

The pursuit of restoring an abdicated Patriarch is quixotic

Dilwenberu Nega

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EOTC's Holy See of Saint Tekle Haimanot has been vacant since the death of its 5th Patriarch, H.H. Abune Paulos I, in August 2012. In Ethiopia, following his state funeral, there was a call by the laity for his successor "to follow in Abune Paulos' footsteps." However, reactions to his death among US-based Ethiopian vuvuzela politicians have been at best untamed and at worst infantine. No sooner had the Holy Father's death been announced than they embarked on a coordinated campaign to restore EOTC's 4th Patriarch, H.H. Abune Merkorios I, who having abdicated his legal and moral responsibilities had eloped to the United States via Kenya soon after the nightmarish system which he also served as a Member of Parliament crumbled like a house of cards when the combined forces of EPRDF seized state power in 1991.

Will the campaign to re-enthroned an impetuous Patriarch who has turned into a puppet on a string of opposition politicians succeed? Was he dethroned or did he abdicate? If dethroned, why did he not resist to his dying breath any pressure from those who are alleged to have arm-locked him into renouncing his position of Head of EOTC? After all, did he not take a vow at his enthronement to shepherd his God-entrusted flock during the course of his life on planet Earth? If he did abdicate, what moral or legal right does he now have to reclaim the throne he gave up out of his own volition? Or did he, like us mere mortals, have to give in to the fear of man as opposed to the fear of God? As if his abdication and leaving his spiritual children in the lurch were not enough egregious errors, why did he then go ahead with the establishment of a rival holy synod outside Ethiopia? Is it true that EOTC's faithful - who after all believe that salvation only comes from a fine blend of faith in our Lord and good works - are divided by the whims and eccentricities of a Patriarch who is more interested in saving his skin rather than saving the souls of others? Does the Canon Law of EOTC allow a US citizen to be re-instated as "Patriarch of Ethiopia" more than half-century after EOTC gained an autocephalous church status from the Holy See of Saint Mark in Alexandria, Egypt? These are only some of the burning questions that need to be tackled in an open and free-spirited manner in order to grasp the essence of the ongoing madness and folly surrounding the prospect of restoring a runaway Patriarch to lead a vibrant EOTC, for the Truth will set all of us Free!

There is no better a time-line then, than the genesis of the so-called Holy Synod in the US, to kick off one's analysis of how a handful of notorious cabalists attempted to turn the Church into a political arsenal by allowing party politics to lurk behind the Cross. In his jaw-dropping "confession" of how it all begun - written in Amharic under the rubric of "Our Mother Church is not split" and posted on opposition websites - Dr. Getachew Haile garnered enough courage and humility to pour out to us the unadulterated truth. Please sit back and digest with unblinking eyes his "confession." The transliteration is mine: **"The six exiled Archbishops -**

namely Abba Yissak, Abba Melke Tsadik, Abba Zena Markos and Abba Elias – revealed to those of us who had gathered to discuss routine affairs of our respective parishes, their resolve to establish a Holy Synod. When I asked if it was morally and ethically right for a small group of unrepresentative participants, such as our group, to agree on a matter which for all intents and purposes affects the future peace and harmony of the entire fellowship of EOTC abroad, Dr. Getachew Asrat explained to us the enormous dividends that would flow from such a set up to the ongoing struggle against Woyane. A certain Abba Gebre Selassie then stood up and said that even Archbishops from Addis Ababa have expressed solidarity. I, then, deemed it right and proper to fully support the establishment of the Holy Synod. However, now with the benefit of 20/20 vision, I have come to believe that not only have we been building castles in mid air, but worse of all if we continue to tread on the track we have thus far been travelling, we will end up in the abyss. It's never too late to change course.”

Incidentally even if I don't agree with his involvement in the Higgledy-piggledy politics of diaspora opposition, I nonetheless want to seize this opportunity and take my hat off to Dr. Getachew for garnering enough courage and humility to tell the unadulterated truth: the setting up of a so-called Holy Synod had nothing to do with the faith of EOTC, but had everything to do with aiding and abetting efforts of anti-peace forces to scupper the socio-economic and political gains of Ethiopians in the homeland. If only his likes in academia were to take a leaf out of his book, our democracy would have taken another great leap forward.

The height of hypocrisy

The so-called Holy Synod's nonagenarian Secretary General seems to be bereft of a scintilla of probity as he goes on and on with his tedious claim that EOTC's Holy Synod had committed an egregious mistake by electing Abune Paulos while Abune Mekarios was still alive, for EOTC's Canon Law clearly states that the Head of EOTC is a Patriarch-for-Life, and in the event the Patriarch is unable to carry out his pastoral duties, he can appoint an Arch Bishop as Patriarch pro-tempore. If such an accusation had come from someone who was absent from Ethiopia at the time when changes in leadership took place, I can well understand it. But this claim comes from an Arch Bishop who not only took part in the election of Abune Paulos, but took an active part in the enthronement ceremony of Abune Paulos at Trinity Cathedral. In point of fact EOTC's video footage clearly shows His Grace Abune Melke Tsadik congratulating Patriarch Paulos. If this is not a worst form of hypocrisy, then I want to know what is.

With regard to the issue of the election of a new Patriarch not taking place while the incumbent Patriarch is alive, one needs to enquire if either Abune Melke Tsadik or his coterie of vuvuzela politicians had uttered a word of condemnation when the Derg first imprisoned and four years later strangled to death EOTC's 2nd Patriarch, His Holiness? Is it not, then, a classic case of the frying pan calling the oven black?

Dethroned or abdicated

EOTC in general and its Holy See of Saint Tekle Haimanot in particular are not for the faint-hearted. It has been the abode to men of grit and wisdom for years, and when the going got tough, it was the tough who kept on going. His Grace Abune Petros is a case in point. Never in the long and chequered history of EOTC has there, therefore, been a Head of Church who abandoned his pastoral duties and flee – not to the Promised Land to pray to the God of Abraham and Isaac to deliver us from alleged misrule of EPRDF – but to the US where he lives among those who used to hound and hunt innocent Ethiopians during the Derg's 17 years of national nightmare.

Let's, for the sake of argument, now take up the claim made by activists who support the restoration of EOTC's 4th Patriarch. Even if claim by Wiki leaks suggests that former Prime Minister Tamerat Layne had told former US Ambassador to Ethiopia, Donald Yamamoto, that with the benefit of hindsight he regrets his decision of forcing Abune Merkorios to resign were true, it still does not absolve Abune Merkorios from accusation of dereliction of duty and cowardice. The reason is simple. Men of the robe, particularly the Princes of EOTC (Archbishops) owe their allegiances to their creator and not to a Prime Minister of FDRE. What would have happened to him had he not given in to alleged duress? Would the EPRDF government have him behind bars? On what charges would he stand trial? Can he be charged for being the mentor of the "Butcher of Gondar" Or for remaining tight-lipped while the Derg went on a killing spree in towns and villages the length and breadth of Ethiopia? Or would he have been charged for diverting Birr 150.000 of World Council of Churches' aid money destined for famine victims to fuel Mengistu's war machinery?

To give credit where it is due, imprisoning innocent Ethiopians has never been the affectation of EPRDF. Even in dealing with those bent on trying to circumvent the constitution, it has demonstrated exemplary magnanimity of mind. You just have to look at the current state of well-being of the Birhanu Negas and the. They would have been left to rot in prison had it not been for EPRDF's commitment to pluralistic democracy seasoned with magnanimity. By the same token the fate of Abune Mekarios would have been no different. The case of a Patriarch abdicating his throne just because a Prime minister sent him a letter to resign may make a good soap opera, but the claim hasn't got a leg to stand on in the court of public opinion. How on earth can we, therefore, expect a Patriarch who can't stand for his own rights to stand up for the rights of others?

Blessed is a Holy Synod which turns a blind eye and deaf ear to vuvuzela politics

Within the last two weeks, EOTC's one and only Holy Synod had issued a calibrated response to the clamour for the restoration of EOTC's fourth Patriarch. The Princes of the Church have arrived at a measured decision. Talk of reconciling a divided church amounts to nothing but a whole load of red-herring. Every member of EOTC outside Ethiopia knows in their heart of hearts that the real cause of 'division' is neither dogma nor the person of the Patriarch, but it is the attempt by a few religious zealots at turning Sunday mass into

barnstorming sessions in order to woo loaded but desperate opposition politicians who wrongly believe that political power must and can grow out from an EOTC's altar.

If we, then, were to buy vuvuzela politicians quixotic line of argument that "the cause for the polarization of the laity is the choice Patriarch of Ethiopia, we must then be prepared to repent for we had not causing a split in 1975 when the Derg sanctioned the enthronement of EOTC's third Patriarch while EOTC's second Patriarch was languishing in prison.