POLITICS AND RELIGION IN ETHIOPIA

A Thesis
Presented to
the Department of Political Science
Emporia Kansas State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
Tesfahun Ayele
August 1975
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people who helped make this thesis possible, but for the hours of time they gave me, and for their patience with this work much above that which could be expected of any thesis committee, I owe a very special thanks to Professor Earl Rohrbaugh, the chairman of the committee; Dr. Melvin Dubnick, and Dr. Patrick O'Brien. I also must express my gratitude to Mary Lou McClain, who not only typed the manuscript but put up with constant deadlines and my illegible penmanship. Last, I must thank Virginia Egolf, for the hours of editing, many criticisms and patience she contributed.

T. A.
Approved for the Major Department

[Signature]

Approved for the Graduate Council

[Signature]
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE PROBLEM</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of the Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER OUTLINE</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. THE SOCIOLOGY OF ETHIOPIA</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. CHURCH AND STATE RELATIONSHIPS</strong></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. A SURVEY OF SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS</strong></td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. CONTEMPORARY POLITICS OF NATIONAL UNITY AND NATIONALISM</strong></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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, traditional antagonisms are engrained among the people.

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

---

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

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.\footnote{Richard Greenfield, Ethiopia, A New Political History (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, 1965), p. 43.}

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.\footnote{Robert L. Hess, Ethiopia: The Modernization of Aristocracy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 112.} To the degree that traditionally the political outlook
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 determination, and the Ethiopian view that the boundary should be delimited according to the 1908 Convention with Italy. 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 Eritrea with Ethiopia was prompted by the United Nations' decision after studying the political sentiments of the majority of the Eritreans, a large majority of Eritrean Muslims opposed it. 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. Presently the Eritrean 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 Eritrean Muslims and their co-religionists in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Although not as intensive, there was political unrest among Muslims of Wollo and Arussi as incidents in 1955 and 1967


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 characteristics 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 political 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 overriding 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." Thus, the more modernized nations can be said to be "a body of people who feel they are a nation." 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, religious.

---


language and region. 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 organization 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. Those who constitute the newly created nation-states are not only frequently heterogeneous 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 territorial nationality which overshadows subordinate parochial loyalty, the commitment of the individuals is to their primordial groups.


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  

---

12W. 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 background 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 development 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. The fact is that if and when primordial attachment is broken before national identity is developed, people not only feel "psychologically uprooted" but

---

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 heterogeneity 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

14Ibid., pp. 549-50.

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 in common with most of the developing nations, particularly 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 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 the problem in one country is not necessarily equally detrimental to the problem 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.
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.

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. 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 population.

---


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. 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 overwhelming 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

---

3Lipsky, op. cit., p. 34.
Orthodox Christian denominations and Jewish), 5 percent. However, Lipsky's figure of the pagan population, compared to the estimates of other authorities, is exceptionally high. Traditionally, Christians 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." 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. Of the two, the Amhara became dominant.

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

\[4\text{Ibid., pp. 100-101.} \quad 5\text{Hess, op. cit., p. 20.}\]
\[6\text{Lipsky, op. cit., p. 34.}\]
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. Throughout 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.

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. 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." 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

---


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 significance, 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.

^{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.

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

---

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 Tigrails, 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 Wollo, 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.

12Lipsky, op. cit., p. 137. 13Ibid., 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). 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

---

14Trimingham, op. cit., p. 140.
traditions which proclaim their descent from noble Arabian lineages and from the family of the Prophet.\textsuperscript{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.

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.


\textsuperscript{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 Eritrean 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

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 anointment 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 constitution 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 legitimiz ed the position of the emperor by providing him and the institution of the

18Lipsky, 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." 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 antagonisms, by playing one political force against another, or by directly influencing people through admonition and exhortation.

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


20Lipsky, op. cit., p. 196.
few Muslims are to be found in high positions in Ethiopian govern-
ment.\textsuperscript{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 differently—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 association), not just religion, that have been the reasons for the Muslims' resistance to the scheme of national unity in Ethiopia.

\textsuperscript{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 institutions 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

---

kings of Ethiopia, descendants of Menelik, are of divine line.\textsuperscript{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 strengthened 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.\textsuperscript{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


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 relationship 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. 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

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

---

4 Ibid., p. 25.

of Aksum. It was a major objective of the Ethiopian monarchs, particularly of the Christian era, to establish military and diplomatic relations with their contemporary 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, Trilmingham'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 Christlandom."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

6Ibid., p. 40.

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 conclusion 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 friendship 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


\(^10\) Trimmingham, 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.

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

\[11\text{Ibid., p. 53.}\]
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.\(^1\)

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.\(^1\) 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 thereafter 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 relationship 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

\(^{12}\)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

14Lipsky, op. cit., pp. 103-4.
patriarch in Alexandria and not to be tampered with by the political rulers of Ethiopia. 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.

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 anointment 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.

15Ibid.

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 explanations. 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).

17Levine, 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 uncomfortable fact of life. The danger of this situation led many of

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 Salfa 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 Salfa 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 remaining. 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.

---

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 hierarchy, 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 hierarchy 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.\textsuperscript{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."\textsuperscript{22}

Fasilodas (1632-67) attempted to correct this problem but in his


\textsuperscript{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. Understandably, 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

23Levine, Wax and Gold, pp. 175-76.
24Trimingham, 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. Therefore, 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 Trimmingham'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

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


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 background, 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

---

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..." 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." 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.

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

---

31 Lipsky, op. cit., p. 2.  
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 administrative 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 constitutional 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

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 patriarchate 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

34Lipsky, 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

35Levine, 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 participate 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, debaters and other officials still retain their prestige and predominant economic and social position in most of the rural areas.\textsuperscript{36}

Therefore, while the constitutional and administrative reforms of the recent years have politically subordinated the

\textsuperscript{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

37Levine, 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.'

'in Ethiopia the Church and the State are one.'

These statements may be exaggerated but not altogether unfounded, for the two institutions were entwined 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.

---


39Greenfield, 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 of 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 entanglement 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 relationship between the two institutions was that of state over church as opposed to church over state, or a bipolar balance of power,

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 promulgation and administrative reform Haile Selassie endeavored to subordinate 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 stronghold 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 administration 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.  

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

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 Christian 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 differences affected the two groups in their political relationships.

There were four primary sources used for the studies in this chapter.*

*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-Tigré) 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.\(^1\) 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

---

\(^1\)Trimingham, op. cit., p. xiii.

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. The divine mission had been transferred from the Kings of Israel to the Kings of Solomon. It was their firm conviction 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.

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 misconception was perpetuated by their relative success in subduing their

---

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

4Levine, 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 considered 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 unequalitarian. 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. 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 translated 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 geographically 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

---

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.

---

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

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." 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."  

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.  

---

8Lipsky, op. cit., p. 72.  
9Ibid., p. 73.  
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 exploitation was no less a point of antagonism. 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 regulations 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{12}Lipsky, op. cit., p. 62.

\textsuperscript{13}Levine, \textit{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 religious 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.\textsuperscript{14} After an unsuccessful attempt to destroy Mecca itself, Abrha built a temple in the northern part of the kingdom as a

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 principalities. The most outstanding of such incidents was a military encounter between Amda-Siyon and the ruler of Ifat during the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{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. (\ldots 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 throughout the centuries.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15}Trimingham, op. cit., p. 132. \textsuperscript{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

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 "avaracious 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 established 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.

19Greenfield, op. cit., p. 32.
Such was the case between 1250 and 1285. During this time, because of political conflict between Egypt, Yemen 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. 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

---

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 cooperation 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

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. Furthermore, 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 principalities were doing with Egypt and Turkey, Ethiopia began to cultivate friendship with the Christian rulers of Portugal. By the thirteenth century the Muslim state of Yefat stretched from the coast of Somalia to the Red Sea and included the Dahlak archipelago 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 highlands 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 traditional 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

22Lipsky, op. cit., p. 114.
23Trimingham, 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 Zalla where Muslim leader, Iad ad Din, was finally killed.24

Although the pendulum of success in these wars never permanently ceased oscillating between the warring groups, this last defeat was a relatively long-lasting setback to the local Muslims and their co-religionists 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.

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 counteract 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.  

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-Ghazl (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

---

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

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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{29}Trimingham, op. cit., pp. 86-9. \textsuperscript{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

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 Trimmingham, 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 Trimmingham, "... 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.

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.\(^\text{35}\) 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 conquered subjects under military rule and shown no mercy. "Thus, while Islam was recognized in the southwestern Muslim kingdom, Christianity was established elsewhere."\(^\text{36}\)

\(^{35}\text{Ibid., pp. 122-23.}\) \(^{36}\text{Ibid., p. 129.}\)
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 Eritrea. 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 Eritrea, Harar, Sidamo, Arussi and Bale provinces to the policy of national unity indicates that the end of the religious struggle is only official.\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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 relationship between the people must be sought from a study of the political system and the national aspiration that marked his leadership. 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 traditional 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 Halle 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 nationhood 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 determination 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 dissatisfication 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

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.


3Ibid., 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 territory, 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.  

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 Eritrea 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.  

---


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 Eritrea 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."  

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 inviolable 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 constitutionally 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 emanated 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

---

7Ibid., p. 172.  
8Levine, 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


10J. S. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia (New York: Barnes
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 identification of Christianity with Ethiopian nationality and the subsequent 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 patriarchs and bishops, however much he may privately hold her immense conservatism in contempt. 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 influential 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

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 Qadi 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.\footnote{Lipsky, op. cit., pp. 184-85, 188.} 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.\footnote{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 population 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-Tigré, 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-Tigré ethnic group; a group affiliated with the

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

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 opposition 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 alienated.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

16Levine, op. cit., p. 249. 17Lipsky, 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.18

18Greenfield, 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.

---

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 alienated 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.

21Mather, op. cit., p. 182.
The federation of Eritrea, however, was a potential political problem. Prior to 1952, when the political future of Eritrea 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 Eritrean independence; the second plan, initiated by Great Britain, called for the partition of Eritrea between Ethiopia and the Sudan; and the last, the Ethiopian plan, called for annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia.\(^2^2\)

With the modified version of the third plan prevailing, Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia. Soon after the federation was replaced by complete political unification in an effort, on the part of Ethiopia, to integrate Eritrea more fully. This development, as well as the United Nations' previous decision concerning Eritrea, 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 Eritrea was more tightly integrated within Ethiopia, an arrangement which did not satisfy all Eritrea. Opposition to Ethiopia was directed by the Eritrean 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 Eritrea.\(^2^3\)

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


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

Although these shortcomings of the traditional political system and its narrowly defined national program were known, political 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 Halle 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.\(^4\)

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

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 orientation of the population as a whole toward the central authority as distinguished from the traditional local hierarchy. 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

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 political 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 institutions 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 undermined 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

---

26Ibid.
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 descendant 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. Furthermore, 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


28Lipsky, 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 sur­
veillance, 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 that 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.

30Ibid.
Another major criticism of the political changes made by the Emperor was that he simply replaced one power group, the traditional 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

31Lipsky, 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 irreconcilable 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.

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 divisive 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 elements 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 cause of the problem of national integration within most developing countries. As a result of their political history, it is therefore asserted that most of the peoples within the developing nations are not unified by common experience and shared national aspirations. 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 primordial identities. Presently Ethiopia is comprised of many distinctive 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 Eritrea, Tigre, Begemder, Wollo Pogjam and the northern part of Shoa. The gradual expansion of the Abyssinians culminated late in the nineteenth 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 their 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 population was of major national political significance. Traditionally, the Abyssinian nationalism was based on ethnic, cultural and religious identification and an awareness of the Imperial Institution. 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 devious 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 polarization 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 relationship 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 development 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 fanaticism were the political interests of both sides. Conflicting beliefs and differences became strengthened as each endeavored to dominate 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.
Coupled with this development and religious fanatism were the political interests of both sides. Conflicting beliefs and differences became strengthened as each endeavored to dominate 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.
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 identification of the national government with traditional Amhara-Tigré 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 Eritreans 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 committed 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.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS


Department of State. *Background Notes: Empire of Ethiopia*. Washington: Department of State, 1970.


B. ARTICLES


Clapham, Christopher. "Imperial Leadership in Ethiopia," African Affairs, LXVIII (1968), 110-120.


Marein, Nathan. "Emperor Challenges Arab Churches?" The New Middle East (June, 1969).


