbaum’s study (India) and Ethiopia makes her book worth reflecting on in light of the ethno-political and religious tension in Ethiopia past and present. To this end, a brief review of the book is presented in chapter two.

Gustav Arén’s extensive research in two volumes of his books under the titles \textit{Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia} and \textit{Envoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia}, is very important resource for the subsequent scholarly works since the second half of 20\textsuperscript{th} Century. Arén’s works cover the response of the pioneer missionaries and the local evangelists to the problem of social justice and church/state relations since the inception of the EECMY. Likewise, Øyvind M. Eide, who assessed the relation of church and state in Ethiopia from 1974-1985, reports not only on how the imperial rule and the Ethiopian Orthodox church’s combined effort led to the submission of the other nations to forced unification, but also wrote that the language proficiency and school policy favored the people coming from the northern part of the country. He claims that, during the 1970s, the Amhara accounted for 55\% and the Tigrains 25\% of all the students joining University, while students coming from indigenous backgrounds constituted less than 10\% of the university enrolment. The consequence was that “the most important posts in the state apparatus were occupied by the Amharas.”\textsuperscript{12} Eide also analyzes how the Ethiopian Evangelical

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 18-19.

\textsuperscript{12} Eide, \textit{Revolution and Religion}, 29.
Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) responded to the revolutionary changes that took place in February 1974, which included a new political order, a new social and economic policy and a new religious policy. Besides the researches done by Arén and Eide, Debela Birri’s recent scholarly contribution to the field of theological studies in Africa under the title Divine Plan Unfolding is brought into dialogue in chapter three.

Published by the scholarly contribution of Miroslave Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrington, A Common Word was designed with the purpose of supporting the effort to achieve interreligious peace and spread harmony between Muslims and Christians globally. The authors believe that the followers of both religions can shake hands with each other with genuine religious goodwill, friendship and fellowship. This motive of spreading peace and harmony between Christians and Muslims was intended to be guided not through governments and treaties, but through the popular leaders of the two religions. The authors have intended to see equal peace and revival of friendly relations between the followers of Christianity and Islam streaming from mutual understanding. A brief review of Volf’s understanding of forgiveness is included in chapter four.

David Konstan’s Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea is another scholarly work of great significance to my thesis. Konstan speaks about three types of forgiveness: (1) Moral sense: Forgiving someone who has done something wrong. This is the most basic condition for forgiveness, which implies that one cannot forgive an innocent person. (2) Judicial or political sense: Forgiving someone in the contexts which

13 Ibid., 145-147, 161.

provide no clear condition concerning the guilt. (3) Economic sense: Forgiving a debt is more common and biblical: “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” (Matthew 6:12, KJV).¹⁵ Martin Luther, who categorizes forgiveness into forgiveness of punishment and forgiveness of guilt, argues that it is God alone who forgives sin and grants peace to the heart. Accordingly, forgiveness of sin is not achievable through buying indulgences and doing good works. As he states, “For works do not drive out sin, but the driving out of sin leads to good works for good works must be done with joyful heart and good conscience toward God, that is, out of the forgiveness of guilt.”¹⁶ Both Konstan’s view and Luther’s view of forgiveness establish separate subtopics for discussion regarding the meaning of forgiveness in chapter four.

Heinz Kaufeler, who made a comparative study of the socio-cultural dynamics in Iran and Ethiopia, stated that Menelik II (1889–1913) was the Emperor who achieved the goal of modernization and unification of Ethiopia.¹⁷ His work is very significant to my thesis because of my interest in tracing back to the time of Menelik II in dealing with Ethiopian history and because of his interest in studying the route of Ethiopian modernization. The Ethiopian historian Bahru Zewde recognizes Menelik II for the role his leadership played in the birth of the country’s present-day capital city, Addis Ababa (Finfinne) following the victory on the Italian invaders at Adwa in 1896 and criticizes


him for the subsequent recurring battles for territorial expansion.\textsuperscript{18} Fekadu Gurmesa points out that the Christian Ethiopian Empire under Menelik II exercised a huge political and cultural influence on the people of southern Ethiopia.\textsuperscript{19} Girma Bekele, in his book \textit{The In-Between People}, has intended to call both the Orthodox and Evangelical churches of Ethiopia “to be God’s in-between people, taking risks, giving up claims to exclusivity, and taking upon themselves the form of the servant of servants,” which involves turning away from the institutional self-preservation towards fulfilling their calling.\textsuperscript{20} Theodros Assefa Teklu, in his \textit{The Politics of Metanoia} analyzes the socio-political practices in Ethiopia from theological perspective. Reading the individual works of these scholars enriched my reflection (in chapters three to six) on the pattern of church/state relations under different Ethiopian rulers and the ethno-political and religious tensions it entails.

Finally, Leonardo Boff’s \textit{Trinity and Society} serves as a significant resource for dealing with the tension between ethnicity and humanity in the image of God in a society in terms of the communion that exists between the three persons of the truine God. He highlights the particular relevance of understanding the mystery of the Trinity to the life of individuals and community seeking liberation from oppression.\textsuperscript{21} An Orthodox scholar, John D. Zizioulas (who contributed his \textit{Communion & Otherness} to the field of theological anthropology) states that protection from the other is emphasized in the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{footnote19} Fekadu Gurmesssa, \textit{Evangelical Faith Movement in Ethiopia: Origins and Establishment of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus} (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2009), 103.
\bibitem{footnote20} Girma Bekele, \textit{The in-between People: A Reading of David Bosch through the Lens of Mission History and Contemporary Challenge in Ethiopia} (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), xii.
\end{thebibliography}
Western understanding of personhood. He writes that “In our culture[,] protection from the other is a fundamental necessity. We feel more and more threatened by the presence of the other. We are forced and even encouraged to consider the other as our enemy before we can treat him or her as a friend.”

Zizioulas argues that the Trinitarian God is a significant model for the proper relationship between communion and otherness for the church and for human beings. Boff’s and Zizioulas’s arguments are considered in chapter six of the thesis.

**Statement of the Nature and Purpose of the Thesis**

In taking “The Defiled Imago Dei and Forgiveness” as a topic for my M.Th. thesis at Luther Seminary, I have intended to address the challenges related to religious, political, and ethnic identity in the multi-ethnic Ethiopian society, which consists of adherents of Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions. The tension between ethnicity and humanity in the image of God in this context, which can be traced back to the time of the monarchy, involves an egotism and irresponsible use of religious authority, political power, and ethnic identity in ways that dishonor the sacred image of God in human beings. This complex problem causes the marginalization of God apparent from the egoistic attitude and suppressive treatment of one’s neighbor in religious, political, and ethnic spheres. In short, my claim throughout the thesis is that settling the tension between ethnicity and humanity in the image of God requires critical theological analysis of the religious, political, and ethnic challenges of the past and present Ethiopian society.

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23 Because of defective church/state relations, unfair treatment of adherents of religion (particularly Protestant Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions), and the pretentious ethnic self-propagation experienced in past and present Ethiopian history, it is advisable to safeguard the citizens against violence and social injustice which may lead to chaotic conflict.
in a way that leads to forgiveness as the best option for maintaining a national harmony that values peace, equality, justice, and human flourishing.

**Outline of the Thesis**

Having presented the research interest and the research question, the brief discussion of the existing literature, and the claim of the thesis in this chapter, chapter two deals with the *imago Dei* and the tensions of ethnic identity. The biblical foundation of ethnicity and the image of God in humanity, Luther’s view of *imago Dei*, Wolfhart Pannenberg’s understanding of *imago Dei*, and a brief review of Martha Nussbaum’s *Creating Capabilities* are presented. In other words, it is at this point that how human beings, both as individual and as community, are expected to live in relationship with each other and with God in a way that honors the image of God in them is analyzed.

Chapter three explains the defiled *imago Dei* in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ethiopian contexts. Religion, politics, and ethnicity often fuel violence and social injustice because of the hidden self-interest of individuals or communities involved. This seems to have threatened national harmony in religious, political and ethnic interactions. This chapter gives due attention to the discussion of ethnicity and the defiled *imago Dei* under three major themes: ethnicity in the history of Christianity and in the Ethiopian Church, the defiled *imago Dei* expressed in terms of social injustice and church/state relations, and the defiled *imago Dei* in terms of the declining national harmony in Ethiopia.

A practice of forgiveness in the context of violence caused by political, religious, and ethnic tensions is another key area of the thesis. Chapter four focuses on investigating what a genuine forgiveness means in the context of violence and social
injustice caused by the religious, political, and ethnic tensions in Ethiopia past and present. Who the victimizers and the victims are among the contemporary Ethiopian society should be known in order to seek and give forgiveness respectively. Besides reviewing Miroslav Volf’s *A Common Word* and studying the meaning of the term *forgiveness* both in religious (Christian, Muslim, and African Traditional Religious) and political contexts (in which David Konstan’s model, Luther’s view, and African Religion’s view of forgiveness are analyzed), this chapter points out the relevance and sufficiency of *forgiveness* as a response for the political, religious, and ethnic related offenses.

Chapter five leads us to the response of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) to the tensions between ethnicity and humanity in the image of God. This chapter explores how the EECMY addresses the political, religious, and ethnic challenges of the defiled *imago Dei* on the life of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ethiopian society. Besides addressing the challenges of the society, the church has to handle tensions regarding ethnic identity and the image of God in humanity among the believers. Finding itself in the midst of social injustice and a hostile socio-political setting from its inception under imperial rule, experiencing severe persecution under the military government (1974-1991), and living in the context of ethno-religious conflicts and social injustice under the current government provide the framework for the critical analysis of the church’s response in this chapter.

The conclusion and recommendation section constitutes the last chapter of my thesis, which comprises a brief summary of my findings and argument. This includes short and precise answers to the research question of the thesis, which is dealt with
throughout the research. Finally, based on the findings, the chapter provides
recommendations regarding what should be considered in the ethno-political and
religious interactions in order to see the society working together toward maintaining
peace, harmony, security, equality, justice, freedom, and human flourishing for all
Ethiopians beyond the political, religious, and ethnic boundaries.
CHAPTER TWO
IMAGO DEI AND THE TENSIONS OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

Introduction

This section focuses on the discussion of the biblical foundation of ethnicity and the image of God in humanity. Seen in the light of how people around the world are treating each other based on their ethnic origins, it seems that for a country to have a multi-ethnic society is more disadvantageous than helpful. Whether it is normal if one individual, community, or nation claims higher status than the other because of their ethnic origin or whether such a claim is a consequence of the fall is a point under discussion in this chapter. The central question to be answered in this chapter is as follows: What biblical and extra-biblical evidence do we have to address the tension between ethnicity and humanity in the image of God from a theological perspective in order to foster a harmonious life for human beings in their day-to-day relationship with each other? Regarding the organization of the chapter, the biblical background of ethnicity and the image of God in humanity, Luther’s view of the *imago Dei*, a brief review of Pannenberg’s understanding of the *imago Dei*, and a brief review of Martha Nussbaum’s *Creating Capabilities* are presented one after the other. Finally, I will wrap up the chapter with conclusion.
Biblical Background of Ethnicity and the Image of God in Humanity

Noreen L. Herzfeld, who contributed to the scholarship to bridge the gap between theology and science through her creative work *In Our Image*, analyzes the approach to the image of God in humankind in twentieth- and early twenty-first century theology. Herzfeld suggests that the various interpretations given to God’s image in humankind lie in three major categories: substantive, functional, or relational. According to substantive interpretations, the image of God is viewed as a set of properties intrinsic to each individual human being, among which reason is often mentioned. Functional interpretations refer to the image as a title given to humans by virtue of what they do as God’s representatives who exercise dominion over all other creations on earth. Relational interpretations view the image of God as evident in God-human and human-human relationships, which points to their corporate nature originating from interaction rather than something found in any individual.\(^1\) With this in mind, let us turn to how the issues of ethnic identity and humanity in the image of God are presented in the Old Testament of the Scripture.

The Old Testament Perspective

Human beings were created in the image of God (Gen 1:27) to live in continuous relationship with Him. The term *image* is a translation of the Hebrew word ṣelem, meaning “image.” Its use in the phrases bēṣalmēnû kidmûtēnû (meaning “in our image, according to our likeness”) and bēṣelem ʾēlœhîm (meaning “in the image of God”) in

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Genesis 1:26-27 points to the creation of human being in the image of their Creator.\textsuperscript{2} Gordon J. Wenham states that the rare occurrence of \textit{ṣelem} in the Bible and the uncertainty of its etymology cause difficulty in attempts to interpret the phrase.\textsuperscript{3} In order to answer the question of ethnicity, it is important to know first what humanity means biblically. The discussion is organized under the three categories indicated in Herzfeld’s analysis of the image of God in humanity: substantive, functional, and relational.

**The Substantive View**

It is in the creation narrative of Genesis 1:1-2:3 that the phrase “the image of God” appears with the purpose to highlight the uniqueness of humanity among all of God’s creations. All sea creatures, birds, and land animals are said to have been created “according to their kind” (Hebrew term \textit{mîn} used in Genesis 1:21, 24-25), which implies that all living creatures have to be understood in terms of categories whereby they are identified by virtue of their resemblance to creatures of the same kind.\textsuperscript{4} This distinctiveness of the human race summoned scholars to work toward defining the image of God. Biblical scholars have proposed different solutions regarding what should be recognized as the “image” of God in humanity. Some identify it with the natural qualities


\textsuperscript{4} Eugene H. Merrill, “Image of God,” in Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 442-443. In favor of a substantive interpretation of the image of God, Eugene H. Merrill points out two ways the creation of human beings is distinctive besides not belonging to the category \textit{mîn/} of other creation. The first is the unique creation formula: God says “Let us” only at the creation of humanity instead of “Let there be,” which he used in all other cases (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24). The second is the resolution to make humanity “in our image, according to our likeness” (Gen 1:26): Humanity is not compared to creatures of the same kind, but to God, in whose image and likeness humankind is created.
in human beings that make them resemble God, while others argue that it refers to the mental and spiritual faculties that human beings share with God. Accordingly, it is suggested that the image of God is present in human reason, personality, free will, self-consciousness, or their intelligence. The third group of scholars contend that the image consists of a physical resemblance, which means that man looks like God in the same way a child shares a similar appearance with its biological parents.⁵

Herzfeld, who analyzes Reinhold Niebuhr’s substantive interpretation, states that the ontological understanding of the imago Dei views it as “a quality of characteristic intrinsic to our species, inherent in our human nature, shared with God alone, thus serving to distinguish us from the rest of nature…. The divine image, as a human quality, becomes a part of the substance of our very being.”⁶ Augustine argues, “Certainly, not everything in creatures that is in some way or other similar to God is also to be called His image, but that alone to which He Himself alone is superior; for the image is only then an expression of God in the full sense, when no other nature lies between it and God.”⁷

Gareth B. Matthews, the editor of Augustine’s On the Trinity, states, “It is specifically the mind that Augustine regards as the image of God, the imago Dei. It is mental or

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⁵ Ibid., 443.

⁶ Herzfeld, In Our Image, 16. As Merrill claims, the analogous understanding of the image is evident in the creation stories in which both God and humans speak, are addressed by personal pronouns, exercise authority over lesser beings and possess the capacity of making choices (Gen 2:17). However, as to the ontological difference, unlike the physical and corporeal humankind, which is a mortal creature under God’s dominion, God, who is spirit and eternal, has always existed (Gen 1:1, 27; 2:7, 16-17; Ex 33:17-23). Merrill, “Image of God,” 443.

⁷ Augustine, On the Trinity, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 71. Complementary to this view is Merrill’s argument regarding what being in the image of God cannot mean. Accordingly, humanity bears an analogous resemblance to God rather than an ontological one: “To be like God is to be patterned after him but, at the same time, to be qualitatively inferior to him.” Merrill further notes, “To be in the image of God cannot mean equivalence between deity and humanity, then, but only an analogous or corresponding relationship between the two.” Merrill, “Image of God,” 443.
psychological Trinities that Augustine will seek to use to illuminate the Divine Trinity.”

Niebuhr built on Augustine in “finding the divine image in a reason that encompasses rationality, free will, and an ability to move beyond the self that [he] defines as self-transcendence.” Niebuhr views the capacity for self-transcendence as a consequence of reason, which he regards as “God’s image in us that ultimately leads us to search for and be in relationship with a God who transcends a physical world.”

Herzfeld reveals that the substantive approach has been criticized for three reasons: Firstly, Feminist authors reject this approach for defining the image of God in terms of reason, which makes inevitable the mind/body dualism and thereby implies a hierarchy of traits within the human person. Secondly, philosophers (Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno) criticize the substantive view for the instrumental role the reason plays in the domination over creation and other human beings by serving as a means to end, which neglects the need to determine the soundness of our goal. Finally, the

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8 Augustine, *On the Trinity*, xvi. Augustine’s mental or psychological trinities in Book 9 involves the description of the mind as lover, beloved, and love or knower, known, knowledge. He writes, “And so there is a certain image of the Trinity: the mind itself, its knowledge, which is its offspring, and love as a third; these three are one and one substance. The offspring is not less, while the mind knows itself as much as it is; nor is the love less, while the mind loves itself as much as it knows and as much as it is” (xvi-xvii). At the end of his Book 10 Augustine explains the mental trinities as memory, understanding, and will. Accordingly, he understands the mind as remembering, as understanding, and as willing, which have both a real unity and a real distinctiveness (xvii).

9 Herzfeld, *In Our Image*, 17. As Niebuhr discussed, Augustine, under the influence of neo-Platonism, is the first Christian theologian to understand the full implication of the Christian doctrine of man and to define the image of God. He said, “For not in the body but in the mind was man made in the image of God. In his own similitude let us seek God; in his own image recognize the Creator.” He added, “It is in the soul of man, that is, in his rational or intellectual soul, that we must find that image of the Creator which is immortally implanted in its immorality.” Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 153-154.

10 Herzfeld, *In Our Image*, 18. Herzfeld continued, “While substantive interpretations of the *imago Dei* have fallen out of favor in the twentieth century, Niebuhr in no way stands alone. Paul Tillich holds a similar view, interpreting the image of God as rationality plus a broader faculty he calls ontological reason, that which allows us to comprehend complex level of reality, giving humans a wholeness and a way of perceiving wholeness that other animals lack” (18).
The substantive view is criticized for its “static nature,” which involves setting up an analogy of being between God and human, that allows no room for both the growth in the dynamic understanding of an image and responsibility for instinctive capacities.\textsuperscript{11}

**The Functional Approach**

Herzfeld reviewed Gerhard von Rad’s functional interpretation of the *imago Dei*. Johannes Hehn was the first to introduce a nonsubstantive interpretation in his 1915 article *Zum Terminus Bild Gottes* based on extra-biblical sources. Hehn defined the image of God as a royal kingship rather than as a quality intrinsic to human nature. Old Testament scholar von Rad and many other scholars modified Hehn’s work into a functional view of *imago Dei* based on biblical exegesis. Von Rad argued that the only clear evidence for the concept in Genesis 1 is that human beings are created in the image of God so that they may have dominion over the entire creation. Thus, for him, the *imago Dei* signifies the function of humanity.\textsuperscript{12} Merrill explains this as the creation mandate, in which humanity is given a clear responsibility of multiplying on the earth and having dominion over all creation (Gen 1:26-27; Gen 2:18-20). He rightly states that humankind as both male and female functions as the image of God (Gen 1:28).\textsuperscript{13}

In refutation to the substantive interpretation, Merrill reports an alternative argument of the meaning of the *imago Dei* which is based on grammatical evidence. Accordingly, there are scholars who argue that humanity is not *in* the image but *is* the

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 19-20. Herzfeld further explains, “Reason in this instrumental form makes power and knowledge synonymous; and both are products of the culture in which we live, rather than freely chosen objectives. Thus instrumental reason is both a vague and variable term, as much to be associated with ill effects as with the good. While rationality is one of our chief virtues, it is in itself morally ambiguous” (20).

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 20-21.

\textsuperscript{13} Merrill, “Image of God,” 442-443.
image of God. This means, according to Merrill, that “Humanity does not so much share with God his essential reality, but rather, is a representative of that reality. That is, humankind has a functional role to play, a role that requires no ontological commonness with God.” Merrill concludes that combining both the grammatical and the intra-textual evidence helps to highlight the full significance of the *imago Dei*. As he claims, “Humankind is *in* the image of God but also serves *as* the image. Humans have resemblance to God, even if limited, but stand in God’s place in the administration of God’s creation.”

In his *Genesis*, von Rad argued in favor of translating the Hebrew *bĕšelem ēlœhîm* as “as the image of God,” based on which he not only rejects the interpretation that limits God’s image to man’s spiritual nature but also articulates that “the whole man [physical and spiritual] is created in God’s image.” Herzfeld expresses her consent to this approach, suggesting, “There need be no trait in God after which some quality of human was patterned. Rather, human beings image God when they function in God’s stead, as God’s representative on earth.” Moreover, some biblical scholars state that the concept consists in mankind’s being God’s representative on earth. This common oriental view, in which being created in the divine image allows human beings to play the role of the king, whereby they rule and subdue the rest of creation, is also supported by the texts of the ancient Near East (particularly Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Assyria), which describe

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14 Ibid., 443-444.

15 Ibid. Emphasis in the original.


kings as the image of gods.\textsuperscript{18} Herzfeld gives a valuable comment regarding the limit of this dominion: “The Priestly writer differs from this tradition [of the ancient Near East], however, by extending the image to all persons, thus making the exercise of sovereignty in some capacity a universal trait. Such universally held sovereignty, then, cannot be over other human beings, but over the rest of creation.”\textsuperscript{19}

As Wayne S. Towner argues, the image of God in human beings calls them to exercising even their “dominion” (Gen 1) over other creatures with a high sense of responsibility toward the things that God loves. He writes, “To other creatures we wear the very image of God. They should feel secure, however, for our lieutenancy means that we recognize limitations on our power….To be God’s vizier is to serve at God’s pleasure and to preserve that which belongs to God.”\textsuperscript{20} From the biblical standpoint, this dominion

\textsuperscript{18} Wenham, Word Biblical Commentary, 29-31. Herzfeld further explains von Rad’s functional approach to \textit{imago Dei} as established on his soteriological interpretation of the Priestly (P) writing. She summarized, “Finally, a functional understanding of the \textit{imago Dei} fits well with von Rad’s contention that the thrust of P’s writing is soteriological….Von Rad notes that according to P, chaos is ‘the great menace to creation’ and thus to humanity. Humans are called upon to join God in imposing order on nature, a nature created in reference to humans, and thus to participate in God’s saving plan.” Herzfeld, \textit{In Our Image}, 23.

\textsuperscript{19} Herzfeld, \textit{In Our Image}, 23. Wayne S. Towner, in his exegetical work \textit{Genesis}, explains what sort of dominion this should be. Ancient kings were represented by their statues, which were fixed in every corner of their dominion. Towner rightly articulates, “God the King of Kings, has statues representing the divine self in every corner of the world, but unlike the immobile marbles of the kings, God’s statues walk and walk.” Wayne Sibley Towner, \textit{Genesis} (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 26. God’s statues are not idols made of wood, stone or plastic replicas (Ex 20:4-6; Deut 5:8-10), but his living images in the world that are created with the capacity to love their Maker and enter into relationship with him. This relationship is marked with responsibility and limitations.

\textsuperscript{20} Towner, \textit{Genesis}, 29. Towner puts emphasis on the significance of the \textit{imago Dei} through describing humans as “alone in the world”: “We human beings are the culminating achievement of God, the top of the hierarchy of the creatures, as the biblical writers understood reality. Alone of all the mammals, alone of all the plants, we are invited into personal relationship with God. Alone of all the creatures, we are said to be made in God’s own image, a concept that we can now affirm has to do with a living, articulate relationship. We are capable of rejoicing and growing in that relationship. That is the biblical witness” (30). Therefore, that human beings are alone in the world to be created in the image of God would mean that they are alone to be accountable to God for the failure to discharge this responsibility in the way that honors God’s image in them in their relationship to the Creator and all creatures.
means that humans are stewards of the goodness God has introduced in this world through his good creation.

The functional approach is also not without criticism. The use of extra-biblical sources to interpret *imago Dei* as a royal title, which refers to the king as God’s representative on earth, disregards the understanding that humankind as a whole is God’s image bearer. In addition, by using Priestly writer’s source to interpret the image of God as human beings standing in the place of God on earth, the functionalists missed the main concern of Priestly writer’s theology, which emphasizes God’s holiness and the temple as the only place God reveals Himself to humans in His glory.

**The Relational Interpretation**

Herzfeld refers to Karl Barth as the most influential advocate of relational interpretation of *imago Dei*, who argued that the image of God consists neither in human nature nor in their action, but is identified with the fact that humanity is a “counterpart to God.” As beginning his argument with God (a top-down manner) is not unusual to Barth, he neglected both the qualities and the functions of human beings in his approach and gave much attention to the interpretation of the plural pronoun in the divine counsel “Let Us make man.” For Barth, it is the “I-You” confrontation existing within the Trinity that lays a foundation for the divine-human and human-human relationship. Thus the

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22 Ibid., 24-25.

23 Ibid., 25. Barth’s explanation of the image of the relational Trinity in the divine-human relationship is cited in Herzfeld: “In God’s own being and sphere there is a counterpart: a genuine but harmonious self-encounter and self-discovery; a free co-existence and co-operation; and open confrontation and reciprocity. Man is the repetition of this divine form of life; the copy and the reflection. He is this first in the fact that he is the counterpart of God, the encounter and discovery in God Himself being copied and imitated in God’s relation to man” (26).
imago Dei exists in the relationship rather than in human capacity. As cited in Herzfeld, Barth understands the image as having two meanings: “God lives in togetherness with Himself, then God lives in togetherness with man, then men live in togetherness with one another.”

Barth is not the only systematic theologian in promoting relational interpretation of the imago Dei. Long before him, the reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin viewed the image as designating the vertical relationship between God and human beings. Emil Brunner, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Wolfhart Pannenberg are among those theologians of the mid to late twentieth century in whose work relational interpretations became significant. Pannenberg understands humanity in the image of God as exocentric being. In his interpretation of the imago Dei in terms of human relation to the world, Pannenberg describes human beings as capable of presenting themselves to the other as other or distancing themselves from it.

To summarize Wenham’s argument, the image is interpreted as a capacity to relate to God. According to this view, the divine image in a human being means that “God can inter into personal relationship with him, speak to him, and make covenant with

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24 Ibid., 25-26. Herzfeld argues, “A human being is only fully human insofar as he or she is in relationship with another” (26). She goes on reviewing Barth’s understanding of what it means to be in relationship or encounter with another: “By this, Barth means that we must recognize the other as both distinct from ourselves and as our true fellow….When we treat another as an extension of ourselves, when we withhold or conceal our inner being and do not let the other know us, we do not participate in full humanity” (28).

25 Ibid., 29-30.

him.”27 The Fall, which seriously affected humankind, doesn’t have any impact on God’s being and never alters His authority as Creator and sustainer of all creation. In short, the relational interpretation of the imago Dei is relevant to the problem under discussion even though the three approaches have some points in common. There is no nation in the world which can claim a preferential relationship with God due to their ethnicity. All are equally God’s image bearers.

The Consequence of the Fall and the Imago Dei

God gave the first human beings clear guidance regarding what they were to eat and what they were not supposed to eat. However, as it is narrated in Genesis 3:6-7, that from the very moment the crafty serpent advised how advantageous it was for them to eat from the fruit of the forbidden tree, life couldn’t continue according to the divine direction. Adam and Eve began to decide for themselves what was good for food based on how pleasantly it appeared to their eyes. Then the desire to serve the will of God was replaced by the curiosity to acquire the wisdom and knowledge that would make them independent. This impulse prompted them to the action that caused the Fall of mankind, which resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity. Scholars give a different explanation of what happened to the image of God in humanity as a consequence of the Fall.

St. Augustine, who describes being in the image and likeness of God as the true honor of mankind, states that this likeness can only be maintained in relation to Him. The Fall affects this relation between God and human negatively: Hence he clings to God so

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27 Wenham, Word Biblical Commentary, 29-31. The outcome is written in the Bible: “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves” (Genesis 3:7).
much the more, the less he loves what is his own. But through the desire of proving his own power, man by his own will falls down into himself, as into a sort of center.”

St. Augustine further describes the Fall as an uncontrolled progress of the “inner man” through the reason into external and temporal things instead of clinging to the contemplation and consideration of the eternal reasons. This is the problem all humans are struggling with, whether they stand in the church or in the state, which signifies the insufficiency of any attempt to modify the consequence of the Fall neglecting the need to be restored to the relationship they have with God.

The question, therefore, is how the Fall permanently affects the relationship humans have with their Creator and with other creatures. Herzfeld’s summary complements Towner’s view of the divine image in humans, stating,

The *imago Dei*, or the divine image in humans, has traditionally functioned as a symbol to describe the intersection between humanity and God. It has also symbolized what it is that we value most in ourselves, what separates us from the animals, and that which forms the necessary core of our nature.

Thus the Fall can be described as a loss of this core value that draws human toward God in a distinctive way from animals. This means that with the Fall of the first human beings humankind is left with a distorted *imago Dei* that cannot reflect their relation with the divine.

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29 Ibid., 92. [cf. Genesis 3:4]. Augustine’s argument regarding the negative consequence of the Fall contains three points: (1) the inner man becomes too weak to resist his enemies, namely, the devil; (2) the vision of eternal things is withdrawn from humans as a result of which they are left without the light of their eyes; and (3) they are left with the problem of incongruence between their words and works. To put the third point in his words, “They weave together good words without the fruit of good work so as, while living wickedly, to cover their disgrace as it were by speaking well” (92).

Wenham, in his explanation of Genesis 3:2-3, points out that the problem of turning away from God is seen in the dialogue between the serpent and the woman. In her attempt to correct the serpent, besides altering God’s command by either omitting or adding words to it, she imitates the snake through describing the LORD God simply as “God.”

In this dialogue, the shrewdness of the serpent is expressed through asking questions that God has already answered with an intention to distort His command and reject His authority as Creator. The serpent had promised them to be autonomous beings that set themselves free from God. This implies that the sin of disobedience, which was committed by eating the fruit and resulted in the Fall, is preceded by the “attitudinal Fall” that reveals humans’ propensity to draw near to the shrewd serpent. This turning away from God causes a permanent distortion of the image of God in humanity.

Towner describes the consequence of the Fall as a judgment involving brokenness and alienation that humans experience in their relationships with God and with each other. Instead of taking responsibility for committing a sin of disobedience, the husband excused himself, accused his wife for the wrong done, and even implicitly blamed God for giving him a life partner. Wenham, referring to this unwillingness to take responsibility for disobeying God’s word as a typical problem of all mankind, argues that due to the divisive consequence of sin that alienated humans from their all-caring

31 Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 73. As Wenham rightly states, “These slight alterations to God’s remarks suggest that the woman has already moved slightly away from God toward the serpent’s attitude. The creator’s generosity is not being given its full due, and he is being painted as a little harsh and repressive, forbidding the tree even to be touched” (73). The shrewdness of the serpent is also expressed not only through promising the reversal of death that disobedience or eating of the tree would cause, but also through giving them an empty hope that they would become like God. As Towner analyzes the virtues the serpent attached to the eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree, “Instead of dying, they will become ‘like God,’ or even better, ‘godlike.’” Because the Hebrew generic term for God or gods is usually expressed in the plural, *elohim*, the statement could also mean that the woman and the man would attain divine attributes in their own right. They could become little ‘gods.’” *Towner, Genesis*, 44.

Creator, people tend to justify their misbehavior by either pointing to the circumstances and fate that God has provided them or by shifting the blame on to someone else. Consequently, that original peaceful relationship between mankind and other creations is shattered. This reflects the defiled imago Dei that mankind has to bear as a real consequence of the Fall. Such a life is marked with hatred, discrimination, oppression, and killing each other for achieving selfish desires, which signifies not only a distorted view of ethnicity but also a broken humanity.

In summary, Wenham states that sin has established alienation not only between God and mankind, but also between men and women, and between animals and human beings. However, it cannot totally shatter the goal of universal peace (Isa 11:6-9). In agreement with this, Towner concludes that what we read in Genesis 3 is the story about every human being rebelling against the commandments of God and thus discovering alienation and despair. He describes it as a pilgrimage from innocence to maturity through the territory filled with the peril of loving and hating, growing powerful and cowering in humiliation, living and finally dying. The tensions in ethnic identity in Ethiopia, which is apparent both in the church and state contexts, can be seen as a consequence of this estrangement of humanity. God, who alone knows how severely humanity is wrecked by the sin of disobedience, does not leave his handiwork in the

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33 Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 77-78. It is a blessing to live in God’s presence discharging one’s responsibility as His vicegerent in daily relationship with each other and with all His creations. In contrast, it is a curse to break his commandments and run away from His blessed presence, which would mean leading unrepentant life tainted with a guilty conscious outside the garden.

34 Ibid., 78.

35 Towner, *Genesis*, 53-54. Wenham further views Genesis 3 as God’s history, “whose name is not only Yahweh, but also Emmanuel, and who will not leave his beloved creatures to their fates even when they defy him to his face or thrust a spear in his side.” Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 54.
realm of death for eternity. The hope for restoration into the state of relationship that allows mankind to enjoy life in God’s presence and have daily conversation with him remains the goal of the divine mercy and grace toward which the Old Testament points.

**Luther’s View of the *Imago Dei***

Let us begin this section with Luther’s words regarding his own understanding of the *imago Dei*:

Therefore my understanding of the image of God is this: that Adam had it in his being and that he not only knew God and believed that He was good, but that he also lived in a life that was wholly godly; that is, he was without the fear of death or any other danger, and was content with God’s favor.  

Martin Luther refers to the divine counsel “Let Us make” as a core expression signifying the obvious deliberation and plan with which God created mankind. This deliberation, which involves God summoning Himself to a council, marks the distinctiveness of human beings from other animals. Luther argues that the Bible tells us that mankind was created by the special plan and providence of God, which implies a purpose that surpasses the satisfaction and following of their desires. God’s special deliberation comprises both giving attention to the creation of mankind and making them in His own image.  

Augustine, and other scholars after him, described the image of God as the powers of the soul: memory, the mind or intellect, and will. Thus, “These three, they say,  

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37 Ibid., 56-57. Luther argues that, unlike other animals, the spiritually minded humans were created for a better life in the future, which is so “pleasant and delightful” that it may not be attained while we are in this physical life. Luther states, “But this we have, that we believe in a spiritual life after this life and a destination for this life in Paradise, which was devised and ordained by God, and that we confidently look for it through the merit of Christ” (57).
comprise the image of God which is in all men.”\textsuperscript{38} However, Luther points out the
insufficiency of these powers to contain the image of God: “I am afraid that since the loss
of this image through sin we cannot understand it to any extent. Memory, will, and mind
we have indeed; but they are most depraved and most seriously weakened, yes, to put it
more clearly, they are utterly leprous and unclean.”\textsuperscript{39} Luther’s main concern is to point
out the major distortion which happened to the image of God in humanity since the Fall.
Thus, he asserts that, before the Fall, the image of God was in Adam’s being at creation
and guided him not only toward knowing God and believing in His goodness, but also in
leading a wholly godly life that is free from fear of death under His protection.\textsuperscript{40}

Luther, analyzing Genesis 1:27, attempts to distinguish the manner in which God
is recognized in human beings from the way He is recognized in other creatures. God,
who is known in humans (especially in Adam and Eve before the sin, via the wisdom,
justice, and knowledge of all things) is recognized in the rest of creatures by His
footprints. For this reason, Luther proposes that Adam may be referred to as “a world in
miniature” because, “He has an understanding of heaven, earth, and the entire creation.
And so it gives God pleasure that He made so beautiful a creature.”\textsuperscript{41} This view is

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 60.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 61. Luther further explains: “Therefore the image of God is something far different,
namely, a unique work of God. If some assert nevertheless that these powers are that image, let them admit
that they are, as it were, leprous and unclean” (62).

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 62-63. Luther, summarizing his understanding of the \textit{imago Dei}, stated, “Therefore the
image of God, according to which Adam was created, was something far more distinguished and excellent,
since obviously no leprosy of sin adhered either to his reason or to his will. Both his inner and his outer
sensations were all of the purest kind. His intellect was the clearest, his memory was the best, and his will
was the most straightforward—all in the most beautiful tranquility of mind, without any fear of death and
without any anxiety” (62).

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 68.
complemented by Towner, who describes humans as “alone in the world” because they are the only ones made in God’s own image.

In contrast, it is the damage that death as a consequence of sin caused our memory, intellect, and will that Luther refers to as a “leprosy.” This is expressed not only in the failure to understand the image, but also in the extreme passion in the flesh, which is characterized by its obsessive desire and its disgust after achieving what it craved for, and excessive emotions that arise in the hearts of all humans. Luther speaks about the sort of dangers this wretched nature is exposed to because of the original sin: “We are never secure in God; apprehension and terror cause us concern even in sleep. These and similar evils are the image of the devil, who stamped them on us.” Therefore, Luther rightly states that speaking about the image after the original sin is speaking about something unknown to us.

Nevertheless, Luther emphasizes the restorative role of the Gospel. Accordingly, the Gospel has restored the image of God in humanity into its earlier and even better state through bringing about the rebirth of human by faith and the hope of eternal life. The alienation and despair caused by sin between mankind and God as well as between humans and other creations is removed through Christ’s self-sacrificial death for the entire world. As a result, it is not only the renewal of intellect and will that is effected,

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42 Towner, Genesis, 30.

43 Luther, “Lectures on Genesis, Chapter 1-5,” 62-63. Luther also explains how the fall affected all creatures negatively: “But this condition is the fault of original sin, and from it all the remaining creatures derive their shortcomings. I hold that before sin the sun was brighter, the water purer, the trees more fruitful, and the fields more fertile. But through sin and that awful fall not only our flesh is disfigured by the leprosy of sin, but everything we use in this life has become corrupt” (64). Luther went on, explaining how the fall affected all creatures negatively: “But this condition is the fault of original sin, and from it all the remaining creatures derive their shortcomings. I hold that before sin the sun was brighter, the water purer, the trees more fruitful, and the fields more fertile. But through sin and that awful fall not only our flesh is disfigured by the leprosy of sin, but everything we use in this life has become corrupt” (63).
but also the hope to live in God and with God for eternity, which is made possible (John 17:21) for those who believe. Luther rightly articulates that God’s rejoicing in the counsel and work that led to creation of humans is comparable to His taking pleasure in restoring them through His Son, Jesus Christ. As Luther explains this divine favor, “God is most kindly inclined toward us and takes delight in his thought and plan of restoring all who have believed in Christ to spiritual life through the resurrection of the dead.” Thus, through Christ, our knowledge and understanding of the image of God in humanity is regenerated. Let’s turn to a summary of Wolfhart Pannenberg’s view of *imago Dei*.

**Pannenberg’s Understanding of *Imago Dei***

A brief review of the first three chapters of Pannenberg’s *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* is the main focus of this section. The uniqueness of humanity, the image of God in humanity viewed as openness to the world, and sin analyzed as a tension between centrality and exocentricity, are the major themes of this review. My analysis of Pannenberg’s view with regard to these themes is accompanied with my reflection from African Religion’s perspective.

The first chapter of Pannenberg’s work is devoted to the discussion of the uniqueness of humanity. Modern anthropology, unlike Christian tradition, which defines humanity clearly in terms of God, defines the uniqueness of humanity through reflection on the place of humanity in nature, particularly comparing human existence with that of higher animals. Philosophical anthropology recognizes humanity’s special place in the

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44 Ibid., 64.
45 Ibid., 68.
46 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*. 27. Pannenberg asserts, “A human being is an image of the macrocosm by virtue of containing all the strata of reality (body, soul, spirit)” (27).
domain of animal life, which Max Scheler and Arnold Gehlen described as “openness to the world” and Helmuth Plessner refers to it as “exocentricity.” The concept of “openness to the world,” which is central to “philosophical anthropology,” was used with an intention to describe humanity’s special place in the animal world “in distinction from the dependence of the animals on their environment.”47 Pannenberg argues that “human openness to the world” does not have the character of a given state attributed to it by Scheler and Gehlen. It is, rather, considered as a direction in the process of human “self-realization,” a process through which alone a human being takes form as a self and which therefore may not be reduced to human action alone.48

In the second chapter, Pannenberg established his discussion of the image of God in humanity on the idea of “openness to the world,” which focuses on the comparative analysis of Herder’s view and the traditional notion of the image of God in humanity. Pannenberg’s discussion of the impact of the fall on the image of God involves the

47 Ibid., 34-35. Max Scheler is regarded as the originator of “philosophical anthropology” as a discipline, which later Helmuth Plessner and Arnold Gehlen developed (28). Scheler views human beings (as persons) as spiritual beings whose spirituality cannot be derived from the biological factors that condition their being. However, he also recognized the need for a bodily correlate of the human spirituality in which the special character of human beings can be expressed corporeally. Scheler believed that this is found in human openness to the world (35). Pannenberg reviewed Scheler’s explanation of openness to the world, “Human beings are no longer limited by a set of drives and instincts to a determinate feature world so that their senses would perceive only those features of the environment which are important for their own life and that of the species, while all the other qualities of the objective world would be already filtered out” (35).

48 Ibid., 42. Pannenberg presents Helmuth Plessner’s argument (chapter 2) regarding a limitation of human openness to the world, in which the objectivity-subjectivity problem in human self-transcendence was discussed. Accordingly, Plessner argued that human beings cannot be unrestrictedly open to the world. Although they have a capacity for objectivity in principle, it is not without restriction in practice. Pannenberg stated, “This human self-transcendence presupposes a reduction in instinct, the primitive condition of the human organs, an unfinished state at birth, and a lengthy period of maturation” (60-61). In this process, human beings cannot act as a subject of their own self-realization because of the limitation of their openness to the world. Scheler explained this objectivity as human beings’ presence to what is other than themselves instinctively. To distinguish this behavior from that of other animals, Pannenberg points out human capacity to either distance themselves from other objects or be present to them in a new way (62).
comparison of the instinct that gives an animal’s life direction with the image of God that gives human life direction. Herder views this image of God that gives human life direction as what is already present in human beings in the outline form and connects it to the faith in providence; that is, the image of God is not yet fully present because it is the human goal and destination to be fulfilled in the future based on the plan of divine providence. For Herder, the image of God functions as a “teleological concept” and standard for human behavior, which implies that human beings are “not yet men, but are daily becoming so.”

Parallel to the understanding of the image of God as what gives human life a direction is also found in African religion. In their traditional religion, the Oromo of Ethiopia, who believe in the Supreme Being called *Waaqa/Waaqayyo* (God), believe that it is God the creator (*Waaqayyo Uumaa*) that has fixed both the living and non-living creatures, including human beings, at their respective places in the cosmic order for which He is the designer and protector. They also believe that a superhuman power

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49 Ibid., 45-47. To explain Pannenberg’s analysis regarding the significance of Herder’s idea of the image of God for the modern discussion of philosophical anthropology in more clear terms, it has the “already” and “not yet” dimensions. The “not yet” is that the image of God, as human destiny to become a reality in the future, describes “the unfinished humanity of human beings.” The “already” is that the future of “their destination to humanness is also to be thought of as already playing a constitutive role in establishing their characteristic natural being” (60). Pannenberg quoted I.A. Dorner, who argued that human beings are “destined to a communion of life with God or to religion. The likeness of God is thereby realized in the personal creature, so that the latter becomes an image of God. This image is to be thought of partly as an original gift, partly as a destiny” (54). Dorner further stated that the dispositions for this image “are not yet the true image of God, but only a potentiality for it. The higher meaning of the word ‘image’ points to the future” (55). Pannenberg stated that the nineteenth-century Evangelical theologians found Herder’s work relevant to their understanding of the image of God as the destiny that human beings have to attain in the future, which is made possible by God himself, rather than as a perfection of the original state of humanity before the fall (54-59).

50 Gadaa Melbaa, *Oromia: An Introduction to History of the Oromo People* (Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers, 1999), 23. Melbaa further described the Oromo *Waaga* as one and the same for all human beings, the creator of everything, the origin of all life, omnipresent, infinite, incomprehensible, pure, who does not tolerate injustice, crime, sin, and all falsehood. Put in Melba’s words, “There are many saint-like divinities called ayyaana, each seen as manifestation of the one Waaga or the same divine reality” (24-25).
called Ayyaana, which is a guardian spirit who protects and guides, dwells in a person, an animal or plant. Put in Bartels’s words, “It is ‘something of Waqa’ in a person, an animal or plant making them the way they are: a particular manifestation of the divine, of Waqa as creator and as source of all life. As a catholic Oromo priest explained it: ‘Ayana is Waqa in a particular way.’”\textsuperscript{51} Bartels wrote what his research assistant and informant, Gammachu Magarsa, considers as complete truth, “[W]e see the ayana as flowing out of Waqa in a way, filling the whole of creation, filling every creature whose ayana they are, making them the way they are, both inside and outside.”\textsuperscript{52} It may be this concept of ayyaana in the Oromo Religion that makes it easier for the Oromo converts to Protestant Christianity to understand the Christian doctrine of the “image of God” as Augustine explained it. Thus, Christianity and Oromo Religion share the view that it is only by faith that human life can understand the total dimension in which it stands.

Following Plessner’s explanation of exocentricity as a way of describing human behavior that is open to the world, Pannenberg argues that this structure of human behavior allows them to present themselves to the object as other and also enables them to distance themselves from it in favor of another object. To clarify this, Pannenberg quoted Plessner’s short formulation of the human situation: “Being positioned exocentrically, human beings stand where they stand and at the same time do not stand

\textsuperscript{51} Lambert Bartels, \textit{Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia: An Attempt to Understand} (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983), 118.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 119. As Niebuhr analyzed, in seeking God in the mystery of self-consciousness using what mysticism and Christianity have in common, Augustine demonstrated a balanced approach that goes beyond the ultimate danger of mysticism by arguing that human life points beyond itself, though it cannot make itself into that beyond. In Augustine’s words, “For not in the body but in the mind was man made in the image of God. In his own similitude let us seek God; in his own image recognize the Creator.” He added, “It is in the soul of man, that is, in his rational or intellectual soul, that we must find that image of the Creator which is immortally implanted in its immortality.” Niebuhr, \textit{The Nature and Destiny of Man}, 153-158.
Pannenberg described openness of human beings to the world as signifying openness to God: “[O]penness of the human being to the world signifies ultimately an openness to what is beyond the world, so that the real meaning of this openness to the world might be better described as an openness to God which alone makes possible a gaze embracing the world as a whole.”

Pannenberg asserted that this openness to God is possible only through the mediation of a finite world, which is specifically applicable to the relationship with other human beings whose lives share the same question and experience. Expressing his consent, Gary Simpson’s argues,

Such a universal horizon, nevertheless, is always mediated to us through particular others. This step into the universal brings the self, of course, face-to-face with the question of God. Yet, because the universal is always mediated through particular others, this step into the universal also means that the self must become a self through social relations.

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53 Pannenberg, Anthropology, 66-67. Pannenberg describes the exocentric structure of human living as having an openness that exceeds the limitation to the things of the world. In his words, “Even when they move beyond all experience or idea of perceptible objects they continue to be exocentric, related to something other than themselves, but now an Other beyond all the objects of their world, an Other that at the same time embrace this entire world and thus ensures the possible unification of the life of human beings in the world, despite the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the world’s actions on them” (68).

54 Ibid., 69.

55 Ibid., 73-74. Pannenberg discussed this in connection with the theme of the ultimate human destiny, which involves the question of human beings about themselves and the question of God, in the idea of the image of God. This enabled the thought that human life hopes for immortal destiny that finds expression in the idea of a divine reality that transcends everything finite. Pannenberg further argues, “They [human beings] must continue to depend on achieving their destiny, which directs them beyond the world of finite things, by dealing with the things of their world which, as a world inhabited by society, is mediated to them through the social relations in which they live” (70, 73-74).

56 Gary M. Simpson, “Human Nature and Communicative Ethics,” in Investigating the Biological Foundations of Human Morality, ed. James P. Hurd (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 199. Pannenberg presents different understandings of the “image of God” in terms of human relation to the world. Accordingly, the early church and the Middle Ages viewed the image of God in a relationship of the human soul with God. The Reformers located it in the union of human will with God’s will, which was found in the first human being based on original justice. The modern view, which is established on the biblical exegesis of the Old Testament priestly text, considers the image of God as connected with the authority and commission to rule over creation. This is more clearly perceived in the ancient Near East, where the king was referred to as the earthly representative of God and of the divine rule over the world. Thus the priestly document places the responsibility to play the role of king in the context of creation on the shoulder of human being. Pannenberg, Anthropology, 74-76.
This view concurs with the African religious notion of human relationality. Laurenti Magesa (from Tanzania) asserts that African religion defines a true humanity as related to the context of other human beings in the world, and to the dead. Life and its mystique are constituted on kinship, which is expressed in and by ancestor relationship. A true human being cannot live in isolation if he/she is to be a moral and ethical person. Calamities that human beings experience in their life may be interpreted as a warning that something wrong is done to their relationships with their ancestors, whom Magesa portrays as guardians of life whose intervention is most important to guide to true morality.  

Vincent Mulago, in his article “Traditional African Religion and Christianity,” included in African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society, articulates, “The life of individual is understood as participated life. The members of the tribe, the clan, the family know that they live not by life of their own but by that of the community.”  

Pannenberg suggests that if Herder’s attempt to connect theological statements about God’s image with the anthropological data, which modern thinkers summed up in the concept of human being’s openness to the world, is acceptable, it is right to expect the biblical linking of the image of God and human rule over the earth as related in some ways to the openness to the world. Pannenberg stated that the true meaning of the divine commission given to humanity to be a master of creation excludes the exploitative and

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arbitrary human treatment of nonhuman nature.\textsuperscript{59} He suggests, “Human beings are to rule over the world in a spirit of responsibility to the Father. It is impossible to argue to a right of limitless exploitation of nature for whatever ends human beings may arbitrarily choose.”\textsuperscript{60} This seems to have been neglected in the interethnic and socio-political relations of African society in the past and present.

Nineteenth-century theologians, including Kant and Schleiermacher, held to the view that sin contradicts human destiny. In connection with this, whether the image of God is lost or completely destroyed by the fall was discussed. Pannenberg stated that most twentieth-century theologians agreed that the \textit{imago Dei} as a destiny of human beings cannot be lost or suffer complete destruction.\textsuperscript{61} Paul Althaus described the image of God as the essential destination of human beings to God, which is “neither lost nor able to be lost.” Barth, refuting the view of those who argued in favor of the loss of the image of God through the fall, commented that “the image is not to be thought of as a human possession that could be lost.”\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{59} Pannenberg, \textit{Anthropology}, 76-78. In Pannenberg’s words, “The mastery of nature to which human beings are called according to the account of creation in the priestly document must be exercised in awareness of the creator’s own dominion over his creation. This means that human beings have not been given carte blanche for the selfish pillage and exploitation of non-human nature. Rather, their rule over creation as the creator’s representative must take God’s creative will as its norm” (78). With regard to the distortion of the biblical commission of domination, Pannenberg argues that the problem lies in the attempt to emancipate modern humanity from biblical revelation that turned the biblical commission of domination into a subjugation of nature to human beings on their own authority and for their own arbitrary use.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 79.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 59. Karl Barth and Emil Brunner debated over the question of whether the image of God was completely lost (Barth) in the fall or whether a “remnant” was left (Brunner), which is based on the human rationality and the capacity to be addressed by God. Brunner believes that there is still a distinctive formal human characteristic that survived the fall, though affected by some degree of material corruption, summed up in human rationality and capacity to be addressed by God (49).

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid. Pannenberg argues, “According to Brunner, a point of contact does exist and consists precisely in that formal ‘remnant’ of the image of God; it consists, that is, in the fact that despite sin human beings remain human, so that God’s revelatory action in its turning to them can establish contact with the original destination of their being and remind them of this. This would be impossible if sinners were wholly
Pannenberg devoted the third chapter of his work to the discussion of “Centrality and Sin.” The disloyalty expressed in human dominion over nature caused the brokenness and distortion of human identity. As Simpson stated, “Pannenberg’s analysis of sin as the dominance of centrality over exocentricity means that the fragility of human beings is further exacerbated by the presence of sin within social life.”

Pannenberg defines dominion either as a duty or responsibility mixed with self-interest or exploitation and oppression in which the ruler takes advantage over those under his/her rule so as to satisfy self-interest. Dominion as oppression involves the opposition of the ruler’s will to the inherent rights and integrity of the domain that is ruled.

Plessner, as analyzed by Pannenberg, describes the process of reflection that results in the union of centrality and exocentricity as self-conscious.

Pannenberg defines the dominion of dominion exercised in honor of the image of God in humanity humbly accomplishes the will of God (Gen 1:28) and prompts God’s promise of blessing to fulfillment (Gen 5). It is through serving each other in their relationship, and thereby serving God, that human beings maintain their exocentric identity. In contrast, a dominion that involves propagation of the defiled imago Dei opposes the rule of God by serving the will or self-interest of the ruler. The outcome is oppressing and killing each other due to jealousy and egocentric self-promotion, which is the manifestation of centrality in human beings.

Pannenberg argues that the exocentric self-transcendence, which enables the ego to present itself to other as other, leads to self-consciousness. In contrast, the “break in the ego” occurs when the ego sets itself against the other. The seriousness of this break in the ego is characterized by self-assertion and immersed in hostility to God” (49). Barth did not have room in his theological view for any anthropological conditions to be considered distinct and prior to God’s gracious action because, for him, “God’s action is not dependent on anything outside himself; such a dependence would be an infringement on his sovereignty” (49-50).


Pannenberg, Anthropology, 80. Dominion exercised in honor of the image of God in humanity humbly accomplishes the will of God (Gen 1:28) and prompts God’s promise of blessing to fulfillment (Gen 5). It is through serving each other in their relationship, and thereby serving God, that human beings maintain their exocentric identity. In contrast, a dominion that involves propagation of the defiled imago Dei opposes the rule of God by serving the will or self-interest of the ruler. The outcome is oppressing and killing each other due to jealousy and egocentric self-promotion, which is the manifestation of centrality in human beings.

Pannenberg states, “But Plessner considers it even more basic that self-consciousness as manifestation of exocentricity is the place where human beings are separated from themselves, and at bottom this in turn means the place where they are separated from their own bodies. Self-consciousness is the basis of the knowledge that human beings have of themselves as soul set over against body” (82).

Ibid., 81. Pannenberg states, “But Plessner considers it even more basic that self-consciousness as manifestation of exocentricity is the place where human beings are separated from themselves, and at bottom this in turn means the place where they are separated from their own bodies. Self-consciousness is the basis of the knowledge that human beings have of themselves as soul set over against body” (82).
“arrogant claim” of the ego in relation to the world. Thus it contradicts its own exocentric destiny.66

In this aspect, sociability is the central moral and ethical imperative of African religion. The refusal to share is wrong and considered an act of destruction of the community. Hopkins states that solidarity accompanies social justice. As Benezet Bujo of Zaire argues, as cited in Hopkins, solidarity arises in good and bad situations. Hopkins views good solidarity as a hallmark of the singular person and bad solidarity as evincing to negative directions:

(a) When one person or individuals actively participate in harmful acts against community, communal values, or the common good and (b) when one person or individuals fail to stand in solidarity in the presence of the good. Failure to comport the self and selves in the right way and at the right time constitutes the bad. Both negative active participation and refusal to participate in the good yield the death of community.67

Regarding the universality of sin (the first sin, original (inherited) sin, death), Pannenberg stated that the bondage of will, which is the formal act of self-transcendence,  

66 Ibid., 85. Augustine, as analyzed by Pannenberg, argued, “Concupiscence (cupiditas) is itself a sin insofar as it represents a perverse form of love or volition. This ‘perverse will’ (perverse voluntas) distorts the order of the universe by turning to inferior goods and for their sake abandoning better and higher good—namely, God, his truth and his law” (87-88). Yet, Barth, as quoted by Pannenberg, argued, “Only when we know Jesus Christ do we really know that man is the man of sin, and what sin is, and what it means for man” (92). Following Augustine, Pannenberg described concupiscence as a sinful will that involves turning away from God to minor goods, which cause distortion of the order of the world (87-88). He calls readers’ attention toward Augustine’s description of sin as founded in corruption of human spirit/desire, which has the empirical manifestation and radical character. In refutation of Barth’s argument that human beings cannot realize their sinfulness outside faith in Christ, Pannenberg elaborated on a view shared by Augustine and Luther regarding the universal efficacy of the divine law (natural law). The notion that unbelievers do not have any idea about the state of estrangement of humanity limits the meaning of sin to unbelief, whereby the explanation of sin as “disobedience” of the first human being that caused alienation of the entire human race from God is neglected (90-93).

67 Hopkins, Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion, 87. This is paralleled by a famous insight of Bishop Ambrose of Milan (339-397 C.E.) regarding Just War tradition, as written by Gary M. Simpson: “Whoever does not ward off a blow to a fellow man, when he can, is as much at fault as the striker.” Simpson further analyzes, “Ambrose’s maxim that failure to protect is the moral equivalent of murder extends the natural-law principle of ‘do not harm’ and remains a core value of [Just War Tradition]” Gary M. Simpson, War, Peace, and God: Rethinking the Just-War Tradition (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 41.
reduces its range and points to a motivational structure which precedes and underlies individual decisions and actions “as being the source of human failure in regard to the self.” Christian theology refers to this structure as “original sin.” This enslavement of the will is connected with the egoism of human beings, which expresses itself as the ego considers itself to be the center of its world. Accordingly, human beings are already sinners even before committing actual sin. The universality of sin in the notion of original sin presupposes the universality of the redemption by Jesus Christ.

Pannenberg refutes the traditional Augustinian view of “inherited sin,” arguing that it is “unable to accomplish the purpose for which it was elaborated. It cannot prove the responsibility of individuals for their sinfulness even though the latter already has roots in the natural conditions of human existence prior to any action of their own.” Instead, Pannenberg explains the reason for individuals’ accountability, “Evil in human beings comes from their created nature, but it comes because they fail to achieve their destiny to be the images of God.”

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68 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 119-120. Pannenberg states, “Then it is concupiscence or the inversion of the end-means structure in the human relation to the world that is sin in the foreground; moreover, at the center of this inversion is evidently *superbia*, the baseless high-handedness and egocentricity of human beings, which in turn implies a turning away from God….The distortion of human behavior does not begin with a conscious turning from God; rather, the estrangement from God takes place in an obscure manner and is for long periods more or less unnoticed, being simply implicit in the distortion of our relation to the world and ourselves” (93-94). Unlike Augustine, Kant views human perversity as arising from a distortion of the internal order of human nature itself rather than as a distortion of the order of the cosmos. This involves the divorce of morality from the divinely ordained subordination to the moral law and approving it merely based on its compatibility with the natural striving for happiness, as analyzed by Pannenberg (94-95).

69 Ibid., 124. Augustine views the responsibility of human beings for the inevitable sins which lies in the concupiscential structure of human behavior as grounding on the state of original perfection in which the first human being was created. He argued that Adam could have avoided sin in virtue of the state of original perfection in which he was created (123).

70 Ibid., 145. Pannenberg further explained, “Only in a broad sense of the term is this human weakness that manifests itself as sinfulness to be itself described as “evil;” it is evil only in view of its extreme consequences as seen in hatred of God and one’s fellow human beings. This means, admittedly, that sin is evil even in its root, which is usually hidden from human beings themselves” (145).
Likewise, African religion views sin and morality in the context of social life. Lambert Bartels rightly observed that sin (cubbuu/yakka) in the Oromo Religion is “simply a breaking of the cosmic order.” The Oromo word for truth is dhugaa, which also has the connotation of justice. Waaqa as a guardian and protector of dhugaa (both truth and justice) is central to the oaths and reaction of the people to the transgressors of his law on which their social order is based. The Oromo believe that Waaqa withdraws from those who take a false oath and from evil doers.\(^{71}\) According to Magesa, African religion expresses “sin” or “evil” by the concept of “wrongdoing,” “badness,” or “destruction of life” because of the pragmatic and concrete nature of its moral perspective. Sin is always attached to a wrong doer and, ultimately, the wrongdoer is a human person. The power that leads to wrong doing is believed to be more concentrated in some organs. The phenomenon of the “evil eye,” which means “someone can project harm by looking at another's property or person” comes from this thought. Thus people or personalized beings are considered evil so long as they allow their selves to be instruments for spreading of bad intentions, bad words, and wrong deeds. Put in Magesa’s words, “In other words, they are incarnations of evil powers, at least for the time they behave in an anti-life manner, that frustrate the flowering of life and life-energies.”\(^ {72}\) Niebuhr described sin of human beings as involving the violation of law of love, which is demonstrated in a harmonious relation of “life to life” by pretending to be

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\(^{71}\) Bartels, *Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia: An Attempt to Understand*, 14,102.

the center and source of their own life instead of acknowledging and obey God as the center and source of life.\textsuperscript{73}

Finally, even though Pannenberg’s work is based on western thoughts and intended for western readers, his interpretation of the \textit{imago Dei} in terms of social relations makes it relevant to the African contexts. The importance of recognizing relationship in daily life of both the individual and the community as moral and ethical imperative is expressed in what Mbiti emphasized as a principle of African people’s ethical consciousness: “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.” K.A. Opoku confirms this in his proverb “Life is when you are together, alone you are an animal.”\textsuperscript{74} In the same token, the Oromo refer to an individual who does not like to share as \textit{doqna}, which means “tightfisted” or “stingy.” Such a person loses respect and social acceptance because of their egoistic inclination described in the proverb, \textit{Kan tuutaa wajjin hin nyaanne hantuutaa wajjin nyaatti} (“One who does not eat with people eats with mice”). In short, being human and sociability are inseparable in African religion.

\textbf{A Brief Summary of Martha Nussbaum’s Argument}

The capabilities approach can be provisionally defined as an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and to theorizing about basic social justice. It holds that the key question to ask, when comparing societies and assessing them for their basic decency or justice, is, “What is each person able to do and to be?” In other words, the approach takes each person as an end, asking not just about the total or average well-being but about the opportunities available to each person. … Finally, the approach is concerned with entrenched social injustice and inequality, especially capability failures that are the results of discrimination or marginalization.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{73} Niebuhr, \textit{The Nature and Destiny of Man}, 16-18.

\textsuperscript{74} Magesa, \textit{African Religion: The Moral Tradition of Abundant Life}, 57-65.

In her book *Creating Capabilities*, Martha Nussbaum argues that the problem of the world’s poorer nations cannot be solved by increasing the Gross Domestic Product per capita (GDP). This crude measure does not help to improve the quality of life in a nation which excludes the majority of people from enjoying the fruits of the nation’s economic progress. The failure of the GDP approach is that it neither considers the life quality of poor nor asks whether there are groups experiencing racial, religious, and gender related marginalization within the population. In contrast, Nussbaum claims, the Capabilities approach defends a minimum threshold of capability as an essential condition for social justice.

Nussbaum’s “capabilities approach” begins with a question: “What are people actually able to do and to be? What real opportunities are available to them?” She argues that wise policy choices and dedicated action are required of many individuals in order to improve people’s quality of life. She also suggests that leaders of countries need to balance between the concern for national economic growth and meaningful lives of the citizens. Nussbaum believes that a nation should put its people at the center of the purpose of development. What is the purpose of development? To explain this, she quotes Mahbub ul Haq, who says, “The real wealth of a nation is its people. And the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and meaningful lives.”

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76 Ibid., ix. She further explains, “Because countries respond to public rankings that affect their international reputation, the crude approach encouraged them to work for economic growth alone, without attending to the living standard of their poorer inhabitants, and without addressing issues such as health and education, which typically do not improve with economic growth” (ix).

77 Ibid., 49.

78 Ibid., 76.

79 Ibid., xi.
healthy, and creative lives. This simple but powerful truth is too often forgotten in the pursuit of material and financial wealth.”

To highlight the social injustice that women in India are experiencing, Nussbaum presents Vasanti’s life experience as an illustration throughout her book. Women’s inequalities regarding the right to property and inheritance were institutionalized by the religious-based systems. Moreover, Nussbaum reports that the fact that Indian women have less access to education has limited not only their participation in politics and options to employment but also their understanding of the history and economic structure of the nation. The social and governmental choices as well as weak law enforcement contributed to domestic violence of women. A majority of Ethiopian women have been going through similar repressive socio-political situations.

Nussbaum argues that the GDP approach must be replaced by the Capabilities approach to human development, which is an appropriate means to lead poorer nations towards improving their qualities of life. She states that the struggle for a life worthy of human dignity and for equality and justice are common to all nations. Seen from the standpoint of Nussbaum’s human development approach, all nations are developing nations because “they contain problems of human development and struggles for a fully adequate quality of life for minimal justice.” Yet, the Ethiopian government needs to turn to a Capabilities approach as a means to assure the nation equal access to minimal justice and better quality of life.

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80 Ibid., 1.
81 Ibid., 4.
82 Ibid., 7-8.
83 Ibid., 15-16.
Nussbaum defines Capabilities as the answers to the question, “What is this person able to do and to be?” Amartya Sen refers to them as “substantial freedoms,” a set of opportunities to choose and to act. To distinguish these “substantial freedoms” from internal capabilities, Nussbaum refers to them as combined capabilities, which comprises the freedoms created by a combination of personal abilities and political, social, and economic environment. Internal capabilities are gained through trainings and interaction with the social, economic, familial, and political setting.\textsuperscript{84} Nussbaum believes that the capabilities approach to social justice has to ask what a life worthy of human dignity requires. She provides a threshold level of ten Central Capabilities a government should secure to all citizens, namely, (1) life, (2) bodily health, (3) bodily integrity, (4) senses, imagination and thought, (5) emotions, (6) practical reason, (7) affiliation, (8) other species, (9) play, and (10) control over one’s environment. She argues that the removal of these constitutes robbing of a life of its human dignity.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 20-21. Nussbaum asserts, “One job of a society that wants to promote the most important human capabilities is to support the development of internal capabilities- through education, resources to enhance physical and emotional health, support for family care and love, a system of education, and much more” (21). Nussbaum also discusses the utilitarian approach to human development “that measures quality of life in a nation by looking at either total or average utility, where utility is understood as the satisfaction of preferences” (50). This approach measures quality of life based on the feedback the people give about their lives. She further argues, “[T]he utilitarian approach seems to care about people, but it doesn’t care about them all deeply, and its commitment to a single metric effaces a great deal about how people seek and find value in their lives” (51-53).

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 30-34. Nussbaum’s ten Central Capabilities can be analyzed as follows: The first three capabilities (1-3 in the above paragraph) are concerned with the human life and body, according to which individuals are naturally entitled to the rights to live to the end of human life of normal length, to have good health and suitable shelter, and to have freedom to move from place to place. These capabilities are intended to safeguard individuals against any external attack that may involve untimely death, sexual assault and domestic violence, denial of opportunities for sexual satisfaction, and loss of reproductive health and interest (33). To summarize the next three capabilities (4-6 in the paragraph), they are concerned with the right of expression, association, and critical reflection. They are designed to protect one’s right to use his/her senses, to imagine, think and reason (which allows one to use one’s mind with freedom towards experiencing and creating works, freedom of expressing one’s feeling in political and artistic settings, and freedom of religious exercise), to exercise emotional attachments to things and people, and to defend one’s conception of good and beliefs through critical reflection (33-34). The last four capabilities (7-10) promote the idea that human beings are created with the ability to live with and for other people, animals, plants,
The author also argues that the capabilities approach has common ground with human rights approaches. This link lies in the fact that all people (and nonhuman animals) have some fundamental entitlements just by virtue of their humanity, which the society is responsible to respect and support. Yet the capabilities approach goes further to address issues of gender, race, etc., which the human rights paradigm has failed to do effectively. Nussbaum states that the language of rights is relevant to the capabilities approach because of its putting emphasis on the notion of core entitlement founded on the idea of basic justice. As she puts, “It reminds us that people have justified and urgent claims to certain types of treatment, no matter what the world around them has done about that.”

In Chapter 4, in her discussion of fundamental entitlements, Nussbaum claims that in order to make sure nations are offering a better quality of life, it is advisable to look at a group of central human capabilities instead of looking at GNP. She argues that her version of the Capabilities approach (which gives attention to content, in contrast to Sen’s, which views capabilities as a “perspective of freedom”) considers “the list of ten Central Capabilities as a basis for the idea of fundamental political entitlements and constitutional law.” She further explains, “My version of the approach uses the idea of and the natural environment as a whole. Beside the concern for creation, human beings are entitled to the rights to play and control over their material and political environment. These capabilities protect human dignity, equality, freedom of speech, and the right to hold property (34). These rights are included in the Constitution of the current Ethiopian government. However, the violation of natural and democratic rights is apparent from different sorts of mistreatments the citizens are experiencing at the hands of the government security force.

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86 Ibid., 62-63.
87 Ibid., 67-68.
88 Ibid., 70.
capabilities as the core of an account of minimal social justice and constitutional law.”

Nussbaum expresses that her approach concurs with Sen’s idea of capabilities in maintaining democratic deliberation as long as the fundamental entitlements of nations is respected.

Nussbaum asserts that her capabilities approach endorses and develops Rawls’s idea of political liberalism in order to encourage respect to a plurality of religious and secular views of the purpose and meaning of human life. She argues that established religions or secularism may threaten equality by dividing citizens into an in-group and out-group, whereby it hinders all citizens from entering the public square on equal terms. In light of this argument, Nussbaum describes the Capabilities approach as a political doctrine only, which seeks to ensure respect to the diversity of religious and secular doctrines pertaining to modern nations.

In the Appendix of the book, Nussbaum presents James. J. Heckman’s idea of a human capability approach which focuses on early childhood. For Heckman, capabilities are skills or potentials for achievement. His approach, which is rooted in the “human capital” approach within the economy, is closer in meaning to Nussbaum’s notion of “internal capability.” Heck argues that “human capabilities are shaped decisively at a very early age by environmental influences of a wide variety, beginning with prenatal

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89 Ibid., 71.

90 Ibid., 74-75.

91 Ibid., 89-92. Nussbaum explains, “Any established church (or the governmental imposition of secularism) denigrates nonbelievers in the favored doctrine by stating that they are an out-group” (92). In this case, government is expected to show equal respect for persons rather than taking a stand on the religious and metaphysical issues that divide citizens along the lines of their comprehensive doctrines.

92 Ibid., 93.
influences on later development, and continuing through early life in family and early schooling.”

Nussbaum does not recognize the role Christians play in the implementation of the Capabilities approach. She has good reason for reacting against philanthropy. In arguing against the path of private philanthropy, she wanted to make clear that the spirit of active good will and charity towards others cannot be an effective solution when the role of institutions is neglected. The Capabilities approach rejects the consequentialist thinkers who view the problem of global justice as a mere personal philanthropy. This view promotes the need to obligate people to give a lot of their wealth to charity organizations for supporting people in deprived circumstances. Besides neglecting the role of institutions, Nussbaum points out that this causes enormous collective-action problem and fairness problem. Her position seems to be based on her earlier argument about the nations and global justice, that in the Capabilities approach, it is the responsibility of government to provide support for the Central Capabilities of all. To complement her point, I would also argue that even if the role of institutions is considered, philanthropy cannot help to hit the target of the Capabilities approach where the real need of a society is to change the system of government.

Finally, Nussbaum compares her Capabilities approach with Sen’s approach, which distinguishes between well-being and agency aspects of freedom. In his survey of a variety of conceptions of well-being, Sen rejected “both mental-state conceptions and

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93 Ibid., 193-194.
94 Ibid., 118.
95 Ibid., 113.
desire-satisfaction conceptions” because he argues that they are too narrow to include other important aspects of a person’s well-being. As his conclusion is cited in Nussbaum, “The Primary feature of well-being can be seen in terms of how a person can ‘function,’ taking that term in a very broad sense.”96 Furthermore, he holds to the view that one must evaluate the important functions and this evaluation determines his or her well-being. Nussbaum, who argues that her use of Capabilities-Based conception is political conception and not comprehensive conception of both well-being and agency, concludes that there is no need to distinguish between agency freedom and well-being freedom as long as we have “a sufficiently refined conception of well-being.”97 Although Nussbaum contends that her Capabilities Approach is not comprehensive, her work shows that this claim cannot be substantiated because of the inclusive nature of her research.

**Conclusion**

In summary, all human beings are created in the image of God. God had a clear purpose in mind when He created mankind, which it can be fulfilled only if it maintains the relationship it has with Him as His image bearer and His representative. As Bartel argues, “Because of our connection to and dependence on God, this means that freedom and relationship are inseparable in the *imago Dei.*”98 Yet, human beings did not share essential reality with God by virtue of their creation in His image even before the Fall. There is no nation on the earth that can claim a substantive or an ontological unity between God and their ethnic identity.

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96 Ibid., 197.

97 Ibid., 198-201.

There is also no biblical foundation for a group of people to claim higher ethnic status than others. All human beings are equal in God’s sight as His image bearers. As a consequence of sin, all humans equally bear the distorted image of God. No particular ethnic origin can be traced back to either the Fall or the Tower of Babel. No ethnic group or nation became what they are because of God’s pronouncing judgment on them for breaking a covenant. All are descended from Adam and Eve, who were created in God’s image, equally affected by the Fall, and can be redeemed only in Christ who carried their sin on the cross.

Finally, God’s image in humanity as a responsibility to one another is supposed to be expressed in taking seriously the often neglected-question in our relationship, i.e., how we ought to treat our neighbors on behalf of God. It is compulsory for humanity in the image of God to promote the spirit of love and respect, a sense of belongingness, and an attitude of mutual recognition within the societies with ethnic diversity. In such contexts, to be created in the image of God means that we are accountable to each other regardless of our respective ethnic heritages. The wellbeing of our neighbors really matters more than the egotistic craving of our sinful nature to cultivate a worldwide reputation and recognition.
CHAPTER THREE
THE DEFILED IMAGO DEI IN THE MULTI-ETHNIC AND MULTI-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF ETHIOPIA

Introduction

Religion, politics, and ethnicity seem to be the major causes for the violence and social injustice that happen around the world today. In Ethiopia, the hidden self-interest of the individuals or communities involved is at the center of such conflict, which has been threatening national harmony in religious, political and ethnic interactions. Although theological discussions and critiques are going on at colleges and seminaries, they are muffled and never reach the level of provoking public debate. Therefore, this chapter discusses the following question: What is it that makes religion, politics, and ethnicity the causes for violence and social injustice instead of being agents for promoting peace, security, equality, dignity, and human flourishing, whereby we may do justice to the image of God in humanity in our relationship with our neighbors? To answer this question, ethnicity in the history of Christianity and the Ethiopian church, the defiled imago Dei expressed in terms of social justice and church/state relations (under which I discuss social justice and church/state relations under imperial rules, social justice and church state relations under the socialist Dergue, and social justice and church/state relations under the current government), and the defiled imago Dei expressed in terms of the declining national harmony in Ethiopia today, under which the tensions of ethnic identity and humanity in the image of God and ethnicity superseding
religious identity will be discussed. In this chapter, I also turn to Martha Nussbaum’s *Creating Capabilities* (reviewed in chapter two) in order to use seven of her ten Central Capabilities as a lens through which I analyze the problem. This is intended to establish a clear foundation for addressing the tension between ethnicity and humanity in the image of God in terms of forgiveness within the framework of systematic theology and theological anthropology in the subsequent chapter.

**Ethnicity in the History of Christianity and the Ethiopian Church**

Ethnicity in the History of Christianity

Early church history shows that Christianity was born among a community with significant awareness about ethnic identity. The Bible gives evidence to ethnic-based mutual hostility characterizing relationships between the Jews and the Samaritans (John 4:9). Following Peter’s proclaiming of the gospel in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, Christianity developed within the Jewish community and progressed to Antioch, which became its main center from 44 to 68 AD (Acts 1-12). Later, through the efforts of early evangelists, it rapidly spread to the neighboring regions. Paul, a Jew who began his missionary journey from Antioch, where the followers of Jesus were first called Christians, spent his life carrying the gospel to the Gentile world.\(^1\) Christianity was well established in the eastern Mediterranean world at the end of the 1st century with a significant presence in Rome, the capital city of Roman Empire. During the Patristic period (c. 100-700), the church at Rome became so powerful that tensions began to develop between the Christian leaders at Rome and Constantinople, which later ended in

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\(^1\) Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 62-64.
a schism between the Western (Latin-speaking) and the Eastern (Greek-speaking) Churches for both political and linguistic reasons. Christianity faced severe persecution from the state at its early stages and the church was denied its existence. The conversion of Constantine, who became the Emperor of Rome (306-37), brought to an end the dispute between the church and state. Besides moving from the fringes of Roman society and becoming the central religion of the Mediterranean world, Christianity became an institution that preserved the heritage of classical antiquity, including artistic works on carved stone depicting figures personifying the ethnically defining spirit of the people.

Although ethnicity seems to have been given less attention than religious identity, it played a significant role in shaping the world of the first Christians. As Paul R. Spickard and Kevin M. Cragg state, “The earliest Christian came to Christ, not simply as new creatures, but as human beings with personal histories and social environments. Their lives may have been transformed, their sins forgiven, and their eyes opened, but they continued to live their new lives in a social and historical context.” They add, “The world of the earliest Christians was shaped by the interaction of Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures.” This can be seen in the way the ethno-linguistic expressions—Latin

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6 Ibid. Speaking of the diaspora, Spickard and Cragg say, “Jews living amid a Gentile majority made significant contributions to Jewish thinking. Alexandrians translated the scripture into koine Greek.
and Greek—and the words for geographical directions—East and West—which were used to refer to the two main regions formed by the schism, became the terms signifying an emphasis on the evolving cultural differences between Jews, Greeks, and Romans.

Medieval Christianity went through challenging experiences characterized by the Crusades, the Inquisition, and general intolerance. The competition for political and religious power (to which social, cultural, and economic interests were attached) marked the secular and Christian life of the Middle Ages (c. 500-1500). During this period of church history, another aspect of ethnic categorization was introduced when the “Latin West” or the “Western Empire” was invaded by the Germanic people, who were referred to as “barbarians.” It was the Romans who used this derogatory term to distinguish the Christian Empire from what they labeled as the “barbarian kingdoms.” The conversion of Germans and their interaction with Romans resulted in not only the integration of the Germanic cultural element with the Christian Roman culture, but also later led to the formation of an amalgamated elite. The tribal nature of the conversions gradually led some priests to adopt pagan practices for Christian uses or allowing these practices to remain. It is also important to note that as a result of many bishops’ becoming feudal lords in pursuit of wealth and political privileges, which involved them in constant and

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8 Spickard and Cragg, *A Global History of Christians*, 68-69. The authors further state, “The processes of conversion of these barbarians does not entirely match the twentieth-century models. Many conversions were tribal in nature. That is, a king or leader would decide to make Christianity the tribal religion and his loyal followers were expected to follow suit. . . . That this produced any change of heart among the converts is doubtful” (69).
complicated intrigues and warfare, the church became a political power at the expense of its considerable moral and spiritual authority.⁹

Reformation history reveals that the tension of ethnic identity was mixed up with religious and national issues during this period. In Germany, language was an identifying factor for national unity during the Reformation. Germany was a country with a lot of small states. Luther defended his insight against the accusation by the kings of small states for threatening their faith, language, and nationality. Latin was the language of the time under the large Roman State. The main problem was his translation of the NT into his own (German) language, which was unlawful because the common language of the Bible was Latin at that time. Unity of religion and language was considered something that guarantees the unity of the state. The Lutheran faith spread in the Northern part of Germany, which caused a serious division in Europe. In the south, the religion of the king was the religion of the people. This led to a conflict between Catholicism and Lutheranism. The dispute also spread to other parts of Europe. Catholicism and Protestantism were defended by their respective adherents.¹⁰ As we can see, in general, religion, language, and political boundaries were used as the defining elements of ethnicity in different eras of the church history, which also turned out to be divisive factors when handled with a lack of flexibility rather than contributing positively to the ecumenical and missional identity of the church.


¹⁰ Cairns, Christianity, 280-287.
Ethnicity in Ethiopian Church History

According to the Ethiopian Christian tradition, the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch by evangelist Philip, which is recorded in Acts 8:26-29, marks the introduction of Christian faith to the land. This tradition traces to a much older biblical evidence recorded in 1 Kings 10:1-13 about the queen of Sheba’s visiting the Israelite king Solomon. The queen, who was believed to be Ethiopian, bore him a son named Menelik, a name later adopted by Ethiopian kings. According to the historical account, Christianity first came to Ethiopia about 330 AD, when Adesius and Frumentius, two Syrian Christian brothers, were shipwrecked off the coast and were enslaved in the north during the ancient Kingdom of Axum. The two brothers became so influential in the royal court that they served as tutors to prince Ezana. Ernst Hammerschidt, Siegbert Uhlig, and Jonathan J. Bonk argue that this influence set foundation for the cultural domination that continued to the present day. It is important to note the coming of a group of Syrian monks known as the Nine Saints in 480 AD, who contributed to the ongoing evangelization process. According to Fekadu Gurmessa, in addition to extending evangelization activities outside Axum by the support of the Axumite monarchs, the Nine

11 Kelly, “Ecclesiastical Centers of Early Christianity,” 230. Kelly says, “These may be legends, but historically Semites from Arabia invaded Ethiopia between 1000 and 400 BCE, and the country’s language, Ge’ez, is Semitic. Determining the origins of Ethiopian Christianity is hindered by ancient Christian writers who confused Ethiopia with India and, more frequently, with Nubia (modern Sudan)” (230).

12 Ibid.

13 Ernst Hammerschidt, Siegbert Uhlig, and Jonathan J. Bonk, “Ethiopian Orthodox Church,” in The Encyclopedia of Christianity, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 159. As it is recorded by Hammerschidt, Uhlig, and Bonk in Ethiopian Orthodox Church history, “Frumentius enjoyed success in the exercise of his responsibilities [as a bishop], since Christianity soon became the official religion of the Aksumite kingdom, setting the stage for its eventual domination of the warp and woof of Ethiopian cultural and linguistic identity, a domination that continues to the present day” (159).
Saints translated the Bible into Ge’ez, added vowels to the Sabean alphabet, and incorporated Greek numbers into their writing, which became huge contributions to the Ethiopian civilization and to the cultural gap between the Amhara and other ethnic groups. Later, with Muslims taking control of the port of Adulis in 702 AD, Ethiopia suddenly became isolated from the rest of the Christian world, including the countries of the Mediterranean basin.\textsuperscript{14} Gurmess\textsuperscript{a} states that the impact of the introduction and extension of Islam along the trade routes to the security of the country was not given due attention by the Monarchs until Zara Yaqob (1434-1468) ascended to the Ethiopian throne in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, Christianity served as a channel for ethnic self-propagation of the Amhara, which was expressed through the longstanding domination of cultural and linguistic identity of the country.

Centuries later, the arrival of the German missionary Petter Heyling (c. 1634) and the Swiss Samuel Gobat (c. 1830) as well as the German Johann Ludwig Krapf (c. 1837) with intention to revive the Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity was not successful because of the joint effort of the clergy and monarchs.\textsuperscript{16} For example, Gustav Arén states, “Unable to move into Oromo territory proper without royal permission, Krapf submitted his plan to Sahle-Sillassé in September 1839. The monarch flatly turned him down. ‘The

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\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. Gurmess\textsuperscript{a} says, “In the fifteenth century, Ethiopia faced a threat from Muslim Sultanates. King Zara Yaqob (1434-1468) envisioned getting military assistance from European Catholic governments by seeking to merge the Ethiopian Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church” (46). He adds, “He reckoned that an appeal by the EOC to the Bishop of Rome and European Catholic monarchs for Christian solidarity might bring forth military assistance. In 1431, he sent a delegation comprised of two monks from the Ethiopian monastery in Jerusalem to the Council of Florence (1431-1445) to report on his country’s precarious situation” (54).
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Gallas will kill you’, he argued.”

Birri reports that the clergy convinced King Sahle Sellassie of Shoa of the political and religious importance of preventing Europeans from proceeding to the central part of the country. As a result, in 1842, he gave orders at the coast to prevent missionaries, including Carl Wilhelm Isenberg and Johann Ludwig Krapf, from re-entering the kingdom. As Birri states, “The king discouraged him [Krapf] by saying that the Oromo would kill him if he were granted permission to go. . . . The Orthodox priests influenced the people to rise in protest against the return of the missionaries.”

This was a deliberate attempt to prevent mission to the Oromo people.

Later, the modern Ethiopia came into existence with the victory over the Italians at the battle of Aduwa in 1896 under the rule of Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913), who integrated his mission of unification with the spreading of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. Emperor Haile Selassie (1892-1975) not only maintained Menelik’s achievements until 1974, but also fostered the domination of the Amhara ethnic group under the umbrella of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity as a dominant religious force. Nation and religion were viewed as identical, as one had to be Amhara and the member of EOC to be recognized as a citizen. Obligatory use of Amharic, taking an Amharic name at baptism, and banning the public use of any other language were among the means of “Amaharization.” Izabela Orlowska rightly states that being Amhara has been nearly synonymous with being an Orthodox Christian in Ethiopian history. Orlowska

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18 Birri, *Divine Plan*, 27-29. Gustav Aren reports, “The clergy argued with the monarch: ‘Their ethos is not like ours and their sacred book is different from that which is accepted in our country. If they are allowed to return, people will fall away from the faith of the fathers.’” Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers*, 81. Sahle Selassie’s response to this shows his firm stand to act according to the request of the clergy. He said, “By the death of Wasen-Seged, neither Isenberg nor Krapf shall ever enter my kingdom again” (82).
further explains: “Fluency in Amharic provided some ability to engage in the litigation that was necessary to claim rights to land within the new system.”\textsuperscript{19} Although there was openness for missionaries during this period, the Protestant missions were considered a potential threat to the integrity of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. As Hammerschidt, Uhlig, and Bonk testify, “Church and state have traditionally been closely intertwined in Christian Ethiopia, the ruler regarding himself as the defender of faith.”\textsuperscript{20} This exposed the people of the land to religious and political oppression.

During the later situation in Ethiopia after the return of missionaries during the Italian invasion, the evangelical churches experienced a great revival movement. In the west, the Evangelical pioneers of the EECMY could cross the barriers of ethnicity, status, regionalism, and denominationalism. Qes Gebre-Ewostateos (from Eritrea) and Qes Badma Yalew (from Gojjam in North Ethiopia) took the initiative to reach the people in their own language and started to learn Afaan Oromoo to use it in reading the Scripture for worship in Bojji Mariam Church (the then-Orthodox Church in west Wollega).\textsuperscript{21} Wilfred and Eleanor Bockelman testify that it was the lay movement that took place in the west, which led to the beginning of the church, saying, “During the years 1946-1948 a wider spiritual awakening took place, and it resulted in the formation of congregations.”\textsuperscript{22}

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\textsuperscript{19} Izabela Orlowska, “Ethiopia, Modern: Society and Culture,” in \textit{New Encyclopedia of Africa}, ed. John middelton and Joseph C. Miller, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2008), 299. Orlowska writes, “The Amharic language, which is the national language of Ethiopia, is also an important source of identity. In the conquered regions, unless individuals adopted these traits, they were stigmatized and exposed to harsh forms of economic exploitation” (299).
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\textsuperscript{20} Hammerschidt, Uhlig, and Bonk, “Ethiopian Orthodox Church,” 160.
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\textsuperscript{21} Staffan Grenstedt, \textit{Ambaricho and Shonkolla} (Sweden: Uppsala University, 2000), 70-71.
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\textsuperscript{22} Wilfred Bockelman and Eleanor Bockelman, \textit{Ethiopia: Where Lutheran Is Spelled “Mekane Yesus”} (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 46. Wilfred and Eleanor Bockelman stated that some Orthodox priests, who could see the spiritual awakening, joined the evangelical movement. They continued, “[B]ut the Orthodox Church soon put pressure on them and accused them of leaving the faith of
In the south, Staffan Grenstedt, in reference to the Kambata/Hadiya evangelical churches, states that the reason for this revival could be the initiative the local evangelists had taken to witness for Christ in the people’s local language. Ethnic identity was not seen as a divisive element, as the people were crossing the border to Walayita and achieving the conversion of many to evangelical Christianity. Consequently, the formerly-hostile ethnic groups started to worship together after receiving the gospel of reconciliation. These practices should be referred to as a model for addressing the imbalance between theology and ethnicity, even in the other Ethiopian Evangelical churches.

Political and cultural oppression continued during the time of the military government ruled by Mengistu. The confiscation of the property of the Ethiopian Evangelical church Mekane Yesus (including the radio station known as Radio Voice of the Gospel (RVOG), which was mainly sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation and serving all of Africa and Southeast Asia from 1957-1977), signified not only a denial of religious freedom, but also the ecumenical presence in Ethiopia. With the separation of

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23 Grenstedt, *Ambaricho and Shonkolla*, 65. As Gustav Arén articulates, “This incident aptly illustrated the deep fellowship that might arise from the rediscovery and the personal experience of the core of the Gospel: salvation through faith in the atoning death, resurrection and glorification of our Lord Jesus Christ. This fellowship bridged social and ethnic gaps. In these years it united Amara, Eritreans, and Oromo in a common concern for spiritual renewal through the dissemination and the study of the vernacular Holy Scripture.” Gustav Arén, *Envoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia: In the Steps of the Evangelical Pioneers* (Stockholm: EFS Förlaget, 1999), 96.

church and state under the current Ethiopian government, the church has taken advantage of religious freedom and reclaimed most of its properties.

Currently, despite this legacy of the past, there is a tendency to be attracted towards regionalism at the expense of the longstanding sense of belonging and unity among believers. This unity, which even survived marginalization during imperial rule and the severe persecution by the communist regime, is being threatened. The misperception of the political and religious freedom has its own negative impacts on the life of the community. First, ethnic identity is being confused with one’s religious identity to the extent of compromising the core values of our identity in Christ for secular practices. This is apparent from the tendency to be engrossed by the revival of traditional religions without questioning how they affect one’s spiritual life. The church seems to be unprepared for bridging the gap between traditional religions and Christianity, which may cause an identity crisis arising from toleration of syncretism. Secondly, the solidarity of the nations is in challenge because of the lack of clear explanation of federalism.

Therefore, the church needs to seek ways of maintaining the balance between the identity of believers as a spiritual community and the loyalty to their home region as good citizens before it is too late. It is to the imbalanced and egotistic use of both the religious and ethno-political powers that I refer to as the defiled imago Dei. If theologians in Ethiopia continue to be irresponsible to this issue, they will fail to balance the present situation and the past history of Christianity. Tillich criticizes the orthodox theological system in Europe for such a failure.\textsuperscript{25} Of course, the church had a clear statement in her constitution which allowed mutual recognition and respect for ethnic identity and cultural

\textsuperscript{25} Tillich, \textit{Systematic Theology: Reason and Revelation Being and God}, 3.
values even before the government started to do so. I believe that there is a great need to interpret the biblical teaching, the longstanding tradition, and the current statement of the church at all levels—beginning from the grass roots—if the church is to keep her healthy growth uninterrupted.

**The Defiled Imago Dei Expressed in Terms of Social Justice and Church/State Relations**

In this section, I will analyze the problem of social justice and church/state relations in Ethiopia from 1889 to the present through the lens of Martha Nussbaum’s *Creating Capabilities*. The details in the critical analysis of the patterns of the church and state relations of the past and present day Ethiopia focus on two things: pointing out the degree of continuity in the practice of social injustice under different rules and giving clear picture to readers who are not familiar with the past and present history of Ethiopia. Accordingly, the social justice and church/state relations under imperial rule, social justice and church/state relations under the socialist Dergue, and social justice and church/state relations under the current government will be presented. The right to property, religious freedom, freedom of education, and the right to participate in the politics of the country are among these key areas discussed throughout. Let us begin with the analysis of the pre-revolution Ethiopia.

**Social Justice and Church/State Relations under Imperial Rule**

This subtopic discusses the rules of Emperor Menelik II and Emperor Haile Selassie. Although Ethiopia has gone through a long history of imperial rule, this subsection gives particular attention to the years 1889-1974 because this time marks the formation of modern Ethiopia. Menelik II (1889-1913) was the Emperor who achieved
the goal of modernization and unification of Ethiopia,\textsuperscript{26} which led to the birth of the present-day capital city of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa (Finfinne), following the victory over the Italian invaders at Adwa in 1896.\textsuperscript{27}

However, history shows that King Sahle Sellasie of Shoa fought wars of territorial expansion against the Oromo of the Addis Ababa area to expand his Shoa kingdom into the Oromo areas of the Tulama earlier.\textsuperscript{28} According to Negaso Gidada, the former president of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and a leader of the opposition party, the Europeans, who were accompanying the king reported, “The luckless inhabitant[s], taken quite by surprise, had barely time to abandon their property and fly for their lives to the fastness of Entotoo which reared its protecting form at the distance of a few miles.”\textsuperscript{29} Regarding this warfare, Ronald J. Horvath says, “During 1880’s the tide of war turned in favor of the Amhara who extended hegemony over the Galla

\textsuperscript{26} Kaufeler, Modernization, Legitimacy, and Social Movement: The Study of Socio-Cultural Dynamics in Iran and Ethiopia, 81.

\textsuperscript{27} Zewde, A History, 68.

\textsuperscript{28} Negaso Gidada. “A Tragic Consequence of the ‘10th Addis Ababa Integrated Development Master Plan: Warning for the Future’.” Zehabesha, May 8, 2014. http://www.zehabesha.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Negaso-Gidada-Aricle.pdf (accessed May 9, 2014). Gidada wrote: “A witness (Harris from England) to what was happening during Sahle Sellasie’s wars against the Oromo also speaks particularly what took place in Entoto, the hills in the northern part of Addis Ababa. This is a recorded history (Harris 1844, 178; Bonnie K. Holcomb and Sisai Ibsa, 1990, 85).” He further explains, “Here is what is written: ‘While these forces (Forces of Sahle Sellasie), who were in effect demonstrating their use of guns given by European to Sahle Sellasie, began to destroy the Oromo life and resources, the guests of Sahle Sellasie, the Britons who accompanied the mission with the king, were observing with field glasses what was happening.’” Ibid.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. Gidada continues reporting the words of the eyewitness Europeans: “The spear of the warrior searched every bush for the hunted foe. Women and girls were torn from the building to be hurried into hopeless captivity. Old men and young were indiscriminately slain [and] mutilated among the fields and groves; flocks and herds were driven off in triumph and houses after houses [were] sacked and consigned to the flame.” He also says, “The Oromo of the area, particularly the Gulallee, remember that their leaders such as Tuba Mona, Birraatuu Goolee, Waamii Gaaroo, Shabbuu Bordee, and Ilaansoo Halloo died in these wars of conquest of the area.” Ibid.
Käufeler, explaining the patterns of conquest, exploitation and integration, reports that

Abyssinian tradition holds that conquered lands become state property at the disposal of the emperor. In the Kibre Negest it is stated that people in conquered areas who comply with imperial rule should become subjects and pay tribute, but in case they offer resistance ‘go forward to assault and oppress them, since the Lord your God will make you master of them.’

The emperor’s ordering assault and oppression in God’s name sounds as if God is the God of the powerful, who enjoys seeing injustice and violence happening to the poor and the powerless.

Menelik II’s rule was characterized by recurring battles for territorial expansion, to which he was attaching historical and economic justifications. As part of his plan to modernize and unify Ethiopia, Menelik II fostered greater trade expansion and commerce in order to gain enough money to modernize his army. This involved selling the musk and ivory obtained from the south-west to European traders, which would not bring any revenue to the people of the region. If one is allowed to observe the past experience of social justice in Ethiopia through the lens of Nussbaum’s capabilities approach, which

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33 Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844-1913* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 37. Besides musk and ivory, Menelik’s rule highly encouraged slave trade. Gustav Arén, in reference to Cederqvist, reports, “In his [Cederqvist] letters and reports, and they were many, he described and commented on other instances also which were incompatible with his understanding of justice, fairness and human integrity. During his trip to Wollaga in 1904 he had passed through territories which Menelik’s generals had subjected to his sway and slave-hunters had almost depopulated by carrying away thousands of people year after year.” Arén, *Envoys of the Gospel*, 136.
was designed more than one hundred years later, the eighth of her ten Central Capabilities, the concern for other species was debased by uncontrolled killing of animals from whose species musk and ivory was obtained.\textsuperscript{34} Moreover, the battles he fought in his ultimate desire to assume the throne and to expand and secure his rule attest to his cruelty and dehumanizing character.

The spread of Orthodox Christianity followed the victory in battle of territorial expansion.\textsuperscript{35} Menelik II’s “unification” movement was defective in attitude towards other people because of its oppressive treatment of the people to which he was expanding his rule. Moreover, both the conservative and liberal approach to religion at different times resulted in secularism and religious conflict. This confirms Nussbaum’s argument that established religions and secularism may cause inequality of citizens. Like the other rulers before and after him, Menelik II gave political leadership over the provinces which came under his subjugation as a reward to his own relatives. This is injustice according to Nussbaum’s capabilities approach, which is concerned with the basic social justice and asks the question, “What is each person able to do and to be?” that considers each person as an end. In the capabilities approach, the choice or freedom of the society is focused on so as to respect their power of self-definition. When the government promotes social injustice and inequalities instead of addressing them, the outcome is the capability failures.\textsuperscript{36} This is true for Ethiopians during the imperial rule.

\textsuperscript{34} Nussbaum, \textit{Creating Capabilities}, 34. Gustav Arén also reports the existence of large market places in Addis Ababa, which attracted about ten thousand visitors on regular basis, including people who had to travel for two weeks to get supplies of commodities they could find only at this market place. Arén writes, “A British diplomatic mission to Menelik stated in 1897: ‘Nearly all the sellers were, noted, Gallas [Oromos]’. Cederqvist made the same observation in 1904.” Arén, \textit{Envoys of the Gospel}, 110.

\textsuperscript{35} Zewde, \textit{A History}, 62-63.

\textsuperscript{36} Nussbaum, \textit{Creating Capabilities}, 18-19.
There was no remarkable change in the relation of Church and State under Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974), who assumed the title of Negus (meaning king) in 1928 and was crowned the Emperor in St. George’s Church and took the name Haile Selassie in 1930 following the death of Empress Zawditu. An emphasis on modern education, the independence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church from Coptic superintendence, and victory over the Italian invaders are the main achievements that mark the rule of Haile Selassie I. However, access to higher education was confined to the people coming from the northern part of the country, the Amharas and the Tigres.

Eide reported,

A survey conducted in 1966 revealed how language proficiency and school policy favoured the Amhara. At the time[,] the Amhara accounted for 55% and the Tigrains 25% of all the students entering University. During the 1970s students who came from indigenous backgrounds constituted less than 10% of the university enrolment. As a result[,] of this the most important posts in the state apparatus were occupied by the Amharas.  

It is worth noting that the real situation of the people today reveals that it was not the entire Amhara and Tigre people but the children coming from the better-off feudal families that were enjoying the privilege of modern education. Nussbaum’s second and fourth Central Capabilities view health and education as key areas in the human development to which all citizens have equal entitlement. Limiting access to education is a strategy to limit or deny participation in the political life of the country. An illiterate society does not raise serious questions of basic justice and liberty because of uncritical approach to life and human dignity. In Ethiopian history, this denial of access to education is coupled with the prioritizing of access to political power and modern

37 Eide, Revolution and Religion, 29.
military force to these two northern ethnic groups, which makes the other ethnicities powerless and subject to oppressive rule.

A written constitution and the emergence of parliament had marked the feudal structure under Emperor Haile Selassie’s rule. Freedom from Coptic superintendence was followed by the emperor’s claiming divine election, as a result of which he became the head of both the state and the church. This is apparent from how the emperor was officially addressed: “Emperor Haile Selassie I, the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, King of Kings, Elect of God.”38 This claim seems to have been an extension of the practice of elevating kings to the divine status in ancient Mesopotamia, according to which the Akkadian term falmu was used to designate both the divine cult image and the relationship between a deity and kings. According to Stephen L. Herring, “The king is compared to the gods by means of his military power and his attentiveness to his people in the immediate context.”39 Moreover, the king is regarded as the image of a god not only for being the agent who will carry out punishment against those already condemned by the gods, but also for his kindness and mercy expressed in granting a request, which is comparable to that of the gods. This confirms the view that “the person is the image in that he or she functions in a way similar to the referent.”40 However, in the case of


40 Ibid., 38-39, 48. Herring writes, “According to this viewpoint, the very nature of kingship in Mesopotamia, which was thought to have originated with the gods, meant that the king constantly participated in a divine role. The nature of the office as the state’s single and ultimate governor, as the representative of the people to the god, and as the representative of the god to the people, ensured the integration between kings secular and divine status.” (41). Nussbaum warns nations today against any established church or governmental imposition of secularism, lest one party would consider the other as an out-group. Despite the gap in time and setting between her argument and that of the imperial rule in
Ethiopia, citizens experienced the disadvantage of the combination of church and state. The social injustice and oppressive rule of the monarchy signifies that both the king and his governors as the image of God failed to function in a similar way to the referent. It is the defiled *imago Dei* that one can find in humanity in such an oppressive system.

In short, to spell out the capabilities failures from a theological perspective, the problem arises from the failure of the emperors to discharge their responsibilities both as bearers of God’s image and as those appointed to rule over the nations standing in God’s place. Although the Ethiopian rulers (kings, clergy, and emperors) were viewed as God’s representatives, under whose rule all citizens were supposed to enjoy justice, security, and freedom, they couldn’t exercise this power as His living images in a way that honors Him among the people of the land. To be more specific, instead of exercising their lieutenancy (as creatures in God’s image), which Wayne Towner highly recommends, with recognition of the limitation of their power and serving at God’s pleasure with the intention to preserve that which belongs to Him,41 they preferred to preserve what belonged to them and destroy everything they considered a threat to their rules. Luther condemns such practice as that which violates God’s purpose for creating humans in His own image (Gen 1), which he describes as surpassing the satisfaction and following of their own desires.42

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41 Towner, *Genesis*, 29.

42 Luther, “Lectures on Genesis, Chapter 1-5,” 56-57.
Social justice and Church/State Relations under the Socialist Dergue (1974-1991)

The socialist Dergue[^43] which was represented by Mengistu Hailemariam was totally different in ideology from those preceding it. The time was characterized by wars around the border, drought, and famine. The socialist Dergue was known for its political party, called the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE), which was military oriented. The motto was to fight against the “Woyane Bandit until one man and one bullet is left.”[^44] This makes it obvious that the political order lacked decency. Instead of allowing dignified and flourishing life, human life was compromised for securing political position.

The first of Nussbaum’s ten Central Capabilities, the right “to live to the end of a human life of normal length,”[^45] is violated in Mengistu’s motto. Young people were taken from schools, homes, and marketplace to forcefully fight war in which they did not believe. They were exposed to premature death, which was the cause for a countless

[^43]: “The Derg, Common Derg or Dergue (Ge'ez: የረጋጉ, meaning “committee” or “council”) is the short name of the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1987. It took power following the ousting of Emperor Haile Selassie I. Soon after it was established, the committee was formally renamed the Provisional Military Administrative Council, but continued to be known popularly as “the Derg.” In 1975, it embraced communism as an ideology; it remained in power until 1987.” David A. Korn, “Ethiopia, the United States and the Soviet Union,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derg (accessed February 15, 2015).

[^44]: Woyane is a collective name of the then Tigrai People Liberation Front (TPLF), which is currently the ruling party of the Ethiopian government. Woyane seems to have arisen in response to the administrative corruption of Haile Selassie’s rule. As it is recorded, “After the liberation of Ethiopia from Italian occupation in 1941, Ethiopia saw many rebellions spread out in different parts of the empire. Among these rebellions however, the “Woyane Rebellion” in southern and eastern Tigray in 1943 had become a powerful and highly popular uprising that, with in few months it had shaken the government of Haile Sellasie to its core and as a consequence, the Imperial government resorted in using aerial bombardment by collaborating with the British Royal Air Force so as to quell the rebellion.” Sarah Vaughan, “Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woyane_rebellion (accessed February 15, 2015).

[^45]: Nussbaum, Creating Capabilities, 33.
number of widows, orphans, and defenseless elderly people. Families of the young people were denied their right to resist when their youth were snatched by the government body. Any expression of grief and anger at their absence was not justified. It was even considered as anti-revolution. According to the fifth of Nussbaum’s ten Central Capabilities, they were denied the right to emotions. All Ethiopians were robbed of their right to experience justified anger by the political leaders, who claimed more authority, right, and respect than they deserved at the expense of the citizens’ human dignity.

The church and state was totally separated, at least in administration. At the early stages of the Dergue regime, Islam had also enjoyed religious freedom. Later, all religions were denied freedom, lest the socialist ideology and the government policy on war be compromised. Protestant missionaries were expelled and believers were persecuted throughout. Although the military Dergue denied all religions their freedom, the bias was towards the EOC because of the influential members in the political party. The persecution of protestant believers was not only because of the incompatibility with the communist ideology, but also because of the hidden agenda of the party members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church members.

However, one remarkable change under Mengistu’s rule is his literacy campaign, which was envisioned and supported by the EECMY and helped the majority of the citizens to read and write. Christians, though they suffered persecution from the state, testify that God used this atheist government as an instrument to prepare the people for reading the Bible (at least for Oromia state) and worshipping in their own languages. Of course, the vision and mission of the literacy campaign was originated by the EECMY

\[46\] Ibid.
and implemented by the socialist government. At this point, Nussbaum’s argument that the established church threatens equal respect for persons is challenged because the atheist government and the evangelical church had obviously joined hands towards the flourishing of the Ethiopian society. The openness to work with the church confirms that Luther’s doctrine of the two kingdoms of God is obviously at work through the peaceful interaction of secular government and the Christian church.

Social Justice and Church/State Relations under the Current Government (EPRDF 1991–Present)

The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) established a democratic government in 1991. This remarkable political change following the downfall of the Dergue regime helped all Ethiopians to taste equal freedom and justice. The current federal government encourages the unity that recognizes diversity rather than enforcing it by weapons. Regarding religious matters, the government claims a liberal stand. This separation of state and religion, which is clearly recorded in the constitution under Article 11, is comprised of three points: “[1] State and religion are separate. [2] There is no state religion. [3] The state shall not interfere in religious matters and religion shall not interfere in state affairs.” The third point is often misunderstood as meaning there should be “a wall of separation between church and state,” while what Ethiopians


48 Ronald F. Thiemann, Religion in Public Life: A Dialectic for Democracy (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 42. Thiemann describes the advantage and disadvantage of introducing the principle called the separation of church and state, which is derived from the metaphor “a wall of separation between church and state” that first appeared in Roger Williams’s letter to John Cotton and then in Thomas Jefferson’s letter to the Baptist Association of Danbury, Connecticut, into the legal tradition of the United States of America. The advantage, as Thiemann states, is that “this principle has come to shape
have been longing for was a proper relation between government and religion that allows a proper role of religion in public life of the society rather than a strict neutrality between faith and politics. Speaking of the separation of state and religion in Ethiopia based on the country’s constitutional law often causes the tension between the need for institutional separation and the mutual exclusivity, which can be described as the tension between impartiality and noninvolvement.

In addition to the separation of church and state, freedom of worship, freedom of press (which currently seems questionable), and self-governance make the rule different from those before it. The human and democratic rights of the citizens are indicated under Article 10 of the constitution in unambiguous words, as follows: “[1] Human rights and freedoms, emanating from the nature of mankind, are inviolable and inalienable. [2] Human and democratic rights of citizens and peoples shall be respected.”

The introduction of ethnic federalism has further modified the process of defining ethnic identity. This has enabled the regional states to work for the socio-economic development of their region including conducting education in the language of their choice, which is a tremendous change in Ethiopian history. However, Orlowska rightly observes that allowing particular ethnic groups to control the regional state power in sub-regions (called waredas) and resource allocation based on ethnicity are among the factors which

our nation’s understanding of the relation between the political and religious spheres in the United States. Not only has it guided constitutional interpretation of the first amendment; it has also molded the American public’s understanding of the proper relation between government and religion” (42). As he points out the disadvantage, “At a time when our nation is struggling to define the proper role of religion and religiously based moral convictions within public life, the phrase ‘separation of church and state’ and its standard metaphor ‘a wall of separation between church and state’ serve not to clarify but to confuse. . . By confusing on religious and governmental institutions they obscure the essential concern for individual freedom and equality that undergirds both the ‘no establishment’ and the ‘free exercise’ clause” (42-43).

49 Gidada, “Constitution.”
have led to the tensions of ethnic identity. Orlowska says, “This system has given rise to debates over the authenticity of ethnic identity that serve to critique the system of ethnic federalism as a whole, or to question the rights of particular groups or individuals.”

The question of social justice needs to include a discussion of the campaign on poverty, which includes both agricultural and industrial aspects. This effort has been criticized for exposing the country to a global land-grab. Recent research done by The Oakland Institute in the USA reveals that Ethiopia is one of the preferred destinations for agricultural investment in Africa, which transferred 3,619,509 hectares of land to domestic investors, state-owned enterprises, and foreign companies (including Indian agro-enterprise) between 2008 and 2011. Accordingly, the existing formal and informal rights to land are neither respected nor recognized. As it is reported in this study, “Because there is no community consultation or independent media reporting, there is little knowledge of land deals at the local level, and communities often only find out that the land has been given to investors when the bulldozers or workers show up to clear the land.” The government claims that “these investments will allow for much-needed foreign currency to enter into the economy and will contribute to long-term food security.

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through the transfer of technology to small-scale farmers."  

However, in this process, the local farmers are forced to leave the area chosen for investment. Nussbaum’s tenth central capability, the capability to control over one’s material environment, in this case the land and moveable properties, is compromised for the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The poor farmers do not have equal property right with the rich investors.

According to Negaso Gidada, this land-grab includes attempts to prohibit the Oromo from historical claims to Addis Ababa (Finfinne) city. Gidada presents the historical background to the major conflict this caused in May 2014 in his article, “A Tragic Consequence of the ‘10th Addis Ababa Integrated Development Master Plan.’” He points out that the Oromo take seriously the problem related to Addis Ababa for three reasons: the sacrifice of life and property during the war of conquest, the unfulfilled government promise to respect the interest of Oromia over Addis Ababa (included in the Constitution of 1995), and the expulsion (from Addis Ababa University) of 300 Oromo students, who challenged the current government decision to move the capital of Oromia from Addis Ababa (Finfinne) to Adaamaa, in 2003/4.

Another major conflict occurred in May 2014 when the ethnic Oromo University students protested the implementation of the “10th Integrated Development Master Plan of Addis Ababa,” which was allegedly designed by the federal government with the intention to make Addis Ababa a modern metropolitan by extending modern infrastructure to the surrounding towns.

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52 Horne, “Understanding Land Investment,” 1, 5, 20. It is also reported that “many of the larger lease areas include traditionally inhabited by the Gumuz, Anuak, Oromo and other peoples.”

53 Nussbaum, Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach, 34.

54 Gidada, “A Tragic Consequence.”

55 Ibid. Gidada reports, “Although the problem started in the universities, it later involved the general public and high schools.” The Oromo community living abroad also expressed their solidarity with
Oromo university students protested the putting into effect of the city Master Plan, which they believed was designed with an intention to bring the eight towns of the Oromia Regional State under the government of the Addis Ababa City Administration. Reportedly, the response from the government side was jailing and killing of those students blamed as organizers of the protest by the security officers. Moreover, the government accused them of being ‘terrorists,’ ‘backward,’ ‘narrow nationalists,’ ‘racist,’ ‘divisive,’ and ‘separatists,’ which seemed a mechanism used to justify the jailing, torture, and ethnic killing.

Using power in this way is not only against the purpose for which some leaders of the current ruling party began the war against the imperial rule under the theme of “Land for the Tiller!” and later against the military government, but it also violates the current Constitution. The church/state relation doesn’t allow the church to propose a better strategy towards the country’s economic development. This implies that, just like other African countries with similar situations, Ethiopia needs a joint effort of political analysts and theologians who boldly exercise the freedom of critiquing the longstanding

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56 Ibid. “The incident of May 2014 is recorded as follows: It was a month marked by extraordinary exhibition of solidarity by the country’s ethnic Oromo students who protested the coming into effect of a master plan by the Addis Ababa City Administration (AACA). As is always the case with Ethiopia, the protests resulted in the regrettable (and unnecessary) loss of lives, destruction of properties and disruption of the academic schedule.” As it is further reported, “If one is to stick by it, the government's own account put the number of deaths at 11, of which seven were in Ambo, a town 120 km west of the capital Addis Abeba. Other deaths occurred in Meda Walabu University in Bale, 320 km southwest of the country; and in one of the oldest state universities, Haromaya, in east of the country, a bomb explosion at the campus's stadium during a European soccer match screening injured 70 students, killing one.”

57 Ibid.
economically oriented ideology which justifies ethnic inequality either intentional or unwittingly.

To summarize this subsection with Gary Simpson’s words, “One’s ideas are closely tied to one’s historical and social situation, and one’s historical and social situation is embedded in the economic relationships among and interests of different economic classes. That is ideas—systems of ideas—and their ‘rationality’ cleave to and, indeed, comply with the economic interest of the powerful.”

This is true for the problem of social justice and church/state relations in the past and present Ethiopian history. Therefore, it is very essential for the government which has introduced ethnic federalism, to distinguish carefully between ethnocentric attitudes and claims of one’s democratic and fundamental rights.

The Defiled Imago Dei Expressed in Terms of the Declining National Harmony in Ethiopia

Many African countries, including Ethiopia, are experiencing religious conflicts and problems of social injustice. This subsection focuses on the discussion of the causes of the declining national harmony in Ethiopia today under the following two subtopics: the tensions of ethnic identity and humanity in the image of God and ethnicity superseding religious identity.

The Tensions of Ethnic Identity and Humanity in the Image of God

According to the Ethiopian national census of 2007, the percentage of population in terms of ethnicity is: “Oromo 34.5%, Amhara (Amara) 26.9%, Somali (Somalie) 6.2%,

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Tigray (Tigrigna) 6.1%, Sidama 4%, Gurage 2.5%, Welaita 2.3%, Hadiya 1.7%, Afar (Affar) 1.7%, Gamo 1.5%, Gedeo 1.3%, other 11.3%.”

The current total population of the country is about 97.9 million. At this point, it is important to see how the relationships between the people of different ethnic groups are being distorted either by ethnocentric interpretation of the current government policy or by the influence of the past hierarchical approach to ethnicity. Ethiopia is a country of people belonging to broad ethno-linguistic categories, namely, Cushitic, Semitic, Nilotic, and Omotic. Based on the 1994 national census, Orlowska speaks about the importance of the Oromo and the Amhara in defining identity in the multiethnic Ethiopia. Accordingly, the Oromo constituted 32.1 percent of a population that at the time was approximately 53.1 million of the then about seventy million total population, while Amhara made up 30.1 percent of the population. The report shows the Tigrean (6.2%), Somali (5.9%), Gurage (4.3%), Sidama (3.5%), and Welaita (2.4%) as other sizable ethnic groups.

According to the current Ethiopian government policy of ethnic diversity, all ethnic groups and individuals, as citizens of the country, have fundamental rights, which include the right to equality before the law, the right to the protection of privacy, and the right to freedom of religion, belief, and conscience. Ethiopia is a country known for the peaceful coexistence of people of different ethnic identities. Intermarriage, blood


60 Ibid.

61 Orlowska, “Ethiopia, Modern: Society and Culture,” 298. Orlowska criticizes the census in Ethiopia for relying on rigid ethnic boundaries which do not allow the flexibility of identity.

relations, and socio-political factors have been used as means to bridge the ethnic and religious gap among the people. Common cultural elements and national identities have created a conducive atmosphere for mutual acceptance and an inclusive attitude towards each other that doesn’t require compromise of one’s commitment to his/her ethnic identity.

But it is unwise to think that things haven’t changed with the policies of the current government regarding ethnicity. The conflicts that happen sporadically between people of different ethnic origins in different parts of the country serve as an example of the existence of ethnic tensions, which people suggest different causes for. Firstly, those who defend the federal system argue that the tensions arise from misunderstanding of one’s freedom and responsibility. They criticize the government only for the delay in explaining what is included in the constitution regarding the rights and obligations of individuals and communities.

Secondly, there are those who argue that the cause for disharmony and conflicts is the fact that the ethnic diversity in contemporary Ethiopia depends on the borders designed during the campaign of empire building in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century rather than on the social environment. The main problem in this case, is that ethnic identity is not a useful strategy for legitimately demanding benefits from the state for one’s own group, but can be misused as a means to express competition among ethnic groups over education, income, status, infrastructure, and political influence. As Carola Lentz rightly explains, “This tendency has partly to do with the territorial

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unevenness of modernization, which distributed valued goods such as education and infrastructure inequitably. Colonial ethnicization cast such differences as favoritism for particular ethnic groups vis-à-vis others.**64**

Thirdly, those who view the current ethnic federalism as having been imposed on the nations by the government with the use of coercive power argue in favor of “self-determination.” This group believes that the cause for the recurring ethnic conflicts in the land is the enforced unity under the umbrella of federalism characterized by ethnic inequality. They also describe those who promote this sort of federalism, which has no room for discussion of ethnic grievances, as “unionists” whose political objective is *unity at all cost.* Asfaw Beyene and Seyoum Hameso say,

> It is not the means but the end that matters for them….This is why true unity must be based on a radical change in the way ethnic identity is perceived in Ethiopia. Hidden motives should be exposed and the truth about genuine unity should be told in order to lay a cornerstone for a common future.**65**

Theodros Assefa Teklu, who has made a very recent theological contribution to the Ethiopian academic discourse under the title *The Politics of Metanoia,* refers to those hold to this view in sociological terms as “instrumentalists” or subscribing to “the conflict model.” He argues that this paradigm asserts the right to national self-determination on the basis of conflict and the need for change draws upon Marxist and

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**64** Lenz, “Ethnicity: Overview,” 314, 317. Lentz reports, “Most African communities defined themselves by neighborhood, kinship, or loyalty to a political authority, not necessarily by common language and culture. Many precolonial states were multiethnic entities, whose present-day ethnonym was a common name that referred only to their shared acceptance of the ruler, not to shared origins or language….In most cases, ethnic community ideologies developed only in interaction with European ideas about ‘tribes,’ brought to Africa by missionaries and colonial officers” (314).

However, as the current political debate among contending intellectuals shows, on the one hand, this group seems to be seeking an independent nation according to the right of nations indicated under Article 39:1 of the constitution, which reads, “Every Nation, Nationalities and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession.” On the other hand, they seem to be satisfied if they see unity based on federalism that respects the ethnic equality, justice, and human rights as included in the Constitution.

Lastly, those who want to see unity in its imperial version totally reject the line of ethnic federalism the country is following. They argue that Ethiopians need to be united under one centralized government. Teklu refers to this group, whom he describes as those emphasizing the survival or persistence of Ethiopia and the integration of its people, as “functionalists.” The shortcoming of the functionalist paradigm is that in an attempt to maintain national harmony among the Ethiopian nations, it considers the need to address carefully the questions of ethnic identity discussed above as less important. Thus, it intensifies the tensions of ethnic identity.

Ethnicity Superseding Religious Identity

The religious aspect of ethnic tensions involves the conflicts among adherents of four major religious groups: Ethiopian Orthodox (43.5%), Islam (33.9%), Protestant (18.6%), and Traditional Religion (2.6%). According to the 2007 census, the adherents of

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Catholic and other religions constitute 0.7% each.\textsuperscript{69} Let us see the problem of ethnicity in religious context as follows.

Firstly, it is not uncommon to hear the adherents of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity claiming that they belong to the native religion, which is often seen as a mark of being Ethiopian. Orlowska reports that conversion to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and assimilation to Amhara culture happened not as a result of missionary impact, but on the basis of political and military power. As she also argues, only if they were converted could non-Christians “avoid some of the worse forms of discrimination, as the prejudices of the northerners could not be as easily applied to other Christians.”\textsuperscript{70} In contemporary Ethiopian society, the claim of supremacy by one religious or ethnic group over others serves more as a reminder of past offenses, which exacerbates ethnic tensions, rather than as an instrument of maintaining control over the religious life of other ethnicities. There is no constructive role in repeating the longstanding practice of attaching names with derogatory connotations like “pagan, savage, uncivilized, uncultured, enemy, slave or inherently inferior”\textsuperscript{71} to any ethnic group with a purpose to convert them to a religion or assimilate them to a culture.

Seen in light of Niebuhr’s analysis of the sin of pride, this misrepresentation exposes the three types of sin of pride (namely, pride of power, pride of knowledge, and

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\item \textsuperscript{69} \url{http://www.theodora.com/wfbcurrent/ethiopia/ethiopia_people.html} (accessed February 2, 2015).
\item \textsuperscript{71} Melbaa, Oromia: An Introduction to History of the Oromo People, 14. Names like “Galla,” “Gudella,” and “Shanqilla” are some examples of names with derogatory connotations given to people of different ethnic groups by the Amhara ruling class with the intention of bringing about self-denial and assimilation.
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\end{footnotesize}
pride of virtue or self-righteousness) committed against the neighboring nations by those involved in such denigration. In all cases the self’s criteria are mistaken for God’s standards.\(^{72}\) One may notice the ethnic pride expressed as greed for political supremacy hidden behind the religious enthusiasm shaping Ethiopian history.

Secondly, the followers of Protestant Christianity are also highly influenced by the political situation. It did not take them a long time to allow division over the disagreement on how one’s ethnic and religious identities are to be handled. The majority believe that faith does not require a total rejection of one’s ethnic origin and argue that it is important to have a balanced approach to ethnic and religious identities. But others argue that the church should not consider the questions related to ethnic identity as worth addressing because they regard it as a threat to its unity. This difference in understanding the issues related to religion and ethnicity, coupled with a crisis of leadership, often fuels the ethnic tensions that are not only spoiling the relationship of believers to each other, but also damaging the reputation of the church in public.

This can be illustrated by what happened during the time of the transitional government. The negativity was about to be revived following the downfall of the fascist government in 1991 when some non-Oromo preachers started to rebuke the “spirit of Booranticha” (or the spirit of the Oromo), whereby they committed a historical mistake of identifying the Oromo nation and their culture with an evil spirit. This connection of national identity with an evil spirit was/is expressed by prayerfully rejecting the Booranticha spirit “in Jesus name.” The intention is to inhibit the request of freedom to worship in Afaan Oromoo (Oromo vernacular) in city and town congregations, the

\(^{72}\) Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 188-200.
question which is still considered irrelevant and divisive in some congregations. This gradually led to the development of competition among believers belonging to different ethnicities during elections and recruiting for theological studies. The tensions of ethnic identity are more apparent during the church council meetings and the general assemblies, which are responsible for the election of leaders to the key positions in the life of the church. Similarly, in competitions for the vacant positions in the church organizations, it has become ethnic identity rather than appropriate qualifications needed for the office that is considered as the implicit criterion for recruitment.

Thirdly, the sporadically occurring conflicts between adherents of Islam and Christianity is another cause of the ethnic tension. Currently, the majority of the Oromo are adherents to Islam and Christianity. It is said that Islam spread in Oromia as a reaction to the forceful introduction of Orthodox Christianity. Melbaa claims, “The Oromo accepted Islam and non-Orthodox Christianity en-masse because they identified Abyssinian Orthodox Christianity with the Oppressor and also to assert their identity vis-à-vis Abyssinians.” He also cited the Amhara monk Atseme as writing, “The Galla became Muslim for his hatred of Amhara priests.” He also compares this conversion as an expression of the rejection of values associated with imperial conquerors with Afro-Americans’ conversion to Islam in the 1950s and 1960s in reaction to the racial discrimination and oppression they faced from white people. Some fanatic Muslims, who argue that religion and ethnic identity are inseparable, killed Christians (including


74Ibid. Melbaa also cited Bereket, who said, “…Oromos in Arsi province accepted Islam in large number as a demonstration of Anti-Amhara sentiment and a rejection of all values associated with imperial conquerors.”
Evangelist Mikaa’el Qana’a of the EECMY and some priests of the Orthodox Church), burned down church buildings, and demolished Christians’ personal property in the major conflict of September 2006. The fact that Mikaa’el and others were killed by Muslims of the same ethnic origin because they refused to denounce their faith confirms that ethnicity was viewed in terms of loyalty to one’s religion rather than tribal heritage.

Lastly, the current revival of the Ethiopian Traditional Religions, particularly the Oromo traditional religion, is another aspect of the ethnic tensions expressed in religious terms. The potential danger of neglecting Ethiopian traditional religions is not being given as much attention as the conflicts between Islam and Christianity. The most common mistakes made by Christians and Muslims is that they define African Religion and its practices from their own respective religious standpoints. In this case, we Christians and Muslims approach the adherents of traditional religions with disrespect as if their religion is useless and has no truth which may serve as a point of contact with ours.

Melbaa notes that many Oromo converts to Islam and Christianity retained the practice of the original Oromo religion. As Bartels also testifies, the conversion of the Oromo to either Islam or Christianity that resulted in the diminishing of the rituals and social institutions in which the traditional religion used to be expressed did not affect the people’s traditional manners of experiencing the divine. This confirms Magesa’s description of African religion as a “lived religion” which one is born into it and learns from childhood throughout one’s life rather than a doctrinal that one requires formal

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75 Ibid., 27.
76 Bartels, Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia: An Attempt to Understand, 15.
The kind of solidarity the Oromo exhibit during the celebration of *Irreecha*, which is their annual thanksgiving holiday, which goes beyond religious boundaries, can be one example of this view. Others consider this a threat to religious unity. The participation of both Christian and Muslim Oromos on *Irreecha* may be wrongly perceived as a compromise of their respective religions, which leads to a generalization that one’s ethnicity determines which religion to follow. Of course, there may be some who turned back to the traditional religion due to attraction toward the currently reviving Oromo culture, which survived the threat of eradication from enforced mass conversion and its consequences which are portrayed the political life of the people.

### Conclusion

To summarize this chapter, it is most unlikely that unity in its imperial version is desired anymore by any nation because it was based not only on the denial of the indigenous nations but also on dehumanization of all outsiders to the so called “royal” circle. Seen in light of Nussbaum’s seventh central capability—*affiliation*—the capability to recognize, live with and toward, and imagine the situation of other human beings was missing. Moreover, “Having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others”\(^78\) was endangered. This may lead to a question whether the unity being claimed is totally neutralized from its polarizing elements of the past. According to the tenth of Nussbaum’s ten Central Capabilities, the prohibition of the right to *control over one’s_

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\(^{78}\) Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 34.
continued. The right to participate in political choices was compromised
by silent submission to the central power. Nussbaum argues that freedom of speech,
political access and opportunity, and religious freedom are the crucial elements for a
society to protect cultural and religious pluralism. Her point that “any policy that assigns
differing degrees of freedom of speech to different groups of citizens will automatically
fall below the threshold” is applicable to the situation in Ethiopia in the past and
present. To enjoy freedom, peace, prosperity, and security, conversion to Orthodox
Christianity was mandatory. Adherents of other lines of Christianity, Islam, and
traditional religions were excluded from participation in socio-political activities.

In short, settling the tensions between ethnic identity and humanity in the image
of God should involve addressing the ethnic, political, and religious questions by giving
special attention to peace, equality, justice, and human rights. Finally, a genuine national
unity can only be achieved through dialogue based on mutual recognition of the citizens
rather than subordinating it to a particular ethnic, political, and religious identity.

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79 Ibid.

80 Ibid., 109-110.
CHAPTER FOUR
PRACTICE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE CAUSED BY
POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS, AND ETHNIC TENSIONS

Introduction

This chapter deals with the challenges of forgiveness in the past and present Ethiopian context of violence caused by political, religious and ethnic tensions. In Ethiopia, adherents of Christianity, Islam, and the Traditional Religions coexisted with respect and peace for centuries. However, with the growing external influences from a certain fanatic Islamic movement, those with personal political agendas are using the recent development of awareness of ethnic and religious identity as a divisive instrument. Besides the offensive practices in the past, there are sporadically occurring political, religious, and ethnic conflicts among the people. My intention in this chapter is, therefore, to point out that acknowledging the wrongdoings and responses of vengeance is the right step towards giving and receiving forgiveness for the political, religious and ethnic violence committed in the past and present Ethiopian history. Regarding the chapter’s organization, beginning with a brief summary of Miroslav Volf’s view in A Common Word, the meaning of forgiveness (in which I analyze David Konstan’s model in his Before Forgiveness, Luther’s view, African Religion’s view), and forgiveness as a response to the violence caused by political, religious, and ethnic tensions will be presented.
A Brief Review of Miroslav Volf’s View of Forgiveness in *A Common Word*

The book discusses the sort of relationship that should exist between Christians, Muslims, and adherents of Judaism. In this section, Volf’s view of forgiveness in the context of religious tensions between Christian and Muslims and Volf’s understanding of the nature of God’s love and the meaning of the Christian claim that “God is Love” will be presented.

Volf’s View of Forgiveness in the Context of Religious Tensions

This subtopic focuses on Volf’s discussion of the anticipation of peace between Muslims and Christians through forgiveness and reconciliation. He contributed his thoughtful theological chapters to *A common Word* under different titles. He is fully aware of the tensions and deep conflicts between Muslims and Christians, which are often expressed in murderous violence.¹ Volf believes that it is possible to build more peaceful relationships between Christians and Muslims based on the common belief in the Oneness of God and the commitment to love Him and our neighbor.² However, Volf should have explicitly noted what distinguishes Christian understanding of “Oneness” of God from Muslim’s view, because the important thing is understanding what our neighbors believe rather than sharing that same faith with them. What I want to point out

¹ Miroslav Volf, “A Common Word for a Common Future,” in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor*, ed. Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrington (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2010), 18. As he states, “Tensions, deep conflicts, and often murderous violence between us are leaving a trail of blood and tears as well as a mounting deposit of deeply painful and potently dangerous memories. These clashes undermine the hopes and efforts of many to live in peace, to flourish as individuals and communities” (18).

² Ibid., 19-21. Accordingly, a just peace between Muslims and Christians has to triumph over tensions and injustice. In spite of the violence and oppression many Christians have experienced from the hands of Muslims, their faith calls them to love their Muslim neighbors even in situation of enmity. In doing so, they express their intentional obedience to the foundational principles of their faith and a deliberate decision to follow the example and teaching of Jesus Christ. This is a sign of hope for the common future.
is that the “Oneness” of God should not be perceived as the existence of a common belief in monotheism. Although Volf discusses the communalities and differences, he neglects how the difference in understanding of even what they have in common (i.e., the dual command of love) affects their relationship. What unites Christian and Muslim neighbors should be the fact that the one God has one law. The common view between them, which will also play an important role in forgiveness, is that this God has one law. Nevertheless, the fact that Muslims and Christians have different understandings of the role this law plays in making people righteous is the major point that disunites them. Understanding this should come first before joining hands to cultivate attitudes of trust and peaceful relationship.

Volf proposes an effective way of handling the differences between the religions. A significant agreement between Christians and Muslims on love of God and neighbor does not erase the undeniable differences between both religions. Instead, it plays five roles: (1) It helps them to get to know each other in their differences; (2) It enables the genuine believers to respect and protect others regardless of the differences; (3) It helps them live together harmoniously notwithstanding their differences; (4) It does not totally eliminate all conflicts, but sets a foundation on which Muslims and Christians can productively discuss and overcome these conflicts; and (5) It encourages the adherents of each religion to hold the other accountable to its best insights and commitments.³

³ Ibid., 21-22. Moreover, the metaphor of a handshaking, as used by Volf, “is not about which convictions we hold to be true; it is about our attitude toward each other and each other’s convictions.” Nor does handshaking imply that Muslims and Christians have resolved or will easily avoid issues that lead to disagreement. Rather it would mean that they are willing to work “on resolving these conflicts through peaceful means and to work together whenever and however possible so as to live at peace with one another in justice as we share common space in this world” (60).
Volf also argues that the world cannot be at peace if Muslims and Christians are not at peace. The meaningful peace that enables us to secure an enjoyable common future and the survival of the world itself can be achieved only if the discussion between Muslims and Christians goes beyond the ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders. The larger communities of the two religions must be involved in activities to seek peace around the world. This will help to join hands to avoid the potential threats to peaceful coexistence from both sides.

Volf points out the importance of acknowledging guilt and asking for forgiveness for past and present mistreatment among Christians and Muslims. The past and present relationships of Muslims and Christians involve mutual exclusion and hostility. Based on the Old Testament Scripture and Jesus’ teaching (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 7:5), Christian scholars suggest the need to first acknowledge the hostile treatment of their Muslim neighbors by Christians in the past (e.g., the Crusades) and in the present (e.g., the excesses of the “war on terror”). Asking for forgiveness of the “All-Merciful One” and of the Muslim community worldwide for the guilt of sinning against our Muslim neighbors is what must be done before responding to the invitation to shake their hands. It is also advisable to think of things that cause and intensify the attitude of mutual exclusion and hostility between Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia. Among them is found the longstanding slogan that says, “Ethiopia is the island of Christianity.”

Although Christianity was introduced to the land long before Islam, I would argue that

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4 Ibid., 49. Volf suggests that this requires more than a mere dialogue: “So let our difference not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us live with each other only in righteousness and good works. Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill.” This advice must be applied in the Ethiopian context, where there is a culture of trust and identifying together among the adherents of different religions and people of different ethnic origin.

5 Ibid., 52.
the repeating of this proposition among the Ethiopian community today, in which Muslims constitute about one third of the population, can be interpreted as no less than denying them their right to be citizens.

However, another important matter that should be noted is the difference in teaching between Christians and Muslims regarding religion and government. Christians teach that government and religion have distinct integrities, according to which there is a difference between the government, which is given and sustained by God, and the church, which is also given and sustained by the same God. These are two different “kingdoms” of God’s rule. Christians today are not the source of “excess of war on terror,” which means there is no need to seek forgiveness for the church. Therefore, before any confessing and forgiveness is possible there must be a distinction made between a government in which churches are located, and the churches which do not make decisions of government and indeed are institutionally separate from them. Understanding this distinction helps to avoid making Christians accountable and forcing them to demand forgiveness from Muslims for mistakes committed by a government, which is a serious mistake, because it is impossible and meaningless to be forgiven for sins one has not committed. Charles Griswold, who argues that to forgive someone implies their accountability for the wrongdoing, states that “what distinguishes forgiveness is in part that it represents a change in the moral relation between wrong-doer and wronged that accepts the fact that wrong was indeed done, and done (in some sense) voluntarily.” Yet, in the context of Ethiopia, it is possible to speak about church and state being falsely intertwined in the Middle Ages and during imperial rule, which makes confession

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significant not because of the Crusades, but of the wrong understanding of how the church and the state are not the same.

Volf also discusses the notions of “representative repentance,” asking forgiveness “on behalf of Christendom” for wrong doing committed against Muslims, and “acknowledgement” of the seriousness of sin in God’s eyes. The idea of representative repentance was not accepted in the critical Yale Response because Christians must not be held responsible for the excesses perpetrated by the secular governments and military regimes of the past and present under the umbrella of the Crusades and the “war on terror.” Instead, Christian scholars concurrently responded in the Yale Response that it is significant to acknowledge that many Christians have sinned against their Muslim neighbors. Thus, as Volf rightly puts, “Asking forgiveness, then, is not so much representative repentance as it is acknowledgement of the seriousness of these wrongdoings in God’s eyes and in the eyes of our Muslim neighbors.”7 I believe that this is applicable to the violence caused by the political, religious, and ethnic tension caused in Ethiopia during the past monarchical rule. It is very significant to acknowledge wars fought under the umbrella of “unification” and attacks on the cultures and languages of other nations under the guise of religion as wrongdoings so that Christians and Muslims may join hands for better common future. In this case, the church does not need to make representative repentance, but give instructions to its various governments to do so, and make sure they do not repeat these sins. The “annual repentance day” recently introduced has to put the importance of acknowledging offenses committed against victims before the practice of “representative repentance.” If our nations intend to remove the pain of the

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wrongs done by their forefathers, the best action to be taken to achieve this is avoiding the repetition of past sinful practice.

Volf’s Understanding of the Nature of God’s Love and the Meaning of the Christian Claim that “God is Love”

Volf also discusses the nature of God’s love in *A Common Word*. Christians understand God’s goodness as following from the fact that God is love. His love is neither reactive nor dependent on the character of the object of love. Martin Luther, as quoted by Volf, stated, “The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.”

Christians believe that our love of neighbor has to be informed by God’s love, which is not only unconditional and indiscriminate, but also demonstrated on the cross-God’s love is sacrificial love. Accordingly, Christians are expected to reverse the corrupt image placed on the cross of Jesus Christ through the Crusades and current media depictions of enmities by living out the message of love, service, and sacrifice it represents in their day-to-day relationship with their Muslim neighbors. Martin Luther insisted that love for one’s enemy is expressed through the continual forgiveness of the neighbor and the reception of forgiveness. By doing this, Christians imitate Jesus Christ

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8 Ibid., 70. In consent with Muslim scholars who argue that love has an ontological priority within the divine nature and in refutation of those who argue that God loves only those who submit to him, Volf asserts, “Whether God is angry with us or delights in us, whether God approves of us or condemns us, God loves us with the same unchanging divine love rooted in, and indeed identical with, the very being of God.” Thus he responds to the question regarding the way God’s qualities of love are related to His wrathful attributes. See also: Reza Shah-kazemi, “God, "the Loving”,,” in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor* ed. Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrigton (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 89-90, 106-107.

and prove that they are his authentic followers as indicated in Galatians 2:20. Muslim and Christian scholars’ views concur on the statement that justice and freedom of religion are crucial parts of love of neighbor. Volf in consent with Joseph Cumming and Melissa Yarrington states, “When justice is lacking, neither love of God nor love of the neighbor can be present. When freedom to worship God according to one’s conscience is curtailed, God is dishonored, the neighbor oppressed, and neither God nor neighbor is loved.”

10 Likewise, for Muslims, “Love of the neighbor is an essential and integral part of faith in God and love of God because in Islam without love of the neighbor there is no true faith in God and no righteousness”11. The sympathy and empathy for one’s neighbor must be accompanied by generosity and self-sacrifice.

According to Volf, Christians cannot nurture negativity toward their neighbors and be authentic followers of Christ at the same time.12 Nonetheless, Volf should have included that the most important thing that helps to overcome the violence between Christians and Muslims through forgiveness is to realize that hostility of a person does not signify that they are not Christian (or not Muslim). The mark of the Christian is that

10 Miroslav Volf, Joseph Cumming, and Melissa Yarrington, “Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to “a Common Word between Us and You”,” in A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor, ed. Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrington loving God and Neighbor (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 54-55. Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:44-45 that the love by which his followers love their neighbors must be as unconditional as is the love of the infinitely good Creator. This involves embracing our neighbors with forgiveness—even when they turn out to be our enemies. Whenever Christians do this, there is no doubt that they join Jesus Christ, who prayed for his enemies (Luke 23:34).

11 Ibid., 60.

12 Volf, “A Common Word for a Common Future,” 75. “Prejudice, hostility, active animosity, or outright violence on the part of a Christian toward anyone, including any individual Muslim or any Muslim community, is not an option for a follower of Jesus Christ and may in fact be an indicator that, notwithstanding loud protestations to the contrary, one is in fact not an authentic follower of Jesus Christ” (75). This reminds me of Christian and Muslim of my home area, who represented the adherent of the two religions of their respective Wereda (district) on a peace conference, and who argued that the offenders from both sides are not recognized as genuine church/mosque members.
they receive and use forgiveness. If there is a violent Christian, then the right response is not to tell Muslims they are not Christian, but to show Muslims how to use forgiveness even for such a one, and that not only does such forgiveness work for such Christian, it also would work for any Muslim who would like to receive as a gift from Christ. With this in mind, let us go to the last section of the summary, which deals with the meaning of the Christian claim that God is love.

Volf further argues that we encounter God’s love in relationship:

When we encounter active love, when we give it and receive it, the invisible and unique God, who dwells in inapproachable light, becomes “visible” in the world—visible not to the physical eye, not even to the intellectual eye, but to the spiritual eye….For Christians, all manifestations of the One God in the ordinariness of neighborly love are strictly speaking but echoes of God’s self-manifestation in Jesus Christ.¹³

In his reflection on the foundational Christian claim that God is love, Volf advises not to neglect the distinctiveness of our respective faiths but, instead, to be open to each other with a motive to “care for those of other faiths” so that we can learn from each other.¹⁴ Based on 1 John 4:7-19, he argues that the Christian claim that “God is love” names the character of God’s being far beyond His activity toward the world. It means that God is actively engaged with humanity, which is much more than merely saying that God loves. As Volf rightly states, “But Love properly understood is God and God is properly understood love….As a character of God’s being, God’s love is as eternal as


¹⁴ Ibid., 126.
God is.”15 He goes on, describing God’s eternal love as always being the first love and never based on the character or behavior of things that are “outside” God. In Volf’s words, “God’s love is ‘first’ even toward sinners, the ungodly, the wrongdoers, and is not in any sense a response to anything they do—to their movement toward God or their emergent love of God.”16 This portrayal of God’s love as “first” toward sinners, regardless of their attitude toward Him, helps us to spell out that God is a merciful God whose forgiveness always streams from His love.

Volf, further explaining 1 John 4:7, which reads “Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God,” comments that it is not enough to love God, because God’s love must flow out toward His creatures rather than remaining confined within the Godhead. Any human love that comes from God or like God’s love must flow toward neighbors.17 This implies that knowledge of God and love of neighbor are inseparable. Volf elaborates this with St. Augustine’s comment on 1 John 4:7, in which he argued that whosoever violates charity denies Christ and acts against God, though they say the right things about the identity of Christ and the nature of God. Augustine equates the failure to love one’s neighbor not only with lacking of knowledge of God, but also with denial of God. Volf argues that the implication of this for Christian relations to non-Christians is that “non-believers or adherents of another religion, if they love, can be closer to God than

15 Ibid., 127-129. Volf states, “Because God is the Holy Trinity, God’s eternal love is self-giving love rather than self-centered love. Consequently, God’s love for humanity is a freely giving love rather than a love motivated by the benefits that the object of love holds for the one who loves it” (132).

16 Ibid., 132-133.

17 Ibid., 137-138. According to Volf, “The love simply returned to God is very much unlike love. Love passed on to the neighbor is like God’s love. That is why everyone who is born of God loves, and everyone who loves is born of God. The point can be put tersely: no love of neighbor, no birth from God” (138).
Christians notwithstanding Christians’ formally correct beliefs about God or even explicit, outward faith in Jesus Christ.”

This is meaningful for Ethiopian Traditional Religions, as they teach that God loves anyone who does good work, fulfills promises, and hates evil. We can use this idea as a point of contact to bridge the gap between religions.

To avoid misunderstanding, Volf refutes the notion that God will live in us if we show sufficient diligence in loving our neighbors. He warns against the danger of turning things on their head, which would make God’s active love for us dependent on our love and thus lead to the denial of the gratuity of God’s love, the very being of God. Volf articulates that God’s presence in us is the condition of love of neighbors, not the other way around. With His presence, God shapes our character and enables us to be and act in conformity with Him. This is the reason for Volf arguing that the invisible and unique God becomes visible to the spiritual eye in the world when human beings give and receive active, ordinary, and neighborly love in their daily interaction, which echoes God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ (1 John 4:9). With this, let us proceed to the discussion of forgiveness.

**What is Forgiveness?**

In this section, we will see what the term forgiveness means in religious, philosophical, and cultural contexts. David Konstan’s model, Luther’s view of forgiveness, and African Religion’s perspective of forgiveness and the notion of gumaa and waadaa will be presented.

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18 Ibid., 138.

19 Ibid., 140.
David Konstan’s Model

David Konstan speaks about three types of forgiveness: *The Moral sense* involves forgiving someone who has done something wrong. This is the most basic condition for forgiveness, which implies that one cannot forgive an innocent person. *The Judicial or political sense* involves forgiving someone in contexts which provide no clear condition concerning the guilt. A governor or someone with authority may exercise their right to waive a sentence either for a person who is proved guilty or because they were convinced that the person involved is innocent. *The Economic sense* involves forgiving a debt, which is more common and biblical: “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” (Mat 6:12, KJV). In this case, *forgive* means *remit*, or forgoing the debt. This implies that the creditor is free to cancel the debt, regardless of the attitude of the debtor towards the creditor. Although Konstan admits that there is a significant relationship between the three models, he gives attention in his book to the use of the term *forgive* “that involves commission of a wrong and a certain kind of foregoing in respect to the wrongdoer.”

This, coupled with the limited scope of the research, compels me to focus on the *moral sense* of forgiveness, which allows dialogue with the work of Margaret R. Holmgren in her *Forgiveness and Retribution*.

Margaret R. Holmgren defines forgiveness from a philosophical standpoint as a response to wrongdoing. She asserts that the way people respond to wrongdoing has a significant effect on the quality of their life. Both personal and international relationships between people to some extent define their attitudes toward forgiveness. According to

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21 Ibid., 2.
Holmgren, “our attitudes toward self-forgiveness play a significant role in forming our conceptions of ourselves and consequently in determining our ability to function well in various aspects of our lives.”  

Holmgren discusses retributivism, which, according to her, seems to incorporate a ground-level respect for the offender’s autonomy and capacity for moral agency. The retributivists view the capacity for moral agency as something that entails both rights and responsibilities. Just as our capacity for moral agency protects us from being treated with disrespect, inequality, and manipulation, it also makes us accountable and subject to the requirements of morality. Thus the retributive reactive attitudes hold a fundamental respect for both the requirements of morality and the victims of moral behavior. Holmgren argues that any plausible position or response to wrongdoing will embody respect for the offender as a moral agent, respect for the requirements of morality, and respect for the victims of immoral behavior.  

Scholars agree on the notion that to forgive someone implies that they are responsible for the wrongdoing and that the wrongdoer and the wronged party accept the fact that the wrong was done voluntarily. Konstan quotes Alice MacLachlan, who, in her doctoral dissertation *The Nature and Limits of Forgiveness*, writes, “the very act of forgiving—however it is expressed—makes a number of claims: that something wrongful was done, that the wrong has caused harm, and that you (the forgiven) are responsible, even culpable, for this harm.”  

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23 Ibid., 7-9.

between *exoneration*, *exculpation*, and *forgiveness*. The first two terms suggest that the offender may well have been innocent, in the sense that there were sufficient mitigating conditions or simply no evidence of guilt, whereas the term “forgiveness” implies genuine offense.  

Forgiveness is relevant when the offense in question is a voluntary and intentional wrong. It is good to highlight the difference between the positions of retributivists and that of advocates of the paradigm of forgiveness at this point. Because retributivists conflate the wrongdoers with their actions and attitudes, they approach the offenders and their offensive actions and attitudes judgmentally, whereby they deny the wrongdoers their right to be respected and recognized as moral beings with basic moral capacities. Holmgren writes, “In developing the paradigm of forgiveness, I argue that an attitude of unconditional genuine forgiveness is always appropriate and desirable from a moral point of view, regardless of whether the offender repents and regardless of what he has done or suffered.” She adds, “On the other hand, retributivists argue that forgiveness is morally *inappropriate* under certain circumstances. Most commonly, they hold that an attitude of resentment is called for when the offender fails to repent or when he has done something especially heinous.” Konstan points out three conditions in which forgoing a grievance constitutes an act of forgiveness: “conditions relating to the

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25 Ibid., 15.

26 Holmgren, *Forgiveness and Retribution*, 11.

27 Ibid., 10.

28 Ibid.
forgiver; conditions relating to the forgiven; and behavior consequent upon forgiveness, which, if not manifested, calls into question whether forgiveness has really occurred.”

Holmgren argues that this is missing in utilitarian analysis of response to wrongdoing. She claims that philosophers considered the utilitarian analysis of response to wrongdoing as disregarding the respect to offenders as autonomous moral agents. In reference to Strawson’s work, she discusses two distinct responses to wrongdoing: the “objective” attitude and “reactive participant” attitude. Unlike a reactive attitude, which involves holding resentment, forgiveness, love, gratitude, etc. toward one another as people relating as equals in interpersonal relationships, the utilitarian analysis of response encourages an objective attitude. Accordingly, “Offenders seem to be in some sense ‘objectified’ as we try to manage their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in the attempt to maximize good consequences. They do not seem to be addressed in a straightforward manner as persons who are our equals, or as autonomous moral agents.”

She further says, “In contrast, the retributive reactive attitudes seem to be rooted directly in respect for persons as autonomous moral agents.”

In explaining what sort of reaction both the wronged and the forgiven parties should exhibit toward forgiveness, Konstan describes forgiveness as a dyadic relationship. On the one hand, the absence of negative reactions from a person who has been wronged or forgetting the offense inflicted would not imply that the offense has

29 Konstan, Before Forgiveness, 6.

30 Holmgren, Forgiveness and Retribution, 6-7. As Holmgren presents Strawson’s definition of the objective attitude, “To adopt the objective attitude toward another human being is to see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of senses, might be called treatment; as something certainly to be taken account of, perhaps precautionary account of; to be managed or handled or cured or trained; perhaps simply to be avoided” (7).

31 Ibid., 7.
been forgiven. Konstan quotes Griswold as stating, “Forgiving cannot be forgetting, or ‘getting over’ anger by any means whatever….He elaborates, Forgiving is a far deeper and richer phenomenon, involving….much more reflection and interaction between forgiver and forgiven. So too, no forgiveness exists in which the ostensibly injured party treats the offense as negligible or unworthy of attention, as though it were committed by a child.”

On the other hand, Konstan argues that forgiveness needs to be recognized by the forgiven party. “We cannot simply forgive on our own, without recognition of the party to be forgiven, nor a gesture on the part of the other party. Forgiveness takes two agents, not just two persons: if I forgive you, it is because you have earned my forgiveness.”

This must be followed by repentance marked by the inner transformation of the wrongdoer, which involves a genuine turning away from the offensive behavior. The impulse to repentance involves “a profound moral transformation that seeks to reject the qualities of the self that were responsible for the offensive behavior.”

Kostan further elaborates that the penitent has to aim at manifestation of the inner change that alters the person’s life permanently in a way that signifies the acquiring of new identity rather than simply wishing to offer compensation to the victim. He asserts,

This acquisition of a new self is not immediately visible, but it must nevertheless be revealed to the injured party, if forgiveness is to be granted; for forgiveness depends on the conviction that the offender has truly had a change of heart. It is here that the idea of confession enters in, for confession, in the religious sense, involves not simply admission of guilt but (ideally) the declaration of an inner metamorphosis, an alteration so deep as to amount to a conversion.

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32 Konstan, Before Forgiveness, 6-7.

33 Ibid., 7.

34 Ibid., 10.

35 Ibid.
There must also be inner transformation from the forgiver’s side. Konstan and Alice MacLachlan agree on the point that to forgive demands the offended party exhibit a certain changes of behavior. According to MacLachlan, as quoted by Konstan, “The idea of forgiveness as a change of heart [in the forgiver] is the image most commonly alluded to by contemporary philosophers writing on the subject.”

Holmgren writes, “Forgiveness is generally understood as a change of heart in which an initial attitude of resentment is overcome and replaced with a positive attitude toward the offender.”

Konstan further articulates that the modern understanding of forgiveness is irreducible to the appeasement of anger that involves compensation and other means, but it is rather a “bilateral process involving a confession of wrongdoing, evidence of sincere repentance, and a change of heart or moral perspective on the part of the offender, together with a comparable alteration in the forgiver, by which she or he consents to forego vengeance on the basis precisely of the change in the offender.” Put succinctly, forgiveness in a modern sense is “a response to an offense that involves a moral transformation on the part of the forgiver and forgiven and a complex of sentiments and behaviors that include sincere confession, remorse, and repentance.”

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36 Ibid., 12.

37 Holmgren, Forgiveness and Retribution, 32. Konstan states that this transformation of heart may be expressed by avoiding anger and bitterness toward the wrongdoer, which lets the attendant desire of revenge go. Instead, once the forgiveness is given and recognized, the transformation in the forgiver entails a willingness to restore a moral relationship with the offender based on the wrongdoer’s repentance rather than on any other grounds like compensation, personal retribution, judicial punishment, and public humiliation. This is how forgiveness becomes a dyadic relationship demanding a personal transformation of both the wrongdoer and the wronged parties. Konstan, Before Forgiveness, 12-13.

38 Konstan, Before Forgiveness, 20-21.

39 Ibid., 59.
In Christian forgiveness, God’s forgiveness of human fault is given more emphasis than interpersonal relations. The analogy of human generosity in cancelling debts is used to explain divine forgiveness that has the capacity of wiping away the sins committed by others. This makes God’s forgiveness very different from ordinary forgiveness. The New Testament teaches that repentance is an important condition for forgiveness. Konstan writes that repentance, particularly outside the gospel, is considered as a function of faith rather than simply as regret over offense done to other human beings. In this way, “it assumes a peculiarly spiritual or inward character, even as it looks back to the unique focus on God’s forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible, with its almost obsessive concern with a fall from God’s grace because of a failure to observe his commandments.”

Error or sin is described in both the Old and the New Testaments as the major cause of discordance in the relationship between God and human beings. The very fact that no one can claim innocence before God makes the confession of their guilty behavior the only option. As Konstan argues, they are supposed to commit themselves to

reforming their natures, sincerely and with deep remorse, in the hope of obtaining a remission of God’s anger. God is stern, but also kindly toward his creatures and mercifully disposed toward honest repentance or a change of ways. But God is not an ordinary person: he does not go through a process of overcoming his resentment at mistreatment, or work through doubt about the authenticity of apologies and promises.

The term sinner (hamartôlos), which frequently appears in the New Testament and in the works of Christian writers, introduces a new category: “a person is now qualified as an evildoer, not just as one who has done wrong. It is the difference between

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40 Ibid., 122-123.

41 Ibid., 123-124.
having committed a crime and being a criminal: it touches on one’s very nature, as being in a state of sin.” Konstan, elaborating on John Chrysostom’s homily on the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25, states, “Repentance is not just a response to wrongdoing but a defense against the vulnerability of the subject on all fronts and within; it is our nature, not just a single act, that demands repentance in the hope of gaining forgiveness.” There is the same understanding of repentance and release from sin in the Western and Eastern Christian tradition as well as in the early church fathers’ writing in Greek and Latin. As presented by Konstan, John Chryssavgis stated that Christianity testifies that the past can be undone. A genuine repentance results in forgiveness and regeneration because human nature can change and all things are possible for God. Within the church as the Body of Christ, forgiveness or absolution is a freely given grace of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

In summary, Konstan underlines that forgiveness is widely perceived as an urgent matter these days:

From the legal movement known as restorative justice, which seeks to overcome the resentment between criminal and victim as a way of healing both, and the truth and reconciliation commissions that attempt to sublimate the deep resentments resulting from violent social oppression, to the more individualistic psychotherapies and religious counsels that promise peace with oneself or with

42 Ibid., 126.

43 Ibid., 127.

44 Ibid., 145. John Chryssavgis states, “Repentance (metanoia) not only prepares us for Pascha; repentance is itself the beginning of the Passover into life- the lifting up of the inner being in anticipation of the raising up of the total being.” He further states, “To repent is to awaken from the sleep of ignorance, to rediscover our soul, to gain the meaning and purpose of our lives by responding to the incomparable love of the One who is ‘not of this world,’ the One who ‘demonstrates His own love toward us, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ (Rom. 5:8).” John Chryssavgis, Soul Mending: The Art of Spiritual Direction (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 1.
God, forgiveness has recommended itself as a specially profound, moral and effective way of rising above bitterness and resolving conflict.\textsuperscript{45} Konstan sought to show that the notion of interpersonal forgiveness in a modern sense is both universal and of relatively recent coinage, which is missing in the classical Greece and Rome as well as Jewish and Christian traditions which emerged within and alongside them.\textsuperscript{46} This will lead us to discussion of Luther’s view of forgiveness.

Luther’s View of Forgiveness

Martin Luther categorizes forgiveness in two ways: forgiveness of punishment and forgiveness of guilt. The forgiveness of punishment or indulgence reconciles the person outwardly with the church by removing the work and effort required for satisfaction. The forgiveness of guilt or heavenly indulgence reconciles the person with God by taking away the fear of heart and creating a glad heart and a joyful conscience before God, without which no one can be saved. Luther recommends that forgiveness of guilt must be practiced every day.\textsuperscript{47}

Regarding those who seek peace their heart in the face of its sin through buying indulgences and doing good works, Luther argues that forgiveness of sin is not achievable by doing good works and ruining one’s body by too much fasting and straining. It is God alone who forgives sin and grants peace to the heart. Thus, forgiveness of sin must be sought first and foremost before doing good works, “for works do not drive out sin, but the driving out of sin leads to good works. For good works must

\textsuperscript{45} Konstan, \textit{Before Forgiveness}, 170.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 170-171.

be done with joyful heart and good conscience toward God, that is, out of the forgiveness of guilt.”

For Luther, God provided the holy sacrament of penance in order to deal with the problem of sin in a way that comforts all sinners. Besides the forgiveness of sin and peace of conscience, the sacrament of penance leads to freedom from all despair and assaults by the gates of hell. He points to three major things pertaining to the sacrament of penance: absolution (the words of the priest proclaiming to sinners that they are free because their sins are forgiven by God), grace (the forgiveness of sins and the peace and comfort of the conscience of), and faith (the firm belief that the absolution and the priest’s words are true) in God’s promise that “Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Mat 16:18-19). Faith makes the sacraments accomplish the purpose they are intended for. Luther warns that absolution and sacraments are in vain and even do more harm than good where there is no faith. He shares St. Augustine’s argument that the sacrament affects the forgiveness of sin not because it takes place, but because it is believed. Luther rightly argues that the effectiveness of the sacrament of penance and the forgiveness of guilt are completely dependent on God’s word and the person’s own faith rather than any human office or authority. To put it in Luther’s words,

The priest is necessarily uncertain as to your contrition and faith, but this is not what matters. To him it is enough that you make confession and seek an absolution. He is supposed to give it to you and is obligated to do so. What will come of it, however, he should leave to God and to your faith.…Thus Christ ordered that [the exercise of] authority in the church should be a rendering of service; and that by means of the keys the clergy should be serving not themselves but only us. For this reason, as one sees, the priest does no more than to speak a

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48 Ibid., 10.

49 Ibid., 11-13.
word, and the sacrament is already there. And this word is God’s word, even as
God has promised.\textsuperscript{50}

Luther also warns against disbelieving that we have received forgiveness when we
are absolved from our sins. Accordingly, the sin of disbelieving the article of the
forgiveness of sins found in the Creed for daily prayer is the greatest of all sins because
this is the sin committed against the Holy Spirit. His command to believe that even the
most grievous sin of all is forgiven is no less binding for Christians than His promise to
give them forgiveness of sins.\textsuperscript{51} Thus Luther argues, “Where there is no faith, however,
there neither contrition, nor confession, nor satisfaction is adequate.”\textsuperscript{52} With regard to
those who consider the sacrament of penance as useless because of their hardheartedness
and the fact that they have not yet experienced the disturbing anxiety which does not
allow them to seek comfort for their conscience, Luther recommends the importance of
softening them up with “the terrible judgment of God and cause them to quail, so that
they too may learn to sigh, and seek for the comfort of this sacrament”\textsuperscript{53} (Is 40; Mat
11:28).

Why do we sometimes continue to experience the turbulence and uneasiness of
conscience even after going through the sacrament of penance and receiving the
forgiveness of guilt? Luther responds that the problem is faith. He argues, “It is just as
impossible that the heart should not be joyful when it believes its sins are forgiven, as

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 15-17.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 20.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 18.
that it should not be troubled and uneasy when it believes its sins are unforgiven.” He further argues that this should not lead to despair, as God may sometimes allow faith to remain weak so that the confessor can recognize it as a time of temptation (anfechtung) intended to test and stimulate him/her to pray for God’s help, saying, “Oh Lord help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24), and “O Lord increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). Luther concludes, “Thus does the person come to learn that everything depends on the grace of God: the sacrament, the forgiveness, and the faith. Giving up all other hope, despairing of himself, he comes to hope exclusively in the grace of God and cling to it without ceasing.”

Luther also discusses the significance of confession and absolution far beyond the particular time sins are oppressing and frightening our conscience. Just as one needs to confess their sins every moment privately because no one can claim of leading sinless life on earth, it is also advantageous for those who believe in the forgiveness of sin to hear often about absolution. Luther states, “This is why I said that the faith of the sacrament does everything, even though the confession be too much or too little. Everything is profitable to him who believes God’s sacrament and word.” Luther clarifies that the authority to forgive sin, which Christ speaks about in Matthew 9:6-8, is what a priest or any Christian says to someone they see being afflicted in his/her sins. As he states,

He can joyously speak this verdict, “Take heart, your sins are forgiven” [Mathew 9:2]. And whoever accepts this and believes it as a word of God, his sins are surely forgiven. Where, however, there is no such faith, it would do no good even if Christ or God himself spoke the verdict. For God cannot give a person

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54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., 18-19. John Chryssavgis writes, “Then, when you arrive at the end of your individual resources, an infinite and eternal source can open up. Not that divine grace is absent beforehand; it is simply unnoticed while we yet depend on ourselves.” John Chryssavgis, Light through Darkness: The Orthodox Tradition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 66.
something he does not want to have. And that person does not want to have it, who does not believe that it is being given to him; he does the word of God a great dishonor, as was said above.57

This is the reason why the confessions and absolution are essential in the church. With this in mind, let us discuss briefly African Religion’s view, particularly the Oromo practice of handling forgiveness in terms of gumaa and waadaa.

African Religion’s Perspective of Forgiveness and the Notion of “Gumaa” and “Waadaa”

It is important to give a brief description of the notion of gumaa (blood price) and waadaa (covenant) among the Oromo people as one of the Ethiopian traditional ways of responding to wrongdoing before discussing forgiveness as a response to the violence caused by political, religious, and ethnic tensions. The Oromo communities (and also other groups of people, e.g., Sidama, Amhara, Tigre, and Gedeo, etc.) have their own traditional way of handling conflicts in order to avoid vengeance and ingrained hatred between the offender and the offended parties. Tamene Keneni, who contributes an article to Oromo cultural studies focusing on the psycho-social analysis of gumaa, rightly describes gumaa as “one of the Oromo indigenous institutions of conflict resolution, justice administration and peacebuilding that was able to persist and function to date.”58

The term gumaa denotes the existence of a strong sense of belongingness or responsibility to one another among the community members.

57 Ibid., 21.

The notion of *gumaa* signifies that an attack on the life of any individual community member is counted a disrespect and wrong done to that community. The Oromo believe that *Waaqa* is the God who seeks *gumaa* from the person involved in blood feud. The willingness of the victimizer to approach the offended party for settling the dispute implies that they take full accountability to pay the price proportional to the mistake committed, which is a sign of respect for the victim. In doing so, they also make peace with *Waaqa gumaa baasu* (God of vengeance) and *lafà* (earth). This portrayal of *Waaqa* as God of justice can be used as the point of contact with the biblical view of God (1 Kings 21:17-19; Psalm 94:1; Romans 12:19).

The term *waadaa* signifies that the major concern of the communities involved in a dispute is the future of their relationship, i.e., how the offense spoils their relationship permanently. Thus, they work together toward freeing both parties from the offensive past and the propagation of spirit of enmity that prompts for vengeance. Asafa T. Dibaba, who studied the case of the Salale Oromo community, refers to *waadaa* as the non-violent principle of handling disputes. Accordingly, the community elders and tribal legal actors, who lead the proceedings at the site chosen for settling disputes involving blood price (or *gumaa*), work toward pacifying the contesting parties. This involves the sacrifice of the blood of an animal (usually a lamb) as a visible symbol confirming the *waadaa* to be entered into by swearing to forgiving the blood feud or the guilt and forgetting the wrong done toward the victimized community or individual. The wrongdoer or the party that represents him/her is responsible for admitting the offense, which is expressed by providing the animal to be sacrificed. Additionally, both parties swear an oath to each other: the wrongdoer not to repeat the mistake and the wronged not
to seek vengeance. They swear to forgive each other for the sake of Waaqa (God) and lafa (earth). Let us illustrate this with the traditional way the Oromo of west Ethiopia settle disputes in forgiveness and reconciliation.

In the traditional context of the forgiveness and reconciliation process, both parties choose elders who come together to hear them telling the cause of a conflict as it appears to them. Similar to the Christian reconciliation process, the elders warn against deceit and pretention in Waaqa’s (God) presence. Then each party promises to speak the truth and takes turns to present the cause of the conflict. When one party presents, the other must listen quietly. Even if something provoking was said, the presentation must not be interrupted by a reaction from the other party due to the respect for Waaqa and for the elders. But it is possible to respond to what was said at the right time. After hearing the causes of the disagreement as reported from both sides, the elders take a brief time in the absence of the parties to analyze the issue separately. Then, based on the hearing, they can judge which party is guilty of the offense and recommend the begging of forgiveness from the victim. Eventually, the elders stand up with the offender on their side, face the victim, and beg for forgiveness in the name of Waaqa on behalf of the victimizer. The victim stands up and announces that forgiveness is offered for the sake of Waaqa, for the respect of the elders, and to put an end to the enmity between them and the offender. The forgiveness also includes a promise not to seek vengeance against the victimizer in the future, which means they have entered waadaa (covenant). If the offense is related with bloodshed, the forgiveness is confirmed by a ritual that involves slaying of a sheep.

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brought by the offender, which represents the *gumaa* (blood price). The elders bring them together and they embrace each other as a sign of reconciliation and restoration of love and peaceful relationship. This will settle the issue between them so completely that one party cannot do any harm to the other because of this issue.

This *waadaa* (covenant) established between the two parties by the blood of the lamb signifies that the victim is so valued and worth respecting that the offense must not be left without *gumaa* (literally, *price*). Moreover, because of the *waadaa* the two parties entered into, their good relationship is restored and the dispute is put to an end. This shows that there is a point of contact between the *gumaa* and the *waadaa* principle of the Oromo Traditional Religion on one side and the Christian concept of penance and forgiveness, which demands the transformation of the heart, on the other side.

What does it mean if the offended party is not willing to settle the conflict this way? What does it mean if the issue already settled in forgiveness and reconciliation is reversed? How does this put to question the authority of the reconcilers, *Waaqa* and elders? As Christians, can we withhold forgiveness from someone begging for it in the name of God? Is there any difference between withholding forgiveness and reversing the issues settled in forgiveness and reconciliation? In the traditional context, both the refusal to settle conflicts in the presence of the community elders and the reversal of the issue settled in forgiveness and reconciliation are regarded as undermining the presence of the elders, whom the community considers as gifts of *Waaqa*. In Dibaba’s words, “To violate *waadaaa* is considered as a threat to the wellbeing of the community and to risk severe human and/or divine punishment.”

When this happens in the faith context, it

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60 Ibid.
causes great damage to the life of discipleship and to the reputation of the church because it implies that Christians have freedom either not to give or refuse to receive forgiveness. This description suffices for our current discussion, as it is beyond the scope of this paper to expand more upon the notion of *gumaa and waadaa*. With this in mind, let me proceed to my reflection on forgiveness in different contexts of Ethiopia presented above.

**Forgiveness and Reconciliation as a Response to the Violence Caused by Religious, Political and Ethnic Tensions**

One may argue that *forgiveness* is an irrelevant and insufficient response for the offenses committed against the citizens related to political, religious, and ethnic tensions. First of all I want to make clear that I am discussing such tensions from a theological stand point, which allows me to base my argument on a biblical foundation. The Bible teaches that forgiveness is the appropriate response to all wrongdoings, including the ones we consider as unfair treatments. Second, the most important point that all readers should consider is that of the problem of evil for which we cannot find satisfactory explanation if we push the scriptural approach to wrongdoing to the side. It is important to acknowledge that human heart has a recurring tendency to attribute wrongdoing to temptation in order to escape responsibility for the wrong done (Gen 3).

If we attribute evil to specific groups of people, governments, religions, and cultures in dealing with our past and present social problems, we simply do nothing more than repeat the mistakes of the eighteenth-century scholars and the subsequent modern culture, which sought to derive evil from specific historical sources because they couldn’t explain how evil was introduced into human history. As Reinhold Niebuhr rightly articulated this mistake of modern culture,
It attributes evil to specific historical causes without inquiring how these particular causes could have arisen. The eighteenth century attributed tyranny and injustice to governments as well as to historic religions; and it was never very clear about the relation between the political and the religious sources of injustice.\textsuperscript{61}

Instead, if we recognize the existence of evil on our planet long before the advent of our corrupt rulers and ruling classes, with their oppressive systems, our tyrannical governments in our past history, our dishonest priests, pastors, and Imams for the teachings of the scriptures of their respective religions, and our “bad” neighbors with their disgusting attitudes, we will never regard each other as inherently evil for past offenses. Moreover, it is possible to argue that those political, religious, and ethnic leaders as well as those fraudulent neighbors are not the particular sources of the evil that distorted our past history of relationship by their nature. As Niebuhr further states, “A particular manifestation of evil in human history cannot be regarded as the source of a general evil inclination. It is, on the contrary, but the fruit and consequence of a profounder root of evil.”\textsuperscript{62} However, they are accountable for the irresponsible use of their God-given freedom as human beings with moral capacity. This will make forgiveness the right response to the past and present wrongdoings if the nations are to enjoy a peaceful life and good, common future.

Griswold asserts that forgiveness is not a virtue within a perfectionist ethical scheme, where the perfected person is nearly or totally immune from mistakes in judgment. He rather describes forgiveness as “more appropriate to an outlook that emphasizes the notion of a common and irremediably finite and fallible human nature,

\textsuperscript{61} Niebuhr, \textit{The Nature and Destiny of Man}, 99.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 98.
and thus highlights the virtues that improve as well as reconcile but do not aim to ‘perfect.’”\textsuperscript{63} Having this said, I proceed to discussion of forgiveness in socio-political context.

Socio-Political Context: Who Are the Victims and the Victimizers?

Regarding the situation during the imperial era, I would argue that it must also be recognized that it is not only the Amhara ruling class that oppressed the other nations under imperial rule. The system was organized in such a way that people could practice injustice and domestic violence against each other even within their respective ethnic circles. It is to such context of humanity that Griswold refers as inescapably rooted in a fractured and threatening world, for which forgiveness is a response that leads to a good life.\textsuperscript{64} This implies that no ethnic group can claim innocence and neutrality as, at least, someone from their side had played an instrumental role in the imperial oppression, either directly or indirectly, whether willingly or forcefully. This might have also been expressed in the bias and manipulation detected at different levels in the life of the society, from the grass root to the higher intellectual, political, and spiritual realms. This would lead one to argue that the citizens share the blame for the wrong done in the past (though the degree may differ) and need to seek and give forgiveness to each other.

Griswold explains this as,

\begin{quote}
Our interdependence as social and sympathizing creatures; our embodiment and our affective character; our vulnerability to each other, our mortality; our standing to demand respectful treatment from one another, as befits creatures of equal dignity, and our obligations to one another; the pervasiveness of suffering—most
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{63} Griswold, \textit{Forgiveness}, 14. Griswold further states, “Forgiveness is a virtue against the background of a narrative about human nature and its aspirations that accepts imperfection as our lot (in religious view, our lot absent divine grace, and in a secular view, our lot unalterably)” (14).

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 14-15.
often unmerited where it is intentionally inflicted—and of pain, violence, and injustice: these are part and parcel of that imperfection.\textsuperscript{65}

Some should be held accountable because they accepted whatever the authorities or those in position had dictated to be done without using their capacity to question and their access to the political and religious authorities for the flourishing of the people, whom the political and religious system had robbed of the right to choose and to speak for themselves. They did not consider it worth claiming that they became who they were because of the sacrifice the people in their ethnic circle had paid. Others are responsible because of their direct involvement and contribution to the offense committed as the authorities and agents of imperial rule.

Penance and forgiveness in this sense demands both parties admit the wrongs done against the victims and recognize that their complaint is reasonable. It is only through seeking forgiveness from those who were wounded by their attitudes and actions that they may do away with their guilty conscience. This leads us to a very important question: Where are the victims and the victimizers today? The only evidence one may find, however long and deep one may trace back into Ethiopia’s past, is not the people involved directly, but the history of their wrong deeds, perverted thought, and negative attitudes as well as the past history of the people who were the victims. Of course, history does not pass without leaving its marks, whether good or bad, on the contemporary society, which serves as its messenger by passing on these marks from one generation to another. If this is true, it can be argued that not only both parties and the victims of the

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 14. Griswold emphasizes the relevance of forgiveness as a virtue to human relationship in our imperfect world saying, “a picture of the world as we have it, including ourselves as embodied, affective, and vulnerable creatures, plays into the judgment as to what will count as virtue. Virtue expresses praiseworthy or excellent ways of being responsive to the world, given the sorts of creatures we are” (19). This makes forgiveness desirable.
old system, but also their thought and deeds, are represented by individuals and communities among the insider and outsider groups in Ethiopia today. This may also lead us to another equally important question: Who are those who need to seek forgiveness? Is it only the people whose line of heritage can be traced back to those who were identified as the oppressors? Who are those which should give forgiveness? Are they the ones whose line of heritage can be trace back to the oppressed group of people? Or, is it possible to find individuals and communities whose minds and interests are shaped by defective historical practices of the past centuries? Or can we hear among all nations and cultures the voice crying for justice, freedom, equality, and flourishing of all human beings beyond political, religious, and ethnic boundaries?

It is a deadly sin to consider other people and their value systems as devilish in order to promote one’s own ethnic identity and culture. Murphy rightly argues that the failure to treat people in a way appropriate to their value is to injure them. He refers to this as an “objective” injury, which is based upon what one regards as the correct moral or societal facts about self-worth. He further states, “If the person who has been wrongly treated knows this, then he will not only be but feel insulted.”  

As Cameron Harder paraphrases Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s suggestion, “those who are disadvantaged by any social arrangement are likely to see the problems in that system most clearly because they are feeling the pinch.” Therefore, Miroslav Volf’s suggests in his *Exclusion and Embrace*,

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67 Cameron Harder, *Discovering the Other: Asset-Based Approaches for Building Community Together* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2013), 77. Harder’s book was intended to help the disconnected and hidden people both within and outside the church find each other and build a community that transcends the, geographical, religious, ethnic, and political boundaries. 67
Hence the will to be oneself, if it is to be healthy, must entail the will to let the other inhabit the self; the other must be part of who I am as I will to be myself. As a result, a tension between the self and the other is built into the very desire for identity: the other over against whom I must assert myself is the same other who must remain part of myself if I am to be myself.\(^68\)

Every individual or group of people that regards other people’s languages and cultures as meaningless and bad cannot be free from the sin of pride that continuously oppresses and frightens their conscience. The right action for such persons is to seek forgiveness from the people toward whom they developed such negative attitudes and committed such offenses, which in turn caused an ingrained hatred that spoiled the relationship of the nations for centuries. People who were wronged also need to seek forgiveness in case they have been responding to this wrongdoing inappropriately with a motive of vengeance. It is a wise nation that lets go of the dark memory of abusive relationships in the past and works together toward bridging the gap between the people for the common good of the present and future generation based on equality, freedom, justice, and respect for human flourishing. This agrees with Holmgren’s words:

I argue that the attitudes of unconditional genuine forgiveness and genuine self-forgiveness incorporate the attitudes of respect, compassion, and real goodwill for persons. Further, I argue that the attitudes of unconditional genuine forgiveness are always appropriate and desirable from a moral point of view in response to wrongdoing. I then argue that if we extend the basic attitudes of respect, compassion, and real goodwill to all persons equally, we will be led to adopt a justice-based moral theory that enjoins us to secure for each person the most fundamental interests in life compatible with like benefits for all.\(^69\)

\(^68\) Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Exclusion and Embrace vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 91. To complement Volf’s argument with Chryssavgis’s comment regarding the importance of rediscovering ourselves, “In struggling against what we are not, we are in fact seeking to discern what we truly are and to know ourselves. The reality is that we tend to forget who and what we are. Not that we may be tempted to imagine that we are more than we actually are; unfortunately, the reality is that we tolerate being less than we are called to be.” Chryssavgis, *Light through Darkness*, 65.

\(^69\) Holmgren, *Forgiveness and Retribution*, 3.
The first response to wrongdoing should be developing a sufficient attitude of self-respect either as an individual or a group. Holmgren refers to Murphy as stating a victim’s first task in such a process of addressing the wrong to be to recover one’s self-esteem. “As Murphy points out, every act of wrongdoing carries with it the implicit message that the victim does not warrant a full measure of respect. In Murphy’s words, the message is ‘I count and you do not, and I may use you as a mere thing.’”\(^{70}\) If a person or a nation that has a wrong self-perception tries to give and receive forgiveness, they will never do more than repeat the insult and offense others have committed toward them. It is very important to have a clear and right understanding of who we are and who others are before entering into any conversation. Likewise, it is advisable to know what specific issues demand we go through the process of penance and forgiveness. We do not need to repent for the good things we have done and the right questions we have asked. Any social system or its constitution which establishes this as a criterion might have a wrong foundation and a perverted understanding of forgiveness and need to be revised.

**Religious Context**

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who wrote the foreword to *A Common Word*, states that compassionate cooperation with others based on mutual love and respect for one’s neighbor is inseparable from being a Christian and a Muslim.\(^{71}\) With regard to the current religious tension between Muslims and Christians, the common law between the adherents of both religions must be taken seriously. A positive response to it

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\(^{70}\) Ibid., 59.

\(^{71}\) *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor*, ed. Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrington (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), x.
from both sides helps to see a significant change in Muslim-Christian relations. As Volf predicts, “A day of transition from deep conflicts to mutual beneficial coexistence may be dawning.” The case in Ethiopia is different. Muslims and Christians have lived together peacefully, intermarried, suffered the consequences of poverty and wars along the border, fought against and defeated the Italian invaders, suffered through oppressive feudal and communist regimes, and experienced the sorrows and the happiness of life together for centuries. It is the influence from the fanatic Islamic movements in Arab and some African countries that is trying to change the longstanding peaceful coexistence between both religions into disastrous conflict. I think what they should do first is to agree on being alert to the external movement that spoils their peaceful relationship and culture of mutual respect that contributes to the peaceful coexistence.

Regarding recent disputes, healing each other’s wounds must come first so that the common ground between Christianity and Islam can be used as a firm foundation for working together towards living in peace and justice. What does acknowledging guilt and asking for forgiveness imply in this context? It means that Christians should not wait until Muslims appeal to church leaders to lead the Christian community to see the sins they have committed against their Muslim neighbors. Nor should Muslims wait for the push from Christians on their Imams. Either party should say “Yes, we have sinned against our neighbors.” Shying away from the offense we committed against others has not helped to achieve peace and justice in our relationships. Nor will it help in the future. Researching and acknowledging our failures to contributing to human flourishing based

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on the common word between us will lead to receiving genuine forgiveness from each other.

**Conclusion**

The theologians of both Islam and Christianity are responsible for bridging the gap between Muslims and Christians. The hitherto existing major and minor conflicts between adherents of both religions involves their differences in understanding and explaining God, their respective faiths, and the faith of their respective neighbors. Bridging the gap in understanding can only be handled through a deep theological dialogue. It is beyond the understanding and mandate of secular government and the analysis of their political experts to address the problem related to Christianity and Islam for three reasons.

First, the conflict resolution mechanisms used by governments to handle other cases cannot be effective in solving religious conflicts because they are not designed with an intention to heal the past wounds and pains. They may either provide temporary relief from tension or even cause further wounds in order to attain peace and justice in political terms. In this case, the genuine forgiveness and reconciliation is not achieved because both parties are not satisfied with the actions, as the root causes of the conflicts are not effectively addressed. This is not because of the government’s unwillingness to address the issue, but because of the lack of knowledge and access to the nature of such religious conflicts.

Second, political leaders and experts cannot avoid bias when dealing with religious conflicts. It is not easy to totally neglect a sense of belongingness and relation to one’s religious heritage while undertaking the analysis of such conflicts. Very few
persons can commit themselves to seeking justice and peace in a balanced way going beyond the impact from the community belonging to their religious circles.

Third, issues arising in Muslim-Christian relations involve what people believe. The government is not in a position to tell citizens which faith to follow or which to neglect. This means that it cannot say that one faith is right and the other is wrong. Why is this? Because the conflicts involving faith require spiritual ways of handling them, which include genuine forgiveness and reconciliation for offenses committed against the other. This forgiveness and reconciliation can only be reliable if it considers what the adherents of both religions believe about true forgiveness and reconciliation. Both Christians and Muslims must also listen to, understand, and respect what their neighbor says about forgiveness and reconciliation. There must also be openness to recognize what is written in their respective scriptures (the Qur’ān and Bible) as long as it is helpful for the peaceful coexistence of Muslims and Christians.

Therefore, what is the role of the government in this situation? The government has to play a facilitating role instead of imposing reconciliation. It is the duty of the government to make sure that its citizens are enjoying equal freedom, justice, and legal protection in this reconciliation process. Anyone who denies the right of a single citizen to flourish because of their religious affiliation, political views, or ethnic origin must be treated according to the bylaws of the country. It is not spiritual to impede the government from punishing the guilty and fighting injustice. An action taken by the government against individuals violating natural human rights should not be considered as an attack on one’s religion. Holmgren, comparing the paradigm of forgiveness with the retributivist position on response to wrongdoing writes, “And those who endorse
Retributive theories of punishment argue that punishment is an intrinsically appropriate response to crime, whereas the paradigm of forgiveness holds that punishment can be justified only if it provides fundamental benefits for all citizens.\textsuperscript{73}

Finally, if there is an established constitution, which is designed by the equal participation of all citizens, all kinds of injustice and violence must be treated accordingly. Yet, this process needs transparency and clarity so that it may not cause distrust toward the government. The community of faith has to receive an explanation and be convinced about why the members of their religious group should be treated that way. Therefore, Christians and Muslim theologians as well as the responsible government bodies are supposed to help the followers of both religions understand, respect, and treat each other with love. They are also responsible for teaching their community what the relation between religion and the state should look like.

\textsuperscript{73} Holmgren, \textit{Forgiveness and Retribution}, 5.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE RESPONSE OF THE ETHIOPIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH MEKANE YESUS (EECMY) TO THE TENSIONS BETWEEN ETHNICITY AND HUMANITY IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Introduction

This chapter discusses the response of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) to the political, ethnic, and religious challenges of the defiled *imago Dei* on the life of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ethiopian society. The church responds to the external challenges (political and religious), which arise with change in the political system, and simultaneously to the tensions of ethnicity within the life of the church based on her motto of “Serving the Whole Person.” My intention in this chapter is to analyze the missionary effort toward establishing the church and the EECMY’s response to persecution and social injustice under different political systems in order to show the role of the church in addressing the tensions of ethnic identity in the life of the Ethiopian society and among the believers without suppressing the ethnic identity of all nations. The discussion will be organized according to responses to the denial of recognition and social injustice under the imperial rule, to socialist ideology and social injustice under the military government, to ethno-religious violence and social injustice under the current government, and to violation of church policy and division among the believers.
Response to the Denial of Recognition and Social Injustice under Imperial Rule

This subsection discusses the EECMY’s response to the era of oppressive imperial rule, during which the church was established as a national church after going through years of persecution and discrimination. The presentation is organized under the following two subtopics: the dream to establish the church among the “southerners” and “zēga” nations, and the denial of recognition and social problems addressed simultaneously.

The Dream to Establish the Church among the “Southerners” and “Zēga” Nations

As we have already discussed in chapter 3, the oppressive systems under King Sahle Sellasie and Menelik II constituted a hierarchical and discriminatory relationship among the different ethnicities of Ethiopia. In this system of domination, the terms “south” and “north” were used to refer to people rather than to geographical locations, to which a connotation of the status of “subject” and “subjugator” are attached respectively.

In his *Evangelical Faith Movement in Ethiopia*, Fekadu Gurmessa recounts, Eike Haberland’s explanation of the term “southerner” as referring to “the Cushitic and other peoples” who were conquered and incorporated into the Abyssinian Empire: “After their incorporation, the people of the south became zēga in the expanded Ethiopian state. Originally, the term was used by Abyssinians generically to refer to the peoples of southern Ethiopia, and it had an undertone suggesting the status of a subject.”¹ The term zēga later came to be of similar meaning as the word “citizen.” The negative attitude

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¹ Gurmessa, *Evangelical Faith Movement*, 103. In reference to the article by the anthropologist Eike Haberland, Gurmessa describes the intensity of the influence of the Christian Ethiopian Empire on southern Ethiopia under Emperor Menelik II: “It is well known that during the later Middle Ages and at the beginning of modern times the Christian empire of Ethiopia [Abyssinia], the state of the Amhara and Tigray, exercised a great influence on southern Ethiopia politically and culturally.” He further writes, “The south is home to the people whom Emperor Menelik II conquered and incorporated to his expanding empire in the nineteenth century” (103).
toward one’s language and culture developed in this context of hierarchical and subject-subjugator relationships and was maintained by Emperor Haile Selassie I. However, it is important to note the joint response of the Protestant missionaries and local evangelists which later led to the church’s establishment under Haile Selassie I. The missionaries had to address this problem by translating the gospel into the languages and cultures of the Ethiopian nations.

Between the late 19th and mid-20th centuries, the seed of the gospel sown by missionaries started to bear fruit. Debela Birri reports that the missionaries of the Swedish Evangelical Mission, who were denied entrance into the interior and kept at the Red Sea coast, opened a school in Massawa “where the exiled Orthodox priests and deacons”2 (including Gebre-Ewostateos) and freed Oromo slaves (including Onesimos Nasib and Aster Ganno) could be trained to take part in mission to the Oromo people.3 The most important aspect of this training was the translation of the Bible into local languages. The arrival of the Oromo translation of the Bible, while the people were suffering subjugation and humiliation under Amhara rule, served as an unparalleled assembling point. Eide states, “In using vernacular language, the Evangelical pioneers stood out in contrast to the priests of the EOC who applied Ge’ez and Amharic, the

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2 Birri, Divine Plan, 31. Birri writes that these Orthodox priests and deacons were those who were eager to bring revival movement in the Orthodox Church as a result of reading the Scriptures translated and distributed by CMS missionaries in the vernacular. Accordingly, “The contact intensified the desire for reform and aroused the suspicion of the Orthodox Church hierarchy with the result that these Bible readers were soon accused of non-Orthodox beliefs and were excommunicated and suffered persecution” (31).

3 Ibid., 30-31. These missionaries were aware of the challenge they would encounter. As cited by Birri, “Krapf did not hide the prevailing difficult political situation in Ethiopia, but advised them to bypass Ethiopia and go to the Oromo country by way of the Sudan….Thus the first missionaries of the Swedish Evangelical Mission, Mr. Carl Johan Carlsson (1836-1867), Mr. Per Eric Kjellberg (1837-1867), and Rev. Lars Johan Lange (1836-1911) were sent to the Oromo people, and they arrived Red Sea port of Massawa on March 15, 1866” (30-31).
language of the conquerors.” The missionaries, who had no doubt that the closed door would be opened by God sooner or later, were preparing evangelists for proclaiming the good news among the marginalized nations. It was this missionary response that initiated evangelical pioneers of the EECMY to go beyond ethnic boundaries proclaiming the gospel of salvation in the local language in west Oromia (Bojji). Arén regards this as the fulfilment of the dream to evangelize the Oromo.  

The missionary response included reacting against social injustice and human rights violation that they either noted or themselves experienced. Arén reports that missionaries like Karl Cederqvist (1854-1919), a pioneer missionary from Sweden (1904-1919), responded by providing the helpless slaves and poor people in Addis Ababa and the surrounding villages with medical treatment free of charge. Although Cederqvist himself was frequently moving for several years in search of an unblemished lodging for rent to shelter himself from rain and cold, he exhibited an excellent missionary quality through his commitment in rendering medical service and approaching the government.

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4 Eide, Revolution and Religion, 92. Arén says, “It was Onesimos and Aster who had furnished the team at Boji with the tools for their work: the New Testament, the Reader, and the Hymnbook - all of them in Oromo. These books appealed to the feeling of the people everywhere and much contributed to the response to the gospel. The Orthodox missionaries, who used Ge’ez in church and otherwise preferred their own Amharinya, were regarded as instruments of Amhara culture and Shoan domination.” Arén, Evangelical Pioneers, 398.

5 Arén, Evangelical Pioneers, 310. As Arén explains the development, “Evangelical Christians were allowed not only to return to their native areas but to propagate their faith and establish a church of their own. Some of them were also able to fulfil the old dream of a mission to the Oromo by penetrating to Wollaga in the south-west, where the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus ultimately became the fruit of their labours” (310).

6 Arén, Envoys of the Gospel, 115-121. Arén writes, “Medical care was mostly not within the reach of beggars, slaves and other unfortunates. Cederqvist catered without distinction for whoever sought his help in matters of health, be they high or low, rich or poor. He was particularly concerned about the domestic slaves and the numerous attendants to officials and feudal lords who received an utterly low pay or nothing at all. By inner constraint the treated these people free of charge although his superior in Sweden blamed him for overdrawing his budget for medicine” (121-122).
authorities to get those who were jailed and suffering torture and mutilation for their faith released.\textsuperscript{7} The case was opened against “all the Bible readers in Wollaga and Leqa,” who were charged with subversive religious activities.\textsuperscript{8}

It is not easy to understand the struggle of missionaries and local evangelists without noting the negative attitude of the ecclesiastical and imperial authorities toward evangelical Christianity. This can be seen from how Abune Mateos angrily argued on hearing the case of Bojji evangelists. As Arén states, “He declared that he would rather have Islam than any form of Christian faith that was not Orthodox.”\textsuperscript{9}

In Bojji, this negativity partly arose from the all-inclusive character of the fellowship established among those who went to Gebre-Ewostateos’s home for a cup of coffee after worship at the Orthodox Church was over, mainly to listen to sermon and sing evangelical hymns in

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid. Aleqa Taye Gebre-Marian (1860-1924) was one of the “envoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia” and a prominent theologian of evangelical conviction, who founded his faith on Scripture. Arén testifies, “He believed that a renewal of Christian life would ensue from a faithful teaching of the vernacular Bible and a reclamation of the tenets of the Apostolic Church. He was ready to stake his life on this sacred enterprise and was well prepared for the task” (19). According to Arén, “1911 and 1912 were also the years when he [Cederqvist] pulled every string conceivable to obtain Aleqa Taye’s release from prison and did his utmost to induce the legation to use their influence to save Aleqa Tegenye, Qes Badima, and their associates from torture and mutilation” (121). Tegenye Wuddneh (one among the laymen) and Badima Yalew (1885-1973) (one of the then-three young priest, the other two being Beyene Ingida and Tegbaru Like Tegenye) were accused of heresy by Abba Wolde-Mikael of the Bojjii Mariam Orthodox Church in 1911 and imprisoned simply because of reading the Bible and proclaiming the good news (65-68).

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 65-68. According to Arén, Wolde-Mikael presents his written case as, “the Bible readers insult the tabot [the Tablets of the Ten Commandments] and violate ‘the faith of the Emperor Menilek;’ the chief propagators of the heresy are three priests: Badima Yalew, Beyene Ingida, and Tegbaru, besides five laymen: Tegenye Wuddneh, Gebre-Yesus Tesfai, Ayele Yimer, Boru Siba, and Samuel Danki; all the eight of them are much given to anomalous preaching” (68). When the indictment against the Booji evangelists was tried in \textit{chilot} (law court) at Naqamte in May 1911, the large number of people witnessed in support of Abba Wolde-Mikael that “the Boji evangelists scorned the Orthodox faith and brought it into discredit. The accused denied the charge and maintained that they only taught what was written in Holy Scripture” (71).

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 75-79. Neither Aleqa Admasu, a prominent ecclesiastic at St Giorgis Cathedral, nor Abune Mateos was satisfied with the torture and lashing the Booji evangelists suffered in prison in October 1911 in Addis Ababa. Arén states, “Aleqa Admasu urged that the Boji evangelists should be mutilated—if they had a hand and a foot cut off and the tongue cut out, they would be unable to continue their heretical activity….He [Abba Wolde-Mikael] suggested that they [instead] should all be exiled to their native areas, forbidden to teach and preach, and never be allowed to live at Boji” (80-84). Wolde-Mikael sought only to maintain his ministry within the Booji Mariam parish without being interrupted by the evangelists.
In going beyond the boundaries of gender, age, and social standing, this fellowship marked a tremendous paradigm shift in the religious and political context maintaining hierarchical social status. This is what Arén describes as leading to the deep fellowship arising from the personal experience of the core of the gospel.

Another aspect of the missionary response to the need of Ethiopian society involved development and social services activities. It was the missionaries who started social services and development work, including literacy education, formal schools, clinics and hospitals. The role of Rev. Karl Cederqvist of the Swedish Evangelical Mission and Dr. Thomas Alexander Lambie of the United Presbyterian Church of North America should always be remembered in this regard. Both missionaries combined the task of preaching the Gospel with the medical and educational works in a balanced way. Both of them reacted indignantly against slavery, oppression of the poor, and other social evils. They treated all people equally with respect and love. The difference this made is clearly stated by Arén:

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10 Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers*, 400. As Arén rightly describes, “Ethiopia has of old been a country of hierarchies” (401). He further argues, “In Wollaga the evangelical ethos eventually became attractive as to elicit a sizable following, substituting to a large extent a spiritual fellowship for the cultural one” (407). Adopting the Orthodox tradition of fellowship, which allows only men to gather in ye-senbeté bet (a special building for fellowship and common meal), Gebre-Ewostateos “reformed it and filled it with a new meaning. Widening the fellowship to include all, irrespective of sex, age and social standing, he transformed it into an instrument for proclaiming Christ” (400).

11 Arén, *Envoys of the Gospel*, 96. This experience involves “salvation through faith in the atoning death, resurrection and glorification of our Lord Jesus Christ. This fellowship bridged social and ethnic gaps. In these years it united Amara, Eritreans, and Oromo in a common concern for spiritual renewal through the dissemination and the study of the vernacular Holy Scripture” (96).

12 Ibid., 347-353. Arén reports, “Cederqvist expressed great concern about the numerous slaves who were found all over the country. He revolted at the manner in which they were treated—‘worse than cattle’” (137). He also writes, “Like Cederqvist, Lambie revolted at slavery, the oppression of poor and other social evils that he witnessed. In one of his first reports from Sayo he writes, ‘The more one sees of slavery the worse one hates it….These rulers and high ones all profess the greatest love and respect for us and shower presents upon us which have filched from the poor’” (355).
People marveled that he [Lambie] treated slaves in the same way as other patients. They could not grasp why he cared about slaves. They regarded slaves as ordinary property, as cattle or money, even as tools, not as human beings. Lambie objected strongly. He maintained that slaves were also created in God’s image, just as precious to Him as any free man, and used their coming to his clinic as an opportunity to speak to them about God’s love for them.\(^\text{13}\)

This legacy of missionaries should always be considered in handling the tensions of ethnicity and humanity in the image of God. A person deserves respect and equality not by virtue of his/her social status or ethnic heritage, but because he/she is human.

When Dejach Birru, the governor of Qellem, allowed Lambie to do medical work in his dominion in July 1919 and offered to employ him and pay him a salary, the latter politely responded that his mission was to preach the gospel with full liberty.\(^\text{14}\) Lambie wanted freedom of mission to address both the physical and the spiritual needs of the people through running a hospital, a school and a church simultaneously. In doing this, both Cederqvist and Lambie demonstrated that their presence was more than that of a “medical missionary,” as the governors and their officers used to refer to them. They were the “envoys of the Gospel” as Arén called them. The outcome of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which has the power to set free from both spiritual and physical oppressions, was the establishment of the EECMY as a national church in 1959.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^\text{13}\) Ibid., 355-356. Likewise, Arén reports a similar approach by Cederqvist: “Cederqvist’s understanding of the equality of all men came into conflict with ingrained concepts of social prominence. He expected every patient at his clinic to wait for his turn. He could not grasp why a slave should cede his place in the queue to anybody else, even if that person happened to be a notable….as it once happened- Cederqvist lost his patience, lifted the angry nobleman, carried him in his arms out of the compound and shut the gate without paying heed to his loud protests” (122).

\(^\text{14}\) Ibid., 352-353. As Lambie’s words are cited by Arén, “I want you to clearly understand, I said to him, that I am here to preach Christ, and if you in any way prevent this I cannot stay. I intend in the hospital you promise to build me to teach the patients the Bible and pray with them. Do you agree?”

\(^\text{15}\) Later, the response in perseverance of the evangelists in the face of the persecution prepared them for two purposes: (1) The experience helped the local evangelists to lead the great revival movement
I would like to argue that this was God’s response to the sigh of the *southerners* and the *zēga* people, who were suffering not only political oppression but also religious discrimination due to their ethnicity. Since then, the church continued to humbly serve the *southerners* and the *zēga* nations as well as the *northerners* equally aiming at bridging the gap between ethnicity and humanity in the image of God. Eide, confirming this stated, “One should keep in mind that the church leaders had all grown in and experienced the realities of living in the political, social and religious periphery.”

As the late Rev. Gudina Tumsa explained the purpose of church’s existence in such a society, “A Christian is placed by God to live and proclaim the Gospel of Christ to the people that are in need and difficulty so that they can turn to God to get their needs met and their problems solved.”

This humble beginning, the church among the *zēga* people, makes the Mekane Yesus Church a church for all nations which responds to ethno-political and religious tensions by building a community of love in which close personal relationships are nurtured.

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17 Gudina Tumsa, “The Role of Christian in a Given Society,” in *Witness and Discipleship: Leadership of the Church in Multi-Ethnic Ethiopia in a Time of Revolution* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003), 1-2. Tumsa asserts, “We believe that God has placed us where we are to do his will as Ethiopian Christians and to fulfill his purpose” (2). Complementing proposition, Rev. Dr. Wakseyoum Idossa, the current president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, in his address to the 36th annual meeting of the Committee for Mutual Christian Responsibility (CMCR), which focusses on the theme of “Urbanization and the Response of the Church,” states that the EE CMY is mainly a rural-based church. As his words were reported, “The Church’s presences in the cities are usually due to the mobility of our rural congregation members which forced the church to move intentionally and meaningfully upon the challenge of our presence in the urban settings.” [http://www.eecmy.org/?page=!news&article=217](http://www.eecmy.org/?page=!news&article=217), (accessed March 15, 2015).
Denial of Recognition and Social Problems Addressed Simultaneously

The Mekane Yesus Church had experienced the negative impact of identifying nation and religion too closely under Emperor Haile Selassie I, which was expressed “in the strong protest of the Patriarch against connecting the word ‘Ethiopia’ to the name of the Church Mekane Yesus, the result being that this church was registered under the name ‘The Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in Ethiopia.’”18 Gurmessa explains the cause for the denial of recognition and intensified persecution: “One reason the persecution was intensified was the concern about Ethiopian national identity and fear that evangelicalism might weaken loyalty to the state.”19 After struggling for more than fifty years, the EECMY was officially declared and registered as a legal body on 13 February, 1969.20 The church went through similar discrimination and mistreatment to what Stephen Neill reports regarding the experience of the new Christian group emerging as a minority group in India during the mid-20th century.21 Although his specific

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18 Eide, Revolution and Religion, 15.

19 Gurmessa, Evangelical Faith Movement, 238. Gurmessa cited John Markakis as stating, “According to tradition, Ethiopian nationality is theologically defined, its primary criterion being faith. A non-Christian could not be an Ethiopian, nor could an Ethiopian adhere to any other creed.” Similarly, he cited Eide, who in reference to Haile Mariam Larebo writes, “Due to the age-old concern that non-Orthodox subjects could not be loyal citizens[,] there is a strong belief that churches other than EOC should not be allowed to exist in Ethiopia” (239). This false accusation and marginalization of the Evangelical Church by giving peripheral status within the society was an expression of loyalty to the decision of the religious conference, called by Emperor Yohannes and king Menelik II, held at Boru Meda, in Wollo, in 1878, which declared that there should be only one Ethiopian Orthodox faith. Marcus, The Life and Times of Menelik, 57. Gustav Arén states that “the Oromo people were losing their [political and religious] independence one by one and that the Ethiopian [Orthodox] Church was giving effect to the Boru Meda edict of 1878 by founding churches in new regions.” Arén, Evangelical Pioneers, 374. Bahru Zewde describes Yohannes as the most conservative of all emperors who forced Muslims to renounce their faith and embrace Christianity, lest their land and property be confiscated. Zewde, A History, 48.

20 Eide, Revolution and Religion, 39.

21 Stephen Neill, Christian Partnership (London: SCM Press, 1952), 16. Neill states, “At the start, the tiny Christian group in a new area is inevitably felt to be allergic to the society within which it is found, perhaps a harmful parasite on the closely integrated system which it cannot but be in process of injuring or
reference is to the attitude of the Indian leaders of this period, it is also true for what the young protestant church was experiencing under the imperial and military rules in Ethiopia. Gurmessa reports that beside the concern about loyalty for national identity, it was the concern for their own economic interest that motivated the political authorities and the Orthodox clergy to unleash persecution of evangelical Christians. Eide reports that the Protestant Christians were falsely accused of being pacifists. From the strong persuasion of the imperial rule by the clergy to intensify the persecution, it is not difficult to see that there was an interference of the office of the Patriarch and bishops into the imperial office and responsibilities. The EECMY demonstrated its Lutheran view of church/state relations in responding to this problem by continuously requesting the constitutional separation of church and state. Luther teaches that both the worldly rulers and Christians have enough to do to serve God in their respective offices without one interfering into the other’s calling and office. The distinction between the callings and the

destroying. As the church grows, it may still be disliked or even hated; but it establishes its position as an integral part of the life of the nation and people” (16).

22 Gurmessa, *Evangelical Faith Movement*, 241. Gurmessa paraphrases John Markakis’s words: “As the principal owner of a third of the land in the new provinces . . . the EOC collected tributes from the serfs who worked its land. It is clear that the landholding nobility and the clergy reinforced each other’s authority in defending their interesting economic interest in dividing amicably between them the appropriated surplus produce of the peasantry.” Eide also discusses the problem on page 31 of his *Revolution and Religion*.

23 Eide, *Revolution and Religion*, 76-77. The severe accusations and persecution of the Ethiopian Full Gospel Church during early 70’s can be a good example. Eide writes, “It seemed as the Emperor was willing to help them. The Patriarch and the bishops of the EOC threatened that if he did so some of them would resign. In 1972 the persecution increased. The members were accused of all kinds of evil, but they were never tried in court or found guilty of immorality. In April 1972 a large group of members were imprisoned, many of them for a year. The EOC committee responsible for approving groups like this considered Mulu Wongel as ‘dangerous for the nations’ . . . At the time EOC was highly concerned about ‘youth-oriented splinter groups who preach inter alia against defense of the nation and against serving the armed forces’” (76-77).
offices has to be kept “so that everyone can see to what God has called him and fulfill the duties of his office faithfully and sincerely in the service of God.”

In the midst of persecution, some Mekane Yesus Congregations in Addis Ababa envisioned the importance of fellowship for addressing social problems effectively. This resulted in the formation of the Council of Lutheran Congregations in Addis Ababa (CLCAA) on 23 August 1969, which in turn caused the establishment of the adult literacy classes and urban community centers in the city. Rev. Gudina Tumsa and missionary personnel played a significant role in organizing and leading the CLCAA. Johannes Launhardt writes, as indicated in the first paragraph of the Terms of Reference, that the objective of the CLCAA was “[t]o foster fellowship among the congregations of this council and with other Christian groups.” This fellowship was desired to address jointly both the spiritual and physical needs of the urban dwellers in this challenging situation.

As the church in the society, the EECMY did not want to neglect the question of social justice. Bishop Christian Krause of Germany, discussing the role the church played during the last years of Emperor Haile Selassie (the early ‘70s), states, “Mixed as always

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25 Johannes Launhardt, Evangelicals in Addis Ababa (1919-1991): With Special Reference to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Addis Ababa Synod (Münster: Lit, 2004), 187-194. This vision was initiated by the Entotto Mekane Yesus, the Makanissa Mekane Yesus, and the International Lutheran congregation met together with the then-Youth Secretary of the Mekane Yesus Church, Rev. Gudina Tumsa, on 8 November, 1968. The purpose was to form the Council of the Mekane Yesus Congregations in Addis Ababa (187-189).

26 Ibid., 189. Launhardt writes, “The Council of Lutheran Congregations, under the chairmanship of Qes Gudina Tumsa, had become, between 1969 and 1974, an important forum for the various Lutheran congregations and institutions to exchange views and jointly act on urban issues and needs” (194). Regarding Gudina’s commitment, Launhardt states, “Besides the office work and the preparation of documents on theological issues and the role of the church in society, one of his concern was a holistic presentation of the Gospel to urban man” (187).
in Ethiopia with ethnic tension and oppression, were the questions of justice, poverty, hunger.” Bishop Krause witnesses: “Here in the city, I sat with Gudina in the very early 70s. He brought in friends and we discussed the question of social justice, hope for the poor, land reform, education and health services for everybody, not only for the upper classes, but also not for only one given ethnic group.” Eide appreciates the church taking a bold step toward criticizing the imperial policy on land at the 7th General Assembly in 1971. He states that “the Mekane Yesus [c]hurch ought to be given credit for taking up one of the most burning issues of the time, the social situation in ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ Ethiopia.” In its service to the whole person, the church focuses on extending Christian love and care for humanity and the entire creation with a purpose to promote peaceful co-existence and safeguard natural freedom of human beings to live in peace, harmony and prosperity against any attempt by individuals, groups or the state to reduce or violate them as its core values.

The EECMY did a groundbreaking job in bringing the significant holistic theological approach to development to the attention of the WCC in its letter of May

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28 Ibid., 104.

29 Eide, *Revolution and Religion*, 81. Later, the current EECMY Development and Social Services Commission, the establishment of which was prompted by the need to administrate the social services, started by the pioneer missionaries, came into existence with the church’s accepting “wholistic” approach as a guiding principle to ministry in 1972. The church, through its Development and Social Service Commission (DASSC) aims at the capacity building of the marginalized people at the periphery through providing a participatory social service and development work. Through its DASSC, the Church addresses both the physical and spiritual needs of Ethiopians with a desire to create a “reconciled, just, and prosperous society.” http://www.eecmydassc.org.et/mission.htm, (accessed February 23, 2015).

1972. Eide, emphasizing the influence of this letter at the follow-up conference held in Nairobi in 1974, states, “the letter went a step further than usual in that it concluded evangelism as part of the essential aspect of development….One consequence of this theological approach is that the concept of sin takes on an extended meaning, involving the social structures that keep man in bondage and abuse.”

The discussion of social justice continued among the church leaders until it finally gave rise to a resolution of the church’s 8th General Assembly in 1973, which, according to Eide, agreed on “recommending Parliament to speed up the handling of the bill on land reform.” Another thing worth noting is that the General Assembly urged the church members to set a good model and avoid taking part in injustice. The outcome was that the church members, who were working in government office, were found to be exceptionally free from the acceptance of bribes, which was a major problem of the country during the imperial time.

31 Eide, Revolution and Religion, 86-87. Eide repeatedly notes that the paper points beyond the immediate concern it was intended to address in laying the theological foundation for the EECMY’s active involvement in the revolution to come. As he articulates, “The prophetic task in relation to questions of righteousness and justice in society is about to become an issue of importance on the eve of revolution.” He summarizes, “The political aspect of the church’s engagement is further illustrated in language and educational policy, the question of freedom of conscience, social service, and the raising of awareness of the structural causes of poverty and exploitation of fellow men” (86).

32 Ibid., 81-82. Eide writes, “It was resolved that ‘the church officers inform the Parliament that the speeding up of the ‘Land Owner and Tenant Bill’ would be highly appreciated.’ When forwarding the resolution, on 7 February 1973, Emmanuel Abraham was quite outspoken when he stated that we ‘realize that the land owner system is the main reason for slowing down development.’” (82).

33 Ibid., 82. As quoted by Eide, the first paragraph of the minutes of the General Assembly committee included in the letter reads, “God is Lord of right and justice. A Christian should obey the will of the Lord, standing for right and make just decisions, dissociating himself from all injustice and never exploit others” (82).

34 Bockelman and Bockelman, Ethiopia, 93-94. The Bockelmans state, “Because of the constant economic stress under which most people constantly find themselves, income through bribes has become an accepted way of life….There are, of course, exceptions to the accepting of bribes. Among the notable ones are some of the high officials in the government who are also leaders in the Mekane Yesus Church” (93-94).
However, some members of other denominations who are not comfortable with religion’s involvement in politics, often misinterpret the church’s concern for the holistic life of the society as a weakness and a form of political activism. However, Eide clearly states, “anyone wanting to explain the conflict between the Ethiopian government [the military Dergue] and the Mekane Yesus [church] simply as a political conflict centering around the nationality issue in Wollaga, are mistaken.” Wilfred and Eleanor Bockelman testify that there was even time when the church had earned itself the dubious reputation of condoning injustice because of its tradition of keeping itself free from all political entanglements. Therefore, as the Bockelmans recommend, “the church’s main task is to proclaim the gospel, but in that proclamation it must show concern for people. One way to show concern is to imbue leaders of government and industry with the same kind of concern.” This implies that the church always needs to act responsibly whenever there is tangible evidence that the government is repressive, which should be done with a totally different motive from that of freedom fighters and opposition parties. In this regard, the effort of the church to address social problems under the imperial rule should not have been undermined. Nonresistance was demanded by the state, but the church preferred nonviolent resistance to injustice. With this in mind, we now proceed to the

35 Eide, Revolution and Religion, 248. It is important to note that, as a Lutheran church, the EECEMY acknowledges the doctrine of God’s two Kingdoms and always seeks to work with the existing government both when it is democratic and in the absence of better alternative. Anyone insisting in interpreting the church’s involvement as a form of activism needs to substantiate their argument with evidence indicating that the church went beyond criticizing the oppressive system and recommending ways to improve it to advocating open revolution.

36 Bockelman and Bockelman, Ethiopia, 94. Wilfred and Eleanor Bockelman suggest that the separation of church and state should not hinder them from seeking opportunities for working together to accomplish the will of God. Accordingly, “If it is the will of God that hungry people be fed and that diseased bodies be given a chance for healing, and that curious minds be stimulated with education, then why can’t church, industry, and government all work together, each contributing its own strengths” (104).
discussion of the EECMY’s response to the problem of social justice under the military regime.

**Response to Socialist Ideology and Social Injustice under the Military Government**

This section discusses three responses of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus to the problem of ideology and social injustice under the rule of the military Dergue under the following subtopics: perseverance in the face of false accusation, socialist ideology, and prayers against atheism and fascism.

**Response to Socialist Ideology**

The EECMY has been responding boldly to political changes in Ethiopia since 1974. The role of Gudina Tumsa, the then-Executive Secretary of the church was remarkable. In his presentation on the topic of “The New Political Ideologies and the Church,” on the General Assembly of the church in 1976, Gudina’s brother, Baaroo Tumsaa, who was a member of Politburo, argued that the capability to adapt to new situations had become imperative for survival of the church. In response to this proposition, Gudina unequivocally argued that there would be no common ground between materialism and Christian faith. From this time on, Gudina was seen as a threat for the ideology of the government and means were sought to get rid of him.

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37 Eide, *Revolution and Religion*, 161. In Gudina’s words, “It must be understood that there can be no reconciliation and no compromise between what the church believes and materialism. Marxism-Leninism and the church can never be friends. Materialism thinks and lives from below, from matter, but the church lives from the Spirit of God, who comes from above.” Gudina’s point seems to be similar with Nussbaum’s notion of the mutually exclusive nature of established church and government with regard to respect of equality. But that is not the case. Nussbaum argues from a purely political standpoint that considers adherents of one established religion as a threat for the freedom of choice of those who do not follow it. However, Gudina argues from theological perspective that the Christian church that is called to spread the knowledge of God in the land and the atheist government, which wants to disseminate the nonexistence of God have little in common.
As a representative of the LWF rightly states, “Guddinaa Tumsaa drew all his motivation from Scripture. In my opinion he is only comparable to Bonhoeffer!”38 As Eric Metaxas reports, two days after Hitler’s election, Bonhoeffer, in his speech which drew the battle line, said that the God of the Bible was supportive to true authority and benevolent leadership, but against the Führer Principle and its advocate, Adolf Hitler.39 The revolutionary changes that affected the life of the Ethiopian Church in February 1974 included a new political order, a new social and economic policy and a new religious policy. In those days, the church was struggling to create and see a just society in Ethiopia in which equality and human dignity was secured. But what the government was doing both at the peripheries and at the central part of the society was the opposite. The EECMY found it important to make adjustments in response to the changes. The church’s response to these revolutionary changes can be categorized as both internal and external.40

Internally, theological adjustment was needed. Gudina and other church leaders of the time played a significant role in giving the believers a clear and biblically based direction in this situation. In March 1975, the draft of a pastoral letter which described the situation of the EECMY in the Ethiopian Revolution was presented to the executive committee. The advancement of the wellbeing of the people, the definition of the church,

38 Ibid., 221-222.

39 Eric Metaxas, Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 139-142. As Metaxas reports, Bonhoeffer firmly resisted the Führer Principle, which was designed by the new generation who was in search of meaning in life and guidance to lead Germany out of the political crisis. Metaxas describes the Führer’s leadership as false leadership with a self-derived and autocratic authority, which had a messianic aspect. In a different note, it is important to mention that among about a dozen of the reviewers of his book, some scholars sharply criticize Metaxas for presenting a distorted image of Bonhoeffer in his biography, which involves reading into Bonhoeffer’s life an evangelical influence than the fact allows.

40 Eide, Revolution and Religion, 145-147.
comments on economic policy, and the question of ideology were among the contents of the EECMY’s official statement on the revolution.\textsuperscript{41}

Externally, religious freedom was needed. The church made wise decisions to work with the secular government as long as the wellbeing of the citizens was central. On the other hand, the EECMY had written a letter requesting more religious freedom. The continuing revision of the constitution of the country, which stated that complete religious freedom could be realized only by establishing a secular state that secures equal freedom to all religious groups, was the main concern of the letter.\textsuperscript{42} As Launhardt writes, “Qes Guddina was not a person to keep quiet about the repression forced upon the church and her believers by the authorities. In 1978 he refused to join a government good-will tour to Europe and appear in media confirming that there was religious freedom and no persecution in Ethiopia.”\textsuperscript{43} The problem the church wanted to address at this level was that the Ethiopian government must set itself free, at least constitutionally, from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in order to respect the religious freedom of the citizens. As a result, the hostile attitude of the government towards the Mekane Yesus church continued.

Eventually, Tumsa, the then-general secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, was arrested by the revolutionary government of Ethiopia in June of 1979. When President Nyerere of Tanzania, who approached the dictatorial military

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 148. To put the position of the Church in Gudina’s words, “On the question of ideology the letter first affirms that it (the church) ‘aspires to justice, respect for human right and the rule of law’, but it guards itself with the words: ‘Ideologies cannot be considered as absolute. Complete allegiance is due to God and God alone’” (148).

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 148-170, 220.

\textsuperscript{43} Launhardt, \textit{Evangelicals in Addis Ababa}, 187. “Qes” is an Amharic predicate borrowed from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church tradition to address an ordained minister. Its English equivalent is “priest.”
government as per the request of the representatives of the LWF and managed to get him released from prison, offered him a possibility of escape, Gudina said, “Here is my church and my congregation. How can I, as a church leader, leave my flock at this moment of trial? I have again and again pleaded with my pastors to stay on….Never ever will I escape.”  

Gudina Tumsa was abducted and killed by strangulation with a wire on the 28th of July, 1979. Gudina’s commitment to his call was comparable to that of Bonhoeffer, whose concern was not only about his situation, but also seeking God’s will about his German nation. In one of his letters to Maria, Bonhoeffer wrote that God’s will and our subjection to it must not be disputed. Most of all, he was a man with firm stand who died, as a Flossenburg doctor reported, “so entirely submissive to the will of God.” Such was the legacy Bonhoeffer and Gudina left for Christians today, who are struggling to balance their service to their nation with their responsibility as God’s servants, called and sent by Him to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Mat 28:19).

Perseverance in the Face of False Accusations

In this section, I will reflect on the church’s response to the military government’s attitude toward war, peace and justice. With the revolutionary change that took place in 1974, the military government became involved in war against the neighboring Somalian government and later against freedom fighters, which continued until 1991. As the government put the defense of the united Ethiopian nation against the external and internal forces as the major objective of the wars fought around the border (against both

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44 Ibid., 220. Rev. Gudina quoted 2 Corinthians 5:15: “Christ died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 321, 490, 532.
the Somalian forces and the freedom fighters), those who disliked the presence of protestant Christianity in Ethiopia systematically rephrased their false accusations in a way that provoked the denial of recognition and persecution of the EECMY by the state.

As a result, according to Eide, evangelical Christians were falsely accused of spending their time praying rather than working (whereby they were wrongly blamed for the presence of famine in the country), distributing anti-revolutionary pamphlets and posters, being Pentecostals and Jehovah’s Witnesses, and getting involved in political activities favoring the freedom fighters. Pastors, evangelists, missionaries, and lay church members were imprisoned and harassed severely all over the country. Church properties were also confiscated.47 Between 1978-1982, the EECMY synods at the periphery became the main targets of government-led repression, which was expressed through jailing and torturing the synod leadership.48 However, neither the church nor Christian parents discouraged the youth in connection with their faith from positively responding to

47 Eide, Revolution and Religion, 230-248. For example, in Western Synod, at the order of the government authority centered in Naqamte, the administrator and the cadre, accompanied with armed soldiers, entered into the churches and arrested the whole congregation while they were at Sunday services. As Eide reports the incident in Begi, “The congregation was brought to the police station where the people were exposed to heavy rains for two hours before they were brought back to church and given a long political lecture. Among other things the congregation was warned against the missionaries. The administrator who gave the lecture also declared that the government no longer acknowledged the Mekane Yesus Church, only the Orthodox and the Muslims” (234). Eide includes the words of the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who, in conversation with the Swedish ambassador to Ethiopia in 1979, argued “There is freedom of religion in Ethiopia. We have no problems with the Orthodox or the Muslims. But there are problems with the imported churches” (250).

48 Ibid., 252. According to Eide, “In addition to facing political charges, the arrested synod leadership was accused of having indoctrinated the youth with Christian thought and prevented them from taking part in revolutionary activity by inviting them to Christian meetings” (252). The slanderers often try to substantiate their accusation with Jesus’ advice regarding how to respond to an evil person, “But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also” (Mat 5:39).This reminds us of how the German pope and clergy unfairly attempted to directly apply Luther’s words from his work on doctrine that concerned Christians and the conscience to the war against Turks, which was totally different. That was intended to divert the attention of people from the problem his work was addressing, which was the competition between the pope and the clergy on the one hand and kings and princes on the other hand. Luther, “On War against the Turk,” 163.
the call from the government to participate in wars to protect the country. Such false accusations were intended to hinder the spreading of the gospel of justice and freedom by outlawing Christian gatherings, which was paralleled to the attempt of the German religious authority to disseminate false teaching using the Turkish War as a cover for attacking Luther for criticizing their way of life.49

Indeed, there was a consistent Christian teaching to safeguard faith against the socialist propaganda, which aimed at convincing all citizens about the “non-existence of God.” In addition, church leaders and pastors were advising the youth to discharge their responsibility as citizens even when the forceful recruitment for military service was used as a threat to their right to attend worship services. From the kind of commitment seminary instructors and theologians exhibited in preparing leaders for facing such persecution boldly, it is possible to argue that there was an indisputable legacy of Luther among the Ethiopian Christians of this era. In his article, “On War against the Turk (1529),” Luther writes in order to safeguard the sound biblical teaching against the slanderers regarding how to fight with a good conscience to protect the country from external enemies. His purpose was to teach biblical passages that could guide the Germans during this time of approaching war.50 Later, Dietrich Bonhoeffer also provided

49 Luther, “On War against the Turk,” 164-165. Luther exposes the hidden agenda behind the disseminating of false doctrine. The major interest of the Pope is not to wage war against the Turk, but using the Turkish war as a cover, as Luther argues, for robbing Germany of money by means of indulgences. What was at stake? Firstly, the bishops wanted to bring the greatest shame and dishonor to Christ’s name by preferring to fight with the sword against flesh and blood to fighting against the devil with the word of God and with prayer, which was appropriate to their calling and office. Secondly, the Christians and the princes were prompted to attacking the Turks before amending their own ways and living as true Christians. Luther refers to this as “one rascal punishing another without first becoming good himself” (164-165).

50 Ibid., 162. Luther had a brief conversation with the professional soldier Assa von Kram, who met him in Wittenberg in July of 1525, regarding the question of whether soldiers could be Christians without ceasing their profession. Von Kram seems to have been troubled in conscience and unable to reconcile his confession of Christian faith with his profession. In response to this question Luther wrote the
the German Christians with a theological interpretation of the Psalter under the title
“Prayerbook of the Bible,” which is part of his *Life Together*. Most of all, the small group
of Christians who decided to resist Nazism found the book worth reading for
strengthening personal communion with Christ, whereby Christian faith can be
sustained.\(^51\) Similarly, the Ethiopian pastors and evangelists were encouraging Christians
to consistently read the Bible to maintain their personal relationship with God in the
context of war and persecution.\(^52\) Defending the Christian faith and the truth that God
really exists was the central theme of the teachings, sermons, prayers, and songs
composed during the atheist government era.

Response in Prayer of Resistance against Atheism and Fascism

In addition to the denial of God’s existence, the severe persecution of Christians
and the denial of freedom of worship, the violation of the right to security and life, the

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\(^51\) Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press,
1996), 143-177. Bonhoeffer argued that the Psalms is the prayerbook of Jesus Christ, which Christians
should also make their own. His argument was meaningful to the people in Nazi Germany who were
referring to the Old Testament as the Jewish book displaced by the New Testament. Bonhoeffer teaches
that prayer is not what one can do on their own, but should learn from Jesus Christ. He suggests that
Christians need to pray the Psalms with confidence and love in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

\(^52\) This regular moment of silence under the Word is what marks the difference in approach to the
Scripture between the Ethiopian Evangelical Christianity and Orthodox Christianity, as the latter
encourages church members to read texts from books other than the Bible for everyday prayers. Pertaining
to the intensification of persecution, the hidden agenda in the case of Ethiopia under the Dergue regime was
to make legitimate the denial of any other form of Christianity besides the Orthodox, using the war around
the border as a cover for spoiling the church/state relations by falsely accusing the Protestants of being
pacifists.
threat of communism to the right to private ownership of property, the forceful recruitment of the young people for military service and the rapidly increasing number of orphans, widows, and helpless elderly people were among the factors which prompted the EECMY and other evangelical churches to prayerfully resisting the injustice practiced by the government. Although the church believes that a government is placed in the world by God in order to maintain order in society, the congregations were triggered by the gradually exacerbating political situation expressed in the declining concern for peace, justice, and human rights to pray against the repressive government system. The major theme of the prayer was to see the atheist ideology terminated and replaced by a government that recognizes the existence of God and seeks peace and justice. Concern for peace, justice, human rights, and freedom of worship were among the core items of prayer services in the churches.

Behind the prayerful resistance was the fact that Christians believed that the Dergue became an instrument of the devil in allowing the persecution of the church and the death of the productive members of the society. It was such prayer that Luther recommended German Christians consider before going to war against the Ottoman Empire.⁵³ To describe the devastating impact of allowing the takeover on the people and

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⁵³ Luther, “Appeal for Prayer against the Turks (1541),” 215. In the year 1540, the King John Zapolya of Hungary died and Suleiman the Great, the Sultan of Turkey, invaded Hungary. This brought the Turkish army to the borders of German territory. The troops of Ferdinand of Austria were also destroyed, which had left Vienna defenseless. France entered alliance with the Turks and sent its army. In this crucial time, Elector John Frederick, the Saxon prince, asked Luther to issue an “appeal” for prayer against the Turks. As Gustav Wiencke, the editor of Luther’s work under discussion, suggested, “Probably the elector was chiefly interested in defending Lutherans against the charge of being reluctant to fight the Turks and in building moral for defeating the Turks, while Luther was more concerned with the need for repentance and inward preparation for some catastrophic punishment at God’s hand. Both, however, were united in their faith in the power of prayer and in seeing in this event God’s visitation on the people for their sin” (215).
their Christian faith, Luther refers to the Turks as the “servant[s] of the devil.”54

Therefore, he argues, “in order not to lose our Lord Jesus Christ, his word and faith, we must pray against the Turks as against other enemies of our salvation and of all good, indeed, as we pray against the devil himself”55 In the case of Ethiopia, it is not exaggeration to say that all evangelical Christians of the military government era regarded Luther’s proposition that “The devil [was] in the saddle, making such people think they are clever and wise” applicable.56 Therefore, the main target was to strike the devil and win back the atheists to faith in God, which was the right step toward peace, justice, and religious freedom.

It seems that this legacy of Luther’s prayer became more important when later in 1980s the depressing condition of daily life caused the tension between the churches and Communist state of East Germany. Ronald J. Sider argues that the churches served as a safe place where people could meet and discuss the urgent need of change regarding

54 Luther, “On War against the Turk,” 174-175. Luther states, “The great need of our time should have moved us to this prayer against the Turk, for the Turk, as has been said, is the servant of the devil, who not only devastates land and people with the sword, as we shall hear later, but also lays waste the Christian faith and our dear Lord Jesus Christ” (174-175). It was clear that Christian faith was at risk if the Turks were allowed to take over. Luther has a good reason to pray against the Turks. He sees clearly that the Turks not only used force to prevent preaching and suppress the word, but also used wiles to trap people with their dangerous examples that attract people toward their faith (175).

55 Ibid., 175. Luther recommends prayer, repentance, and change of their evil ways. What should be done so that God may answer their prayer? Princes and rulers were responsible for making sure that justice prevails and God’s word is honored. Pastors should preach the urgency of obedience and repentance faithfully. The people must pray boldly without doubting and tempting God but bringing their petition before Him who does everything according to His divine wisdom. It is the duty of the preachers to admonish the people to pray and repent. The innocent people need to trust God, though they do not know that it is God’s will that they should suffer captivity. Luther, “Appeal for Prayer against the Turks (1541),” 230-231.

56 Luther, “Appeal for Prayer against the Turks (1541),” 236. As the Turk is the rod of the Lord our God and the servant of the raging devil, the Christian has to take the first turn to fight and smite the devil where by the rod can be taken out of God’s hand. This way the Turk may be found alone “in his own strength, all by himself, without the devil’s help and without God’s hand.” Luther, “On War against the Turk,” 170.
human rights, peace, and environmental care. These secret protest groups started regular “peace prayers” in 1982, at the end of which people stayed behind discussing issues related to the environment and nuclear disarmament.\textsuperscript{57} When the state continued to respond harshly, the church took the bold step of nonviolent official protest, which not only encouraged the entire citizenry toward mass demonstrations, but also resulted in the stepping down of the Communist Party leaders in November of 1989. As Sider describes, “Most important of all were the prayer services in the churches ‘that managed to imbue the whole protest movement with deeply rooted ethic of nonviolence that was the condition of every action taken.’”\textsuperscript{58} German pastors and theologians contributed a lot to the peacefulness of the protest. Another important lesson we learn from this experience is that prayer, not protest or mass demonstration, is the starting point of the church’s struggle against repressive government. For a couple of reasons, neither church-led protest nor the mass demonstration could be organized by the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus against the socialist regime.

The establishment of the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia, which is traced back to the prayer fellowship of early 1970s, was another significant response to the challenge of the socialist ideology. The inter-denominational prayer meetings which were used as a means to connect the evangelical churches around the last years of

\textsuperscript{57} Ronald J. Sider, \textit{Nonviolent Action: What Christian Ethics Demands but Most Christians Have Never Really Tried} (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015), 96. As Sider reports, “After a prayer service, groups stayed in the church to discuss issues such as the environment and nuclear disarmament. But the Stasi spied on, harassed, and not infrequently arrested and imprisoned these groups. Attending the prayer meetings could mean the end of a person’s career or being blackballed from university” (96). The socialist political cadres were treating Ethiopian evangelical Christians exactly the same way.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 96-99. Sider writes, “A week of October 9, prayer services followed by demonstrations happened all over the country. ‘Everywhere people holding candles streamed out of their churches to fill the streets’” (99).
imperial rule continued under the communist regime and finally led to the foundation of the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE) in 1976. The evangelical Christians considered seriously the importance of repentance of sin (as there was a strong tendency of interpreting disaster, including the war and natural calamities, as the consequence of sin, for which the people were incurring God’s wrath in the land) in order for their intensive fasting and prayers to be heard by God. This practice reminds us of Luther’s encouraging the German Christians to commence the war against the Turks with repentance and reformation of lives. This must be understood as a spiritual warfare in which the devil has to be beaten first without weapons and human armies so that God’s wrath may be removed. Likewise, Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the German Christians under Hitler’s leadership to repentance as an amicable way for the Church to solve the problem. At the downfall of the military regime of Ethiopia in 1991, the evangelical churches stood together to witness that God answered their prayers by removing the communist regime so that the gospel could continue to be preached and people continue

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59 Among the nine founding churches of the Fellowship were found the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church, Meserete Kristos Church, Ethiopian Mulu Wongel Church, Ethiopian Genet Church, Ethiopian Yehiwot Birhan Church, Baptist Church, Emnet Kristos Church, and Lutheran Church in Ethiopia. These churches standing together in Christian fellowship focusing on prayer for peace, human right, political and economic change contributed a lot to the intensification of Christian faith and trust in God’s intervention in the midst of persecution by the atheist government, which was expressed in imprisonment, torture, and execution.

60 Luther, “On War against the Turk,” 171-172. According to Luther, “Every pastor and preacher ought diligently to exhort his people to repentance by showing our great and numberless sins and our ingratitude, by which we have earned God’s wrath and disfavor, so that he justly gives us into the hands of the devil and the Turk.” Luther argues that this repentance of sin and amending of their ways must be followed by prayer trusting in God, who promised to hear it. Luther believes that this prayer should be brief and consistent, like “Oh help us, dear God the Father; have mercy on us, dear Lord Jesus Christ!” This prayer concern has to include even those who persecute the word of God.

61 Metaxas, Bonhoeffer, 178-179. As Metaxas reports, “First, he [Bonhoeffer] said that God was using this struggle in the German church to humble it, and no one had the right to be proud and self-justifying. Christians must humble themselves and repent. Perhaps something good would come out of the struggle, but having humility and repentance was the only way forward.”
to worship Him with freedom. The church today needs theologians and pastors who warn Christians against the self-justifying pride in dealing with ethno-religious violence, social injustice, and political regression.


In this subsection, I will discuss the EECMY’s response to the emerging of ethnocentric attitudes with religious freedom, the violation of Church policy and division among the believers, and the subsequent religious and political tensions.

**Response to Transition from Persecution to the Peril of Ethnocentrism**

Asmarom Legesse, in his *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*, discusses three different but interrelated types of ethnocentric thought, namely, *sentimental, vicarious, and cognitive*. Referring to the respective works of Sir Frederick Lugard and Bronislaw Malinowski, he describes the *sentimental* ethnocentrism as involving self-glorification and a belief in the superiority of one’s own culture, which he considered as naïve in its essential character and, thus, not deserving much attention.

*Vicarious* ethnocentrism, which Legesse describes as a subtle, which can influence both laymen and scholars, develops as a result of a continuous exposure to a system of a society. Everyone who lives in an alien society for a long period of time cannot resist the alteration of his/her worldview. He states, “The more conscious [one] is of the internal validity of the culture, the more likely that he will adopt the cognitive structure of his hosts and accept their stereotyped images of neighboring societies as a valid description
of the reality.” In light of his critical analysis of Eike Huberland’s work, *Galla Süd-Äthiopiens*, which he criticizes for failing to grasp the relationship between history and society, i.e., the core philosophical concern to the Borana (the Oromo of southern Ethiopia), Legesse defines *cognitive* ethnocentrism as the failure of a social scientist to comprehend the thought processes of a society without the mediation of his/her own culture. This type of ethnocentrism defies respect for other people’s right to be evaluated on their own terms, which are meaningful in their cultural context and have so much to contribute to cross-cultural communication.

Legesse unequivocally suggests, “The war that Africans must wage in the postcolonial era is a war against ethnocentrism…. The fact that colonialism has retreated into the background does not mean that its philosophical foundations have suddenly ceased to exist.” Like other African countries of the postcolonial era, Ethiopia obviously struggles with the challenge of an ethnocentric approach to political and religious relations. Ethiopia is a home for many ethnic groups, which have been experiencing the combination of the *sentimental, vicarious, and cognitive* ethnocentric thoughts and practices for centuries. Jørgensen testified that he was annoyed with anger “in the midst of ethnic terrorism in Ethiopia,” which he compared with the white prisons

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62 Legesse, *Gada*, 276. As Legesse rightly states, “The malignant version of vicarious ethnocentrism occurs when the student of culture builds up an entire interpretive model based on native ethnocentrism” (276).

63 Ibid., 278-283. As Legesse states the negative consequence of this approach, “When the investigator’s cognitive models prove to be irrelevant to the culture under study, his data become a primitive mass of uncoordinated facts and the society in question appears culturally bankrupt” (283).

64 Ibid., 274.
of apartheid in Johannesburg. Conflicts of interests, clashes between ethnic groups, exploitation and fighting were the painful experiences in the life of the society. The tendency to consider one’s culture as of higher status than others’ while at the same time looking down on any value system of outsiders is one of the predominant factors for ethnocentrism. Responding to such situations may require the church and theologians to know the role they ought to play in this context.

How can a revitalization of people’s ethnic identities affect the churches negatively? As we have discussed in Chapter 4, the longstanding sense of belongingness and the unity among believers, which revived marginalization and severe persecution in the past, is currently being threatened due to the misunderstanding of how political and religious freedom can be enjoyed without confusing people’s ethnic identity with their religious identity. It is also noted that neglecting the revival of traditional religions and the lack of awareness of one’s rights and obligations in ethnic federalism contribute to the intensification of ethnic tensions.

William B. Gudykunst and Young Yun Kim rightly argue that ethnocentrism hinders the understanding of the communication of people from other cultures and they suggest cultural relativism as a key to understanding peoples' behavior in their cultural contexts. A healthy and harmonized relationship is needed among the believers for the mission of God to be fulfilled in our life.

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66 William B. Gudykunst and Young Yun Kim, Communicating with Strangers (Boston, MA McGraw Hill, 1997), 5.
Although the EECMY does not allow an ethnocentric approach to mission and ministry, two extreme positions of ethnicity can be seen among the members of the city congregations of the Church. On the one hand, there is a tendency to confine one’s identity to that of ethnicity at the expense of spiritual identity. On the other hand, Christians who want to avoid this extreme sometimes find themselves another extreme of upholding their membership in the community of believers, which involves a total denial of everything related to their ethnic heritage. In the first case, all value judgments are made based on the culture of the ethnic group to which the person belongs, regardless of the God-given design for life, while in the latter case the instrumental role of ethnic diversity for God’s involvement in the world is totally neglected. The bias of congregational leadership often fuels up the ethnic conflicts in the church. Daniel L. Migliore challenges such a position with his sharp and precise statement based on God’s existence in communion of relationship, saying, “to confess that God is triune is to affirm that God exists in communion far deeper than the relationships and partnerships we know in our human experience.”

Therefore, in response to the ethno-linguistic tensions, the Church has included an unambiguous statement in its constitution in favor of mutual recognition and respect for ethnic identity. Efforts are being made at all levels to interpret the biblical teaching, the longstanding tradition, and the current statement of the church.

Response to the Violation of the Church Policy and Division among Believers

As a result of the influence of the current political situation, we may be tempted to confine our vision for mission to our own group of people, ethnocentric mission. Our

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assembly and council meetings may sometimes be highly obsessed with discussions related to favoritism, nepotism, regionalism, and racism to the extent of seeking freedom from each other rather than for each other. But the worst thing is when the resolutions of the decision-making bodies end up violating the constitution of the church due to a deliberate negligence of the leaders to address the root cause of the problem, ethnocentrism.\textsuperscript{68}

The situation of the Ethiopian churches is comparable to Metaxas’s report regarding the experience of the German church during National Socialism. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who boldly addressed the chaotic situation of Germany during this time in his writing “The Church and the Jewish Question,” defines the church as the place where Jews and Germans stand together. By calling the German preachers to address the discriminatory attitude of the German congregation members towards Jewish Christians, Bonhoeffer exhibited how seriously he takes the question of church and the ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{69} Metaxas also reports that the German Christians justified twisting and bending the traditionally accepted meaning of the Scriptures and the doctrines of the church in a complicated way. One aspect of this attempt involved the confusion that arises from

\textsuperscript{68} The divisive chaos caused by the bias of some church members and leaders in the Jimma Mekane Yesus Congregation (2007) and the bloody ethno-political conflict between the Oromo and the Benishangul people of southwest Ethiopia (which led to the temporarily closing of the local church) in 2008 can be mentioned as evidence. The reconciling role of God’s mission is at risk in this context as the spoiled reputation doesn’t allow the involved Christians to preach the gospel to the unreached outsiders living in their neighborhood. The church should be appreciated for sticking to its biblical and constitutional approach wherever irresponsible attitudes of hatred appear among different groups of people worshipping together.

\textsuperscript{69} Metaxas, \textit{Bonhoeffer}, 150-151. What prompted Bonhoeffer to consideration of the question of Jews was the adoption of the Aryan Paragraph by the Christian leaders of the mainstream Protestant church, which recommended the formation of separate churches for the Jewish Christians from the German ones whereby the distinctly German church would neglect the Jewish question. Bonhoeffer argued that the church that doesn’t respond to the Jewish question would fail to be a genuine church of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, it is the duty of the church to question the state, help the victims of the state, and act against the state in order to stand with the Jews (152, 155-156).
identifying Christian faith too closely with a cultural or national identity, which was viewed by other Christians as confusion and nationalistic heresy. Thus Bonhoeffer sets a good example for theologians and pastors in integrating a prophetic voice with pastoral concern in his balanced approach to questions arising within the church and society. Complementing this is Orthodox theologian John Cryssavgis’s description of the church as follows:

The Church is the place with room enough for all, with all of our faults. Here we are welcomed, validated and affirmed as children of God….Here we can be “in the same space with one another,” which is implied by the literal meaning of synchoresis, forgiveness….Here each one speaks one’s mother tongue, feeling “at home” in the embrace of the pantokrator, “the One who holds all.” The church is the “land of the living,” chora zon zonton, the place of love and reconciliation.

The EECMY has taken seriously the issue of ethnic identity and included a policy of ethnic diversity in its constitution with the intention to maintain the need for mutual respect. The first paragraph of Article 4:4 of the church’s Constitution confirms that all human beings are equal regardless of the difference in age, sex, color, language, ethnicity, worldview, and social status. The second paragraph highlights that the church regards the diversity in culture, language, and ethno-national identity as God-given beauty of the Ethiopian nations that has to be treated with respect. The third paragraph accentuates that the unity in baptism, faith, and doctrine of the church can be reinforced

70 Ibid., 165-174. Metaxas also provides readers with an account of the church’s struggle against National Socialism. The German Christians were careful not to reveal their most radical belief to the German people until the conference of April 1933, which Metaxas refers to as a model of theological soberness. The idea of establishing the German church as a united Reich church under the leadership of the Führer with the purpose of the Nazis political achievement was unwittingly voiced by German Christians. The church leaders appointed three bishops to discuss the church’s future. Hitler had proposed Ludwig Müller to be his Reich bishop and head of the united church to be. Bonhoeffer and his students argued against the German Christians’ proposal and walked out the meeting with 90% of the participants as an expression of their opposition to Müller’s election (176-178).

71 Chryssavgis, Soul Mending, 15.
and sustained only if the diversities of the nations are recognized and respected.\textsuperscript{72} Accordingly, people of different ethnic origins have to treat each other as brothers and sisters in God’s household. When they gather for prayer, worship and other concerns, they are expected to serve and edify each other in relationships whereby they can be a channel for blessings for the church and for the nation at large. As all human races are God’s image bearers, any sort of supremacy, discrimination, or oppression against one another is unacceptable both biblically and constitutionally. Based on this, the church recognizes the freedom of all ethnic groups to worship in their own language wherever there is need under the framework of the constitution.

Language usage is an important aspect of living in harmony with other people. William B. Gudykunst and Young Yun Kim rightly say, “Our attitudes toward other languages and dialects influence how we respond to others, whether we learn other languages, when we use other languages or dialects, and whether we accommodate to people with whom we are communicating.”\textsuperscript{73} One can easily detect these problems in the current situation of our country. For example, there are some individuals and group of people who argue that removing Amharic from its central position assumed for centuries as “national language” may cause danger to the unity of the citizens, which is a “shibboleth.” I believe that speaking as many languages as we can is not bad by itself.

What we should avoid is sanctioning a language as the only perfect means of

\textsuperscript{72} Constitution of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus: Amended and Approved by the 17th General Assembly of the Church Held in January 1997, (Addis Ababa: EECMY, 1998), 14-15. This title is my own translation of the Amharic publication.

\textsuperscript{73} Gudykunst and Kim, Communicating, 209-210. When we learned reading and writing in Amharic, there was no clear awareness regarding others’ attitude toward our mother tongue. Later, with the opportunity of using our vernacular, we started to experience hostile attitude towards each other, which was marked by division in the church and recurring conflict among university students of different ethnic backgrounds.
communication in a land to the extent of denying others their right to use and develop their vernaculars, which is the main cause for the declining harmony among the Ethiopian ethnicities. There is no reason for considering the growth of others’ languages as a threat to ours.

However, the longstanding tradition to sanction one culture while downplaying the other, labeling it as devilish, is not easy to penetrate. There is a mentality of confining the use of all other languages to their respective regions, which traces back its origin to the practice during the imperial rule and also to that of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church, which considered Amhara culture to be perfect and Amharic to be the only national language suitable for being spoken by the citizenry. This seems to have taken root deeper in the EECMY as the request of some ethnic groups to worship in their native language was not entertained according to the church’s constitution and became the cause for the chaotic division of the congregations in Addis Ababa, which was resolved in reconciliation in February 2010 after twelve years of separation.  

However, it is important to note that many church members question the effectiveness of the forgiveness and reconciliation process because it has failed to address the root cause of the conflict that led to the split. This is apparent from the recurring conflicts between the congregations in Addis Ababa—even after the forgiveness and reconciliation conference of 2010.  

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74 The reconciliation and unifying committee had been working towards settling some issues which needed careful treatment. The language issue seems to be a continuous cause of tension in some city congregations, as there are still leaders who do not want to see worship programs in any language other than Amharic. These leaders tend to politicize the request of the believers, but spiritualize their own negative response to the request. This should be handled carefully, as it is not only against the church constitution but also against the constitution of the country. Most of all, it is not biblical.

75 The recent conflict between the group of believers in Entoto congregation (who worship in Amharic) and those who worship in Afaan Oromoo can be mentioned as an example. Worship on Sundays
reconciliation, there should have been no room for unworthy competition between people worshiping the same God in different languages. A Christian gathering has to be marked with a feeling of embrace and responsibility towards others, notwithstanding weaknesses and differences in cultural identity. Chryssavgis rightly argues, “Forgiveness through repentance does not alienate us from the weaknesses of others, but, in fact, welcomes such weaknesses, for we are all responsible one for another.”

If, instead, hatred and negative attitudes prevail over love and good will for one another, it is in vain that we repeat the texts of the ecumenical creeds in our worship every Sunday. How can we who repel each other for differences based on ethnicity confess “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins?” In short, the action taken to bring about forgiveness and reconciliation seems to have neglected the very important question of ethnic identity, which ought to be treated according to the Constitution of the church if genuine reconciliation is to be achieved.

Response to Religious and Political Tensions

Although the Ethiopian traditional religions have revived significantly since 1991, religious conflicts often occur among adherents of Islam and Christianity (with a very

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76 Chryssavgis, *Soul Mending*, 16. Chryssavgis argues that the community of the church ought to be a site for learning to “share our weaknesses and to shed our tears, to love and to be loved. We recognize that we do not have to be perfect for people to welcome us. Repentance is the act of our re-integration into the healing body of the faithful, our way toward reconciliation with the “communion of saints” (15).

few reports of the clash between the Orthodox and Protestant Christians). Some groups of our contemporary Muslims want to treat their Christian neighbors (both Orthodox and Protestants) inhumanly, perhaps in vengeance of the denial of religious freedom and discrimination they went through in Ethiopian history. This violates Nussbaum’s fourth and sixth Central Capabilities, namely, *senses, imagination, thought*, and *practical reason*, which allow all persons to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason in a truly human way. Theologically speaking, Martin Luther argues that memory, the mind or intellect, and will, which Augustine and other scholars described as the image of God, “are most depraved and most seriously weakened” since the Fall of humanity, which caused the permanent distortion of the *imago Dei*. This is apparent whenever people treat each other unjustly based on ethnic origin, political views, and religious background, which signifies the loss of the capacity to love their Maker and maintain the relationship they are supposed to have with Him.

Taking this into consideration, the EECMY responds with forgiveness and respect whenever religious conflicts occur. The way the church has treated Muslims involved in the killing of Evangelist Mikaa’el Qana’aa of the EECMY Begi Gidami Synod and the burning down of church buildings and private properties of the Church members is a good example. The synod provided the offenders, who were exposed to epidemic disease arising from poor sanitation, with clean water, bathrooms, and medication during their stay in the local prison. This shows that the church believes that wrongdoers need to be

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78 Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, 33-34. Nussbaum rightly asserts that the denial of freedom of religious exercise is not only the deprivation one’s right to use their mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression, but also robbing them of the entitlement to the capability “to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of their life” (34).

79 Luther, “Lectures on Genesis, Chapter 1-5,” 61-62.
treated with respect as human beings while being held accountable for the wrongs done. Responding in this way, the church teaches that the evil deed has to be treated separately from the agent. This agrees with Holmgren’s suggestion that an attitude of respect, compassion, and real goodwill toward the offender helps to practice unconditional genuine forgiveness and respect for morality expressed in separating the sin from the sinner.\textsuperscript{80}

With regard to offering forgiveness in a political context, the way the EECMY treated the former Dergue regime officials who were in prison from 1991-2012 is admirable. First, as itself a victim of the decisions of these executives of the military government, the church had forgiven them for persecuting and harassing its members, confiscating its properties, and killing its leaders (including Rev. Gudina Tumsa). Then it took on its shoulder the responsibility of mediating the reconciliation of these officials to the families and relatives of the victims of the system, as a result of which they were pardoned by the Ethiopian government and released from jail on January 9, 2012. This affirmative response of the church can be seen as a good example of how religious forgiveness leads to political forgiveness and reconciliation. It also implies that the church needs to make sure a genuine forgiveness is practiced among its members before challenging the state to grant political forgiveness for those seeking it.

The EECMY actively engages itself with peacebuilding activities among the Ethiopian society through its Peace Office.\textsuperscript{81} The establishment of this office more than

\textsuperscript{80} Holmgren, \textit{Forgiveness and Retribution}, 83.

\textsuperscript{81} http://www.eecmy.org/?home=po, accessed May 10, 2015. Regarding the mission statement of the office, “The Peace Office is a non-hierarchical, relationship focused entity of EECMY committed to effecting both attitudinal and behavioral transformation of the EECMY membership in particular and
two decades back is the church’s response to the religious, political, economic, and ethnic conflicts recurring within the Ethiopian society. This office, in collaboration with the EECMY Synods and the local government bodies, calls peace and reconciliation conference, which brings together the parties involved in conflicts. Besides assessing the root cause of the conflict, incorporating a contextual theological reflection with the modern conflict transformation and the communities’ traditional conflict resolution mechanisms is significant to the effectiveness of the peace conference in leading to peace and reconciliation. The EECMY Peace Office addressed the political dispute occurred following the national political election in 2005. It played a great role in settling the sporadically occurring religious conflicts between Muslims and Christians since 2006. Mediating the ethnic conflicts among various communities in different parts of the country (for example Oromo and Beni Shangul people (2004) and the conflict among the Guji Oromo and the Burji people (2010) are some among the significant involvements of the church in the society.

The church plays a significant role in the educational work of Ethiopia through providing basic education services and community-based education like literacy and informal trainings under the goal of “Education for All.” Girls and children with disabilities are given special attention in the Church’s effort to provide access to education. Furthermore, the church supports the government in the areas of educational institutions, including vocational and technical training institutions. However, one of the major challenges to the government is the question of justice raised by the educated society within the EECMY constituencies in general via the provision of peace, civic and human rights education and by rendering preventative and responsive services to destructive/negative forms of conflict.”

minds, particularly University students, who are exposed to imprisonment and expulsion simply because of their critical approach to the irresponsible exercise of power by government authorities. The church seems to be very much reticent whenever the government is directly responsible for the dispute and loss incurred.

University students seem to have been the only ones speaking boldly against injustice, regardless of the sacrifice it entails. Gidada reports that the decision made by the current government in 2003/4 to move the capital of Oromia from Addis Ababa to Adaamaa, against the Constitution of 1995, caused a controversy that led to the expulsion of 300 Oromo students from Addis Ababa University. Neither the students nor the general public was allowed to challenge this decision. As a then-undergraduate student at the Mekane Yesus Seminary, I remember the government body coming to our campus as per the request of the seminary students and instructors seeking explanation for the action taken. After listening to various questions asked by the seminary community regarding the violation of human and democratic rights included in the state Constitution, one of the government representatives responded that we, as the community of a religious organization he referred to as a “congregation,” cannot question the government’s decisions and actions. The representatives repeatedly cited Article 11 of the Constitution, which says that “religion shall not interfere in state affairs” and vice versa. This is a clear misappropriation of the constitution for a purpose which it is not intended. The EECMY was not allowed to interfere in this issue except for some congregations in Addis Ababa, which responded to the conflicts arising at the University by opening their doors for students seeking help, regardless of their ethnic origin.
Another area of political tension at present, for which the society seeks the response of the EECMY, is the challenge of urbanization and land grabbing by domestic and transnational companies. In the past, through the critical theological reflection of very few theologians, lay preachers, and its members working in government offices, the church challenged the oppressive system. From this experience, much is expected of the church to address the problem of the expansion of urbanization and land grab under the cover of investment. What is going on in the suburbs of Addis Ababa is not too far away from the city congregations, synods, and the central office of the church. In response to the challenge of urbanization, the church set a good example through the 36th annual meeting of the Committee for Mutual Christian Responsibility (CMCR) held in February 2015 in Addis Ababa, which focused on the theme of “Urbanization and the Response of the Church.” Rev. Dr. Wakseyoum Iddosa, the current president of the EECMY, described the church’s presence in the cities as an intentional and meaningful move provoked by the mobility of rural congregation members to urban.83

However, the current real situation is very much different from the challenge the church has been facing during the last 50 years. Yes, in the past, it was the rural people who were migrating to urban settings, which was calling the church to paying attention to the needs felt by individuals who moved to the urban settings. But currently, another

83 http://www.eecmy.org/?page=!news&article=217 (accessed March 15, 2015). “The Committee for Mutual Christian Responsibility is a forum established in 1974, where the EECMY and overseer partners of the church come together for the purpose ‘to encourage and strengthen interdependence, sharing and mutuality in furthering God’s mission of transformation, reconciliation and empowerment.’” As it is stated in the article posted on the church’s website, “The 36th annual meeting of the Committee for Mutual Christian Responsibility (CMCR) was held from February 3-6, 2015 at the Gudina Tumsa Wholistic Training Center, Addis Ababa. This year’s theme was: ‘Urbanization and the Response of the Church.’” This means that the church has been playing a significant role in addressing the challenges pertaining to relocation of people from rural to urban areas since early 70’s. The church’s involvement includes literacy and training to adjust to rural culture.
aspect of the challenge seems to be missing from the concern of the Church. The expansion of Urbanization includes the city people systematically stretching out their borders with political intentions and gradually integrating the rural environment into the urban setting, which causes dismantling as well as loss of property and cultural identity of the vulnerable rural community involved. This requires the church to widen the scope of its theological reflection and practical response beyond addressing basic needs to the level of criticizing injustice and violation of human rights. Just as those in the past responded to the call from urban dwellers, the church leaders today need to turn their ears toward the call from rural communities and challenge the implementation of oppressive political and industrial projects. This way the church can maintain its longstanding legacy of being the church that serves the needs of others on behalf of God. The intentional and meaningful response provoked by the mobility of rural congregation members to urban areas in the past needs to be repeated today with addressing the challenge of the political, cultural, and industrial self-propagation of the urban dwellers over the rural communities.

A very recent response of the EECMY is a statement condemning what is arguably a mixture of religious and terrorist attacks in Libya and a xenophobic attacks in South Africa on the citizens of Ethiopia and other African countries. The EECMY Executive Board members, on the church’s 32nd regular board meeting held in Addis Ababa on April 22, 2015, issued a statement condemning the beheading and brutal killing of 30 Ethiopians in Libya by the terrorist Islamic group called ISIL on April 18, 2015.

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84 As the church in the society, the reflection on the theme of urbanization is highly relevant to the EECMY because, as Rev. Dr. Wakseyoum proposes, “Together we should discern ways and means of responding to the multifaceted challenges we are facing as a result of expansion of Urbanization.” http://www.eecmy.org/?page=news&article=217 (accessed March 15, 2015). The current cause of the conflict between Addis Ababa City Administration and the suburban towns of the Oromia regional state (discussed in chapter 3) can be mentioned as an example of the problems.
Likewise, the xenophobic torturing and killings of innocent Ethiopians and citizens of other African countries in South Africa was condemned by the Board members. The letter of statement condemned the brutal killing that took place in Libya as act of terrorism which cannot represent any religion. Nevertheless, it is very important not to convince Ethiopian Christians that ISIS is a mere terrorist group with no religious belief before thoroughly studying the power behind them and a religious teaching (if any) they propagate. The statement traces the longstanding peaceful coexistence of Muslims and Christians and continues promising that “the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus members and leaders will fight any action[s] that are [a] threat [to] peace and unity and will stand by the side of the government and the people of Ethiopia.”

Ethiopian Christians remember the tragic death of the Orthodox and Protestant Christians in 2006, including the priests of the Orthodox Church (in Jimma Zone, at Bashasha) and Evangelist Mikael Qana’a of the Mekane Yesus Church (in Begi Ghidami). The killers used the brutal way of butchering with a knife, similar to ISIS and burning Christians with the church building. These were fanatic Muslims, not a group with no religious belief.

In addition, the statement of the Executive Board, in reference to the statement of the 8th regular meeting of the Church Council held in July 2013, mentions illegal human trafficking and joblessness (poverty) as the causes for the increased migration of young

85 http://www.eecmy.org/?page=news&article=220 (accessed April 30, 2015). Accordingly, it is not only a violation of human rights but also an irresponsible and a merciless sin committed against God’s will for human life. A paragraph reads, “The detestable act committed by the terrorist group had a religious cover; nevertheless, it does not represent any religious belief….Almost every religion teaches that human beings should live in peace and harmony by striving together for mutual benefits and contribute to betterment of others.”

Ethiopians to other countries.\textsuperscript{87} Although the problem of poverty is undeniable, it is surprising that the letter of statement hasn’t said anything about the domination system of the government, which is leading a countless number of young Ethiopians into exile. Seen in the light of the kind of boldness by which the young Mekane Yesus church imbued the imperial government system, the legacy of the late Rev. Gudina Tumsa, who didn’t hesitate to speak against injustice and the oppressive system of the military government, the enduring faith demonstrated by the thirty young Ethiopians who were not intimidated by the armed ISIS militia and never renounced their faith even though they knew that it would cost them their irreplaceable lives, the statement reveals the deliberate negligence in applying the longstanding practice of critical theological reflection to our church/state relations.\textsuperscript{88} If this continues, the church may have to defend its public theological stand against the following criticisms: (1) it is developing a passive attitude towards the government domination system; (2) it intentionally prefers uncritical involvement in the church/state relations to the longstanding legacy of a critical

\textsuperscript{87} http://www.eecmy.org/?page=!news&article=220 (accessed April 30, 2015). The cause of migration is described in the statement: “Illegal human trafficking is the main reason for causing exile, suffering and death on our citizens. Regarding this situation, the church’s 8th regular council meeting in 2013 has made a clear statement so that the youth of Ethiopia won’t be victims of migration and illegal human trafficking. The council decided that pastors and evangelists of the church give strong teachings on awareness creation of the negative side of migration and that the church also has been trying to create job opportunities for the youth so that they can be self-supportive and change their life in their country.” Accordingly, illegal human trafficking and joblessness are the two causes of exile. Nothing was said regarding the cause of joblessness.

\textsuperscript{88} I do not believe that the EECMY is new to engaging its theologians with a thorough and critical reflection on the political situation in the country. Nor do I find a good reason for a public theology of the fast-growing Lutheran Church to neglect the need to remind the state to make sure justice is being exercised at all levels in the life of the society. A large number of educated young citizens are crossing the country’s national boarder to escape from torture and death they would suffer in the hands of the government security force simply because they spoke against injustice. Seen in light of the real political situation in Ethiopia today and the consequence of speaking against the repressive government system in the past history of church/state relations, the church’s response seems to have intentionally overlooked a thorough theological reflection on the root cause of the problem that leads the citizens into exile.
engagement in political affairs; and (3) it wants to maintain peaceful collaboration with the state even at the expense of its public theology rather than challenging the irresponsible exercise of power.

**Conclusion**

For the EECMY, responding to the impact of the defiled *imago Dei* on the life of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ethiopian society is not a new practice. The experience of the pioneer missionaries and the local evangelists who proclaimed the gospel to the people depicts the kind of perseverance with which they responded to the physical and spiritual suppression caused by the sin of disobedience that alienated humans from God. The church, which is the outcome of this response, found itself in the midst of the struggle to address the tensions between ethnicity and humanity in the image of God from the early stage of its inception. Following Luther’s doctrine of “God’s two Kingdoms,” the EECMY exhibited an effective presence among the society through critical church/state relations.

Nevertheless, seen in the light of the advocacy role the church was playing selflessly in the past and the gradually exacerbating religious, ethnic, and political tensions at present, the critical theological reflection required to address both the internal and the external challenges seems to be inadequate. There is a strong need to address the tensions between ethnic and religious identities of the believers through modifying the contextual theological studies focusing on the immediate and the root causes for declining national harmony. Finally, the church has to work toward redesigning a clear and biblically founded public theology in order to respond to the emerging nationalistic
heresy, i.e., the confusion that arises from identifying Christian faith too closely with cultural or national identity.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The image of God in humanity is a unifying element in a diverse ethno-political and religious world. We are not condemned to live alone, cut off from one another; we are called to live together and to enter into the communion of the Trinity. Leonardo Boff argues that understanding the communion that exists between the three persons of the truine God has a particular relevance to the life of individuals and community seeking liberation from oppression.\(^1\) All human beings are created in the image of God, regardless of their ethnic background. No ethnic group can claim the presence of God’s image more than others. Likewise, all ethnic groups are equally affected by the Fall, which caused human estrangement and a need for God’s restorative grace. Any attempt to impede an individual or a group of people from seeking and worshiping God in a way meaningful to their culture is not only oppressive, but also a sin of denial of God’s purpose for life in diversity. Therefore, the EECMY has to work towards a just and lasting change in the attitudes of its members toward each other so that they can live according to their confession of the triune God, which takes into account God’s ultimate purpose for all

\(^1\) Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 6. Boff contends that, “This understanding of the mystery of the Trinity is extremely rich in suggestion in the context of oppression and desire for liberation. The oppressed struggle for participation at all levels of life, for a just and egalitarian sharing while respecting the differences between persons and groups; they seek communion with other cultures and other values, and with God as the ultimate meaning of history and of their own hearts” (6).
human beings. Our theology should play an instrumental role in the church’s effort to help believers achieve a balanced view between ethnic identity and humanity in the image of God.

The image of God in humankind is central to the ways people treat each other. This image signifies that humanity belongs to the royal family while still being the dust. Our rebellious character separated us from God and condemned us under the penalty of death. But Christ renewed our royal identity and restored us to God. Whatever we do to people, we do it to the image of God. Our faith needs to be demonstrated in an elegant, sensitive, unpretentious, accessible, and eminently practical lifestyle in our day-to-day interaction with our neighbors. Therefore, the Christian perspective of ethnicity should not be taken far away from the relationship we have with God and with each other.

Creation in the image of God is what we share with adherents of non-christian religions and people with ethnic heritage different from ours. Whoever doubts this denies the full humanity of the religious or ethnic outsiders. Our differences can be perceived as beauty if humanness is given prior recognition as something on which our ethnic identity, religious affiliation, and political views are founded. Kelsey, who used the analogy of sculptor and clay to explain the “essence” of human beings, argued,

Just as the form a sculptor imposes on the clay is what makes determinately a statue of a person or of a horse….so an essence is the form that makes one actually to be the determinate kind of being one is….It is the “humanness” of every individual human being, that which makes him or her genuinely human. Since it makes them all equally and fully human, it is identical in them all. But it is not identified with any one of them.2

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Niebuhr explains humanness in terms of Christian faith and the freedom of God. He argues that the presupposition of the Christian faith saves humankind from the extremes of either being lost or becoming everything. Christianity maintains a balanced approach to human beings as significant creatures involved in the processes of nature and time (as well as one’s transformed self and sustained life) by the mercy and power of God. All Ethiopians must focus on this “humanness,” regardless of differences in ethnic origin, language, religion, and political views, to achieve harmony in the African landscape.

Seen in light of this, our exclusive Christian claim that we who are bought by the blood of Christ belong to one body of Christ should not be perceived as totally detached from our ethnicity. Moreover, in favor of spiritual unity of believers, the church shouldn’t tolerate any form of social injustice related to ethnic identity or social status of a particular group of people. Reinhold Niebuhr, in his Moral Man and Immoral Society, criticizes the church’s attitude toward social injustice, which he describes as “defeatism of religion”:

The fact that slaves had rights of equality in the early church did not aid them in improving their civil status. The church left the institution of slavery undisturbed until economic forces transmuted it into serfdom of the Middle Ages…. To this day religious communities and churches pride themselves on their ability to transcend economic and social inequalities within the pale of their organization; but it does not follow that they will move vigorously against the social injustices in the larger society which they know to be in conflict with their religious and moral ideal.  

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3 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 92. Niebuhr notes, “But this significance as a free spirit is understood as subordinate to the freedom of God. His inclination to abuse his freedom, to overestimate his power and significance and to become everything is understood as the primal sin. It is because man is inevitably involved in this primal sin that he is bound to meet God first of all as a judge, who humbles his pride and brings his vain imagination to naught” (92).

4 Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man & Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 77-78. In her ten Central Capabilities, Nussbaum focuses on the need to respect fundamental political entitlements and constitutional law. She also argues that special attention should be given to equal access to health and education in forging of human development reports. Equally
Christianity is intercultural, and as the body of Christ, when a part of the body is hurt, the other part should share the suffering (Gal.3:27-28). In short, all ethnic groups should work toward bridging the gap between their respective communities. The past tendency of claiming supremacy by one group of people must be faced critically and boldly. In this way, all Ethiopians (regardless of their ethno-political and religious background) can share responsibility for both the transformation and the socio-economic crisis the society experiences in the future.

Moreover, to settle the tensions between ethnicity and humanity in the image of God, it is important to make a clear distinction between maintaining one’s ethnic identity—identifying with the cultural values and traditions of the society to which one belongs—and ethnocentrism. Ethnic origin by itself poses no threat to a given society. People often seek their own ethnic group for worshipping, going for retreats together, spending vacation time together, and even to choosing their religion. Whether this is normal or should be considered as ethnocentrism and be challenged is a hot issue in the context of the Ethiopian and African society at large today. The main question should be about one’s motives. Whether there is still room for sharing with outsiders or whether segregation is so destructive that it can damage the unity of the wider society must be taken into consideration when dealing with the issue of ethnicity. It is obvious that

important in the pursuit of justice is the freedom of a person to speak, to learn, to participate in politics, and to defend one’s body against assault. Nussbaum, Creating Capabilities, 34, 69-71. In contrast, there are recurring reports of suppressing of university students’ right to express their emotions by sending excessive military forces onto the university campus instead of listening and responding to their questions regarding social justice. Not only university students, but also journalists, artists, and intellectuals who criticize the government system may face termination from jobs, imprisonment, and torture. This ethnic-based violation of human rights makes the victims cross the border to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Nussbaum states that the Capabilities Approach renounces forcible humanitarian intervention and considers it as a strategic mistake, especially if the nation is democratic (111-112). Although it is too early to expect a perfect and complete democracy in Ethiopia at this level, the denial of social justice and the violation of constitutional law need to be challenged.
liberation from oppressive rule should include the possibility of working with all other people outside our own ethnic and racial boundaries. Taking the opposite extreme may expose us to developing an ethnocentric attitude toward others, which in turn causes hostility and distorted interethnic relationships. This is what I refer to as a defiled imago Dei in the Ethiopian context.

Our differences do not imply that a particular group of people is responsible for the discord, mistakes, misfortunes, and calamities we have been suffering in the horn of Africa. Thinking this way may cause us to repeat the errors of the imperial time by defaming other people while giving ourselves the character we do not deserve. Niebuhr criticizes modern human beings for their effort to derive evil from specific historical sources with an intention to ascribe wrong-doing to temptation and thus trying to escape responsibility for it. Because they failed to explain the origin of the power and the inclination to introduce evil into history, they tried to seek a solution for the problem of evil through increasing education. This warns the people of Ethiopia against blaming each other and calls them to share responsibility for both bad and good experiences. Thus, the social injustice and domestic violence the citizens have been suffering within the political, religious and ethnic spheres since the imperial time needs to be treated with genuine forgiveness. Explaining the guilt in question, respect for the offender as a moral agent, admitting wrongdoing, taking responsibility for the wrong done, and willingness to exhibit a change of heart that results in attitudinal change are the most important steps toward genuine forgiveness and reconciliation. Approving historical mistakes of our forefathers is not only an irresponsible approach to national harmony, but also a

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5 Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 93-96.
promotion of negative attitudes toward each other, which serves as an instrument for destruction of our nations.

Finally, the EECMY has already been participating in the process of handling the ethno-political and religious conflicts among the people of Ethiopia. The church needs to keep building on the legacy of the pioneering missionaries, the local evangelists of the earlier days, and the late Rev. Gudina Tumsa in order to respond effectively to increasing political, religious, and ethnic tension. One way to do this is through maintaining its public theology, particularly the doctrine of the *imago Dei* and the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation, in a way that allows self-critical reflection regarding the church’s role in addressing the major challenges of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ethiopian society.

**Recommendation**

The last subsection of the thesis, in which I present what needs to be considered as a means to reduce the tensions between ethnicity and humanity in the image of God in the ethno-political and religious life of the people of Ethiopia, is organized under three subtopics: Maintaining national harmony without suppressing ethnic identity, a need for rethinking public theology, and practice of interfaith dialogue instead of imposed conversion.

**Maintaining National Harmony without Suppressing Ethnic Identity**

An Orthodox scholar, John D. Zizioulas (who contributed his *Communion & Otherness* to the field of theological anthropology) states that protection from the other is emphasized in the Western understanding of personhood. He states, “In our culture[,] protection from the other is a fundamental necessity. We feel more and more threatened
by the presence of the other. We are forced and even encouraged to consider the other as our enemy before we can treat him or her as a friend.”6 Zizioulas argues that the Trinitarian God is a significant model for the proper relationship between communion and otherness for the church and for human beings.

Maintaining the national harmony of the citizens by no means requires the suppressing of one group of people by another, one clan by another, or females by males. Nothing can justify discriminatory approaches based on differences in gender, ethnicity, and social status. Niebuhr refers to the classical view of human virtue as holding to the notion that not all human beings have the capacity to be either happy or virtuous. The Stoics, who considered most human beings as fools, viewed happiness as a virtue for the wise.7 In contrast to this view, our difference in languages, cultures, and views do not imply that one is less human than the other. All are equally God’s image bearers. Thus our differences are the ground on which we establish mutual respect and recognition. By recognizing others as human beings with meaningful cultural heritage, we pave the way for others to recognize our heritage in a similar way. Treating people with disrespect and pride prompts them to do the same to us. For example, Hopkins citing Rosemary Radford Ruether, a feminist theologian, wrote,

Ruether claims that “women cannot affirm themselves as imago Dei [in the image of God] and subjects of full human potential in a way that diminishes male humanity”… . Women, as the denigrated half of the human species, must reach for a continually expanding definition of inclusive humanity—inclusive of both genders, inclusive of all social groups and races. Any principle of religion or society that marginalizes one group of persons as less than fully human

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6 Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, 1-4.

diminishes us all….Thus the achievement of woman’s full humanity entails the full humanity of men and all of creation.  

What our differences mean and do not mean must be reflected on from religious and cultural perspectives in addition to that included in our political constitution. This may require us to reform a dyadic description of individual and communal identities in a way that never allows room for the subject-subjugator interaction of the imperial era. Location, nationality, ethnicity, clan, and family relationship were significant in describing the role of the individual in the collective as a social institution of relevance. This was true for both the first-century Mediterranean world and the traditional African society. S. H. Mathews, in Christian Fasting, explains the practice of defining the personal identity of individuals in terms of their relationship to some other person or thing as dyadism. He stated, “The dyad is the ‘other’ by which one can define oneself, and understand one’s station in comparison with others.”  

Mathews illustrates the dyadic view with the description of individuals by their relationship to the wider community in the Mediterranean world of the biblical time. Accordingly, some people were identified in terms of their location (Saul of Tarsus), nationality (“Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons” (Titus 1:12)), clan (Paul is a Benjamite; Mary is of the house of David), family relationships (James and John are the sons of Zebedee), or school of thought (Paul is a student of Gamaliel). There is nothing inherently hierarchical in the dyadic self-description in our relationship to other individuals or community.

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8 Hopkins, Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion, 31.


10 Ibid. Mathews indented the words of J. J. Plich and B. J. Malina in Handbook of Biblical Social Values, “Dyadism, therefore is a means value by which one’s honor can be continually checked, affirmed, or challenged….Personal identity and knowledge of this sort belong in a cultural world that is highly
Beyond everything we claim in our family heritage, humanity in the image of God is the strongest bond that connects us together as God’s children. God’s ultimate design for society excludes unjust and unequal relationships, but comprises transforming, open, and egalitarian relationships under the impact of “Spiritual Presence.” As Tillich argues, “Justice implies equality; but equality of what is essentially unequal is as unjust as inequality of what is essentially equal.”¹¹ He further notes that any sort of existential inequality is under a continuous Spiritual judgment “because it tends to produce social situations in which ultimate equality becomes invisible and ineffective.”¹² The church today has to consider this view of a society in order to serve God’s purpose in this world through its members, who are placed here in order to propagate the knowledge of humanity in the image of God.

National harmony can be strengthened by a selfless interpretation of unity in diversity. This involves recognition of the entitlement and capacity of all nations in the land for taking leadership. Political leadership has to be free from the unjust egoistic domination of a group of people over the majority. The misrepresentation of a certain group of people with the intention to erode their traditional ways of enriching the capacity of individuals and preparing them for political leadership seems to be a major

ordered and carefully classified, so that there is a place for everyone and every one in his place….It follows that such people tend to think of themselves and others in stereotypes which tell of their role and status: as fishermen and carpenters, as scribes and lawyers, as governors and kings” (13).

¹¹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 262. Tillich uses the phrase “Spiritual Presence” to mean determined by faith and love.

¹² Ibid., 262-263. Tillich argues, “The first problem following from the establishment of any kind of community is the exclusiveness which corresponds to the limitation of its inclusiveness. As every friendship excludes the innumerable others with whom there is no friendship, so every tribe, class, town, nation, and civilization excludes all those who do not belong to it. The justice of social cohesion implies the injustice of social rejection….The ambiguity of cohesion and rejection is conquered by the creation of more embracing unities through which those who are rejected by the unavoidable exclusiveness of any concrete group are included in a larger group—finally in mankind” (262).
problem unchallenged in Ethiopian history for centuries. As a result, nations became ignorant of their own traditional ways of addressing uncertainty and anxiety. Vicent Mulago’s portrayal of the Bantu religious (African religion) conviction that a person undergoes a profound transformation after appointment to the position of government can be mentioned as an example of African religion’s view of political power:

Yet, before his designation, before the investiture that consecrates and transforms him, the king is no more than a simple mortal, a man like the others. Now that the fingers of God and of his ancestors have pointed him out to assume the government of his people, there is produced in him, precisely by this designation that consecrates the investiture, a total change, a change of heart in the Hebrew sense.13

According to Magesa, it is believed that, beyond the moral guardians of the families, groups, clients, and of society at large, the mystical powers of God, the ancestors, and the spirits charge the kings, chiefs, and other types of authority figures with political responsibility.14 Pannenberg, who describes the divine commission given to humanity to be master of creation as excluding the exploitative and arbitrary exercise of power, argues that the Creator’s own dominion over His creation is central to the call for human beings to rule over nature.15 As affirmed in the introductory section, “Deliver Us from Evil

13 Olupona, *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, 122. Niebuhr refers to the misrepresentation and practice of injustice against the weak and the powerless as expansion of ego in which the fortunes of nature and the accidents of history may endow an individual or a group with power, social prestige, intellectual eminence or moral approval over against their fellow. This expansion of ego is not only an unjust treatment of neighbors to achieve security and prestige, but it is also sin of pride against God. In this manner, selfishness and sensuality destroy life’s harmony with others and with the self. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 226-228.


15 Pannenberg, *Anthropological Theology*, 77-78. This implies that human beings’ rule over creation must be guided by God’s creative will as His representative. God rules in justice. Pannenberg explains humans’ relationship to the world in terms of the “image of God,” which the Reformers located in the union of human will with God’s will which was found in the first human being based on original justice. The modern view which is established on the biblical exegesis of the Old Testament priestly text considers the image of God as connected with the authority and commission to rule over creation (74-76).
Consultation Statement,” of the Lausanne conference that met in east Africa (Nairobi, Kenya) in August 2000 to hear and engage in discussion of issues raised in the documents presented under the title “Deliver Us from Evil” affirms,

We are called to participate in God’s mission of fighting evil and the evil one in order to restore what was destroyed as a result of the Fall. We live in a world with tension between the kingdom that has already come in Christ and the continuing realities of evil. God’s mission will be completed when Christ returns, the kingdom of God comes into power, and evil is destroyed and eliminated forever.\(^{16}\)

This is the 
\textit{missio Dei} in which the Ethiopian churches are called to participate in the midst of all socio-political challenges and ethnic identity questions.

The Political notion of Federalism is the best alternative for maintaining harmony between the Ethiopian nations. If Federalism is to be effective, it has to combine the values undergirding the African traditional view and other religions’ view of government with modern political perspectives. In this regard, it is important to note that, unlike Nussbaum, I hold to the view that when the church and state work together avoiding extremity and exclusivity in handling the political and religious freedom of the people, social injustice will be addressed effectively by their joint effort. Jonathan J. Bonk, who wrote a foreword for Girma Bekele’s book, \textit{The In-Between People}, states that the author has intended to call both the Orthodox and Evangelical churches of Ethiopia “to be God’s in-between people, taking risks, giving up claims to exclusivity, and taking upon

\textit{Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission}, edited by A. Scott Moreau, et al. (Monrovia, CA: World Vision International, 2002), xix. As described in the introduction of the document the consultation was convened by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the Association of Evangelicals in Africa. Regarding its purpose, “The consultation objective was to seek a biblical and comprehensive understanding of 1) who the enemy is; 2) how he is working; and 3) how we can fight him in order to be most effective in the evangelization of all peoples” (xvii). This can be achieved if Christians fix their eyes on the future hope, as the writer of Hebrews urges us to “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:2). Christian faith affirms the connection between the historical past (creation, Fall, and redemption), present fact (the already established kingdom of God on earth in Christ to which the believers as the new being in Christ are called to lead a transformed life that participates in God’s mission), and the future hope of eternal life (the not yet aspect of the kingdom), which will be fully consummated at the return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
themselves the form of the servant of servants,”¹⁷ which involves turning away from the institutional self-preservation towards fulfilling their calling. Using the current government system, which encourages Federalism and unity based on mutual recognition, the new generation of scholars is expected to work towards securing social justice and human dignity with equal respect for all persons on the basis of natural law and Christian ethics. The church’s involvement in the political life of the society should go beyond repeating the regular prayer included in our liturgy (for a government that acknowledges and fears God). Without ceasing this prayer, the church has to work toward developing a habit of critical theological reflection, focusing on issues related to domestic violence and human development.

A Need for Rethinking Public Theology

Paul Tillich describes theology as a tool by which the Christian church appropriates the eternal truth to the temporal situation of the people. Accordingly,

Theology, as a function of the Christian church, must serve the needs of the church. A theological system is supposed to satisfy two basic needs: the statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth for every new generation. Theology moves back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received.¹⁸

¹⁷ Bekele, The in-between People, xii.

¹⁸ Tillich, Systematic Theology: Reason and Revelation Being and God, 3. The term theology, which is coined from two Greek words, theos and logos, etymologically means “a word about God.” Christian theology is concerned with all creative and redemptive ways and works of God with humanity in Jesus Christ. The fact that it is based on the major principle that “God alone can speak His own word about Himself” makes the task of Christian theology listening and reflecting upon what one hears. In other words, “Christian theology is the reflective and obedient response of the church to the Word that God speaks about Himself in Jesus Chris.” The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979).
Theology plays a significant role in the transformation of the socio-political life of a society. David H. Kelsey defines theological anthropology as the doctrine about human nature. Theologians have been engaged with the discussion of humanity in connection with creation, revelation, sin, fallenness, redemption, and ultimate destiny.\(^\text{19}\)

However, exclusion of theology from the categories of educational disciplines causes the major hindrance to the role of public theology in Ethiopia. Desta Heliso writes that “The Ethiopian government believes that one of the means through which economic development can be achieved and values essential for moral progress be produced is education. However, theological education is not part of the categories of disciplines that make up education.”\(^\text{20}\) Heliso attributes this exclusion simply to an error in translation and interpretation of the Constitution rather than the problem of government policy. In his words, “This is not to say that the government is against any religious body establishing its own theological institution. But such an institution is not recognized by the Ministry of Education on the basis of the argument that the Constitution does not provide for this.”\(^\text{21}\) The question should be whether the Ministry of Education has authority to deny the right conferred on the citizens in the Constitution to the extent of violating it. Is the government not responsible to make sure the constitutional right of the citizens is secured? Heliso proceeds, pointing out that Article 90:2 has been cited as restraining the government from recognizing and setting mechanisms to assess the

\(^{19}\) Christian Theology, 167-168.


\(^{21}\) Ibid. Heliso’s argument implies that the implementer of the Constitution, in this case the Ministry of Education, misinterprets the Article 27:2 in the Constitution, which reads: “Without prejudice to the provisions of sub-Article 2 of Article 90, believers may establish institutions of religious education and administration in order to propagate and organize their religion.”
standards of religious institutions. Heliso also articulated that this Article was used to argue against religious and theological education being provided at state and private schools and universities.\textsuperscript{22} Although the Article is intended to avoid an excessive entanglement between religion and government, it is obviously misused to justify the denial of recognition. Thiemann argues that the only way religious diversity can be appropriately respected by a democratic government is through acknowledging religions and religious symbols conveying messages of pluralism and avoiding governmental endorsement of a particular religious beliefs as well as a religious symbols that are clearly sectarian in nature. Any discriminatory governmental action always causes a problem of insider-outsider dichotomy among the favored (adherents) and the excluded (nonadherents) members of the political community.\textsuperscript{23} Therefore, in order to go beyond what causes hindrance to respect for religious pluralism that the Constitution requires, the Ethiopian government needs to distinguish governmental acknowledgement from governmental endorsement.

Heliso’s statement that both “Church and the Academy” should set a context for creating thinking communities by allowing the ways of faith and politics to cross into each other’s territories is recommended for addressing the current political, religious, and ethnic tensions. Put in Heliso’s words, “In order to bring faith to bear in the world of

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. However, Heliso disagrees with the existing English translation of Article 90:2, which reads, “Education shall be provided in a manner that is free from any religious influence, political partisanship or cultural prejudices,” gives two alternative translations: “1. ‘Education shall be provided in a manner that is free from any religious, political and cultural influence.’ 2. ‘Education shall be provided in a manner that is free from any religion, political outlooks and cultural influences’” (172). Heliso rightly argues that gaining the government recognition for theological institutions is so significant for the country with 97.3% of the population claiming to be affiliated with some sort of religion if the citizens are to be both the “believing and thinking communities.”

\textsuperscript{23} Thiemann, \textit{Religion in Public Life}, 48-49.
politics, there is also a need to develop a public theology that is credible enough to influence public policies. The obvious result would be promotion of values that are essential for moral as well as economic progress.”

It should also be known that public theology, as Thiemann states, is “a genuine risk-taking venture. By opening the Christian tradition to conversation with those in the public sphere, public theology opens Christian belief and practice to the critique that inevitably emerges from those conversation partners.” His argument can be complemented with the points Jürgen Moltmann makes regarding the task of Christian theology as something different from repeating the works of other disciplines of studies, lawyers, legislators, and diplomats in United Nations have accomplished in their struggle for the realization of human rights. Its foundation and the concern entrusted to it make the public role of Christian theology so unique. As Moltmann explains,

On the ground of the creation of man and woman in the image of God, on the ground of the incarnation of God for the reconciliation of the world, and on the ground of the coming of the kingdom of God as the consummation of history, the concern that is entrusted to Christian theology is one for the humanity of persons as well as for their ongoing rights and duties.

Accordingly, the specific task of Christian theology combines human claims with God’s claim upon humans. Moltmann refers to this as aiming at “grounding fundamental human rights in God’s right to—that is, his claim upon—human beings, their human dignity, their

24 Heliso, “Theological Education in Ethiopia,” 172.

25 Ronald F. Thiemann, Constructing a Public Theology (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 23. Thiemann further argues, “The standpoint of faith does not make the theologian or the Christian community immune from criticism. In the contrary, because the starting point for public inquiry is faith rather than rational demonstration or transcendental argument, entrance into the public sphere is filled with genuine risk, including the possibility that some of the community’s most basic convictions might have to be reformed or even jettisoned” (23).

fellowship, their rule over the earth, and their future. It is the duty of the Christian faith beyond human rights and duties to stand for the dignity of human beings in their life with God and for God.”

This signifies how disadvantageous it is for a nation when theologians are influenced by their self-interests and fail to lead churches, congregations, and ecumenical organizations toward being advocates for human dignity and rights.

This marginalization of theological education seems to have maintained the passive attitude of the church toward the repressive system of the government. Amsalu Tadesse Geleta argues,

> [T]he political system is causing famine, war and environmental destruction. In addition to being unable to distribute food in times of famine and killing hundreds of thousands in war with Eritrea, Ethiopia was unprepared when a massive fire consumed thousands of hectares of forest in the southern areas in 2000. Several students who protested the government’s handling of the fire were killed and farmers were imprisoned. Further, ethnic conflicts within the country have fragmented the nations and have had negative impact on the unity and mission of the church in Ethiopia today.

A similar event was reported by Knud Jørgensen, who served with the Radio Voice of the Gospel in Ethiopia. In his words,

> There is anger and grief within me—an anger that has followed me for many years. I first felt it as a young radio reporter [who] was sent to Wollo and Tigre in Ethiopia in 1974 to report on a famine that killed more than 1 million. This was a famine caused by human greed and ignored by the celebration of the Organization of African Unity tenth anniversary in Addis, less than 100 kilometers away.

If our theology has to go beyond duplicating colleges and seminaries toward equipping the trainees for addressing public issues, we have to share that feeling of “anger and grief” with Jørgensen whenever we see people suffering and dying due to egocentric

27 Ibid.

28 Deliver Us from Evil, 102.

29 Ibid., 213. Wollo and Tigre are the regions located to the Northern part of Ethiopia.
treatment. Moltmann rightly argues that Christian organizations and churches need to maintain self-criticism in connection with criticism of the nations, states, classes, and races for engaging themselves with egoism. He continues, “[H]ence one can also expect their witness to a human solidarity with all those who bear the human countenance and, more particularly, their willingness to stand up for those robbed of their fundamental rights and freedoms.”

This is put on the shoulder of theologians and theological schools. Having theological schools in Ethiopia requires much more than securing instructors’ salaries and scholarship for students. There has to be a strong bond of commitment between seminary instructors and the church decision-making bodies, particularly the Department of Mission and Theology Directors, if theological education is to be recognized as a tool for carrying on God’s mission in the world.

In this context, there is no satisfactory indication that the churches’ involvement could pass beyond providing material support to the level of addressing the political problems theologically. Moltmann’s proposition that the problem in the relations of faith and politics in Protestantism requires dealing with the basic problem of theology itself before trying to handle the ethical issues needs to be considered. He states, “As long as a Christian does not know what true Christian faith is, he or she cannot relate in a reflective way to political questions. As long as the church does not know what the true church is, it cannot change its relationship to the state.”

Our academic and historical records always neglect the theological perspectives. Speaking about Ethiopia/Abssynia in terms of biblical language and the role our country plays in the progress of world history is one

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31 Ibid., 62.
thing, but to argue that this, in addition to embracing Christianity before some African
countries, would enable us to claim national uniqueness is another thing. My concern, as
an Ethiopian, is that we theologians should work toward the development of a self-critical
approach to our past and present history so that we may contribute something to the
theological institutions’ efforts to see the nation built on a biblically founded and
theologically balanced spiritual growth. Then we can expect less prejudice and mature
dialogue based on respect for others on religious, political, and ethnic issues. This way,
the churches can demonstrate that they are there for others.

Practice of Interfaith Dialogue Instead of Imposed Conversion

Social injustice and violation of human rights can be minimized by treating our
differences with tolerance. Ethiopians lived together for centuries not because they had
the same political views, the same religion, and the same ethnic identity, but because they
could handle these differences with tolerance among themselves. The recent recurring
religious conflicts between Christians and Muslims should be addressed through
dialogues involving not only religious leaders, but also the community and theologians
from both religions. Furthermore, adherents of one religion must not be allowed to
dominate the followers of another religion. Niebuhr’s warning to religions and the state
against being “the vehicle of collective egotism” is worth considering in this regard. He
describes religious class domination, religious intolerance, and religious self-assertion as
the worst experiences that cause disharmony among nations. Whenever these happen, the
priestly class, which claims to have the absolute truth that others lack, causes social
disabilities and exclusion of the victim from any universe of meaning, uses religious
absolutes for serving selfish desires, and claims God as the exclusive ally of their dependent self.\textsuperscript{32}

A peaceful interaction among religions (including African religion) is the best alternative, and needs to be expressed through mutual recognition and finding points of contact as a starting point for dialogue. A forceful conversion causes hatred and enmity rather than achieving trust, love and unity among the nations. Some Muslims’ recently developing fanatic attitude toward Christians, which is expressed in murdering believers and destroying properties, including church buildings, houses, and crops, is the living example. In light of what we have seen in the preceding chapters, it is not exaggeration to describe this attitudinal change as a gradual transition from the will-to-live to the will-to-power. Furthermore, the extreme claim that an ethnic group (for example, the Oromo) cannot be adherents of any religion other than Islam implies a denial of the practice of African traditional religions long before conversion to Christianity or Islam. The tendency of Christians (both Orthodox and Protestant) and Muslims to stigmatize traditional religions as ignorant about the God of the Bible not only denies the individual and communal identity of the adherents of the Ethiopian traditional religions, but also deliberately attempts to detach the nations from their African origin. It is worth noticing that even Western Scholars and theologians have recognized the central role African religion plays in vitalizing and sustaining genuine black African culture. As stated, “Once relegated to the realm of ‘primitive’ and stigmatized as ‘pagan,’ today there is a new acknowledgement of its importance, especially in its stress on folk practices, communal

\textsuperscript{32} Niebuhr, \textit{The Nature and Destiny of Man}, 200-201, 212, 217.
values, and personal relationships.”³³ This encourages African Christians and Muslims to look for points of contact and engage in dialogue with the adherents of the African traditional religion rather than trying to sweep it out of the land with all its values.

Volf argues in favor of interfaith dialogue in Muslim-Christian relation, that it should be recognized “that each community holds some mutually exclusive truth claims regarding the nature of God, the way of salvation, etc. These differences may be not only undeniable but also irreducible.”³⁴ Under these circumstances, interfaith dialogue aims at understanding our respective faiths better, communicating with each other in more effective ways, and identifying ways in which our convictions overlap, regardless of our differences, in order to live together in peace.³⁵ As Volf and other Christian scholars argue that interfaith dialogue does not involve giving up convictions that make truth claims about God and God’s relationship to the world in order to achieve agreement, but aims at working towards deeper understanding of what we and others believe and discovering “that we already agree on more than we originally thought.”³⁶ I suggest that Ethiopian Muslims and Christians should use their good relationship as opportunity for taking initiative toward creating a better understanding of what their respective neighbor believes in order to sustain peace and security for all citizens in the land. In short, all offenses committed against each other in the past need to be handled with genuine

³³ Publisher’s synopsis taken from the back cover of Jacob K. Olupona’s *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*.

³⁴ *A Common Word*, 66.

³⁵ Ibid., 74.

³⁶ Ibid., 66.
forgiveness under the guidance of the respective scriptures of both religions and the bylaws of the country.

Finally, it is also worth noting that an analysis of Nussbaum’s capabilities approach through the lens of social justice and church and state relations in Ethiopia reveals a promising improvement as the wheel of the nations’ history rolls from the imperial rule to the current government system, particularly with regard to defending a minimum threshold of capability as an essential condition for social justice and human development. Nevertheless, Ethiopian scholars are expected to do context-based capabilities research on human development and social justice without bias towards church or state.
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