POLITICS AND RELIGION IN ETHIOPIA

A Thesis

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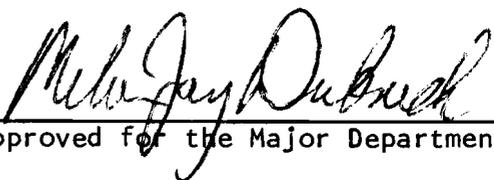
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by

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the advent of Christianity into the royal palace

of the Ethiopian monarchs the religiously, culturally and ethnically

diverse and politically semi-autonomous peoples were collectively

subjected to the rule of Christian emperors. Gradually, led by

the political and religious ideas of the time, a church-state

relationship was developed by which the two were mutually obligated

to defend and spread both the faith and the Christian polity. After

that the Ethiopian Orthodox Coptic Church was the state religion

and hence, directly or indirectly, a cause for an ongoing political

struggle between Muslim and Christian Ethiopians.

> The history of Ethiopia was a continuous struggle of
> the Christian polity against Muslim and pagan tribes, either
> warding off their attacks or striving to expand the Ethiopian
> domain over them. Although the warfare has subsided, tradi-
> tional antagonisms are engrained among the people.[1]

According to traditional practice the king was the head

of the church and "defender of the faith." He also looked after

and ensured the economic well-being of the church. In return,

the church legitimized the political authority of the king by

"teaching obedience to him, consecrating him, excommunicating his

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[1]Saadia Touvas, Somali Nationalism, International Politics
and the Drive for National Unity in the Horn of Africa (Cambridge,
Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 137.

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enemies, and providing the man and institution of kingship with the aura of divinity."[2]

This traditional arrangement did not merely survive Muslim opposition but, in spite of it, was given a legal tone by a recent constitutional affirmation.

> The importance of this tradition and genealogy lies not in its being believed to be both literally true and theologically significant by the uneducated peasantry, but rather that the whole structure of Ethiopian society--Christian Church and State--is based upon it. It also has legal endorsement since the Emperor Haile Sellassie first introduced constitutions in the twentieth century.[3]

Current estimates vary but most believe that well over 80 percent of the total Ethiopian population is almost equally divided between Muslim and Coptic Christians. The remaining religious minorities are divided between the various denominations of Christianity, Judaism and a form of paganism. Their relative importance in terms of both number and traditional political activity being slight, this study addresses itself primarily to Muslims and the Coptic Christians.

Much of the history of Ethiopia has been dominated by political wars between the two. Previous studies have invariably explained this widely known and written about problem in terms of religious differences.[4] To the degree that traditionally the political outlook

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[2]George A. Lipsky, Ethiopia: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture (New York: Hraf Press, 1962), p. 101.

[3]Richard Greenfield, Ethiopia, A New Political History (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, 1965), p. 43.

[4]Robert L. Hess, Ethiopia: The Modernization of Aristocracy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 112.

of each group has been influenced by its respective religion the explanation may be correct. It is also possible that the Christian-value-oriented political system and its partiality to Christians created religious consciousness as a political factor. This then can be a consequence rather than the cause of the problem in question. This possibility has not been studied adequately.

THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

The hypothesis to be developed in this paper is that the inherent disintegrative political effect of religious pluralism on national politics is further compounded by the specific institutional arrangement between church and state in Ethiopia.

Importance of the Study

As a result of internal struggle, Ethiopia has not only suffered in the past but also its future seems to depend on how it may go about solving the seemingly chronic problem of national unity. Increased political awareness and Haile Selassie's drive for political centralization, contrary to the intended purpose of the latter, made the traditional Muslim-Christian antagonism more potentially volatile than ever before.

To whatever factor one may attribute the survival of Ethiopia as a nation, its national unity has been gravely threatened. Ethiopia's Muslim Somalis and the area they inhabit (Ogaden) have long been a subject of dispute between Ethiopia and the Somali Republic.

At present the issue lies between the Somali view that
a plebiscite should be held, on the basis of self determina-
tion, and the Ethiopian view that the boundary should be
delimited according to the 1908 Convention with Italy.[5]

Ethiopia's refusal to determine the issue by the administration

of a supervised plebiscite, as Somalia had proposed, suggests

that the Ethiopian government anticipated that the decision of

the people in question would have been contrary to Ethiopian

desires.

Although the political union of Eretrea with Ethiopia was

prompted by the United Nations' decision after studying the poli-

tical sentiments of the majority of the Eretreans, a large majority

of Eretrean Muslims opposed it.[6] After 1970, with the acceleration

of guerrilla warfare by the separatists, the government was forced

to declare a state of emergency. Also, it believed that the separatist

cause was supported by Muslim states such as Egypt, Syria and the

Sudan.[7] Presently the Eretrean Liberation Front continues its

struggle for political secession. The sources of its aid, and the

intensity of the warfare indicate the political aspiration of the

Eretrean Muslims and their co-religionists in the Middle East and

elsewhere.

Although not as intensive, there was political unrest

among Muslims of Wallo and Arussi as incidents in 1955 and 1967

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[5]John Drysdale, The Somali Dispute (New York: F. A. Praeger,
Publisher, 1964), p. 98.

[6]Ernest W. Luther, Ethiopia Today (Stanford: Stanford
University Press, 1958), p. 146.

[7]Roland Oliver and Anthony Atmore, Africa Since 1800
(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 240-41.

showed. There is good reason to believe that other Muslim groups were restrained from revolting as a result of their fear of political repercussion and by the uncertainty of success rather than as a result of political satisfaction.

Thus, Ethiopian national unity could be compared to a thin and torn veil, the fabric woven from fear of retribution and political uncertainty.

Therefore, the problem needs to be studied, not merely because it is there and an important one, but also because the political system of the monarchy itself as a possible cause of the problem has not been studied adequately. The present study intends to do that by analyzing the effects of this church-state relationship on current problems of national unity.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Although the intensity of the problem of national unity and its specific causes have varied from one country to another, the general problem has been common to many old and new countries including Ethiopia. Therefore, a brief review of the literature concerning the common underlying causes will be helpful to our understanding of the problem in Ethiopia.

Whether or not people--as individuals or groups--identify themselves with the country of which they are citizens, and the extent to which they support the national aspirations, depends on their feelings about the country and their beliefs in the values for which its social, economic and political institutions stand. The possibility of attaining national awareness and agreement of

purpose have depended on the history and specific internal charac-
teristics of each country as a nation.

With the exception of a few countries, nations have been
comprised of more than one cultural, linguistic, religious, racial,
ethnic, and regional group. Historically, primordial identities
have been a basis of national unity as well as a cause of national
disunity, depending on the sociological makeup and degree of poli-
tical modernity of each country. Therefore, while cultural and
social homogeneity is important to the political unity of both
modern and traditional states, it is not an over-riding factor
to the national unity within the former. Within the modernized
nation the political significance of primordial identities has
generally been undermined by the development of an overlapping
political loyalty and a common political culture. The political
culture as a common set of attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments gives
not only "order and meaning to a political process" but also provides
"the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behavior in
the political system . . . and it encompasses both the political
ideals and the operating norms of a polity."[8] Thus, the more
modernized nations can be said to be "a body of people who feel
they are a nation."[9] They have thus reached a point where their
identity of membership is preserved by a frequent redefinition
of the joint purposes of the nationals rather than by race, religion,

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[8]Lucian W. Pye, Aspects of Political Development (Boston:
Little, Brown and Company, 1966), pp. 104-5.

[9]Rupert Emerson, From Empire to Nation (Boston: Beacon
Press, 1960), p. 104.

language and region.[10] The various groups of people within some

developing countries do not have or share this essential cultural

quality on a national level.

Although some developing countries are known to have existed

for a long time in their present form, in these as well as in

many new states the loyalties of the individuals were, and continue

to be, to differing forms of social authority and political organi-

zation such as the tribe, clan, dynastic state, or religious group.

Most new nations, as they presently exist, did not evolve from a

common history and cultural heritage but rather are the arbitrary

creations of the colonialist period. The colonial frontiers by

which these nations are defined do not necessarily correspond

to the social and cultural boundaries of the peoples that are

lumped together to form the new nations.[11] Those who constitute

the newly created nation-states are not only frequently hetero-

geneous and culturally unrelated, but also the secular nation-

state with which they are being asked by the elite to identify

themselves and to which they are expected to owe their political

allegiance is foreign to them. Since there is no sense of terri-

torial nationality which overshadows subordinate parochial loyalty,

the commitment of the individuals is to their primordial groups

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[10]Dakhart A. Rustow, A World of Nations: Problems of
Political Modernization (Sixth Edition) (Washington, D. C.:
The Brooking Institution, 1971), pp. 70-71.

[11]Myron Weiner, "Political Integration and Political
Development," Political Development and Social Change, (ed.) Janson
L. Finkle and Richard W. Gable (New York: John Wiley and Sons,
Incorporated, 1968), pp. 554-56.

rather than to the nation of which they are presently a member.
The force of tradition is still alive to the point that the people
continue to identify themselves, organize their communities, and
express their beliefs in terms of race, ethnicity, religion and
language. Their interest in the nation-state or their conscious-
ness of it has been minimal. As a result, the very effort to
create such tacit understanding has been frustratingly slow and
painful to those who have assumed the responsibility and has led
to a resurgence of traditionalism.

In the new countries, the pressure for asserting regional,
ethnic or traditional values is greater,

than elsewhere since,

. . . tacit understanding of the proper limits are not
yet agreed upon, and people are little aware of a public
interest that must take priority if the national community
is to solve its problem effectively and survive.[12]

The problem of national unity is further complicated by
facts that seem to be inherent among plural societies undergoing
rapid political changes. We have already noted that most of the
developing countries are comprised of many distinctive social
and cultural groups with little sense of national consciousness.
During the early phase of political transition these groups are
not only preoccupied by a consciousness of their differences but
also eager and determined to assert parochial interests. The
fact that one calls himself an Amhara or Tigre before he calls

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[12]W. Howard Wiggins, "Impediments to Unity in New Nations:
The Case of Cylon," Political Development and Social Change, (eds.)
Janson L. Finkle and Richard W. Gable (New York: John Wiley and
Sons, Incorporated, 1968), pp. 563-64.

himself an Ethiopian; an Ibo before a Nigerian, or a Hindu before
an Indian is common knowledge. As a result the effort of the
national leaders to elevate the national interest over the parochial
ones, the designation of one of the many languages as the official
national language, and even the very ethnic and religious back-
ground of the leader become controversial issues that often lead
to political strife and dissension. The controversy as to which
of the many languages in India should be the national language
is an example. The conflict between the Christian and Muslim
citizens of Lebanon is another. In Ethiopia this same kind of
divisive problem exists in the Muslim's political feelings toward
the traditional connection between the government and the Orthodox
Church.

Although there had been some degree of success in this
task of nation building, some of the means chosen for the purpose
and the speed at which social change is taking place has not been
without negative consequence. The process of political develop-
ment has often created a further division, not only between elites
and the masses, but also within the masses, between those who
are adapted to the new culture, and those who still persist in
the traditional value pattern.[13] The fact is that if and when
primordial attachment is broken before national identity is
developed, people not only feel "psychologically uprooted" but

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[13]Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba (eds.), Political Culture
and Political Development (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton
University Press, 1965), p. 17.

also, in most cases, have turned to political action detrimental

to national integration, for it is a foregone conclusion that:

> . . . it is only where national identity is developed
> without the destruction of parochial loyalties or without
> robbing them of their legitimacy that political commitment
> can be combined with a set of norms that limit the range
> of applicability of political criteria.[14]

But for this to happen, as Leo Kuper and M. G. Smith, among others,

have suggested, not only must the traditional tendency to associate

political stability with cultural homogeneity or political instability

with cultural hetrogeneity cease but also the political system

must be structured to acknowledge cultural differences and provide

mechanisms for the political participation and power of all groups.[15]

As it has already been pointed out, Ethiopia has much

in common with most of the developing nations, particularly with

the African. Its stage of political and economic development

as a nation, the social and cultural diversity of its people and

the subsequent national problem are much like that of other

developing nations. Therefore, to the extent that the problem

of national unity in these countries is a result of characteristics

common to all of them, the general explanation just made about

the problem of national unity within the developing nations as

a whole relates to Ethiopia. However, beyond this generalization

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[14]Ibid., pp. 549-50.

[15]Leo Kuper, "Plural Societies: Perspectives in Problems,"
Pluralism in Africa (eds.) Leo Kuper and M. G. Smith (Berkeley:
University of California Press, 1971), pp. 8-9, 18-20, and Leo
Kuper, "Ethnic and Racial Pluralism: Some Aspects of Polarization
and Depolarization," op. cit., pp. 484-86., and M. G. Smith,
"Institutional and Political Conditions of Pluralism," Pluralism
In Africa, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

the problem of national unity and its causes differs from one country to another, both in kind and complexity, due to past and present specific national situations that are peculiar to each country. As a result, a factor that is detrimental to national unity in one country is not necessarily equally detrimental to that objective in another country. Most of all, the critical importance of a single factor is relative, not absolute, since the problem is seldom a consequence of a single factor.

With this in mind we shall now turn to the study of Ethiopia in order to determine whether or not the hypothesis of the study is valid.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 2 describes the social and cultural tradition of the Christian and Muslim groups in Ethiopia and relates their significance to the problem under study.

Chapter 3 examines the traditional relationships between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the monarchy and examines the political impact of that relationship on the non-Christian people within Ethiopia.

Chapter 4 studies the political history of the Muslim and Christian groups and assesses the subsequent social, economic and political relationships between them.

Chapter 5 examines the state of the national unity under the leadership of Haile Selassie and his approach to the problem of national integration.

Chapter 6 summarizes the facts and relates them to the hypothesis of the study in order to arrive at conclusions regarding the cause of the problem between the Muslim and Christian national groups.

Despite the attempts by Haile Selassie and some of his immediate predecessors to attain national unity, the country is plagued by its absence. Could it be because the king himself, in some ways being the creation of and dependent upon the opposed church religio-political system, was neither capable of solution to the problem nor acceptable to the Muslims? If so, it may be said that the traditional monarchic political system was not only a restraint to the successful functioning of the government but also a part of the problem itself.

Chapter 2

THE SOCIOLOGY OF ETHIOPIA

As has previously been pointed out, Ethiopia has much
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is valid.

Contrary to what continued Ethiopian political independence suggests, the various ethnic, religious, and regional groups within the political-state are not united by a shared sense of national consciousness and common aspiration. The political value of each group is conditioned by its own distinctive social and cultural heritage. These groups identify themselves by, and owe their loyalties to, either their ethnic groups, the religion they professed or the region where they were raised. Accordingly, the remark has been made that,

> Ethiopia is not a nation-state in the modern sense of the term, and the attitudes of its component people toward their country are not determined, therefore, by awareness that they --as individuals or groups--form part of a unified national whole. Most Ethiopians are bound by traditions governing their way of life and affecting their attitude toward the government, the country, the people inside it and outside it.[1]

Who are these peoples, how, and to what extent, is this the case of Ethiopia as a nation?

Since no official census has ever been taken, the exact number of people in Ethiopia is unknown; estimates range from a minimum of twenty million to a maximum of twenty-seven million people. But, slightly over twenty-three million, a recent estimate of one reliable source, is probably the closest approximation to the actual number of the population.[2] There are six major racial groups. The largest (40 percent) is Galla, followed by the Abyssinians (Amhara-Tigre) who comprise 33.3 percent of the total

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[1]George A. Lipsky, Ethiopia: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture (New York: HRAF Press, 1962), p. 323.

[2]Robert L. Hess, Ethiopia: The Modernization of Autocracy (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 12.

population. The other four are Sidamas, Somalis, Shankellas and Afar-Saho, each group being under 10 percent of the total population. It is believed that over seventy languages and as many dialects are spoken.[3]

In the matter of religion, the people are divided into four basic groups--Christian, Muslim, Jewish and a variety of local religions generally termed as pagan. Although the Christian population represents the various denominations of Christianity, the over-whelming majority of them are the adherents of the Ethiopian (Coptic) Orthodox Church. Virtually all of the Amhara-Tigre, an estimated 10 percent of the Galla population and some minorities from the other racial and ethnic groups are Christians. Similarly a large percentage of the Gallas, almost all Somalis, the Afar-Saho, about half of the Sidamas, and a minority of other racial groups are Muslims. A small minority of the remainder profess an archaic form of Judaism while the rest subscribe to paganism. Within the context of Ethiopian national history the two major religious groups, Christian and Muslim, have been the most important because of both their size and political roles.

The exact proportion of the Christian population to Muslim is unknown for no religious census has ever been taken. Estimates of the Christian population by the Ethiopian Government have been as high as 67 percent. But other sources put the figure much lower. Lipsky's estimate is Ethiopian Orthodox, 35 percent; Muslim, 35 percent; pagan, 25 percent; and other (including non-coptic

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[3]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 34.

Orthodox Christian denominations and Jewish), 5 percent.[4] However,

Lipsky's figure of the pagan population, compared to the estimates

of other authorities, is exceptionally high. Traditionally, Chris-

tians and Muslims have been hostile to one another and there is

good reason to believe that politics rather than religion is the

cause of their mutual antagonism. According to one observer, "It

is quite possible that the Muslim population ranges from 45 to

55 percent," and "yet Ethiopia has a distinctly Christian history,

and religion has played a special role in the past."[5] However,

this cannot be understood without glancing at the history of the

major racial groups, the national political institutions, and

the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Contemporary Ethiopia is an outgrowth of an ancient

Abyssinian state, whose domain then was the northern highlands

comprised of the provinces of Eretrea, Tigre, Begemder, Wallo,

Gojjam and the northern part of Shoa. The gradual but continuous

expansion that eventually led to the emergence of Ethiopia in

its present form was completed during the reign of Menelik II

(1889-1913). The Amhara and Tigre are two closely related ethnic

groups which have been the dominant political rulers of the country,

even though the two together constitute only one-third of the

total population.[6] Of the two, the Amhara became dominant.

The Amhara came to political dominance by the 13th
Century through the restoration of the "Solomonid Dynasty"

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[4]Ibid., pp. 100-101.   [5]Hess, op. cit., p. 20.

[6]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 34.

(1270). Ever since then almost all the emperors of the country have been of Amhara origin.

Between 1889-1913,

> . . . the area subject to Amhara rule was tripled. Through-out most of the past seven centuries Amhara emperors, nobles, soldiers, and colonists have maintained their political supremacy in Ethiopia and have made their tongue, Amharic, the national language.[7]

The Amhara and Tigre are said to be descendents of common Semitic ancestors who had immigrated from South Arabia and through time established the Aksumite Kingdom.[8] The two shared "the legacy of Aksum, the Ethiopic alphabet, Geez literature, monophysite Christianity, similar political and social institutions, and the same style of life."[9] Although traditionally the major sub-groups within each were almost autonomous political units organized under a regional ruler (king), an emperor was maintained as the acknowledged national figure. While kingship was the highest political position given by the emperor or attained by an individual as a result of his military strength, the emperorship was an inherited position by the most qualified and direct descendent of the Solomonic line. Thus, under this system, based on common national memories, symbols, religion, political experience and aspirations of

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[7]Donald N. Levine, "Ethiopia: Identity, Authority and Realism," Political Culture and Political Development, Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba (eds.) (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 247.

[8]Spencer J. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia (New York: Barnes and Noble, Incorporated, 1965), pp. 133-34.

[9]Donald N. Levine, Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 1-2.

Amhara-Tigre, a sense of national community was always present in their consciousness.

Their social organization was based on a kinship group consisting of a number of families of common descent. Each kinship group occupied a definite territory to which every member of the family was entitled either through inheritance or by the right of purchase. In these respects, long before the Amhara-Tigre began to conquer and rule the surrounding Muslim and pagan states, they were a nation to themselves. Their exclusive nationalism, based on ethnic, cultural and religious identification and on an awareness of the imperial institution, led to their continued political and cultural supremacy over all the rest. Politically they monopolized not only the crown, but also a great majority of the important positions in both the government and the armed forces. Culturally, Christian values and objects of religious significnace, such as the cross on the crown, the Star of the Trinity and the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, were the national symbols. Indigenous names of places were replaced by Amharic names in formerly non-Amhara areas, and Amharic, the knowledge of which was required of both government school students and government officials, was the national language. Accordingly, the remark has been made that "however one may assess the fact of Amhara dominance in Ethiopia, it is a given of the present situation."[10]

In contrast with the heirarchic and monarchic Amhara-Tigre, the Galla was democratic and equalitarian in its political culture.

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[10]Ibid., p. 4.

Before they were subjected to the autocratic Amhara rule, they

were governed by elected members of elder tribesmen. The system

was known as "gada" and it referred to sets of age grades. According

to it,

> . . . the entire organization of tribal life was divided
> into stages of eight years' duration. Each tribe was divided
> into about ten groups called gada. The particular gada to
> which a member of the tribe belonged being determined solely
> by his age. The penultimate gada comprised the ruling groups,
> which inherited the outgoing groups of elders . . . . It has
> been considerably changed and weakened . . . by the imposition
> of Amhara rule.[11]

Exceptions to this system of government were the Galla

kingdoms in the west and southwest. The Gallas in these areas

had monarchic political institutions for governing themselves.

The last of such kingships was abolished in 1932 when Kaffa province

was brought directly under Amhara rule.

Whereas membership in the Amhara community was determined

on the basis of race and religion with the traditional system

of government making no provision for incorporating strangers

into the community, the Galla, under the gada system, had a standing

liberal provision with the requirements devoid of racial and religious

identifications. In order to be a participating member of a Galla

community one had only to be interested in and loyal to the community

and to undergo an initiation ritual, which amounted to an oath

of allegiance to the community. Unlike the Abyssinians, the Galla

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[11]Ernest W. Luther, _Ethiopia Today_ (Stanford, Califronia:
Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 32, and Herbert S. Lewis,
A Galla Monarchy (Madison and Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin
Press, 1965), p. 27. The same system is described.

was severely divided within itself by tribe, religion, and region.
As a result of their bitter experience, first with the Somalis,
who were believed to have driven them away from their previous
habitat, the coastal area, to the interland, and second with the
Amhara, it has been stated that

> . . . the Galla developed a warrior tradition similar to
> that of the Amharas and Tigrais, but they never developed
> continuity in leadership or the ethnic unity sufficient to
> unite them successfully against the onslaught of the Amhara.[12]

Many of the non-Christian Galla have not been assimilated.
Because of their past political experiences and their subordinate
position under Amhara rule, they have remained a political liability.
In recent times, the Gallas of Wallo, Yju and Raya, along with
the Afar-Saho people, revolted on several occasions against the
Amhara rule. When Lij Eyassu (Emperor, 1913-1916) was deposed
because of his Islam religious inclination, they revolted in his
support. In 1929 the Azebo Galla revolted against Emperor Haile
Selassie. Between 1935-1936 many of the Galla and Somali groups
were implicated for supporting the Italians. Also there were
incidents of revolt against the Amhara rule in 1948 and 1953 by
the northern Gallas and in 1960 by the Bale Gallas.[13] Although
the Gallas were of single ethnic stock, as an assembly of people
there were numerous subdivisions within them. Such subdivisions
were aggravated by regional and religious differences. In this
sense the Galla was not a united political force.

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[12]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 137.   [13]Ibid., p. 42.

Relatively little is known about the social organization and political aspirations of the Shankella and Sidamas. In the past their political significance was slight as a result of unawareness and helplessness, for none of these groups were known to have had a strong consciousness and commitment to an indigenous political system that could influence their attitude toward the Amhara rule one way or another. However, as in the case of most traditional societies, the sacred permeated the secular thought and action of the people. To that extent it is believed that their political loyalty is to their religious groups. Religiously they are divided between Christians, Muslims, and pagans.

Unlike the Shankella and Sidamas, the Afar-Saho and Somalis are politically active and religiously undivided. Each group is devoutly Muslim and a strong opponent of the Amhara rule. These groups have occasionally used their religion as a basis of political unity in their stand against Christian Ethiopia. The well-known incident of this type of integrated effort was their invasion of Ethiopia under the leadership of Ahmed Gran during the 16th Century (1524-1542).[14] Despite such occasional unity based on religion and common cause, the Afar-Saho and Somalis have been at odds with each other. Their mutual antagonism is attributed to an economic conflict over the scarce grazing areas, water wells, and to the Somalis' traditional sense of exclusiveness based on a notion of superiority. "Traditionally, ... the Somali set most store by their Arabian connections and delight in the vaunting of those

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[14]Trimingham, op. cit., p. 140.

traditions which proclaim their descent from noble Arabian lineages and from the family of the Prophet."[15]

Aside from these facts, the three groups shared the Islam religion, strongly oppose the Christian political rule and, most of all, cherish a very democratic type of social and political organization. The Afar-Saho and Somalis do not have an institutionalized hierarchical political system. Instead they are held together by a series of primarily horizontal, political ties based on patrilineal kinship (tol) and political contract (her). The basic political alliances and divisions, as well as the specific place of an individual in the community, is determined by genealogies. According to Lewis,

> While descent in the male line (tol) is thus the fundamental principle of Somali social organization, it does not act alone but in conjunction with a form of political contract (her). It is this second, and scarcely less vital, element which is used to evoke and give precise definition to diffuse ties of descent.
> Within the series of political ties and social organization based on lineage and clan, is a diya paying group. . . . It consists of close kinsmen united by specific contractual alliance whose terms stipulate that they should pay and receive blood compensation in concert. An injury done by or to any member of the group implicates all those who are party to its treaty.[16]

Overarching the social and political ties of smaller groups is the widest kinship tie by which all kindred clans are united as members of the same clan-family.

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[15]I. M. Lewis, <u>The Modern History of Somaliland From Nation to State</u> (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1964), p. 5.

[16]Ibid., p. 11.

Such differences between the Christian and Muslim citizens, and the nature of their historical-political relationships have been the sources of most of the pressing political antagonism, not merely between the ruling Christians and their unintegrated Muslim subjects, but also between the Amhara-Tigre Christian empire and the neighboring Muslim states.

> . . . The Christian Amhara have remained fearful of a
> possible recurrence of a Muslim invasion. Their neighbors,
> both in the Sudan to the north and in the Somalilands to the
> east, are Muslim . . . . Anytime that Muslim minorities receive
> political inspiration from neighboring Muslim States, as the
> Somalis do, Ethiopia feels seriously threatened.[17]

Presently, Somali nationalists outside of Ethiopia demand the separation of the Somali minority from Ethiopia and its inclusion to Somalia. The Ethiopian government, on the other hand, rejects this demand, and in fact strives to prevent French Somaliland from being added to the Somali Republic. As a result there was a series of armed border conflicts from 1963 to 1964 between the two countries while the tension on the Eretrean front has not been any less since its union with Ethiopia. Presently, because of separatist Muslim rebellion, the province is under martial rule.

These continued hostilities between Christian Ethiopians and Muslims, both within and around the country, seem to be due to political as well as religious reasons. The traditional political

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[17]Saadia Touval, Somali Nationalism: International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 50-51.

system and governmental policy toward religious groups is partial
to the Christian population.

In the first place Ethiopia has been ruled by Christian
monarchs who claimed to be descendents of King Solomon of Jerusalem
and the Queen of Sheba. Devoid of historical foundation as this
legend may have been, the Abyssinians (Amhara-Tigre) identified
with and believed in it. Thus, by virtue of this "sacred genealogy,"
they not only legitimatized their monopoly of political position,
but also regarded all other races and religions as unqualified and
heathens. By constitutional stipulation, the emperor had to be
descended from members of the Solomonic line. Legitimate accession
to the throne depended on the rites of annointment by oil and
bestowal of the crown. Only the archbishop, in whom the authority
to conduct these rites was vested, could transform the status of
a new emperor by such an act of coronation. The revised constitu-
tion stated also that,

> The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, founded in the fourth century
> on the doctrines of Saint Mark, is the established Church of
> the Empire and is, as such, supported by the state. The
> Emperor shall always profess the Ethiopian Orthodox Faith.
> The name of the Emperor shall be mentioned in all religious
> services.[18]

The basis of this relationship between the state and the
church was political in that, as a result of it, both derived
indispensable political benefit, at the expense of the non-Christian
and non-Amhara-Tigre population. The church legitimized the posi-
tion of the emperor by providing him and the institution of the

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[18]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 196.

kingship the "aura of divinity" and by formulating a favorable

consensus of opinion of its clergy and communicants toward him.

For this reason it was stated that "the support of the Abun (Bishop)

and the Church to any Emperor is so vital that one not only has to,

of necessity, solicit their acknowledgement and support, but also

show his Christian faith."[19] According to another author, although

the church did not have the power to decide policy directly,

> . . . it can influence the course of political events set
> in motion by others by whipping up their loyalties or anta-
> gonisms, by playing one political force against another, or
> by directly influencing people through admonition and
> exhortation.[20]

Because of this actual as well as potential political power of

the church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was not merely the

"established church of the empire" but also an economic power,

second only to the government. According to Ethiopian history

one-third of the kingdom was allotted to the church for persuading

the Zagwe (usurpers) to relinquish the throne back to the Solomonic

line in 1270. In addition to its tax-free land holding, the church

received other gifts and royal support, particularly in establishing

churches in conquered territories.

In contrast, there was no such legal arrangement or mutually

beneficial political relationship between the state and the Muslim

citizen. Unlike the church, the mosque had no political influence

at all. "The Amharas are still so distrustful of Islam that very

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[19]David Mathew, Ethiopia: The Study of a Polity 1540-1935 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1947), p. 20.

[20]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 196.

few Muslims are to be found in high positions in Ethiopian govern-
ment."[21]

Therefore, as a result of the traditional arrangement
and practices between the state and the church whereby each was
interdependent upon the other, the latter, as an institution,
received both political and economic privileges and benefits, while
the former reinforced its power among the Amhara-Tigre groups by
being supported by the church. Yet, because of the interrelationship
between the state and the church, the non-Christian populace
(primarily Muslim) and the Christian populace were treated dif-
ferently--so much so that religion determined the political and
economic standing of a person in the national social structure.

It has been these discriminatory policies and the paradoxical
basis of Ethiopian nationality (continued church-state associa-
tion), not just religion, that have been the reasons for the Muslims'
resistance to the scheme of national unity in Ethiopia.

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[21]Luther, op. cit., p. 36.

Chapter 3

CHURCH AND STATE RELATIONSHIPS

Our general examination of the literature and the socio-
logical composition of Ethiopia indicates the complexity of the
factors that usually lead to national disintegration and the presence
of such a problem in Ethiopia today.

Because of the dominant role of the traditional dynastic
political system and its continued association with the church,
Ethiopian nationalism has always referred to these national institu-
tions and their cultural heritage. In order to qualify for the
emperorship it was necessary that one

> must be descendant from members of the Solomonic line
> . . . . legitimate accession to the throne has depended on
> two rites, anointment by oil and bestowal of the crown.
> Authority to conduct these rites was vested in the Archbishop
> . . . the act of coronation transformed the status of the
> new emperor. . . .

A legend, retained as a historical fact among the ruling Amhara-
Tigre ethnic groups, maintains that the Imperial dynasty of the
country originated with Menelik I, son of Mekeda, the Queen of
Sheba and King Solomon of Israel. It is claimed, therefore,
"Christ being the son of God and Menelik a kinsman of Christ, the

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[1]Donald N. Levine, "Ethiopia: Identity, Authority and
Realism," Political Culture and Political Development, eds. Lucian
W. Pye and Sidney Verba (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University
Press, 1965), p. 254.

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kings of Ethiopia, descendants of Menelik, are of divine line."[2]
By virtue of this legendary genealogical claim, the monarch of
Ethiopia was vested with political and, at least in theory, with
spiritual power long before the establishment of church-state
relationships.

This already institutionalized political privilege and
spiritual leadership of the Solomonic dynasty was further strength-
ened by the adoption of Christianity as the royal cult in about
330 A.D. by Ezana, the Aksumite king of Ethiopia, and with the
emergence of the church-state relationship following the conversion
of the king. It has been speculated of his conversion that

> The triumphant establishment of the Christian Church in
> the Roman empire gave impetus to the religious efforts of the
> Christians in Aksum, and Ezana's conversion may not have been
> totally free of diplomatic and political considerations.[3]

Unfortunately, neither the implied presence of Christians
in Aksum preceding Ezana's conversion nor the truth with regard
to whether or not Ezana was influenced by diplomatic and political
considerations is known for fact. The most widely held account
about Ezana's conversion to Christianity is that he was persuaded
by two Christian merchants from Syria who accidentally came to
be members of the palace household. Again, whether this is merely
a fictional account or actual fact, only a further research can
resolve. In any event, between 330 and 340 A.D., in Ezana's

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[2]George A. Lipsky, Ethiopia, Its People, Its Society, Its
Culture (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1962), p. 6.

[3]Taddesse Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia (Oxford:
The University Press, 1972), p. 2.

lifetime, Christianity was proclaimed the official religion of
the kingdom. Since this religion had begun as the royal cult,
and was soon made the official religion of the land (which could
be done only by or with the king's consent), it is logical to assume
that the proclamation constituted some degree of formal relation-
ship between the church and the state. Even though little is known
about the connection between the church and Ezana's successors
until the reign of King Kaleb (sixth century), the very survival
of the church in a predominantly pagan society and King Kaleb's
crusade against the persecution of Christians in South Arabia during
that century, suggest that the relationship was at least preserved,
if not strengthened.[4] Also that

>   Abraha, viceroy of Gabra Masqal, son of Kaleb . . . built
> a church at Sana . . . as a counter attraction to the pilgrimage
> to Mecca and, . . . attempted an expedition to destroy Mecca
> itself[5]

indicates that the relationship was continued.

Regardless of how and why the association between the
church and the state began, since the rise of Islam around and
within Ethiopia, it has been nourished by considerations of political
objectives. An indirect indicator of this fact is the extent to
which Ethiopian foreign policy has been influenced by religion.

Before and after the advent of Christianity Ethiopia had
been in close contact with the Mediterranean world, by which it
was culturally influenced, particularly during the glorious days

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[4] Ibid., p. 25.

[5] J. S. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia (New York: Barnes
and Noble, Incorporated, Second Impression, 1965), p. 41.

of Aksum. It was a major objective of the Ethiopian monarchs, particularly of the Christian era, to establish military and diplomatic relations with their con-emporary Christian emperors against the growing threats of Islamic encirclement.

The existence and nature of the relationships between Ethiopian monarchs and their counterparts in the Eastern Mediterranean have been well documented by previous studies. For example, Trimingham's study shows that "the official conversion of Aksum under Ezana constituted a political link with the Byzantine Empire which regarded itself as a protector of Christiandom."[6] There is no doubt that the friendship was carried over to the successive leaders of the respective countries for the Kebra Nagast (Glory of Kings), a writing which Levine apparently considers authentic, makes a reference to the friendship of Justin I and King Kaleb:

> . . . the Ethiopian monarch was presented as a friendly cousin of the "king of Rome"--an echo of the sixth century alliance between Kaleb of Ethiopia and Justin I of Byzantium --thereafter he came to be regarded as a successor to the latter as well, and hence the sole defender of the true Christian faith.[7]

Also, there is no doubt that the driving force for this continued relationship between Ethiopia and the outer Christian world was political because not only

> Before much was known of Ethiopia, she was imagined as a land arrayed in all the magnificence associated with Prester John

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[6] Ibid., p. 40.

[7] Donald N. Levine, Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 151.

but also the legend of Prester John itself was

> . . . a fantasy conceived at the height of the Crusades

which

> . . . no doubt owed its origins to the desire of Christian
> Europe to discover an ally somewhere beyond the land overrun
> by the Muslims.[8]

It should be remembered that Prester John was a glorious ruler

of a Christian kingdom with all the splendor that only a wishful

imagination can afford to envision. Thus it is a foregone con-

clusion that:

> The interest of Ethiopian Emperors in Europe also stemmed
> from exactly the same reason as the interests of European
> monarchs in Prester John, namely, the opportunity which friend-
> ship might provide for combined operations against Islam.[9]

But the link between Ethiopia and its distant Christian

friends was severed by the Muslim encirclement of the former shortly

after the rise of Islam in the seventh century. After that no

major contact was again made between Ethiopia and its European

friends until 1490. During this time, "encompassed on all sides

by the enemies of their religion, the Ethiopians slept near a

thousand years, forgetful of the world by whom they were forgotten."[10]

While in isolation the church, which had become the symbol

of Ethiopian nationalism, was as much under constant Muslim attack

as the government. Thus, although the problem between the warring

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[8] Jean Doresse, _Ethiopia_, translated from French by Elsa
Goult (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), pp. 7-10.

[9] Richard Greenfield, _Ethiopia, A New Political History_
(New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, 1954), p. 48.

[10] Trimingham, op. cit., p. 43.

groups was essentially a conflict of culture and political interests,
it also became a religious war. In many of these wars between
the Christians and the Muslims or pagans, the destruction of the
churches, their congregations and clergy were the targets of the
attacks. In the perception of the Muslims, politics and religion
were indistinguishable and they were right in the case of Ethiopia
for there was a noticeable political connection between the church
and the state. The Christian population understood its political
problems of succession and war in terms of religion and sought
the solution to these problems from their religion and religious
leaders. Trimingham, speaking of the importance that the Christian
society then placed in their religious leader (who was appointed
by the patriarch of the Coptic Church in Alexandria, Egypt), states:

> The desperate appeals to Alexandria to send an Abuna, .
> . . gave the impression of a people living in a messianic
> atmosphere of crisis in which the overthrow of kings and the
> scourge of invading armies is regarded as a divine retribution
> for unfaithfulness, whilst the arrival of a new abuna is hailed
> as a manifestation of divine forgiveness.[11]

Since Trimingham's observation refers to an early eleventh
century national behavior and attitude, it is apparent that by
the tenth century the church had already become an important
influence on the public, and possibly on the government. In fact,
the separation of church and state under the Zagwe dynasty (1135-
1270) implies that there had been a political relationship between
the church and the Solomonic dynasty until 1135.

> Between the tenth and eleventh century, when the Church
> and the State under the Zagwe dynasty was divided, Islam made

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[11] Ibid., p. 53.

a systematic expansion first by occupying the coastal areas
of Abyssinia and cutting off the outside world and second
by converting the inland pagans to Islam and directing them
into the inland against the Abyssinians and some other parts
of East Africa.[12]

When the royal power passed from the traditional Solomonic

rulers to a newly Christianized Zagwe ("Usurper") dynasty, the

church as well as the descendants of the Solomonic family were

stubborn resisters. The Zagwe dynasty was able to secure the

acknowledgment of the church only after replacing the old bishop

with a new cooperative bishop from Alexandria. Because of political

negotiation between the Zagwe ruler and Patriarch John of Alexandria,

the new bishop was instructed to cooperate with the new political

power in Ethiopia.[13] Even then the antagonism of the church to

the Zagwe dynasty was abated only temporarily, for finally in

1270 it managed to re-establish the old dynasty with whom it there-

after continued to have a close political connection. Thus by

the end of the thirteenth century the church and the state were

politically bound together as a result of first, common experience

and Muslim attack; second, politically alienating existence under

an illegitimate national leader; and third, the longing for the

reinstitution of the mutually beneficial political power and rela-

tionship that they once had.

In 1270 Yekuno Amlak became the first king of the re-established

Solomonic dynasty with the full acknowledgment of the church and

its leaders. The church was politically important to the new king,

not just for its recognition of him, but also for restoring him

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[12]Ibid., p. 60.   [13]Ibid., p. 56.

to power peacefully by persuading the Zagwe dynasty to relinquish the throne to him. Therefore, Yekuno Amlak wasted no time in rewarding the church by giving it one third of the country's land, and also in making other political concessions to it.[14]

Because of a previous agreement between the churches of Alexandria and Ethiopia, the bishop for the latter could be appointed only by the patriarch from Alexandria--and usually this official was an Egyptian sent from that country. For reasons that we shall mention here only briefly but will elaborate upon in the next chapter, the bishop was in a political and spiritual predicament. As an Egyptian serving in a country politically unfriendly to his own he was under constant suspicion and surveillance by Ethiopian leaders. At the same time, as a political subject of a Muslim ruler of Egypt, he was usually advised either through his spiritual superiors or directly by the political leaders of his country to promote Muslim interests in Ethiopia. Thus he was usually under the agony of pleasing two rival political masters and under the torment of spiritual and political conflict. Another major problem of the bishop was the threat from prospective rulers if he were not to recognize their political claims. The new political concessions brought a partial end to this historical problem of the bishop. The old rule that emanated from the agreement between the two churches but which was usually bypassed, particularly by the political leaders, was reaffirmed. Henceforth, as once before, the appointment and removal of the bishop was to be up to the

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[14]Lipsky, op. cit., pp. 103-4.

patriarch in Alexandria and not to be tampered with by the political

rulers of Ethiopia.[15] In this respect the concession provided

the church with some degree of political independence, but not

with the political confidence of either Egyptian or Ethiopian

rulers. For particularly in Ethiopia, his political loyalty was

procured by a careful combination of appeasement and indirect

coercion of the king. So it is noted that

> . . . at the period of his greatest influence the Abuna
> (bishop) was an object of reverence, anxiety and unfatigued
> suspicion.
> In the nomadic court of the late Middle Ages in Ethiopia
> the Abuna followed the emperor's movement, nor did he settle
> to his own quarters until the advent of a static capital.[16]

The church was very important to the actual or potential

claimant of the leadership for two reasons; its ability to shape

public opinion for or against any present or future ruler; and

its possession of the authority for performing the rite of anoint-

ment during coronation. The rite was not only an essential ritual

for bringing God's blessing to the new king but also a consciously

stipulated safeguard against both a Coptic Christian ruler who might

be tempted to change his religion and a non-Coptic Christian, or

Muslim, who might attempt to assume the political leadership. Without

anointment from the proper authority no political power or the

claim to it was legitimate; nor were the people considered obligated

by the oath of allegiance to a properly crowned ruler should he

change his faith while in office.

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[15]Ibid.

[16]David Mathew, Ethiopia, The Study of a Polity 1540-1935
(London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1947), p. 12.

"The highest ecclesiastical authority . . . the abuna . . .
alone had the authority to annoint and crown the emperor, to confer
order, and to absolve vows."[17]

These facts show not only the political power that the
church attained through time, but also clearly suggest the development
of political partnership based on a system of balance of power
between it and the state, particularly since the fall of the Zagwe
dynasty. Since then no leader of Ethiopia significantly undermined
the political and spiritual interest of the church without an
adverse consequence. Their partnership was nurtured by the deep
conviction of both that neither could survive the recurrent blows
of their political and religious rivals without the other. This
was proven to each by the Islamic domination during the Zagwe
dynasty, at the time the political tie between the church and the
state was abolished. When the church and the state were at odds
with each other, their situation was usually exploited by both
Islam and local political factions. But as explained above, the
success of the enemy in taking advantage of the situation was
invariably given religious rather than objective political explana-
tions. It was, therefore, with this history and understanding
of nationhood, that the two national institutions once again
reaffirmed to each other the political unity that managed to
survive internal upheavals and recurring Muslim aggression of
the Middle Period (1270-1632).

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[17]Levine, Wax and Gold, p. 167.

This was a period of unsurpassed political unity between
the church and the monarchs. The two seemed to have been bound
together by a religious zeal and political objective designed to
bring an end to the growing menace of Muslim encirclement. High
on the list of national priorities were territorial expansion
through military conquest, evangelization of the kingdom, and
establishing military and political alliance with the Christian
rulers of Europe in order to counter the recurrence of the age-
old problem with the Muslims.

Therefore, the major policy of kings Yekuno Amlak, Yeshaq,
and Amda-Sion was to destroy the power of the Muslims, who at the
time were in full control of the trade routes leading into and
out of Ethiopia. Their military expeditions were often accompanied
by priests with accouterments necessary for establishing churches
in the conquered areas. According to one report, the enemies

> . . . were presumed to be a preserve of the Church as soon
> as they were conquered militarily. Their land, with all its
> people and other resources, was divided and distributed as
> fiefs among the Christian political and military officials.[18]

This was particularly the case of the defeated pagan society.
In this respect the religious and political frontiers of the kingdom
were extended. But since the Muslims in the outlying areas managed
to maintain full monopoly over the import and export trade, the
technical dependence of the inland Christian society on the services
and good will of the trading Muslims continued to be an uncom-
fortable fact of life. The danger of this situation led many of

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[18]Tamrat, op. cit., pp. 231-32.

the kings, particularly those of the fourteenth and fifteenth
century, to take drastic measures against the agents of their
enemy in the interior parts of the kingdom.

Most noted for their harsh measures were kings Saifa Arad
(1344-72), Dawit (1382-1411), and Zara Yaqob (1438-68). Responding
to Ethiopian policy against Muslims during the thirteenth and
fourteenth centuries, Egypt persecuted its Christian population.
In counter-retaliation Saifa Arad seized Egyptian merchants in
his kingdom and put some to death while forcing others to embrace
Christianity. Kings Dawit and Zara Yaqob were reknown for killing
many of the local Muslim leaders and reducing the power of the
reamining.[19] In particular, the religious zeal of Zara Yaqob
was such that he not only attempted to effect religious uniformity
throughout his kingdom but also revived the old custom of formal
coronation by being recrowned at Aksum--"the citadel of Ethiopian
Christianity." This renewed practice of coronation was consistently
followed by his successors. His success in consolidating the newly
conquered areas and his active personal participation in writing
some of the most fundamental religious books of his time, brought
the church-state relationship to an unprecedented height of political
cooperation. In Tamrat's words:

> The literary and religious activities of Zara Yaqob (1434-68)
> were essentially to stabilize these manifold conquests of his
> predecessors, and to give a sound institutional basis for both
> Church and State in the whole of the Christian empire.[20]

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[19]Ibid., p. 20.

[20]Ibid.

However, shortly after the reign of Zara Yaqob, the Muslims' continued dominance of the banks of the Red Sea was more than just a scarecrow, particularly to King Naod and later Queen Helena, regent to King Lebna Dengel. Therefore, as their political instinct was haunted by the possibility of renewed attack that could shatter the dearly attained internal peace and tranquility, their leadership was preoccupied by formulating and executing political strategies that would abort the sensed danger.

King Naod, as part of his military campaign in the prelude to war against the Somalis, "purified" his army by discharging the Muslim elements from his military units. While a regent, Queen Helena proposed to invite and assist the Portuguese to dominate the strategic Red Sea with the idea that the presence of such friendly power in the area would prevent the local Muslims from receiving moral and political inspiration or military aid from those on the other side of the sea. She had hoped that if the plan was adopted it would lead to a military alliance between Ethiopia and Portugal against the threat of the common enemy. But, as it happened, the anticipated danger preceded the strategy that it was designed to abort. Since the plan was opposed by the King and the nobility, including the church heirarchy, it was never fully implemented. In this matter, that the King's will prevailed over that of his mother and the supporters of her proposal was attributed to the nobility and the church heirarchy who were not only uncertain and suspicious of the Portuguese ultimate political motive, but who were also highly conscious of the doctrinal difference between the Roman Catholic and Ethiopian Coptic Church.

Lebna Dengel later reversed his policy and made alliance with the Portuguese--but then almost too late and only because it became evident that without their help his country was about to lose a most devastating war between the Christians and Muslim conglomerates.[21] While the new relationship with the Portuguese helped Ethiopia win in the most critical war against Ahmed Gragn (1527-1543), the Portuguese religious influence on some of the monarchs became a source of domestic problems which, in retrospect, showed some merit in the initial church apprehension about friendship with the Portuguese.

Za Dengel (1603-4) and Susneyos (1607-32) had to be dethroned for embracing Catholicism. The latter attempted to make Catholicism the national faith but the people revolted under the leadership of the Coptic Church. After being compelled to restore the old faith he was deposed.

Having gone through such an experience in which the defenders of the faith themselves betrayed the religion, the church and Christian nobility became more suspicious of both the monarchs and the Portuguese missionary. For a long time following the two incidents the church and the monarchs stood in conflict with each other, for the church remained isolationist while the monarchs sought "to reconstruct the religious basis of the empire by adopting a progressive policy of cooperation with Western Christian power."[22] Fasilodas (1632-67) attempted to correct this problem but in his

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[21]Trimingham, op. cit., pp. 83-4.

[22]Ibid., p. 90.

strategies went from one extreme to another. He expelled the
Portuguese from his empire and began to negotiate with the leaders
of the neighboring Muslim states for alliance against them. Under-
standably, like his predecessors, Fasilodas was in trouble with
the church and the Christian population as a whole for allying
with Muslim states--the traditional enemies of their religion.
Faced with the threat of excommunication and possible dethronement
the king fought back. It is believed that in this political struggle
between the king and the church seven thousand of the revolting
clergymen were executed by being thrown headlong from mountain
tops.[23]

In the meantime, Muslim leaders had taken advantage of
Fasilodas' favorable policy and the internal division between
the secular and the religious leader to such an extent that the
proportion of the Muslims to the Christians rose significantly.
Alarmed by this fact, Johnnes (1667-82), son of Fasilodas, conceded
to the church's demand by abandoning his father's policy. With
the cooperation of the clergy he called a council in 1668 and
promulgated an edict of religious discrimination in which the
Portuguese were required either to join the national church or
leave the country, while Muslims were ordered to live in segregated
quarters and not mingle with the Christians.[24] In this respect,
whenever there was a conflict of interest between that of the
church and the state, the will of the former prevailed. It is

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[23]Levine, _Wax and Gold_, pp. 175-76.

[24]Trimingham, op. cit., p. 102.

apparent that a few of the succeeding emperors, especially Takle
Haimanot (1769-1777), were a bit uneasy about the growing political
power of the church. Thus the plan was drawn to regain the lands
generously given to the church by the previous kings. But their
effort to weaken the church by reverting the church-owned land
to the state was far from accomplishing the objective of the kings.
In the first place, in fear of outright resistance, the plan was
never fully executed. In some cases the anti-church policy of
one ruler was reversed by the pro-church policy of a successor.
But most importantly, the political fortune of the church was
enhanced by a circumstance which was about to face every ruler
of Ethiopia during the Era of Masafent or Era of the Princes (1769-
1855).

During this period, Ethiopia was ruled by many regional
kings and princes with no recognized emperor to head them. There-
fore, only the church, whose authority transcended regionalism,
saved the country from being totally torn by the rivalry of the
various rulers. The recognition of the church to any claimant
of the emperorship being more vital than ever before, it soon
became more powerful than the political leaders themselves. Stated
in Trimingham's words: "During the Period of Masafent . . . the
Church was the only national institution which constituted a bond
between the rivalry and independent protagonists."[25]

Therefore, the problem of the church during that time was
not so much of repression by secular rulers, but rather one of

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[25]Ibid., p. 107.

how to control its own subordinate officials from independently

endorsing or bestowing the emperorship to their favorite contender.

In 1854 the problem of both the sacred and the secular institutions

was solved by developing mutually beneficial alliance between

one of the contenders for the emperorship, Kassa, later Emperor

Theodore, and the Abuna (bishop).

> The Abuna's plan to unify the Church under his leadership
> and to stop the controversy within it needed Kassa's support,
> at the same time this fitted the leader's plan to unify the
> country politically, a plan for which he needed the support
> of the Abuna.[26]

Following this agreement, Kassa made it clear to the clergy

and the population at large that he would punish them if they opposed

the Abuna in spiritual matters. Similarly, in addition to acknowledging

Kassa as the supreme political power of the empire, the Abuna assured

the latter the loyalty of all the Christians by exerting his spiritual

influence upon them. This systematic exploitation of the political

development during that period enabled the church not only to

fight for its vested interests, but also furnished it with all

the opportunities that the church needed to heal its internal

dissension and consolidate greater power which endured for many

years to come. For example:

> Between 1855-89 the Church was the unifying factor among
> the Christian Tigre and Amhara both in their defense against
> the Europeans in their partition of Northeast Africa and in
> Ethiopian conquest of the Muslim.[27]

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[26]Mordechai Abir, Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes, The
Challenge of Islam and the Reunification of the Christian Empire, 1769-
1855 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, 1968), pp. 141-42.

[27]Roland Oliver and Anthony Atmore, Africa Since 1800
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 91-2.

During Menelik's great territorial expansion from 1889-
1913, the church acquired one third of the conquered area. The
reason Iyasu (1913-1916), successor of Emperor Menelik II, was
ousted, the role of the church in that eventful decision and the
frequent land grants to the church show at one and the same time
the political power of the spiritual leaders and the significance
of religion to the people. Iyasu was deposed for his Islamic
inclination as manifested by his pro-Islam political policy.
Although from the beginning, because of his Muslim family back-
ground, Iyasu was a political suspect, the nobility were not able
to prevent his coronation or dethrone him until after the Abuna
shared their view of the new emperor and finally disavowed him.[28]

Because of this ingrained religious nationalism and the
subsequent political power of the church in making or breaking a
political leader, the traditional strategy of a successful ruler
has been to get along with the church and to assure it of his
religious integrity either by taking a throne name that has a
special religious significance in Christian tradition, such as
Haile Selassie (power of the Trinities), or by declaring, as did
Theodore II and Johannes II (among many others), from time to time
one's messianic intention to defend and extend Christianity at
any cost; or by simply showing one's consciousness of Ethiopian
Christianity by coining popular phrases as Menelik did: "An island
of Christianity in a sea of pagans."[29]

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[28]Greenfield, op. cit., p. 139, and Doresse, op. cit., p. 204.

[29]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 113.

As Greenfield and many others observed, the church on its part "has always been conscious of being the besieged repository of true Ethiopian nationalism. . . ."[30] Consequently, the clergy was not only busy unifying and stimulating the Christian society "to seek dominion over other neighboring peoples, particularly Muslim and pagans," but also "the religion and religious institutions have been a focus of national life."[31] Throughout the centuries in the war against the enemy, the church has given its blessing to the warring army, whom it also encouraged by accompanying it to the battlefield. It is confirmed that:

> Priests have gladly accompanied military expeditions and assisted the efforts of combatants by their divinations and their prayers. But by virtue of the norm that they themselves abstain from violence, the clergy have kept alive in this traditionally martial society a faint echo of Christian ideals of non-violence.[32]

During times of peace, in perfect agreement with church defending monarchs and warlords, the church set a standard of values for the maintenance of legal and social orders. By virtue of their dominant social position, the Christian nobility and the clergy played the role of judges by adjudicating disputes, they expected and received land from the king, and service and rent from their tenants. The nobility assisted the clergy by giving endowments to the religious institutions. They expressed their religious conviction by building churches and attending religious ceremonies as a state function. In return the clergy served the king and

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[30]Greenfield, op. cit., p. 26.   [31]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 2.

[32]Levine, "Ethiopia," p. 259.

his feudal lords by influencing the masses to uphold the official
policies of the king and his subordinates. In this respect the
church preserved the political independence of Ethiopia by unifying
the Christian population against any outside enemy and by mediating
or dictating a political settlement during times of succession
crisis. For all these reasons, the relative importance of the
church to the cultural and political life of the country has been
stated by one most representative observer as follows:

> Modern reunified Ethiopia is the logical inheritor of the
> tradition of ancient Axum. That this is so has, at least
> up until the beginning of the present century, been due far
> less to the occupant or even the existence of the imperial
> throne, than to the Ethiopian Christian Church, dating as it
> does from the heyday of Axumite power, and to Ethiopia's long
> history of national independence.[33]

More recently Haile Selassie dented the traditional power
of the church by introducing a written constitution and adminis-
trative reform that just began to establish the legal and political
power of the monarch over the church. However, while this step
more or less subordinated the church to the state, in no was did
it abolish the relationship between the two. In fact, the con-
stitutional provision strengthened relations by giving a legal
foundation.

According to the constitution of 1955 only adherents of
the Ethiopian Orthodox Church could be accepted as members of the
imperial family. The constitution also obligated the Emperor,
by an oath upon coronation, to profess and defend the Ethiopian
Orthodox Church. Article 126 of the same constitution acknowledged

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[33]Greenfield, op. cit., p. 24.

the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as the state supported and established

church of the empire. Article 127 gave the Emperor the power

> . . . to approve the selection and appointment of the
> Abuna and other bishops, and the right to promulgate the decrees,
> edicts and public regulations of the Church, except those
> concerning monastic life and other spiritual administration.[34]

The significance of much of this was not that it was unprecedented

in the history of Ethiopia but rather the legal expression given

it by the constitution. Haile Selassie was the first ruler of

Ethiopia to introduce a written constitution and therefore the

first Ethiopian emperor to be the head of the church and the state

by force of both traditional and constitutional law.

The church was further weakened when in 1950 its paradoxical

aspiration for spiritual independence from the Alexandrian patri-

archate came true. Traditionally the bishop of the Ethiopian

Orthodox Church was appointed by the patriarch of Alexandria of

Egypt. Thus, until 1950, because of the church's external source

of legitimacy the head of the Ethiopian church was independent

of the king. In case of a difference between the two, the king

had to solve the problem through either direct negotiation and

compromise with the official in question or by appealing to his

superior in Egypt. Of course, the king always had the option of

compelling his opponent by resorting to outright violence, but

the political repercussion of such a course would be so grave that

it was seldom used. Since the Ethiopian Orthodox Church acquired

the status of a self-governing body by becoming independent of

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[34]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 106.

the Coptic Church in Alexandria, its choice and appointment of higher church officials has become subject to the Emperor's approval. As a result the political power of the king over such individuals was much greater than it was before 1950.

In addition, after 1942 the church lost much of its traditional administrative, judicial and economic power. Following government initiated legal reform, taxes on church property were made payable to a government-controlled centralized church treasury. The church courts in dealing with their congregations and with tenants who farmed church-owned land, were limited in the penalties they might impose. Similarly, the jurisdiction of the church over individuals was strictly limited to spiritual matters. Also, the administration of the church itself was subjected to the central government's influence or control while its importance as a center of education was diminished by the development of secular government schools which were introduced against the objection of the church.[35]

However, the church still enjoyed power and prestige resulting from tradition as well as constitutional provision. As stated earlier, the church was still the established religion of the state and as such derived immense economic and political support from the government, well-to-do public officials and private individuals. Some of the top religious officials held important positions within the government. The Archbishop was one of the constitutionally designated members of the Crown Council that convened from time to time to resolve major issues of legislation and questions of

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[35]Levine, Wax and Gold, p. 181.

national policy. He was also the permanent member of the Council

of Regency--council consisting of seven members of which three

were members of the royal family (including the empress mother)

and his position on the council was fourth in importance, followed

by the prime minister and the presidents of the Senate and the

Chamber of Deputies. The Council of Regency had the authority

to rule the country whenever the Emperor was unable to do so or

if a successor was under eighteen years of age. The church was

also represented on the Board of Education and Fine Arts, which

derived its authority from the Emperor himself and functioned as

the principal policy-making body. As an example of their influence,

by official instruction, boarding students in government schools,

including colleges and the university, were fed according to the

fasting regulation of the church. Also, in most government schools

a compulsory ethics course was taught by priests or monks from

the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

> Members of the clergy are formally members of the nobility,
> but the Archbishop, his deputy and the chief monks of Axum
> and Addis-Alem monasteries are considered close to the ranks
> of the nobility. The Archbishop officially is a part of the
> government, and he and other members of the upper clergy partic-
> ipate in the Council of the Emperor. In the provinces, the
> various bishops are to be reckoned at least as on the same
> level socially, economically and politically as the provincial
> governors.
> The local priests, debators and other officials still
> retain their prestige and predominant economic and social
> position in most of the rural areas.[36]

Therefore, while the constitutional and administrative

reforms of the recent years have politically subordinated the

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[36]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 64.

church to the state, the relationship between the two was not only

formalized but also strengthened by the same means more than ever

before.

The clergy as a whole, estimated to be 20 to 25 percent

of the male population, derived its power as a social and political

force from both its members and its prestigious profession. In

the opinion of the average layman, they were the agents of God,

and as such ought to be respected and obeyed. In this sense, their

power and prestige was independent of royal favor. In other words:

> Privileged contact with the sacred symbols of the church-
> ordination by the sacrosanct abuna, exclusive access to the
> tabot, and officiation at the Eucharist--gave the priests an
> authority that was independent both of political dispensation
> and of personal accomplishment.[37]

Accordingly, the church had two sources of political power.

By virtue of traditional practices and constitutional provision,

the church was politically linked with the state; this enabled

the church to place some of its officials in high government offices

where they could influence government policies. By virtue of their

profession the clergy commanded the respect and loyalty of the

politically crucial element of the society--the Christians. As

such it had the potential to formulate and shape their opinion

for or against the political leaders of the empire. Whether the

church was a political asset or liability to a given leader can

be determined only with regard to the specific time and issue.

The important fact to be noted here was that there was a clear

political relationship between the two. This fact was reiterated

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[37]Levine, _Wax and Gold_, p. 170.

by both the Emperor and the Archbishop respectively in the following ways:

> 'The Church is like a sword, and the government is like an arm; therefore the sword cannot cut by itself without the use of the arm.'[38]

> 'In Ethiopia the Church and the State are one.'[39]

These statements may be exaggerated but not altogether unfounded, for the two institutions were entertwined by economic and political interdependence. As has been indicated, the state not only looked after the economic well being of the church by allocating to it a tax-free land grant, particularly in newly conquered areas, often at the expense of other religious minorities, but also it boosted the psychological, religious and political ego of the church by embracing Christianity as the only state religion and by shaping the national and international policies in accordance with Christian values and interests. Either out of sincere conviction or in protection of such vested interest, the church on its part continued to popularize an archaic ideological basis of the state--the theory of divine king--by teaching the public the virtue of obedience to a divinely-ordained king. Church school pupils and the adult members of the congregation alike were taught their religious obligation to respect and obey the king whose name was pronounced, whose person glorified and for whose well being and continued reign a prayer was said in all the church's sermons and ceremonies.

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[38]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 101.

[39]Greenfield, op. cit., p. 28.

The political significance of this particular role of the
church to a leader of traditional society such as Ethiopia, where
the legitimacy o- government depended on traditional and religious
factors (explanations), rather than on its efficiency in rendering
social, economic and political service to the nation, cannot be
overstated. The existence of such economic and political entangle-
ment between the sacred and secular institutions and the fact that
the head of each institution was automatically an official with
a prescribed function within the other institutional structure
indicated the religio-political nature of the Ethiopian monarchic
political system.

According to one noted scholar there were two classifications
of a traditional religio-political system; namely, the "organic"
and the "church" models. According to this authority:

> The organic model is characterized by the conception of
> fusion of religious and political functions performed by a
> unitary structure . . . .
> The Church model is characterized by close alliance of
> two distinct institutions, government and the ecclesiastical
> body with extensive interchanging of political and religious
> functions.[40]

Since the church and the state in Ethiopia existed as
separate entities but among other things interchanged political
and religious functions, the political system was best represented
by the second type. However, although in theory the power relation-
ship between the two institutions was that of state over church
as opposed to church over state, or a bipolar balance of power,

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[40]Donald E. Smith, _Religion and Political Development_
(Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), pp. 7-8.

in practice, at least until the abolition of the monarchic system,
the church was an equal political partner of the state based on
actual bipolar balance of power. By way of constitutional promulga-
tion and administrative reform Haile Selassie endeavored to sub-
ordinate the church to the throne. He technically accomplished
this by detaching the church from its external source of authority;
by acquiring the authority to appoint and dismiss the top church
officials; and by asserting his top official position within the
church hierarchy. However, because of the church's economic strong-
hold and continued influence over the agrarian society, its political
power persisted. As a result, not only had the successful opposition
of the church to the Emperor's plan of land reform and the administra-
tion of church services contrasted its political power, vis-a-vis
the Emperor, but its conservatism on matters of economic reform won
it the support of the feudal land lords. As Luther has observed,
being aware of this added political power:

> The Emperor has found it expedient very circumspectly
> even in secular matters; in religious affairs he is doubly
> careful to observe all forms of the Church authority and to
> avoid any action that might give the clergy the impression
> that they are gradually being edged out of the picture.[41]

The historical antagonism between the two religious groups
coupled with this strategy presented a political dilemma potentially
capable of national disintegration for the simple reason that
while it appeased the vested economic and political interest of
the Christian population, it challenged the political aspiration of

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[41]Ernest W. Luther, Ethiopia Today (Stanford: Stanford
University Press, 1958), p. 35.

revolutionary Muslims within the country, including their sympathizers in surrounding Muslim states, such as Somalia and Middle Eastern Arab states.

In the following chapter we shall present political relationships between Muslims and Christians as related to the problem of national unity.

Chapter 4

A SURVEY OF SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIPS
BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS

With the rise of Islam around the Horn of Africa and the
Ethiopian territorial expansion, the religious purity of the Chris-
tian kingdom was lost. Ever since these historical developments,
which began soon after the seventh century, the history of the
country was dominated by both internal and external political
struggles between the conquering Christian society, the vanquished
Muslim principalities and their distant sympathizers--particularly
Egypt, southern Arabia and Turkey.

In this chapter we shall examine the social, economic and
political differences between the Muslims and the Christians, and
how they were interrelated with the religious beliefs. We shall
do this both by illustrating some of the differences in custom,
status and political outlook, and by showing how these had their
basis in religion. We shall also use historical facts, presented
in a chronological order, as a method of showing how these dif-
ferences affected the two groups in their political relationships.
There were four primary sources used for the studies in this chapter.[*]

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[*]These sources were as follows: Robert L. Hess, Ethiopia:
The Modernization of Autocracy (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University
Press, 1970); Donald N. Levine, Wax and Gold: Tradition and

According to Trimingham and others, contrary to the development which followed the birth and expansion of Islam, previous Ethiopian relations with the people of Arabia were those of mutual friendship; even though Ethiopia was saved from the first religious war (Jihad) for having sheltered the disciples of Mohammed when they fled southern Arabia to avoid persecution, the harmonious relationship was soon over.[1]

Confronted by Islamic penetration, the forebearers of contemporary Abyssinians (Amhara-Tigre) began to identify themselves and their Christian oriented values as superior to all other peoples and values. As a result, religion and religious values became the primary determining factors for the everyday dichotomy of "we" and "they" as well as "ours" and "theirs." According to the self-image of the Christians they were not only believers in the only true God, but also the people chosen by him, therefore superior to all other people and the just rulers of the land.[2] They conceived the Emperor as the "Elect of God," an idea probably derived from the pre-Christian belief that the emperors were descended from King Solomon through his son Menelik I, and therefore all descendents of Menelik, through his immediate descent from the

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Innovation in Ethiopian Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); George A. Lipsky, Ethiopia: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture (New York: HRAF Press, 1962), and Spencer J. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia (New York: Barnes and Noble, Incorporated, 1965).

[1]Trimingham, op. cit., p. xiii.

[2]Donald N. Levine, "Ethiopia: Identity, Authority and Realism," Political Culture and Political Development, Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba (eds.) (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 254.

House of David, were cousins to Jesus. They also believed that
the Ark of the Covenant was brought from Israel by Menelik and
therefore they became the chosen people of God rather than the
Israelites.[3] The divine mission had been transferred from the
Kings of Israel to the Kings of Solomon. It was their firm con-
viction that any conflict between them and others could and should
be resolved in their favor, since their desires and acts were
God's will expressed through the "chosen people." Hence, nothing
meant more to the early Christians and their tradition-bound
descendants than the preservation of their religion and the social
and political institutions it permeated. In Levine's words:

> In the hierarchy of values which sustained the traditional
> Abyssinian social order, that of the transcendental religious
> orientation represented by the Orthodox Church may be said
> to have held the paramount position. This is the sense in
> which, as has so often been remarked, religion has been
> Abyssinian's only truly unifying factor throughout the centuries.[4]

Fortified with such a sense of messianism and notion of
justification, the Ethiopians viewed and judged the world around
them in religious terms. There was little or no room for objectivity
or compromise in their attitudes and dealings with the people
they had been struggling so long to paternalize culturally and
politically. In the process, not only did the occasional natural
insubordination of their political subjects coincide with the
misconceptions held by the Amhara-Tigre, but also their miscon-
ception was perpetuated by their relative success in subduing their

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[3]Hess, op. cit., p. 37.

[4]Levine, Wax and Gold, pp. 212 and 254.

insubordinate religious groups (taken as a proof of Christian
manifest destiny, however wishful and futile that might have been).

Steeped in the mores of their respective religions, Muslims
and Christians followed strict social customs and dietary habits
that readily distinguished them from each other. The nature of
their relationship was governed by their respective attitudes toward
each other's customs. Thus, for example, the dyed cotton thread
that all Christians wore around their necks was not only an open
affirmation of their religion, but also an identification mark
that physically distinguished them from "infidels." From the
Christians' point of view, most Muslim customs were not only odd
but despicable. As an example, Muslim men were likened to women
(who according to Amhara-Tigre belief were inferior to men) for the
way they dressed themselves--a skirt-like cloth instead of trousers,
and even more for their habit of sitting to urinate rather than
standing as did the Christian male.

Equally wrong, and therefore despised by the Christians,
were some of the Muslim marriage practices. The Christians believed
the Muslim customs of having more than one wife at a time, of marrying
one's niece, or of marrying a brother's wife upon his death were
strange and immoral, being contrary to the dictates of Christian
law and custom, even though religious law was the basis of both
group's customs. For the same reason, settling a murder case by
accepting financial compensation, licking food off one's fingers
after meals and not being circumcised at the proper age were con-
sidered wrong, and from the Christian point of view reflected the
inferior and barbaric quality of the Muslims. These differences

In customs and their implications were so important that it was
not at all unusual to see a Muslim guest in a Christian home (or
vice versa) being served his meal separately from the host and
his family. There was no question that underlying many of these
social taboos and practices of each custom was religion. Thus,
in the eyes of traditional Christians, all non-Coptic Christians,
pagans, and Muslims were despised and labeled "Aremene," which
simply means cruel and un-Christian.

> The Amhara conception of humanity is radically unequali-
> terian. A person's chief characteristics, in the Amhara view,
> are whether he is male or female, elder or youth, Amhata or
> non-Amhara, Christian or non-Christian, free or slave, and
> well born or poor. Each of these dichotomies falls into
> superior or inferior pattern . . . . The distinction between
> Orthodox Christian and all other religions is all or none.[5]

There being no culture and religious differences between the Amhara
and Tigre, the latter's conception of humanity was not any different
from that of the Amhara. Similarly, Muslims thought of Christians
as people of worthless religion or "coufry," which loosely trans-
lated meant heathen.

However, before and for quite some time after the rise
of Islam, the consequences of these mutual misconceptions were
minimal partly because the two groups of people inhabited geo-
graphically separate areas, each maintaining and living under its
own political and social system and posing no serious cultural
and political threat to the other. This fact was noted by
Trimingham, who stated that "the persecution of those whose

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[5]Levine, "Ethiopia," p. 257.

faith differed from that of the ruler consolidated the community feeling, . . ."[6]

Traditionally, the Christian population was confined to the north and central mountain regions, while pagans and Muslims inhabited the lowlands stretching out around the foothills. This isolated but peaceful existence ended for a number of reasons. First, the difference between peoples of the two geographic areas was made more pronounced by the spread of Islam among formerly pagan people. Second, as a result of a systematic territorial expansion of the Muslims and Christians, the two peoples were no longer geographically separated. Third, although much later on (the sixteenth century), Christians were even more alarmed by the penetrations of Islam and Galla peoples into their traditional homeland. As a result, not only the opposing religions came to a head-on collision but also political values and institutions came into conflict as the authoritarian Christians began to assert their political dominance over the traditionally equalitarian Afar, Somali and Galla peoples.

> Unlike the unequalitarian Amhara (Christian), the Galla (predominately Muslim) is democratic and equalitarian in its political culture . . . . In this respect nothing could be further apart than the political cultures of Amhara and Galla.[7]

As has been shown in Chapter 2 equalitarianism is also true of Somali and Afar-Sono political traditions.

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[6]Trimingham, op. cit., pp. 144-45.

[7]Levine, "Ethiopia," p. 270.

As opposed to the monarchial system of the Christian Amhara-Tigre, where the monarch was divinely guided, even sacred, but where there was a separate head of religion, the Muslim tribes were equalitarian and their informally elected "tribal chiefs," although they were not sacred, appear "to have combined both political and religious roles."[8] In other words, it seems the tribal chief also served as the head of the religious sect, and for this reason politics was seldom differentiated from religion. But given the nature of the relationship of the two peoples before the rise of Islam and the extent that religion overarched the general culture and custom of each, religion was a major factor of rivalry. As a matter of fact, this has been the unanimous conclusion of scholars on the subject. For example, Lipsky stated that "the Arabs are rated low by the Amhara and Tigre because they are Muslim and engage in trade."[9]

The influence of the Christian religion on the people's attitude toward Islam was observable not only from the fact that "the values of warfare and religion were further harmonized by the symbolism of the emperor, Lion of Judah," whose significance was due to religious myth, but also from the fact that traditionally most Ethiopian emperors identified themselves with a notable Christian defending Roman emperor, such as Constantine, by taking such names as their throne names.[10]

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[8]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 72.   [9]Ibid., p. 73.

[10]Levine, Wax and Gold, p. 174.

In addition to religious and political differences, a third
factor that aggravated the rival groups of people was economic
in nature. As the Christian highlanders succeeded in establishing
their political authority over the surrounding pagan and Muslim
population, their economic expoitation was no less a point of anta-
gonism. Traditionally, Ethiopia had no standing army. When the
need arose to defend the country and the religion or to expand
both the religion and political authority, the devout Christian
warlords, their vassals and serfs (to give them European class
names) made themselves available to their divinely guided monarch.
These warriors were paid no monthly salary or rations; instead
they lived on booty and the spoils of war. There was no code
of military discipline to restrain their economic appetite, or
their treatment of the enemy; neither was there a restraining guilt
feeling since their religious father, the clergy and the church,
had given their permission, along with their blessings, to loot
and pillage. As noted earlier, the clergy gave its moral support
and approval to the military expedition not only by following and
praying for them, but also by temporarily lifting the fasting regu-
lations for all engaged in war. Once the enemy was subdued, their
land automatically became the property of the King, who normally
divided it between the military settlers, the absentee landlords,
the church, and the local people in equal ratio. Thus, from the

time of defeat onward, the economic fate and status of the majority

of the local population was that of sharecroppers or gabar.[11]

The system of landholding and subsequent economic inequity

prevalent throughout the country has been stated more boldly by

Lipsky:

> The economic, political and social life of the country
> is dominated by the Amhara and Tigrai peoples, and it is their
> system and their standard that are being imposed wherever possible
> on the other ethnic groups.[12]

Indeed, the significance attached to religious differences

was such that no other human quality, attribute or achievement

played as important a role as religion in determining the social

status of a person. For example, according to the Christian Ethiopian

there were two groups of nobility, namely the mequanent or nobility

and the Kahenat or clergy, based respectively on family background

and on profession. However, while it was quite possible for a

Christian person of an obscure family background to attain the

status of nobility by virtue of wealth within his religious group,

it was almost impossible for a wealthy Muslim to be considered

noble among the Christian society.

> The wealthier Abyssinian merchant was accorded very high
> status, comparable at times to that of the nobility. If an
> Arab, Armenian, or Muslim Abyssinian, however, his status
> would be tainted by that disesteem felt for all outside the
> ethnic pale.[13]

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[11]Richard Greenfield, Ethiopia, A New Political History
(New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1965), pp. 172-73.

[12]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 62.

[13]Levine, Wax and Gold, p. 149.

It should perhaps be noted here that this status being dependent upon religious affiliation was predicated on the basis of the Amhara-Tigre Christian. The Christian convert, who was of course always from outside the Amhara-Tigre tribal groups, was still below the Amhara-Tigre on the social scale. He did, however, reach a higher social level than a non-Christian attained.

Although the criteria by which both Muslims and Christians judged the people both within and outside their respective groups included race, sex, wealth and national origin, it was religion which was the most crucial criteria. It was on the basis of religion that the Christians treated all Muslims alike, regardless of the other's ethnic, language, regional and political differences. The primary significance of religions identity has been confirmed by the numerous wars that were waged between the Christian and the Muslim people throughout the centuries and existed as the major ingredient of the political turmoil. It is these wars which we shall consider in the rest of this chapter.

The earliest known incident of confrontation between Christian and Muslim is said to have begun some time during the sixth century. It is noted during this period that first King Kaleb of Ethiopia and later his son's viceroy, Abrha, launched military assaults on south Arabia to stop their persecution of Christian minorities.[14] After an unsuccessful attempt to destroy Mecca itself, Abrha built a temple in the northern part of the kingdom as a

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[14]Trimingham, op. cit., p. 41, and Taddesse Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia (Oxford: The University Press, 1972), p. 25.

counter-attraction to the pilgrimage to the holy city of Islam.
Both the military interventions and the construction of a temple
to undermine the importance of Mecca clearly indicate that religious
difference was a factor from the beginning. Gradually, with the
spread of Islam along the coastal areas, Ethiopia was surrounded
by Muslims. These newly Islamized people began to monopolize
long distance trade into and out of Ethiopia by refusing to allow
free passage and by molesting Ethiopian nationals and agents doing
business with them along the trade routes and in the market places.
In retaliation the Christian kings not only pursued a discriminatory
policy against Muslim merchants in the interior, but also began
a series of military campaigns against the outlying Muslim princi-
palities. The most outstanding of such incidents was a military
encounter between Amda-Siyon and the ruler of Ifat during the
fourteenth century.[15]

It is believed that in their struggle for equal treatment
and religious freedom, the Muslim converts within and around Ethiopia
began to seek support from Egypt.

> The increasing number of Ethiopian converts to Islam, mainly
> along the trade routes and in market towns, demanded complete
> freedom of worship in Christian Provinces. (. . . like in
> Egypt and elsewhere do Christians)
> It seems that these requests were met with the adamant
> refusal of Christian kings and tenacious opposition of local
> clergy. Naturally, the Ethiopian Muslims approached Cairo
> through their commercial associates, and appealed reciprocal
> rights of worship as were enjoyed by the Coptics. Thus, there
> began the historic role of Egypt as the champion of Islam in
> Ethiopia, a position first assumed by the Fatimid Caliphate,
> and which has characterized Ethio-Egyptian relations through-
> out the centuries.[16]

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[15]Trimingham, op. cit., p. 132.   [16]Ibid., p. 46.

It is not clear whether Egypt's interest was a sincere
compassion for the Ethiopian Muslims or if it was actually motivated
by desire for controlling the source of the Red Sea. In any event,
there is no doubt about its political ambition to control the
source of the Blue Nile, either by annexing the portion of Ethiopia
where the source of the river was located or by helping the Muslim
minority become the dominant political leader of Ethiopia.

> For centuries a fear but half-expressed and operating on
> a very different series of preoccupations exercised the minds
> of Egyptian rulers. They feared and wondered if one day some
> Ethiopian being might divert the flow of the Nile.
> In 1706 Talka Hammonot I, who was then having a dispute
> with Egypt, wrote in his letter to the pasha of Cairo, "The
> Nile would be sufficient to punish you, since God has put
> into power his fountain, his outlet and his increase, and
> we can dispose of the same to do you harm."[17]

In 1769, the same threat was repeated by Tekele Hamanot.

However, they didn't make direct military intervention
or an alliance with the Muslims until after the sixteenth century,
since Islam had not effectively penetrated the interior prior
to that time. Instead of an alliance, the Islam Egyptian strategy
had been to try to influence the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Coptic
Church, who was himself an Egyptian. This strategy was scandalous
and provocative enough to maintain a mutual distrust between the
two countries.

Thus, throughout the centuries that followed, it was Egypt's
consistent strategy to create a favorable political condition
for itself and for Muslims as a whole by influencing the king and

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[17]David Mathew, Ethiopia: The Study of a Polity, 1540-
1575 (London: Eyre Spottiswoode, 1947), p. 16.

his Christian subjects through the appointment of Egyptian patriarchs

as heads of the Ethiopian Church.

> The struggle with Islam was further embittered by the
> fact that the Coptic Church in its dark days sometimes took
> the side of Islam. Acting in collusion with the Muslim rulers
> of Egypt, the Church sometimes appointed abunas who worked
> for the promotion of Islamic interests in Abyssinia itself.
> Thus, political officials of Egypt were directly involved
> in the selection and appointment of abunas to Ethiopia from
> Egypt.[18]

Archbishops George and Aaba Sawiro were probably the most

extreme examples of those patriarchs appointed with the approval

of Egypt's political officials to serve their political interests

in Ethiopia under the guise of their official position.

Patriarch George was accused of being an "avoracious taker

of bribe and a withholder of Church funds!" After refunding the

"illgotten gains," he was deported to Egypt.[19]

Abba Zawiro, in dedication to his political officials in

Egypt, built seven mosques for the Muslim minority in Ethiopia.

In 1080 A.D., upon finding out about the political role of the

supposedly loyal religious father, the Christian king destroyed

the mosques, put the Muslim merchants under more stringent political

control and imprisoned the patriarch. In retaliation, Egypt estab-

lished a similar policy against the Copts within its state. Thus,

Ethiopia was left in the dilemma of either putting up with a pro-

Egypt, pro-Islam religious leader or having no religious leader.

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[18]Trimingham, op. cit., pp. 63-65.

[19]Greenfield, op. cit., p. 32.

Such was the case between 1250 and 1285. During this time,
because of political conflict between Egypt, Yeman and Ethiopia,
Ethiopia closed its border to Muslim merchants. As reciprocity,
Egypt recalled the patriarch, once again leaving the country without
a religious leader. This was very disturbing to the psyche of
the Christian society, which generally had the tendency to associate
national misfortunes with the absence of a religious leader. For
example, the rise of a pagan local queen, who attacked the church
and the clergy between 979-1003 was thought to be divine retribution,
for during that time they were without a bishop. Such beliefs
made the presence of a religious leader an absolute necessity.

Therefore, a negotiation for the return of the patriarch
was begun and an agreement was made whereby Ethiopia opened its
border to Muslim merchants in return for a new prelate and access
to the holy city of Jerusalem.[20] Lacking both the religious authority
and the prescribed number of bishops required to consecrate a
patriarch on its own, the Ethiopian Church had to depend on the
Church of Alexandria.

The technical and political problems that determined the
status of the Ethiopian Church are better understood from the
following quotation:

> In the reign of Patriarch Galsniel (1131-45), the Ethiopian
> king asked Abba Mukael to order more than the prescribed number
> of seven bishops in Ethiopia. But the metropolitan declined
> to do this without patriarchal authorization from Cairo. The
> Caliph apparently agreed. However, Patriarch Gabriel explained to
> the Caliph the implication of Ethiopian church having more than
> seven bishops. If the number reached ten, the Ethiopians would

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[20]Trimingham, op. cit., p. 70.

in the future be able to appoint their own metropolitan, or even patriarch, and would thus be completely independent of Egyptian influence. When he heard this, the Caliph reversed his decision and agreed with the patriarch in his refusal to let the Ethiopians have any more bishops.[21]

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church freed itself from this type of religious blackmail only recently. In 1950, with the copperation of Egyptian religious leaders, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church acquired full independence. But as can be seen from the nature of the relationships of the two countries both before and after 1950, political influence through church officials was not the only strategy and as such the antagonism was far from being over.

Out of necessity, the nature of the Muslim relationship with Christian Ethiopia always depended on the internal political situation of Ethiopia. Around the twelfth century, perhaps because of the controversy concerning the alliance of the religious leader with Muslim political leaders, the enthusiasm of Ethiopian leaders for the Orthodox Church seems to have been at its lowest ebb. One indication of this fact is the political success of the Zagwe dynasty (1137-1270) in usurping the throne. Since no one group could succeed without the support of the church, it is likely that the usurpers got the acknowledgement of the church to their claim. But once the less "religion fanatical" Zagwe dynasty took over, they were not only passive about the expansion of Islam but also separated the state from the church. During this time Islam made a significant advance into Ethiopia proper, first by immigration and then by mass conversion of the pagan society. It seems the

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[21]Tamrat, op. cit., p. 56.

church, having been alienated and alarmed by the relative advance

of Islam under the Zagwe rulers, decided to help the ousted line

of dynasty regain power. Another fact that suggests that this

was the case was that right after the re-establishment of the

old dynasty, evangelization of the kingdom became the highest

point on the list of the state's national priorities. In addition,

the religious sentiment of many of the succeeding kings became

more and more enthusiastic as manifested by the national policy

and role in church affairs of Amda Syon and Zara Yakob. Further-

more, as shown in Chapter 2, the church was most responsible for

the re-establishment of the Solomonic dynasty.

Thus, the initial success of Islam was met by a sudden

revival of Christianity. The result was more and more incidents

of military confrontation from which the Christians managed to

emerge the victors.

After an end was brought to the devastating assault of

the pagan queen Yodit and the controversy between Ethiopia, Egypt

and the church subsided, Ethiopian attention was turned to palace

politics.

With the re-establishment of the Solomonic dynasty in 1270,

the relationship between the government and the church was once

again normalized. Thus, invigorated by revived religious zeal and

newly regained political partnership between the Solomonic dynasty

and the Orthodox Church, the Christian warlords were determined

to reconvert the Islamized pagan and to annex the threatening Muslim

state of Yefat that had come into existence during the tenth century

by exploiting their internal situation.

At the same time, like the newly founded Muslim princi-
palities were doing with Egypt and Turkey, Ethiopia began to cultivate
friendship with the Christian rulers of Portugual. By the thirteenth
century the Muslim state of Yefat stretched from the coast of Somalia
to the Red Sea and included the Dahlak archepelago and Massawa.
Westward Islam had penetrated as far as Arrusi, Sidamo and the
eastern part of Shoa. By then the traditionally pagan peoples of
Sidamo and Arrusi were Islamized.

After the unfailing struggle by Yekuno Amlak and his grandson,
Amda Syon, against the adjacent Muslim principalities (1270-1344),
the latter was recognized as their overlord in 1329. But, as this
arrangement was unpopular, even fragile, the struggle was far from
being over. We are told that beginning from the time of Amda Syon
(1314-44):

> The war of attrition between the central Christian high-
> lands and the Muslim sultinates, entrenched all along the
> eastern and southern fringes of the Abyssinian plateau, is
> the principal feature of Ethiopian history during the following
> two centuries.[22]

At the very time that Amda Syon was asserting his political
authority over the neighboring Muslim states, the Mamluk sultan
of Egypt was persecuting its Coptic subjects. Assuming the tra-
ditional role of Christian kings, "Amda Syon threatened him by
telling him of his intention to do the same to the Muslims in
Ethiopia and even starving the people of Egypt by diverting the
course of the Nile."[23]

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[22]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 114.

[23]Trimingham, op. cit., p. 71.

The threat was partially carried out by Sayfa Arad (1344-72) when he seized all Egyptian merchants within the kingdom, killing some while forcing others to become Christian. Egypt reciprocated this act by further persecution of Christians and by imprisoning patriarch Marcos in 1352 in Alexandria.

Once again, as we will see in the following pages of this chapter, the antagonism was opened up as a result of Egypt's policy toward the Copts and the apparent interest in hegemonizing Ethiopian Muslims.

The local Muslims also played their part by not only capturing an Ethiopian ambassador on his way home from Cairo, but by putting him to death for his refusal to become Muslim.

Although formerly a tacit provision was made for Muslims to practice their religion within certain areas of Ethiopia, people in the immediately conquered or disputed areas were constantly forced to change their religion as proof of their political loyalty to the conquering group. More than ever before this gave the struggle between the state of Yefat and Ethiopia the appearance of a religious war. Thus, at the end of the fourteenth century Haq ad-Din, a Muslim leader, called upon the formerly semi-independent sultans to unite under his leadership and raise their arms against "Abyssinian infidels." The result was a contradiction to the Christian initial success, for they not only suffered territorial loss and destruction of churches, but were also humiliated by being forced to apostacize on the spot. However, after a long period of reorganization, in 1415 the Christians met their enemy in an all-out war under the leadership of King Yeshaq (1414-1429) and

extended their political jurisdiction over the Muslim people from
the lowlands of Ethiopia to the island of Zaila where Muslim leader,
lad ad Din, was finally killed.[24]

Although the pendulum of success in these wars never per-
manently ceased occilating between the warring groups, this last
defeat was a relatively long-lasting setback to the local Muslims
and their co-religionalists abroad.

The evangelization mission that began in 1270 was progressing
fast, seeming to have reached its climax following the military
success and relative national tranquility, but seen in retrospect,
evangelization was to go still further.

Like Amda Syon and Saifa Arad, King Dawit (1382-1411) paved
the way for this historic eventuality by reducing in power and
killing Muslim leaders.

But Zara Yakob (1434-1468) was revered more than any of
his predecessors, not only for extending the frontier of his kingdom
further still, but, most importantly, for his personal interest
in the religion and his official involvement in its extension.
He was credited for the organization and doctrine of the church
which has lasted until the present time. By way of discouraging
the pagan and Islamic religions, he was known to have authorized
the Christian population collectively and individually to stop
people from non-Christian religions by killing them if necessary.

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[24] I. M. Lewis, The Modern History of Somaliland From Nation
to State (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1965),
pp. 25-26.

As he strived to create a uniform religion throughout the kingdom, he not only became a merciless zealot, but was constantly haunted by the presence of Islam abroad and along the frontier of his empire. Trimingham states that Zara Yaqob knew,

> . . . the endemic incursions from Adal, for although continually defeated it could always recover because of its links with the wider Islamic world. To counter act its influence the king made a great endeavor to reform and unify the religion of his own kingdom and to establish relationships with the wider Christian world.[25]

Following the military success of the Christian society, evangelization and political expansion continued through the reigns of the next two kings--Baeda Mariam and Naod (1469-1508).

But shortly after the beginning of the sixteenth century, political power within the various Muslim principalities gradually passed from the less fanatic Walasham to the more resolute Amirs (different Moslem religious tribes). Soon these leaders, secretly equipped with modern arms from Turkey, and united in a common cause, began to challenge the Christian rulers' overlordship. Thus, the longest and the most devastating religious war against Ethiopia began in 1527 under the leadership of the memorable Imam Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim Al-Ghazi (1506-1543) who was called Ahmad Gragn by the Christians.

As the war dragged on, Turkey, upon Ahmad's request, sent a military contingent while Ethiopia desperately awaited similar assistance from the Portuguese. By the time the Portuguese military unit of four hundred men arrived (in 1541) only the north and

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[25]Trimingham, op. cit., pp. 75-6.

central mountain region of Ethiopia was left unconquered. In
the defeated area nine out of ten of the Christian people had
been Islamized by force, "and, as the most important repository
of the cultural heritage of Christian Ethiopia, the Church was
a special target for the destructive furies of the Imam."[26] Their
king, Lebna Dengal (1508-1540) had been killed in battle. So
certain did complete military victory seem the Imam had already
sent the Turkish troops back to their country when his advancing
force was met by the Portuguese and Ethiopian army.

Surprised and worried, weakened by the new encounter, he
once again sought reinforcement and got Arab, Turkish and Albanian
mercenaries. However, his force was destroyed in 1542 near Laka
Tanya in a battle in which Ahmad himself was killed.[27]

Even though this most crucial war against Ahmad Gragn
was won, the threat of renewed religious wars was already in the
making. Exploiting the wartime situation, and sometimes driven
by their Somali enemies, the Galla people had penetrated into
Ethiopia. Most of these formerly pagan people were Islamized
during and after the war and more of them were still coming into
the country. Although the Galla people were initially an equal
victim of Muslim invaders (by whom they were pushed and Islamized),
the Christian attitude about them was such that they neither realized
that fact nor treated them differently from the other Muslims.[28]

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[26]Ibid., p. 301.   [27]Lewis, op. cit., pp. 26-7.

[28]John Drysdale, The Somali Dispute (New York: Frederick A.
Praeger, Publisher, 1964), p. 34; Lewis, op. cit., pp. 27-8, and
Lipsky, op. cit., p. 12.

Thus, having no alternative, the various groups of Gallas, whether they were already converts to Islam or were still pagan, began to struggle against the Christians, both in alliance with other Muslims and on their own.[29]

While Ethiopia was recovering from its longest war, Turkey and Ahmad's successors were forming an alliance. In 1557 Turkey occupied Massawa, the northern frontier of Ethiopia.

By the time Massawa was liberated from the Turks in 1559, Ahmad's successor was attacking from the east. It was only after an exhausting struggle in which King Galawdewos (1540-1559) was killed and the southern border left open to maximum Galla infiltration that the eastern Muslims were repelled.

During the reign of Sarsa Dengel (1563-1597) the Turks made a second attempt to get a foothold in the north, this time in alliance with a local Christian ruler. But in 1579 the king expelled the Turks and drove the Abar-Somali Muslims in the east past their stronghold, Harar.[30]

Following this, there was a period of relative peace in which much of the attention of the Christian rulers was devoted to policies governing their relationship with the Portuguese, the local Muslims and other non-Coptic ethnic elements under their rule. Thus, in 1668 the Muslims of the highlands in the north and all other non-Christian ethnic groups were "debarred from owning lands and engaging in agriculture." Trimingham states further that these restrictions and general social ostracism led them

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[29]Trimingham, op. cit., pp. 86-9.   [30]Ibid., pp. 97-8.

not only to proficiency in trade and handicraft but also helped
them to unite in a common cause and to dominate the trades.[31]

Now free of their traditional enemy, the Christian population
was also taking a second look at their relationship with the
Portuguese, who were slowly influencing the royal family to accept
Roman Catholicism as the national religion. But with the revolt
of the Christian populace the king was forced to restore the old
religion and evict the Portuguese.

At the same time Egypt, who traditionally was a supporter
of Ethiopian Muslims, took the opportunity to try to execute a
long-standing desire for the control of the Nile and the Red Sea.
Their ambition was partially realized when the occupied part of
Eretrea, thereby gaining control of the Red Sea. Simultaneously,
they gained control of Harar, a control which they were able to
retain for four years.

Shortly after solving their problem with the Portuguese
by expelling them, the Amhara-Tigre dynasty began an internal power
struggle that left the country in a state of anarchic regionalism
called the Zemenemesafent (Era of Princes), from 1769-1855. This
political development led to a further expansion of Islam among
both the pagan people and disenchanted Christians.

During this time Muslims were the dominant traders within
and around the country. As they were considered a necessary part
of the economic life of the country, they were permitted to travel
both within and outside of their regions. In the course of their

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[31]Ibid., p. 103.

travels, unchecked by the Christians, they were able to expand their religion by Islamizing people along the trade routes and in the market places. According to Trimingham, it was during this period of internal struggle that the formerly Christian nomadic people of Eretrea were converted.[32]

The circumstances also led to the emergence of the Galla dynasty, which was committed to the cause of Islam while officially professing Christianity. Although there is no conclusive evidence, it is generally believed that members of the dynastic family gave support to Islam.[33]

During this period the Islamic religion continued to expand, particularly within the province of Eretrea. It was this invasion by an outside power and the expansion of Islam that finally unified the Christians. According to Trimingham, ". . . for the first time (1876) all Abyssinians as a whole were called upon to protect their land and faith and they responded. Emperor John proclaimed a mass levy which took on the character of a crusade against the Muslims."[34]

One of John's dreams was to establish a complete religious unity within his empire. Thus, by his order, in 1878 a council of the church was convened and an edict issued. This edict said, among other things, that all non-Christians within the country must be converted to Christianity within a given number of years, in no event to exceed five.

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[32]Ibid., p. 112.   [33]Ibid., p. 111.

[34]Ibid., p. 121.

However, shortly after the edict was issued, it was ignored and the Muslims were ordered to build Christian churches in their areas and to pay tithes to their parish priests. Also, all non-Christian state officials had to either accept Christianity or resign their positions. So, while many did convert, there were also those who resigned and moved to Muslim areas, causing the plan to be considered unsuccessful, and shortly after John's death (1888) the Muslims were granted full religious freedom (1889) by the new ruler, Menelik II.[35] This was done to try to ensure the political loyalty of those Galla who by virtue of marital relations had come to hold government positions since 1721.

In contrast to his predecessor, Emperor Menelik took a more diplomatic approach. As his ambition was the territorial expansion of the empire, he directly attached the question of religion to the political relationship that the new areas had with the state. Menelik promised that the question of religious freedom would be based on the cooperation of the area to be acquired. If military victory was gained by acquisition rather than battle, that group would be allowed to maintain their religion, as well as their local political autonomy.

However, if resistance to the occupation of a territory was shown, then the people of that area would be treated as con-quered subjects under military rule and shown no mercy. "Thus, while Islam was recognized in the southwestern Muslim kingdom, Christianity was established elsewhere."[36]

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[35]Ibid., pp. 122-23.   [36]Ibid., p. 129.

In addition to this religious concession the Galla dynasty (Abba Jifar) of the southwest was left in power for its peaceful acceptance of Menelik's suzerainty until it was abolished in 1932 by Haile Selassie. Traditionally, the political allegiance of this and other militarily conquered people was expressed by payment of a yearly tribute.

After the partition of the adjacent parts of Africa by Britain and Italy in 1908, Menelik's territory was recognized and an international boundary was drawn. This boundary comprised Ethiopia in its present form excluding Eretrea. With this territorial acquisition Ethiopia was able to assert its authority over people who previously were only under its nominal suzerainty. After that, open rivalry between Muslim and Christian was minimal, although an undercurrent of political tension based on consciousness of religious differences persisted.

As Hess noted:

> In the name of national unity, the Emperor has declared that Christian or Muslim, all are Ethiopians. Whether all Muslims want to be Ethiopians, however, is doubtful. The continual resistance of Muslims in Eretrea, Harar, Sidamo, Arussi and Bale provinces to the policy of national unity indicates that the end of the religious struggle is only official.[37]

In the following chapter we shall explore more fully the contemporary developments governing the relationship of the people in question and analyze the social and political forces at work along with the impact of the historical facts which we have just reviewed.

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[37] Hess, op. cit., p. 112.

Chapter 5

CONTEMPORARY POLITICS OF NATIONAL UNITY AND NATIONALISM

Problems of national unity or the lack of it have been
fundamental in the experience of nation-states seeking to modernize,
and Ethiopia is no exception.

Given the absence of political freedom and the presence
of overwhelming fear of repercussion, whether the conformity of a
given national group to political authorities is a consequence
of forced unity (power politics), or a result of shared aspiration
is hard, if not impossible, to know. Thus, the relatively long
and seemingly peaceful political co-existence of Muslims and
Christians under Haile Selassie must not be confused for a successful
national integration. Instead the real explanation of the rela-
tionship between the people must be sought from a study of the
political system and the national aspiration that marked his leader-
ship. This is what we shall study in this chapter.

As might be expected, upon becoming the leader of the
country, one of Haile Selassie's immediate political tasks was
the integration of the many ethnic and religious groups which
had been brought together by Menelik's great conquest. This was
to be accomplished by strengthening (but renovating) the tradi-
tional political system through gradual political reform. It is

doubtful, however, that the reform was more than a political token.

As one observer has summarized:

> There have been no radical changes in the Amhara orientation
> to nationhood under His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I.
> The values which informed this orientation under Menelik have
> remained the same: the Solomonic monarchy as the locus of
> sovereignty, territorial integrity, national self-determination,
> and a tempered emphasis on Orthodox Christianity. What has
> happened during Haile Selassie's long and eventful regime
> is that these themes have been enriched by new experiences
> and the accretion of new meanings. The net result has been
> a slow but continuous evolution of a sense of Ethiopian nation-
> hood consistent with the traditional Amhara beliefs and values.[1]

It seems that political necessity rather than a free-willed

personal political preference motivated Haile Selassie's determina-

tion to preserve the basic aspects of the traditional political

system and the traditional conception of nationhood. The historically

contending groups of people that he endeavored to unite created a

political dilemma, since the satisfaction of one group meant the

dissatisfaction of the other. Haile Selassie had neither the

power nor the willingness to take the political risk of being

labeled pro-Islam by initiating drastic reform, for that would

have undermined the Amhara-Tigre's vested political and economic

interest and thereby his own power base. It also was not certain

that this would win the political loyalty of the Muslim population.

Moreover, regardless of his motive, the possibility of being suspected

by the Christian nobility and church officials of favoring Muslims

was always there. To a leader who had just witnessed, and even

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[1]Donald N. Levine, "Ethiopia: Identity, Authority and
Realism," Political Culture and Political Development, Lucian
W. Pye and Sidney Verba (eds.) (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton
University Press, 1965), p. 254.

possibly participated in, the downfall of his immediate political predecessor for the same reason, the danger of being suspected of leaning too much toward Islam was too great and not worth taking.

From the beginning, it was the aspiration of Haile Selassie to maintain the national integrity and at the same time recover the adjoining areas of Eretrea and the Afar. Yet, if this national project was to be realized, it was necessary that the political life of the Muslims already within Ethiopia be made more attractive to them. This dilemma of reconciling historically antagonistic religious groups was further complicated by an increasing concern on the part of the Arab states, and Somalia, in the internal political life of their co-religionists within Ethiopia. For, according to one observer:

> The major internal problem in the Horn of Africa is the eventual conflict between Somali nationalist aspirations and Ethiopian expansionism in defense against these aspirations.[2]

Castagno also notes that "in 1956 an Egyptian official was expelled from Ethiopia for unduly interfering in questions concerning the Muslim population."[3]

In the 1950's Egypt and Ethiopia were engaged in a radio propaganda warfare over the political loyalty of Ethiopian Muslims. The implications of both the Egyptian propaganda and the Somali nationalist aspirations against Ethiopia's national integrity was summarized by another observer.

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[2]A. A. Castagno, Jr., "Somalia," International Conciliation, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (March, 1959), p. 392.

[3]Ibid., p. 389.

The encouragement given to Somali nationalists by Cairo
is another source of concern for Ethiopia. The Islamic content
of Egyptian propaganda may have an influence not only on the
Somalis, but upon other Muslim minorities as well.
At stake for Ethiopia is not only one fifth of its terri-
tory, but the very foundations of the Ethiopian state. If
the principle of secession is conceded the Somalis, it may
stimulate similar demands by other sections of the population
and gravely threaten the continued existence of the Ethiopian
state in its present form.[4]

For all these reasons the nature of the Muslim-Christian

relationship was the major source of the national and international

problems of Ethiopia throughout Haile Selassie's long and relatively

peaceful reign. Nonetheless, the continued coexistence of formerly

warring and autonomous people under a central political authority

and the eventual inclusion of Eretrea to the kingdom was due to the

national and international political genius of Haile Selassie.

With this as the background, we shall discuss the politics

of national integration and assess its impact on the political

relationship of the people in the following pages of this chapter.

Concerning the state of the national unity of Ethiopia

under Haile Selassie, Greenfield, a most representative observer,

stated:

The process of creating a national atmosphere in which
the Ormo (Galla), many of whom are Muslim, and the other non-
Christian groups, can feel themselves fully integrated, is
not yet complete, though great advances have been made.[5]

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[4]Saadia Touval, Somali Nationalism, International Politics
and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa (Cambridge, Massachusetts:
Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 139.

[5]Richard Greenfield, Ethiopia, A New Political History
(New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, 1965), p. 47.

Yet, although there were many advances, the progress was slow. This was because national unity was sought without a radical departure from the monarchic political institution and without sacrificing the vested political interest of the Amhara-Tigre power group.

The national project as represented by the government official policy was the political equality and unity of the people, the territorial integrity of the nation, modernization, and the recovery of Eretrea and the Afar territory on the premise that formerly they were parts of Ethiopia. In practice these were to be accomplished without upsetting the traditional political system, its relation with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and the subsequently vested economic and political influence of the Christian aristocracy, to all of which the Muslims in and out of the country were consistently opposed.

First, notwithstanding the Muslim's discernable opposition, the monarchic institution, as well as the power of the Christian monarch, was left intact. In affirmation of the traditional political system it was legally required that the ruler of the country remain perpetually attached to the Solomonic dynastic line and to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The emperor was "the chief legislative, executive, religious, military, and judicial official. The parliament established by the Constitution is both in theory and practice subordinate to him."[6] With regard to the

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[6]George A. Lipsky, Ethiopia, Its People, Its Society, Its Culture (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1962), p. 169.

person and power of the Emperor the Constitution further stated,
"'By virtue of his Imperial blood, as well as by the anointing
which he has received, the person of the Emperor is sacred, his
dignity is invoilable and his power is indisputable.'"[7]

Second, overlapping this aspect of the traditionalism
and concentration of power was the continued political affiliation
of church and state. Although the church was no longer as powerful
as it was once, the legal and traditional relationship of church
and Emperor, as well as their interdependence, did not end.
Following tradition, Article 26 of the Constitution asserted that
"'The Ethiopian Orthodox Church . . . is the Established Church
of the Empire and is, as such, supported by the State.'"[8] In
another section of the Constitution the Emperor was acknowledged
as the head of the church and therefore legally obligated to support
and defend the Faith.

Resulting from the connection of the church with the state,
the Patriarch, as a representative of the church, was constitu-
tionally granted an automatic and permanent membership in the
second most powerful political organ of the government--the Crown
Council. The church also enjoyed vast wealth and prestige because
of its tie with the government and its spiritual influence over
the masses. The political power of the church, which eminated
from its unique social, economic and political position, was most
noticeable by its successful opposition to certain plans of reform
initiated by the Emperor. For example, the church succeeded in

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[7]Ibid., p. 172.   [8]Levine, op. cit., p. 269.

opposing land reform, modernizing the Ethiopian alphabet, the

teaching of mathematics in the curriculum of the church school,

and in replacing Geez with Amharic in conducting the church cere-

monies.[9]

The extent to which the church has been the special military

and political target of first the Muslim and later the Italian

invasions (although in different ways), indicated not only its

political significance but also its symbolism of the Ethiopian

nationalism.

> The Italian policy toward the Ethiopian Church was dictated
> by the way in which it was bound up with the Ethiopian nationalist
> spirit and aimed at weakening and undermining its influence
> rather than arousing resistance through overt persecution
> . . . .[10]

The Church's stubborn resistance against Italy and denuncia-

tion of Haile Selassie's native political contenders upon his return

from exile also showed its loyalty to the traditional government

and hence the mutual political interest and cooperation between

the two national institutions.

In contrast Islam was viewed as the religion of the enemy

and of the political suspects. As a religious institution, it

was neither organized nor was it politically associated with the

national political regime. As such its comparative political

influence over the central authority (by whom it was only later

recognized and given very minimal economic and moral support) was

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[9]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 98, and Greenfield, op. cit., p. 26.

[10]J. S. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia (New York: Barnes
and Noble, Incorporated, Second Impression, 1965), p. 137.

insignificant. Whether this disproportionate political status and
influence was a consequence of historical accident or calculated
political strategy, or whether it was compatible and conducive
to the national aspiration of forging a modern nation-state, the
political inequality of the two religious institutions was an
indisputable fact. This was primarily due to the ironic identi-
fication of Christianity with Ethiopian nationality and the sub-
sequent association of church and state as one of the bases for
national unity.

> . . . the political influence of the Ethiopian Christian
> Church is much greater than that of the Mosque--stemming as
> it does from a link with the monarchy, and command over the
> Agrarian masses . . . as recent history has all too effectively
> shown, no would-be politician or leader can afford to ignore
> the Christian Church, her patriarches and bishops, however
> much he may privately hold her immense conservatism in con
> tempt.[11]

While this historic association of church and state united
the predominantly Christian political leaders of the country by
providing them with deferential access to influencial positions
and a greater self-esteem through the feeling of being a first-
class citizen, it alienated the Muslims who, because of their
religion, were afforded no comparable opportunity, treatment or
political power.

Third, although in practice the religious pluralism of
the country was recognized, the approach to national unity was
through cultural assimilation. Thus the expansion of the Amhara
culture was facilitated both by official and unofficial government

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[11]Greenfield, op. cit., pp. 36-7.

policy. First of all, in the absence of any significant departure
from the Amhara-Tigre tradition, the national political culture
was dominated by exclusively Amhara-Tigre political ideas, symbols
and values. A most significant example of this fact was seen
in the origin of the Ethiopian legal system and its relative importance
over Muslim law. When a new criminal code was issued in 1930, the
Emperor said it was based on the traditional book of law written by
a twelfth century Christian monk, and therefore oriented entirely
toward Christian principles. However, since the original legal
text to which the new code referred was written in a language used
only in the churches, the law continued to be interpreted more by
what was customary than by statute. Although there were some Muslim
courts established, the highest of which was the Court of Shariah,
those had jurisdiction only over the Muslim community, and were
administered by a Chief Oadi and no less than three qadis, all
appointed by the Emperor, upon recommendation of the Minister of
Justice. However, those courts were restricted primarily to personal
matters between Muslims.[12] Thus, Muslim law had only a subsidiary
status, with its function confined to the adjudication of customary
law in civil disputes.

The spread of other aspects of Amhara culture was realized
through the settlement of government officials, soldiers and teachers
in Muslim areas. In these areas places were given new Amharic names,
and the Christian Amhara holidays officially celebrated.[13] In all

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[12]Lipsky, op. cit., pp. 184-85, 188.

[13]Levine, op. cit., p. 247.

government schools a reading and writing knowledge of the Amhara

language was required of all students regardless of their ethnic

background. Amharic also was proclaimed the official language.

Although Muslims represented about half of the Ethiopian popula-

tion and Galligna was widely spoken in the country, English was

considered the second official language. Courses in Ethiopian

history were comprised of only the history of the Amhara-Tigre,

the monarchic institution and of Ethiopia after Menelik's conquest.

Thus the history of the incorporated people before that time was

not taught.[14]

Both the political motives and implications of the choice

of languages and the history curricula, could not possibly be

misunderstood. The Emperor, despite his promises to the Somali

people of the Ogaden area to improve their welfare, did not create

educational facilities of a level to be expected. The reason

given for this was that the Emperor was insistent that "Somalis

who wished to advance themselves should do so through the medium

of Amharic."[15] Equally apparent was the Somalis' resistance to

the idea of being Amharized.

There was little doubt that the strategy of preserving

the old political institution, the link between it and the church

and the gradual expansion of their culture gave pride and power

to the Amhara-Tigre ethnic group; a group affiliated with the

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[14]Greenfield, op. cit., p. 58.

[15]David Mather, Ethiopia, The Study of a Polity 1540-1935
(London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1947), p. 182.

two most powerful national institutions, the monarchy and the
church, by culture, religion, ethnic origin and political aspiration.
In addition, almost all civil and military top positions were held
by the Amhara-Tigre. The royal family, the church and the Christian
nobility were the three major landowners. Among the Christians,
even those who did not enjoy such privileges still took pride
from the fact that they were members of a cultural and political
elite. At the exclusion of all other religions and ethnic groups,
the Amhara-Tigre represented the nation culturally and politically,
particularly the Amhara. Levine summarized this in the following
statement.

> . . . a more revealing measure of Amhara influence on
> Ethiopian political life is the extent to which the ideas,
> symbols, and values which govern Ethiopian politics are drawn
> from Amhara culture. The national politics of Ethiopia have,
> on the whole, been shaped in accordance with what may be
> called Amhara political culture.[16]

So, overshadowed by Amhara cultural, economic and political
power, there existed a large Muslim and pagan minority made up of
many ethnic groups. Although a great majority of them shared
Islam as their religion, they were more conscious of their ethnic,
cultural and regional differences. Despite their apparent opposi-
tion to the Amhara dominance, they were still not politically united.

The Galla, the largest of all the ethnic groups in Ethiopia,
was the least politically aliented.[17] In general, the Galla were
favored by the Amhara-Tigre power group over all others for many
reasons. Traditionally, their political relationship with the

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[16]Levine, op. cit., p. 249.   [17]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 68.

Somali was one of rivalry. A substantial number of the Galla became
Amharized following their early adoption of Christianity, along
with other aspects of the Amhara culture. Unlike other Muslim
groups, most of the Galla were not involved in the collaboration
with the Italians, who, by recognizing Islam and thereby securing
Muslim alliance, attempted to weaken the Christian resistance.

As a result, the political loyalty of the Gallas was little
doubted and resulted in a few of them being given high positions
within the political power structure. However, the great majority
of the Galla had no political influence. In fact, very little
was known about the political aspirations of the Galla, even though
there were incidents of Galla insubordination in such predominantly
Galla areas as Wollo, Balle and Arussi provinces. The most serious
of those incidents took place in the 1950's in Wollo, and was
solved by placing the area rebels under military administration.[18]

By contrast the Danakil and Ogaden Somalis of Ethiopia
were the least integrated. Their opposition to Amhara rule was
always consistent with their traditional political position.
Government efforts to assimilate them were continually and openly
resisted. Because of their collaboration with Italy during the
war, and because of their political sentiment toward the Somali
Republic, they were considered to be a threat to the integrity
of the country.

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[18]Greenfield, op. cit., p. 58.

During the war between Ethiopia and Italy, the Somali support was divided, but most "remained neutral, probably waiting to see which side would prevail before committing themselves."[19]

After the restoration of the Ethiopian government after the war, there were several sporadic expressions of Somali nationalist sentiment. In 1948 the Ogoden Somali nationalists seized government office buildings in Jijiga and tore down Ethiopian flags. Between 1955 and 1961 many towns and bridges along the railroad within the Somali inhabited areas were attacked. The activity was suppressed by military intervention. Since the political aspirations of these people was often regulated by their economic interests within Ethiopia, as well as their fear of military repercussion from the ethiopian government, their true feeling toward the newly created Republic of Somalia was never clear. Nonetheless, their defiance of the Ethiopian authority was supported by the Somali government. The Somali government refused to recognize the existing boundary between Somalia and Ethiopia on the ground that it was established by a treaty between Ethiopia and European colonial powers. It contended the boundary was false and arbitrary since it artificially divided people of the same language, creed and culture. Based on this claim, "Somali nationalists demand the separation of the Ogaden from Ethiopia and its inclusion in Somalia."[20] This resulted in war between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1962.

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[19]Touval, op. cit., p. 75.   [20]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 107.

Somalia has continued to sponsor the Somali nationalist
movement within Ethiopia by arming nationalists, accepting political
refugees and by radio propaganda.

After Somalia's independence, the Ethiopian government
attempted to improve its relationship with the people in the disputed
area. The policy of Amharization was relaxed, and some tribesmen
were placed in political positions in government office within the
area. Others were appointed to parliament by the Emperor and
moved to Addis Ababa, the capital, along with other elected Somali
officials. Pledges were made to improve the welfare of Somalis
through increased economic allocations and schooling.

> . . . by 1960 there were six Somali deputies and one Senator
> in the Ethiopian parliament, and also a number of locally
> recruited administrative and police officials in the Ogaden,
> . . . . no party political activity was permitted and any overt
> expression of Somali nationalist sentiment was firmly dealt
> with.[21]

Another component of the Muslim population was the Arabs.
They had virtually no political power. Regardless of their legal
status, all Arabs were considered untrustworthy aliens. Engaged
in their traditional profession of commerce, they were widely dispersed
throughout the country. Although the Arabs within Ethiopia never
constituted an actual or potential political problem, from their
aliented political existence, they suffered occasional harassment
from the government and were suspected of being foreign political
agents. Their disdain for Christian dominance and compassion for
the Islamic cause was apparent although seldom expressed.

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[21]Mather, op. cit., p. 182.

The federation of Eretrea, however, was a potential political problem. Prior to 1952, when the political future of Eretrea was under consideration by the United Nations, three major plans, each reflecting the ethnic and religious composition of the population, as well as the political interest of some members of the international community, were considered. The first of these plans, sponsored by the Arab nations, called for Eretrean independence; the second plan, initiated by Great Britain, called for the partition of Eretrea between Ethiopia and the Sudan; and the last, the Ethiopian plan, called for annexation of Eretrea by Ethiopia.[22]

With the modified version of the third plan prevailing, Eretrea was federated with Ethiopia. Soon after the federation was replaced by complete political unification in an effort, on the part of Ethiopia, to integrate Eretrea more fully. This development, as well as the United Nations' previous decision concerning Eretrea, was opposed mostly by the Muslim population, as well as by Muslim states of Egypt, Syria and the Sudan. As stated by Oliver:

> Ten years later Eretrea was more tightly integrated within Ethiopia, an arrangement which did not satisfy all Eretrea. Opposition to Ethiopia was directed by the Eretrean Liberation Front, with help from Egypt, Syria, and the Sudan, and in 1970 the Ethiopian government was forced to declare a state of emergency in Eretrea.[23]

With an increased awareness of the government's determination to treat Eretrea the same as any of the other provinces, the struggle

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[22]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 202.

[23]Roland Oliver and Anthony Atmore, Africa Since 1800 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 240-41.

was no longer against centralization but for political cessession.
Even though there were political differences between the Christians
and Muslims of Eretrea, an increasing number of the Christian
population joined the cessessionist movement.

Although these shortcomings of the traditional political
system and its narrowly defined national program were known, politi-
cal reform to integrate the Muslim population was slow and partial.
This was mainly due to Haile Selassie's political dependence on
the conservative traditional power group--the Amhara nobility and
the clergy.

Because of the feudalistic political structure, before
1940 Haile Selassie, like his predecessors, depended on the warlords
for the collection of taxes and the defense of both his political
power and the country. Taxes were paid through the nobility in
goods and services. The church on its part insured the political
loyalty of the Christian masses and that of the nobility to the
Emperor.

In effect, the nobility and the clergy stood between the
monarch and the ordinary people; their political loyalty to the
Emperor rested on mutual interest and cooperation. Without the
support of these two groups he had no legal or political power.
To the extent that the Muslims' political alienation and discontent
was due to the Amhara dominance, any political reform that might
drastically affect these two groups was unlikely to gain the support
of the traditional group and, if attempted, could endanger the
position of the leader. Therefore, the task of national integration
was sought indirectly and in three major phases. First, the monarch

had to cultivate a political power base other than the traditional

group. Second, the political power of the traditional group had

to be gradually reduced and third, the government had to introduce

a political system under which all the people of Ethiopia would

be represented. But, at the same time, in order to carry out

these very steps, the traditional system had to be preserved.

Concerning this dilemma as well as success and failure

in implementing these objectives, it was said of Haile Selassie:

> The power and uniqueness of his position at the head of
> the Ethiopian government are the cause both of nothing being
> done and of some things getting done at all.[24]

Although the first two steps concerned an internal power

struggle rather than the nature of political relationships between

Christians and Muslims, their intended purpose pertained to the

relations of the two groups. For this reason, the strategies pursued

by the Emperor merits discussion.

The political power of the traditionalists was weakened

by the introduction of many administrative, political and economic

measures. By the Emperor's proclamation the authority to give

titles of nobility was limited to him. Outside of the royal family,

all hereditary titles were abolished and the power of the nobility

reduced. Traditional or hereditary administrative and political

powers and duties were now sometimes passed to newly appointed

persons and sometimes left to the traditional individual. In both

cases the status of the individual was changed to confirm the

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[24]Ernest W. Luther, Ethiopia Today (Stanford, California:
Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 151.

new power relationship, that of appointed and appointee. Usually,
if the traditional individual was left in power for political
reasons, he was transferred to areas or provinces a great distance
from his own where he had no political supporters. Similarly,
the newly appointed officials were either constantly transferred
or replaced.

After the development and spread of a money economy, all
officials were paid a salary instead of sharing a percentage of
the taxes they collected, as they had in the traditional system.
Instead, taxes were now collected on behalf of the government
and sent to a central treasury.

Land ownership was made subject to taxation as well. The
enactment of these and other tax and tenure reforms reduced the
obligation of the tenant to his landlord and increased the orienta-
tion of the population as a whole toward the central authority
as distinguished from the traditional local heirarchy. According
to Lipsky and others:

> Formerly non-inheritable land carried a number of specific
> military or religious obligations. The holder, for example,
> was obligated to supply mules, rations, and other goods and
> services to the central army as well as, in some cases, to
> the Church. Such a tenant is known as gabar. The post of
> the village chief (Cheka-Shum), also generally goes to a man
> from one of the larger land holding families in a community.[25]

Since 1941, a paid professional army was established, headed
by the Emperor. Heading each division within the military system
were members of the royal family or individuals who did not have
traditional power. In this manner not only the loyalty of the

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[25]Lipsky, op. cit., pp. 65-66.

newly established army was insured, but also the power of the
provincial nobility was reduced since there was no longer a link
between the possession of land and tenants and military and politi-
cal power. This weakened both the church and other landowners.
It would also eventually challenge the Emperor's power.

Along with the change in the court system, the extension
and changes within government service, and the introduction of
a permanent military, a universal school system was established.
Although schools were confined to major urban areas, and in some
cases used for promoting the traditional Amhara values, they were
open to all ethnic and religious groups and the curriculum covered
many aspects of education. The introduction of modern education
also reduced the power of the church. Its influence over the
educated became less and less and it was no longer the only center
of education.

Following the expansion of modern education, civil efforts
were made to determine one's qualification for appointment to a
civil office on the basis of personal ability and educational
achievement rather than land ownership and family background or
connections. This was one step toward eliminating traditional
thinking and practices.

In 1931 a constitution was initiated for the first time
in the history of the country. Although like other reforms in
the political area, the constitution seemed to be overconcerned
with strengthening the power of the monarch, it provided a legal
relationship between the monarch and his subjects with regard to
their rights and duties. This development not only strengthened

his power over the aristocracy and the church but also created a
new group with limited power. The members of the Crown Council,
Council of Ministers, the Senate and Chamber of Deputies as created
and stipulated in the constitution were appointed by the Emperor.
The new group was predominantly selected from the Amhara-Tigre
traditional aristocracy but it also was composed of members of
non-Amhara-Tigre groups as well as non-Christian groups.

The revised constitution of 1955 provided for the popular
election of the members of the House of Representatives in the
Parliament. However much the policy making responsibilities and
the prerogatives of the elected members of the Parliament were
circumscribed, the idea of electing officials was introduced.

Thus, as remarked by Lipsky, "as a whole the constitution
not only served as a blueprint for the future but some aspects
of it foreshadowed gradually evolving secular governmental institu-
tions and procedures."[26] To that extent, a modern concept of
nation and authority was introduced.

While centralization was necessary for the integration
of otherwise divided religious and ethnic groups, it also created
resentment against the government. This program not only under-
mined local autonomy but also it replaced the local indigenous
officials with a distant royal appointee.

Although these seemed to be good beginnings for national
unity and advancement, no further changes were made. Land reform
was planned to the extent that Haile Selassie officially expressed

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[26]Ibid.

the idea that every citizen must own a piece of land, for there

was more than enough territory to make this feasible. However,

no steps were taken to turn the idea into reality. It was because

of this that both Haile Selassie and his program began to be

criticized by western observers and the educated elite of Ethiopia.

It would seem that the primary criticism was directed

toward what were, perhaps, the actual aims of the Emperor, that

of increasing his power, making it even more absolute than before.

This was best expressed by Levine when he wrote:

> Despite the elaboration of modern governmental structures
> under Haile Selassie, the dominant principles of the social
> order has been that of royal sovereignty. The entire staff
> of government officials has been the direct sociological descend-
> ant of the traditional court retinue . . . the chief value
> . . . of the new nobility . . . had been that of loyalty to
> the sovereign.[27]

The educated elite criticized the emperor for fearing to

antagonize the traditional aristocracy that supported him by pressing

for more rapid modernization. They also criticized the existence

of the Crown Council as a group which usurped the prerogatives

and the policy-making responsibilities of the parliament. Further-

more, they resented ". . . the Emperor's continued authoritarian

arbitrariness and criticize the recently created Parliament and

the election held in 1957 as sham providing a facade."[28]

That the Parliament and elections were a facade was pointed

out by Levine when he surveyed the 1955 Constitution and noted

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[27]Donald N. Levine, Wax and Gold, Tradition and Innovation
in Ethiopian Culture (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1965),
p. 185.

[28]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 194.

that it gave the monarch,

> the right to appoint the members of the Senate . . . to determine the organization, power, and duties of all ministries, executive departments . . . administration of the government and appoints, permits, transfers, suspends and dismisses the officials of the same.[29]

Further criticism which tended to reinforce the idea that the Parliament was a sham, was another given by Levine when he stated that,

> As Parliament enters its seventh year . . . political parties are still not permitted . . . . On the contrary, it has been the steadfast policy of the Emperor to forestall efforts toward the aggregated expression of interest in any form. Through techniques of divide et impera, frequent reshuffling of appointments, and systematic political surveillance, emerging coalitions of interests have typically been disintegrated well before they have reached a stage where positive political demands could be set forth.[30]

This system of reshuffling was carried to all segments of the government bureaucracy, both civil and military, in order to maintain the absolute authority of the Emperor. An example of this was Ras Imeru, an extremely popular progressive who emerged from the traditional power group. In the many capacities he served within the country under Haile Selassie, the populace so revered him tha the Emperor felt threatened to the point that he was sent to various countries as ambassador for a number of years. In 1960 the civil and military organizers of the temporarily successful coup d'etat, realizing Imeru's immense popularity and following, appointed him Prime Minister--a post which we do not know whether or not he accepted.

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[29]Levine, "Ethiopia," pp. 274-75.

[30]Ibid.

Another major criticism of the political changes made by
the Emperor was that he simply replaced one power group, the tra-
ditional aristocrats, with another, the "new nobility," without
changing the corrupt practices of those in public office. Whereas
the traditional aristocrat accepted as his due the "spoils of office"
because he was of the ruling Amhara-Tigre group, the new "aristocrat
by appointment" accepted as his due the same spoils system. The

> . . . view that public office is a private possession,
> a reward from the Emperor rather than an obligation to the
> nation or people, and that it is, therefore, appropriate to
> use government position primarily to help one's relatives,
> inflate one's ego, and multiply one's wealth . . .

is still the prevailing one.[31]

Of course, in order to enjoy the rewards of public office
it was essential that one retain that office and that could only
be done by remaining loyal to the Emperor. So it would seem that
ultimately all criticism had the same basic premise--that with
many reforms, nothing was greatly changed--other than that perhaps
the absolute power of the monarch was reinforced.

It would seem now that the question arises of whether Haile
Selassie could have proceeded in different ways to integrate and
modernize the country.

Perhaps he would have had more support from the various
ethnic and non-Christian religious groups if he had been less careful
of antagonizing the traditional groups; perhaps he would have
had more support from the educated elite had he more speedily
implemented a program of modernization; perhaps there would have

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[31]Lipsky, op. cit., p. 186.

been more unity had he made his conditional reforms more controlled by the people.

But then, perhaps, he would not have remained in power long enough to effect any changes. These are moot academic questions for there is no way of knowing what the consequences would have been.

We do know that the carefully planned and hopefully accommodating gradual approach to national integration taken by Haile Selassie, though it was a beginning, proved to be inadequate and unsatisfactory. Because of the nature of his political position and the problems to be solved, he found himself facing the dilemma of pleasing seemingly irreconcilliable groups. "The Emperor has walked a tightrope between traditionalism and modernism, stability and change. . . ."[32] In the end the very force he created, that of the military, to protect Ethiopia not only from the traditional enemies outside her borders, but from the discontented and sometimes warring groups within the country, proved to be his downfall. Ironically, his power was destroyed by the power he created.

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[32]Robert L. Hess, Ethiopia: The Modernization of Autocracy (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 124.

Chapter 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study has been based on the assumption that there
is a problem of national unity in Ethiopia. This assumption is
supported by studies of many people and my own personal observations
of Ethiopia. This study has proposed that the traditional political
relationships between the Church and the state were devisive to
the national unity of the country.

In an effort to examine the validity of the hypothesis,
a method of historical analysis was used. The specific aspects
of the Ethiopian history considered were presented in chapters
two through five.

Chapter 2 was concerned with a survey of the literature
pertaining to the problem of national unity and with the social
composition of Ethiopia as a nation. Our survey of the literature
has shown the traditional Western concept of a nation, the ele-
ments that promote or hinder national unity within a given country
and the problem of national unity within the developing countries.
Ethiopia was considered as one of the developing countries.

According to the traditional definition, a nation was
said to be a sizeable number of people inhabiting a clearly defined
national territory, joined by common aspirations, and having common
linguistic and religious backgrounds as well as racial and other

aspects of mutual culture. However, the survey has also indicated

that there are only a few nations that fit all categories of the

traditional concept or ideal model of a nation. Accordingly, the

modern and more realistic understanding of a nation has been that

the people are joined by their occupation of a common territory,

have a common cultural heritage, a common political authority,

and the same general aspirations, regardless of their differences

in race, language and religion. For this reason the importance

of the "primordial elements" to the furtherance of a sense of

nationhood and national unity is dependent upon the extent of

political modernization.

Most scholars agree that the political significance of

primordial identities is greater among traditional societies than

among modernized nations. This fact is believed to be the major

cuase of the problem of national integration within most developing

countries. As a result of their political history, it is there-

fore asserted that most of the peoples within the developing nations

are not unified by common experience and shared national aspira-

tions. The loyalties of the individuals are to their respective

language, ethnic, and religious groups, since they have no national

culture or identity. The extent to which this fact pertains to

the problem of national unity in Ethiopia is observed both from

the traditionalism of its people and the variations in their pri-

mordial identities. Presently Ethiopia is comprised of many distinc-

tive social and cultural groups.

Before Ethiopia expanded politically and territorially

over adjoining peoples and territories, its population consisted

of mainly the Amhara-Tigre people (Abyssinians). These two groups
were united by a common cultural heritage and by religion. Their
national territory consisted of the present provinces of Eretrea,
Tigre, Begemder, Wallo Pojjam and the northern part of Shoa. The
gradual expansion of the Abyssinians culminated late in the nine-
teenth century establishing the people and territory of Ethiopia
in its present form. The national culture of Ethiopia has been
that of the Amhara-Tigre culture but it is not shared by all people
of the country. The Amhara-Tigre culture has been advanced as
the national culture but has not been shared by all the people.
Because of thier history and cultural differences, the conquered
groups of people within the country differ from each other as well
as from the Amhara-Tigre group in their traditional identities
and aspirations.

Both during and after the expansion of the country to its
present boundaries, the difference between the religious beliefs
of the predominantly Christian Abyssinians and the Muslim popula-
tion was of major national political significance. Traditionally,
the Abyssinian nationalism was based on ethnic, cultural and
religious identification and an awareness of the imperial institu-
tion. They neither trusted nor had a high regard for a people
and culture different from their own. Conscious of their religion
and national history the Abyssinians believed in their superiority
over all others. These attitudes and sense of exclusive nationalism
were strengthened by their struggle against Muslims for political,
cultural and religious dominance. Due to the religious sentiment
of the warring groups and the close identification of politics

with religion, religious differences determined past and present political relationships between Christians and Muslims.

Apparently this is not only the traditionalism of Muslim and Christian as systems of religious belief and practice but also the continued political significance of religion to the state of Ethiopian national unity. The close cultural and political association of the state with a subnational ethnic and cultural group has been devisive both in reality and by implication.

Chapter 3 examined the role of religion in the national political life of Ethiopia by studying the relationship between the monarchy and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, as well as its political implications to national unity.

The relationship between these secular and sacred national institutions was based on tradition, but always was of political importance to both parties. The Christian faith made its way into the country through the Royal Palace during the fourth century and gradually was passed to the Amhara-Tigre people. Before the end of the same century the religion was widely absorbed by the Amhara-Tigre, who then constituted almost all the Ethiopian citizenry, and therefore proclaimed the national religion. The influence of the religion was such that it permeated almost all aspects of their beliefs and values. Consequently, despite the initial courtesy extended to Muhammed's disciples fleeing persecution in southern Arabia, the Abyssinian viewed the rise of Islam as a serious threat to his religion and culture. The political positions taken by the many Christian Ethiopian monarchs in defense of Christians and Christianity, first in southern Arabia and later within and

around the Ethiopian Empire, created not only a Muslim-Christian
divided world view among both religious groups, but also perpetuated
and even strengthened the relationship between the church and
the state. As the Christian religion became the state religion,
the church received economic support from the monarch and the
nobility. As devout believers in the faith, both the monarch
and the nobility assumed the responsibility of assisting the church
in proselytizing. The church and the clergy reciprocated by recog-
nizing the king as the head of the church; legitimizing his political
authority among the people and by preaching the virtue of obedience
to the ruler.

However, as the influence of the church leaders over the
Christian masses became greater, they acquired the power to make
or break a king. Therefore, once they attained this power the
relationship between the church and the monarchy was governed
by mutual political consideration as well as tradition. Whether
the clergy was a political asset or a political liability to the
kings depended on the extent to which the necessities of their
interdependence were mutually satisfied.

With an increasing political and territorial expansion
of the state as well as Islamic penetration of Ethiopia, although
attempted, conversion of all Ethiopian people to Christianity
became not only impractical but impossible. This fact gradually
led to the new policy of religious polarism in a very limited
sense. A complete religious freedom was given to Muslims only
after 1889. Even then the relationship of the church with the
state continued through Haile Selassie's reign. Although Haile

Selassie, more than any of his predecessors, weakened the power
of the church and the clergy and lessened their huge landholdings
by careful political manipulation and imposition of tax, relegating
it to subserviance of his political power. But the historic rela-
tionship was maintained and given a legal force by a provision
in the new and then the revised Constitution, first created by
Haile Selassie in 1931. This provision affirmed most aspects of
the traditional relationship and the national status of the church.
This relationship of the state with the church, as well as the
state's past political policy and practice toward the Muslim citizen,
has, as a logical consequence, been actually disintegrative. The
evidence contained in this chapter suggests that to have also
been the case in the relationship between the Muslim and Christian
Ethiopian citizenry.

    As contained in Chapter 4, our analysis of the political
history of Christian and Muslim, along with their respective co-
religionists outside of the country, indicates the aspirational
differences between the two religious groups. Much of the history
of Ethiopia was nothing but a recurring warfare by the Christians
to conquer and convert or to ward off Muslim aggression.

    Shortly after the rise of Islam, Ethiopia was encircled
by Muslims. The Abyssinians were not only alarmed by this develop-
ment but also, out of their religious messianism, compelled to
fight. Although religion was not the only difference between
the Abyssinians and the ethnically and culturally varied Muslim
conglomerates, religion became the paramount factor for all their
differences.

Coupled with this development and religious fanatism were the political interests of both sides. Conflicting beliefs and differences became strangthened as each endeavored to domonate the other, but, in effect, each passing war served as a basis for the succeeding one. As a consequence of the seemingly unending wars, the encirclement of Ethiopia was completed and its link with the outside world severed. This brought an end to the cultural and economic exchange that had existed between Axumite Ethiopia and the Byzantine world. The Afar and Somali began to try and extend themselves from their traditional homeland in the arid lowlands to the cool and fertile highlands of Ethiopia but neither group was able to effectively subdue and dominate the other. Neither was there a major war that united most Muslims against their Christian enemy until after the fifteenth century.

Because of the political and religious relationship between Muslims and Christians the greatness of the Ethiopian monarchs was measured almost solely by their success in extending their territory and religion over the surrounding Muslim and pagan peoples. This was manifested by the Ethiopians' reverence for Kings Syfa Gred and Zera Yaquob. Egypt joined the Muslim cause, and in retaliation against the policies of these emperors and their predecessors, threatened to deprive the Ethiopian Church of its highest religious leader (who always came from Egypt). Although not of great political consequence, this and other attempts by the Muslim leaders of Egypt opened up a religious antagonism between Egypt and Ethiopia.

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More detrimental to Ethiopia in its war with the Muslims
was Turkey whose involvement in the war of the sixteenth century
led Ethiopia to seek Portuguese alliance. In this war, for the
first time, most of the Muslims were united in the name of their
religion. The Christians were only able to defeat the Muslims
with the assistance of the Portuguese.

Although both Egypt and Turkey managed to occupy the coastal
parts of what is the present territory of Ethiopia at different
times during the succeeding two centuries, they were eventually
evicted. The Ethiopian boundary in its present form was finally
established in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

In these wars, the extent to which the enemies classified
each other by religion, as well as the religious identities of
the allied groups, suggests that religion was the significant cause
of the rivalry between the Abyssinians and the Muslims.

Chapter 5 was concerned with contemporary Ethiopian national
politics pertaining to the general relationship of Muslims and
Christians under Haile Selassie's rule. The contrasts between
policies and events, political aspirations and realities that
marked Haile Selassie's reign were used for the purpose of assessing
the degree to which Muslims of Ethiopia had become integrated or
had remained unintegrated.

One of Haile Selassie's goals was the national unity of
Ethiopia. However, for reasons which cannot be known, but only
speculated upon, his strategy for national integration was not
made with a complete abandonment of traditional arrangements and
aspirations. Under his leadership the national unity of Ethiopia

was sought with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as the State religion;
the monarchy left intact; Amharic as the national language, and
the Amhara culture as the national culture. Some of these and
similar commitments were given legal basis in the constitution
mentioned earlier.

In the above respect, given the political history and
the numerical ratio of the two religious groups, the identifica-
tion of the national government with traditional Amhara-Tigre
values has actual and logical political implications. The fact
that a great majority of the Muslims have little or no national
political influence or participation and the incidents of political
rebellions by some Muslim groups of these people, particularly
Eretreans and Somalis, seem to support the analysis.

Nevertheless, Haile Selassie had made many integrative
changes and policies. Menelik's policy of religious pluralism
was blessed by Haile Selassie's financial assistance of the Muslims
for the building of mosques. The legal system was in the process
of being secularized in the Western tradition. Under the new legal
code, although much remained to be desired, the equality of Muslims
and Christians was respected. Some Muslims have been put in high
civil and military government posts.

The economic and political power of the church and the
Christian nobility have been reduced by the introduction of more
equitable systems of taxation and land tenure. As a result of
these and other measures Muslims can be said to have been integrated
more than ever before, even though complete integration has not

been realized as can be observed from the present political conditions of Ethiopia.

Haile Selassie's downfall has no direct relation with his policy towards Muslims, although that has been one of the bases of general discontent among both those opposed and those in favor but unsatisfied.

While the analysis of the evidence in this study in general supports our hypothesis, in no way does it suggest religion as the only cause for the nature of either the past or present political relationships between the Muslims and Christians. In view of the complexities of the factors from which the sense of nationhood emanates, and the factors that foster or hinder national unity, the cause is seldom singular.

To what extent did the preservation of the traditional system of government promote or hinder national unity?

To what extent did the preservation of other traditional values help or hurt the nation as a whole?

Why, despite his apparent desire to integrate the people, did Haile Selassie seem to be commited to traditional values? Or was it not a commitment to traditional values but rather a policy of gradualism? There are some answers to these questions which are quite apparent. There are other answers which can be only speculative. Despite the change in leadership it would seem that national integration cannot be achieved without satisfactory resolution of the differences between the two religious groups. Only a further study can give a conclusive answer to these questions.

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