

## RENOUNCING THE DEVIL USING ‘TSEBEL’: IS IT POSSIBLE?

**By Mezgebe Gebrekiristos**

Coming from generations of priesthood, and as a devout Christian myself, I take no comfort in criticizing my own church leaders—the priests. However, the recent trends in the Diaspora Ethiopian churches’ teachings prompted me to write this piece. So, for what it is worth, bear with me and be the judge.

The classic conundrums of the role of a church in the Ethiopian politics still remain unsolved: If the church is open to all parishioners, regardless of their background and political alliance, can a priest mix religion and politics in his teachings? Or, simply put, should priests refrain from political discussions at least while in church? And, if he does not, should he be held accountable for his actions? Finding answers to these questions is simple and complex at the same time.

It is simple because, according to the Christian scriptures, one of the primary duties of a priest is to teach the word of God. More importantly, priests are not supposed to preach their own wisdom but the word of God. And, they should share the word of God not only with believers but also with non-believers. The life of a priest should see the life of his master, God. Pope John Paul II, in his 1979 (#4) Holy Thursday Message, wonderfully put the main function of priests as follows:

*We carry out this office, through which Christ Himself unceasingly ‘serves’ the Father in the work of our salvation. Our whole priestly existence is and must be deeply imbued with this service, if we wish to effect in an adequate way the Eucharistic sacrifice in persona Christi.*

It is complex because there are people, among us, who would not hesitate to use religion as a medium to spread their hidden political agenda. They exploit the church of Christ to their advantage, and they use priests as pawns in the process.

Few would disagree that for most of Ethiopia’s history, politics was a factor in determining if someone got a priest’s blessing to attend a certain church. To my complete astonishment, however, politics is playing a major role today in the lives of many Orthodox Christian believers residing in the Diaspora. Contrary to their solemn duties, certain Diaspora priests are exacerbating the problem by introducing insinuations in tandem with their prayers. Consequently, many Ethiopians are left with two choices: Cease going to the church, or open another one that is friendly to them. Without exaggeration, this recent phenomenon is threatening the millennia-old Ethiopian unity. Hence, priests are expected to teach at least the Golden Rule.

Renowned Ethiopian Artist Solomon Tekalign, in his timely and point-blank song entitled, **”Abba Tsebel Yirchun”**, invited all of us to face the reality and be clean from our sins through the Holy water. Would we listen to and do the right thing for the common good of our country, Ethiopia? To begin with, he has already shown us the efficacy of “Tsebel” by

traveling to Ethiopia, and now he is ready to help his country in any way he can. God bless him and his family!

My fellow Ethiopians, how hard could it be for some of us to answer the call of our country for help? Ethiopia needs our concerted effort in the upcoming millennium more than ever, and is not interested in checking our backgrounds. Our motherland is ready to embrace us with unconditional love. If Solomon could come to his senses by realizing his misguided past, why could not the rest of us do the same?

Ethiopia says "*Lam alechign be semai wetetwan gin alay*" (Meaning, I have a cow in the sky where I do not see its milk). I do not blame her. What good is a Ph.D. in agriculture, if it does not improve the life of the poor farmers by introducing new farming techniques, and tools? By the same token, what good is an M.D. degree to the Ethiopian children suffering from diseases such as malaria, Tuberculosis, and other treatable illnesses if it is owned by deaf ears?

Please tell me the things you have done thus far to alleviate Ethiopia's proverbial poverty. Aren't you tired of the looks of sympathy from your new friends in the Western countries whenever the plight of Ethiopia is raised in a conversation? To be honest, I am, and I am ready to do something about it. Former American president, J.F. Kennedy, said, "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." Likewise, let's ask our country what she needs from us, and lift her up and up for everybody to see. The Holy water may help in this regard. It is possible. See you all in Addis for the Millennium celebration, and to get 'Tsebel' from the Holy Father. May 'Tsebel' be the panacea for our ills! Amen!

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