

MISSIONARY DILEMMAS IN TIMES OF PERSECUTION CASE ETHIOPIA¹

Øyvind M. Eide
(School of Mission and Theology [*Misjonshøgskolen*], Stavanger, Norway)

Abstract: During the period of Communist rule in Ethiopia, from 1974 to 1991, the evangelical churches faced severe persecution. Over 3,000 church buildings were forcefully closed, and pastors were imprisoned, tortured, and even killed. In response to this dire situation, the leadership of the Lutheran church requested a group of missionaries to relay important information to the Lutheran World Federation. This request carried significant political implications and involved significant risks. Additionally, the harassment endured by the churches represented grave violations of human rights. This article delves into the moral dilemmas faced by the missionaries and their subsequent resolutions. Moreover, it sheds light on the ethical quandaries faced by mission organizations and churches, both locally and globally, when dealing with oppressive dictatorships. Ultimately, it illustrates how a church can be coerced into abandoning its critical role in society, embracing submission, and remaining silent.

During the Communist regime in Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991, the evangelical churches faced significant persecution. Over 3,000 church buildings were closed, and pastors were imprisoned, tortured, and killed. In this challenging environment, the leadership of the Lutheran church requested a group of missionaries to convey information to the Lutheran World Federation. This request was politically sensitive and carried substantial risks. Simultaneously, the oppression of the churches violated fundamental human rights. This article delves into the moral dilemmas faced by the missionaries and how they resolved these dilemmas. Furthermore, it examines the challenges faced by missions and churches, both locally and internationally, when dealing with brutal dictatorships. The article also highlights the transition of a church from actively engaging with society to a state of submission and silence.

In 1981, while under the communist regime, I worked as a visiting professor at the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary (MYTS) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. At the same time, I acted as a liaison between the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). In my official capacity, I was approached by Reverend Tasgara Hirpo on behalf of EECMY President Emmanuel Abraham. They asked me if I would be willing to gather information on the difficult experiences faced by EECMY during that time and provide it to The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).² It was evident that the president himself could not openly speak on the matter.

The president had been a minister in the government of Haile Selassie I. Only by forceful intervention by LWF, documenting his faithful service for the Ethiopian people, did he avoid execution at the hands of the revolutionary government in 1974.³ Later on, working as president of the EECMY, his

¹ This article is a development of a lecture given at a conference in Sigtuna, Sweden, on the Nordic-Baltic churches and the Cold War, February 28, 2012. The article is based on Øyvind Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia: The Growth & Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974-85*, 2nd ed., Eastern African Studies (Oxford : Athens : Addis Ababa: J. Currey ; Ohio University Press ; Addis Ababa University Press, 2000).

² At the time Rev. Tasgara Hirpo was president of the Western Synod of the EECMY and at the same time my colleague at the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary.

³ In his autobiography, Emmanuel Abraham gives a detailed account of his time in detention. Emmanuel Abraham, *Reminiscences of My Life* (Oslo, Norway: Lunde forlag, 1995), 229-242. On November 23, 1974, the acting prime minister and fifty-nine members of the government of Haile Sellassie I, along with other top officials, were summarily executed. See Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 98.

position was vulnerable. In the political climate of the time, with a Marxist-Leninist inspired dictatorship in power, the question of information was most sensitive. The request was therefore of great consequence and a risk to my well-being and the work of my mission.

At the time, the general secretary of the EECMY, Gudina Tumsa, had been kidnapped. His location was unknown.⁴ The freedom to practice one's religion, hold beliefs, and gather was at risk. Preaching was restricted, numerous church buildings were being shut down, colleagues were imprisoned, and congregation members were being subjected to hours of indoctrination in Marxist-Leninist philosophy. A serious crisis in the relationship between the church and the state was unfolding.

According to my contract with the mission, I was explicitly prohibited from engaging in any form of political activity while being a guest in a church and country. The initial question was whether the government's harassment of the church had political motives. Would sharing information be perceived as an unfriendly act? This request presented a significant dilemma. This document aims to explain how this dilemma was resolved. It also sheds light on the challenges faced by missions and churches, both locally and internationally, during times of persecution.

TWO BRANDS OF DICTATORSHIP

I was sent to Ethiopia during Haile Selassie's regime. Neither I nor my mission were aware that the permission to work in Ethiopia was part of the Emperor's political ambition to modernize the empire.⁵ The Imperial Decree on Mission, issued in 1944, came about after a long struggle between the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) and the Emperor. The Patriarch believed that it was a serious political mistake to divide the ideological foundation of Ethiopia through the existence of two different churches. In the context of Ethiopia, ecclesiology has a political dimension.⁶

The Emperor's feudal regime was autocratic and had a poor human rights record. Interestingly, it was the last country in the world to abolish slavery in 1933.⁷ When my mission responded to a call from the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), a debate arose in Norway about whether it was politically neutral to work in Ethiopia. The mission stated that our main task was to save souls and that the political situation at any given time was not relevant.⁸ In making this statement, the mission drew on a long-standing Lutheran pietistic tradition to separate the duties of the church and the state.⁹ This statement was soon put to the test.

In 1974, the Ethiopian revolution began. The country descended into chaos and internal conflict. In February 1977, Mengistu Haile Mariam orchestrated a coup d'état. One of his initial actions was the seizure of Radio Voice of the Gospel on March 12, 1977. In the aftermath of Mengistu's takeover, numerous youth lost their lives during the infamous Red Terror period.¹⁰ As a result of the severe human rights violations, the United States withdrew its support. Mengistu then sought assistance from the Soviet

⁴ Gudina Tumsa was abducted on 28 July 1979, and executed the same night. A detailed account of the imprisonment and abduction of Gudina Tumsa is found in Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 175–79.

⁵ The very title of the autobiography of Haile Selassie I indicates the centrality of modernization by introducing into the country Western modes of education. *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, 1892-1937: The Autobiography of Emperor Haile Selassie I* (Oxford [England]: Oxford University Press, 1976).

⁶ The political consideration that religious unity was an important basis for national unity constitute the religio-political background for the opposition and persecution of evangelical Christianity by local authorities prior to the revolution in 1974. Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 25–39.

⁷ Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1995), 53–70, <http://www.gbv.de/dms/bowker/toc/9781569020012.pdf>.

⁸ Gudm. Gjeldsten, "Kritiske Spørsmål," *Norsk Misjonstidende* 124, no. 13 (n.d.): 5.

⁹ The main points of the debate are referred in Oeyvind Eide, "Politikk, misjon og menneskerettigheter i Etiopia," in *Misjon og kultur: festskrift til Jan-Martin Berentsen*, ed. Thor Strandenes (Stavanger: Misjonshøgskolens forl, 2006), https://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-nb_digibok_2013090408004.

¹⁰ The terror and cruelty of the time are unparalleled in Ethiopian history. Estimates of the numbers killed vary. Andargachew Tiruneh gives a careful number of 1500. Other sources give higher numbers. *The Ethiopian Revolution, 1974-1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy*, LSE Monographs in International Studies (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 211.

Union. The ultimate outcome was a communist dictatorship, guerrilla warfare, and a battleground of the Cold War.¹¹

In 1974, the Ethiopian revolution started. The country plunged into chaos and internal conflict. In February 1977, Mengistu Haile Mariam led a coup d'état. One of his initial actions was to seize Radio Voice of the Gospel on March 12, 1977. Following Mengistu's takeover, numerous young people were killed during what became known as the Red Terror. Due to severe human rights violations, the United States withdrew its support. As a result, Mengistu sought assistance from the Soviet Union. The outcome was a communist dictatorship, guerrilla warfare, and a battleground for the Cold War.

THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE MISSIONARIES

The question at hand was whether the change in a dictatorial system had any impact on the missionary enterprise. The rapid and dramatic developments, along with the spread of propaganda, exerted significant pressure on all the supporting missions.¹² Consequently, the security of missionaries became crucial during the spring of 1977. The dilemma of whether they should leave or stay caused great conflicts of conscience for them. Eventually, the missions brought up this matter to their respective boards, and decisions were reached to withdraw personnel from the vulnerable regions.

In May 1977, the missionaries from the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), who were collaborating with the Kale Hiwot Church, were evacuated from their positions in Ethiopia.¹³ The number of missionaries was reduced from 200 to forty. By February 1978, the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) had decreased its staff in Ethiopia from 158 to fifty-eight.¹⁴ The Norwegian embassy had advised the NLM four times to evacuate its missionaries. The mission only partially adhered to this advice, although all the stations in the southeast had already been evacuated. The Danish Lutheran Mission, working with the NLM in Bale, also evacuated all of their staff. The NMS, operating in remote areas in western Ethiopia, evacuated all but one of their sixteen staff members. They had faced severe hardships and an attack by a guerrilla movement. The Norwegian Lutheran Free Church, working in Ghion, also evacuated their staff. The Finnish Missionary Society did the same. The Swedish Evangelical Mission and the German Hermannsburg Mission withdrew their staff, some to Addis Ababa and others back to their home countries. All in all, 77 percent of Lutheran missionary personnel were withdrawn from Ethiopia.¹⁵

One point of particular interest is the different strategies chosen by the Norwegian missions. To fully comprehend the decision made by the NMS, it is crucial to consider the extremely painful experiences associated with the evacuation of China in 1949.¹⁶ In China, one of the problems arose from disagreements among the missionaries regarding their approach towards the Communists. In order to avoid the possibility of a similar incident repeating itself, the board of the NMS heeded the advice of the Norwegian Embassy and officially decided to evacuate from Ethiopia.¹⁷ When the security situation improved, a few colleagues and I were called back to service in 1980. The request from the president of the EECMY put the matter of missions and politics to the test.

¹¹ For an overview of the larger political framework, see Michael E. Latham, "The Cold War in the Third World, 1963–1975," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler, vol. 2 (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 258–80, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521837200.014>; The shift of political alliances in Ethiopia during the Cold War is analyzed in detail by Edmond J. Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 191–212.

¹² Vinskei, *Situasjonen i Etiopia i dag*, 6. desember 1976.

¹³ Peter Cotterell interview, 3 May 1990; Kay Bascom interview 12 March 1995; cfr. Eide, 169.

¹⁴ Oswald Hindenes, "Årsmelding fra Etiopia," *NLM Årbok* (1978):78.

¹⁵ The number of Western missionaries working in the EECMY was reduced from approximately 390 to 90.

¹⁶ As the Red Army advanced in China, most of the missionaries of the NMS were evacuated, but some remained. This created turmoil in the mission. Cfr. E. Eggen, "Kina," in T. Jørgensen, ed., *I tro og tjeneste, Det Norske Misjonsselskap 1842–1992* (Stavanger, 1992).

¹⁷ Cf. Kjosavik, TD "Etiopia," in T. Jørgensen, ed., (1992), *I tro og tjeneste: Det norske misjonsselskap 1842–1992* (Stavanger, Norway: Misjonshøgskolen, 1992), 140–146; Eide op. cit., 141.

POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights can be viewed from multiple perspectives. I will discuss three of them in the following sequence: (1) The right to life and preservation, (2) Economic, social, and cultural rights, (3) Individual human rights.¹⁸

THE RIGHT TO LIFE AND SURVIVAL

During my theological training, human rights were not given much importance. Instead, the life and teachings of Jesus influenced the way missionaries worked. The fight *for* human dignity and *against* evil was thus motivated by the beliefs of Christ. In a traditional role, I served as a preacher and leader of literacy schools, a clinic, and an agricultural project. These activities were aimed at supporting life and ensuring survival, and they seemed to remain neutral in terms of politics.

In-depth studies of why people shifted their affiliation to evangelical Christianity demonstrate that the church's involvement in healthcare and education played a crucial role. People who had only experienced harsh exploitation were taken aback when they encountered love and kindness. Whether they were landowners or slaves, they were treated with equal respect. As a result, the missionaries conveyed a new understanding of human worth and brought about a drastic change in values. Through their actions, they thus criticized the prevailing values and political systems of society.¹⁹

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The Oromo, with whom I worked, were subjected to imperial rule in the late nineteenth century. The Amhara, due to their social position, language, and Orthodox Christianity, dominated Ethiopia at the expense of other ethnic groups. Against this backdrop, American anthropologist Donald Donham provides a compelling interpretation of the evangelical movement: It re-established the people's identity."²⁰ African theologian Lamin Sanneh further explains this interpretation by stating that missionary work, especially through Bible translations and educational efforts, provided the people with "cultural self-understanding, pride of their own language, social awakening, religious renewal."²¹

The initial phase of the revolution partially addressed these aspects, particularly cultural rights, with the introduction of the "First Charter" on December 20, 1974. This document envisioned Ethiopia as a nation free from "ethnic, religious, linguistic, or cultural differences."²² However, unknowingly, the church's efforts to empower marginalized groups had an unintended ethnic dimension, which exacerbated the ethno-political tensions of the country. When a liberation movement emerged in areas associated with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), led in part by former EECMY students, the church found itself caught in a difficult situation.

INDIVIDUAL HUMAN RIGHTS

As a missionary, I gradually became aware of how the evangelical faith was being interpreted by the listeners. The reception showed how a message that appeared to be non-political was transformed into a political reality. Gudina Tumsa provides a clear example of what this means: In Gemo Gofa, a group of Christians took a landowner to court after he confiscated their land. They fought their case all the way to

¹⁸ A. Tergel, *Human Rights in Cultural and Religious Traditions* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala : S. Academiae Ubsaliensis, 1998), gives a broad presentation of the churches' handling of issues related to human rights. In addition to the three areas mentioned here he also discusses ecological rights.

¹⁹ Cfr. Eide, 29, 63, 82.

²⁰ D. Donham and W. James, *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 45.

²¹ L. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 1-8.

²² Eide, op.cit. 96.

the High Court of Ethiopia and emerged victorious. For them, justice was an integral part of their understanding of salvation.²³

This interpretation of salvation was a key issue raised in the famous EECMY letter to LWF in 1972. In this letter, the young church criticized the missions for not speaking out against colonial exploitation. The letter also highlighted the structural injustices that existed. By acknowledging the systems that oppressed and degraded humans, the church expanded its concept of sin. This letter became a defining moment in EECMY theology, which later became known as "holistic."²⁴

The letter partly reflected the ongoing ecumenical debate of that time, including discussions at the World Council of Churches (WCC) meeting in Uppsala in 1968 and the LWF General Assembly in Evian in 1970, where human rights were a key topic. These conferences pushed the EECMY to focus on issues of social justice and human rights. These concerns continued to be prioritized at the WCC meeting in Nairobi in 1975 and the LWF assembly in Dar-es-Salam in 1977. As a missionary I only gradually became aware of how the evangelical faith was reinterpreted in the minds of the listeners. The reception illustrates how a seemingly non-political message was translated into political reality. Gudina Tumsa gives a vivid example of what this means:

When the revolution occurred, the church could have chosen to disengage from politics and remain quiet. However, instead, the church actively participated in the political discussions of the time.²⁵ The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) played a role in advising during this process. In a pastoral letter from 1975, the church expressed its support for the revolution, but only if the state adhered to the principles of law and human rights.²⁶

As the revolution continued, it became evident that freedom of faith was a critical aspect. Gudina Tumsa, in an effort to counter the influence of atheist Marxism, organized the Council for Cooperation of Churches in Ethiopia (CCCE). At this point, the government approached Gudina Tumsa for cooperation, but he declined due to the continued persecution of evangelical Christians. As a result, he was denounced as an enemy of the state. The CCCE was seen as an effort to form an ideological opposition, leading to Gudina Tumsa's elimination and the government's intention to dismantle evangelical churches.²⁷

TO SPEAK OR NOT TO SPEAK

The first to speak up was the Swedish Ecumenical Council in a letter to the Ethiopian government.²⁸ This was followed by a paper from a group under the British Council of Churches at the beginning of 1979.²⁹ The Ethiopian government gave an indignant reply calling the accusations "calculated malicious lies," adding: "If there are impossible things, tampering with religion in Ethiopia is one of those impossible things". The government at all times denied any persecution of evangelical Christians. This left the missions with a number of options. Let me indicate four of them:³⁰

OPTION 1: THE TRADITIONAL POSITION

The government's reaction and the abduction of Gudina Tumsa a short time after left no one in doubt of the government's will to silence any opposition. The prevailing attitude among the missionaries was to do

²³ Gudina Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship: The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003), 131.

²⁴ The full text of the letter is published in Eide, op.cit.263-268. For an analysis of the letter cfr. Eide, 68-70.

²⁵ Four seminars on Christianity and socialism were conducted at Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary in 1975-76.

²⁶ The full text of the pastoral letter is published in Eide, 269-70.

²⁷ Patriarch Tewoflos had been arrested and was killed 27 July 1979, the night before Gudina Tumsa was killed. Hadji Mohammed Sani Habib, a leading Muslim, was forced into submission when the government killed his son and threatened to kill his second son. Cfr. Eide, op.cit., 113, 127-8, 164-5, 175-6.

²⁸ Archbishop Sundby, Swedish Ecumenical Council to Ethiopian Government, Uppsala/Stockholm, 18 January 1979.

²⁹ M. Blair, "Christians in Ethiopia: A Background Paper on Recent Events," 19 February 1979, unpublished, Lutheran World Information, 22 March 1979.

³⁰ Getahun Ijigu, Ambassador Extraordinary to Archbishop Sundby, 24 January 1979.

what was possible and not provoke the government by revealing its violations of human rights. One should be grateful for the opportunities still available in a Communist land and avoid provocation that would lead to expulsion and increased suffering for Ethiopian Christians. On the official level this was the position of NLM. The NLM worked in southern Ethiopia where conditions were easier than in the west. They were very cautious about aggravating the government and putting the whole flourishing work in jeopardy. The general secretary of the NLM, Egil Grandhagen, in an editorial in their mission magazine, *Utsyn*, put heavy emphasis on the missionary task "to win souls." "Therefore one has to draw a clear line between our call as Christian citizens and our call as a missionary organization," he wrote.³¹ Against this policy it is quite remarkable that the NLM board permitted their representative in Ethiopia to join the information group.

OPTION 2: TRY TO FORCE THE STATE

The alternative option was to pressure the government with a threat to withdraw all humanitarian support and, with it, much needed foreign currency. Both church and mission deemed it ethically impossible to use sick and hungry people's right to life in a power struggle with the government.

OPTION 3: SHOUT IT FROM THE ROOFTOPS

A third option was to deem the violations of human rights as so grave that one's conscience forbade silence, whatever the consequences. The Berliner Mission (BM) opted for this approach. BM publicly denounced the Ethiopian government, in particular for its oppression of the Oromo ethnic group.³² Experiences from the Confessional Church's struggle during the Nazi regime had taught them that silence was a dangerous path. When the Hermannsburg Mission (HM) made a protest against BM for linking the violations of human rights to the Oromo's situation, the BM reiterated by accusing the HM "for once again keeping silent about concentration camps." EECMY protested against BM, maintaining that their action increased the pressure on the church. BM was not willing to yield. This forced the EECMY to break off relations with BM.³³

OPTION 4: PUBLICIZE UNDENIABLE FACTS

This was the context of Emmanuel Abraham's request to me in 1981. Emmanuel Abraham gave one condition: In order to avoid any suspicion that information on the EECMY was linked to the Oromo ethnic cause, he demanded that only facts without interpretation be conveyed. Since the request came from the president of the church, it was seen as urgent to me as well as my mission. How did I reply? I could not carry responsibility for such an undertaking alone. The first move was therefore to invite the representative of the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM), Rev. Ingvar Nilsson, the Hermannsburg Mission (HM), Rev. Willy Kalmbach, and the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, Rev. Osvald Hindenes, for a meeting with the president's liaison. We decided that each of us would pass the request on to our mission boards. All of them solved the dilemma by allowing us to convey information.

The general secretary of the NMS, Odd Bondevik, tried to establish criteria for relating to the Ethiopia situation. In the mission's magazine he wrote that "violations against basic human rights, whether they are against Christians or others, is our concern and we cannot pass by in silence." Bondevik defined the criteria by reference to the Norwegian Church's position during the Nazi regime. He quotes the Norwegian Church's stand in *Kirkens grunn*:

³¹ Egil Grandhagen, "Misjon og politikk," *Utsyn*, 8 February 1981.

³² The mission secretary of the BM, Gunnar Hasselblatt, published a number of articles mainly in German newspapers 1982-86, cfr. Eide, 209-10.

³³ The debate and the documents are presented in Eide, 211-12.

It is a sin against God if the state starts to tyrannize the souls and claims the right to decide what a person shall believe, think and feel as his conscience. . . . Where the power of the state separates from justice, there the state is no longer a tool of God, but becomes a demonic power. Therefore there are limits to obedience against the state.³⁴

All missions were thankful for the accurate information given by the group. By letting an international organization coordinate the information process, a uniform policy was possible and the missions and churches could speak with one voice. It was left to LWF to decide whether to publicize information or not.

THE CONFISCATION OF THE EECMY CENTRAL OFFICE

On 10 December 1981, the group got a tip, via a leak in the government, that it was decided to confiscate the EECMY Central Office as a first step to nationalize all church institutions. The decision only waited for Mengistu Haile Mariam's signature. When the order was given to evacuate the Central Office two days later, information was sent to LWF. Through their contacts with the WCC, all member churches were alarmed.³⁵ The result was a storm of protest from all over the world. No other institution of the EECMY was touched until 25 January 1982, when the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary was confiscated. The seminary was, however, returned later the same day. The most plausible reason was that the decision to confiscate was made at department level. Mengistu could simply not risk a second international storm, and so he ordered the return of the seminary.³⁶

It is obvious that the government was furious about the bad press Ethiopia got in the West. Thinking the BM was behind the information, the secret police sent two agents to East Berlin. There they were equipped with a bomb in order to blow up the BM headquarters and kill its mission secretary, Gunnar Hasselblatt. However, the bomb went off while they were arming it. One of the agents was killed and the other arrested by German police.

At this point the LWF saw the situation as so serious that *Oberkirchenrat* Christian Krause, on behalf of the LWF, established contact with the Ethiopian Embassy in Bonn to inform them of the role of LWF. The ambassador rebuked him for intervening in Ethiopia's internal affairs. Krause reiterated the LWF position, with a reference to human rights declarations, and told the ambassadors that the Christians in Ethiopia were our brothers and sisters.

EPILOGUE

In January 1985 Emmanuel Abraham was replaced by Francis Stephanos as president of the EECMY. At the time more than 3,000 churches (1,700 Kale Hiwot, 1,000 EECMY, 300 Pentecostal, Baptist, and Mennonite) were closed, and church life was brought to a standstill. Francis Stephanos was then invited to participate in the drafting of a new state constitution. The church officers saw that the church's stand against the state had almost led it to destruction. They, therefore, stepped down and resolved that the president should accept the invitation. At the same time there was a shift in leadership of the LWF, with Gunnar Stålsett as the new general secretary. The LWF endorsed the EECMY decision according to the pattern of relationship to East European churches. The suffering of the Christians in Ethiopia was silenced! Two years later Francis Stephanos was elected as a member of the national congress. He took his seat together with leaders of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Muslim community.³⁷

³⁴ The public debate in Norway is presented in Eide, 213-4. Cfr. Austad, *Kirkens grunn: Analyse av en kirkelig bekjennelse fra okkupasjonstiden 1940-45* (Oslo, 1977).

³⁵ The general secretary of LWF, Carl H. Mau, called upon all its member churches to "demonstrate solidarity with the Mekane Yesus Church in any way they deemed appropriate" (Eide, 214).

³⁶ Cf. J. Launhardt, *Uns erschrecken die Trommeln nicht mehr: Stadtrandgemeinde in Addis Abeba* (Erlangen, Germany: Evangelische Mission Erlangen), 212.

³⁷ For this paragraph, cf. Eide, 235-48.

The EECMY had come full circle, from Emmanuel Abraham participating in Haile Sellassie's autocratic government, through the EECMY letter of 1972 that criticized the missions for keeping silent on human rights abuses, through critical engagement during the revolution, to silent participation in a state with one of the worst records on human rights in recent history. The EECMY was domesticated, and has never since dared speak up on human rights issues in Ethiopia.

Did international pressure have any effect on the Ethiopian government's handling of the church? It seems that it merely aggravated the political authorities. The bomb in Berlin shows how far the government was willing to go in order to silence critics. However, in 1981 the proposed takeover of EECMY institutions never occurred, and in 1982 the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary was handed back. If this came as a result of the LWF channel, something substantial was achieved.

Let me finish with a reflection by Meseret Sebhat Leab, a scholar of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. At the time I did my research on the persecution of the EECMY, I asked how the church could cooperate with a government that had killed the Patriarch and appointed its own person against canonical law. He paused for a while before he answered, "Canonical law is one thing. Survival is another. What you are witnessing is a question of survival."