



**The Introduction and Expansion of Protestant  
Christianity in Wondo Genet *Woreda* and Its  
Surroundings, 1928-1991**

**By**

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*A Thesis Submitted to School of Graduate Studies of Addis  
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of Masters of Arts Degree in History.*

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**Addis Ababa.**

## **Declaration**

I, the under signed, declare that the thesis is my original document work, has not been presented for degree in any other university and all the materials used for this thesis have been acknowledged.

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SIGNATURE

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This thesis has been submitted for Examination with my approval as the university advisor.

**DR. TAMRAT WASYIHUN**

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**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

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## **Acronyms**

**ALM:** American Lutheran Mission

**DEM:** Danish Evangelical Mission

**EECMY:** Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

**EKHC:** Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church

**EOC:** Ethiopian Orthodox Church

**EPRDF:** Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

**GNM:** German Hermannsburg Mission

**KHC:** Kale Hiwot Church

**NALA:** National Archive Library Agency

**NLM:** Norwegian Lutheran Mission

**NMS:** Norwegian Mission Society

**PM:** Presbyterian Mission

**SEM:** Swedish Evangelical Mission

**SIM:** Sudan Interior Mission

**SKHC:** Sidama Kale Hiwot Church

**SNNPR:** South Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region

**SPCM:** Swedish Philadelphia Church Mission

**UEEC:** Union of Ethiopian Evangelical Churches

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## **Abstract**

*The general objective of the research was to construct the history of introduction and expansion of Protestant Christianity in Wondo Genet area in the period from 1948 to 1991. The study mainly focuses on the way Protestant Christianity was introduced in the study area and the local converts and expansion of the religion. In addition, the socio- economic influences of the religion in the area as well as Challenges and persecutions of the adherents of the Churches in the time of the Imperial and Derg regimes.*

*A qualitative methodological approach is employed in eliciting information from different sources on the subject in question. The study relied on primary and secondary sources. Among the primary sources: archival materials, unstructured interview from different group of informants, such as early missionaries, evangelists and local converts, elders, Church leaders, government officials. Magazines, newspapers published and unpublished materials used as a secondary source from library and internet. Finally, the collected sources crossed-checked and analyzed by using content narrating and describing method.*

*Based on the study findings and analysis, the study suggested that in the study area before the introduction of Christianity, most of the people practiced different traditional beliefs. Orthodox Christianity was the first to be introduced in the area in 1896. After the Orthodox Christianity the next Christian Church planted in Wondo Genet was the MekaneYesus Church followed by Kale Hiwot and Hiwot Birhan Churches. During the expansion of Protestantism, Churches faced both internal and external challenges but the challenges did not stop the expansion of Protestantism. Before the introduction of Christianity to the area, there was continuous clan conflict. However, after the spread of the new faith, the People became peace seeker and clan conflict and violence in the area is diminished.*



## Preface

Historical writing in social history of each locality in Ethiopia is not studied in detail. Among them, the Sidama area is one. This situation attracted me to study the introduction and expansion of Protestant Christianity in Wondo Genet *Woreda*, which is one of the sixteen-*woredas* of the Sidama Province between 1928 and 1991. In this study, an attempt has been made to study the history of the introduction and expansion of the Protestant faith through time in history.

Expatriates missionaries and local evangelists take the year 1928 as landmark since it was in this year that Protestant Christianity introduced to the whole area of south Ethiopia including the Sidama area. In addition, to understand better the society of the study area and see changes, traditional religion and cultural activities of the people before the introduction of the Protestant Christianity in the area.

Methodologically, through analysis and interpretation of sources, the study attempted to reconstruct, the history of Protestant faith in Wondo Genet. In this thesis, both primary mainly oral sources, archival documents and secondary written sources have been utilized. I collected archival materials from National Archival and Library Agency. However, the major source material for the history of the *Woreda* is oral tradition collected from elders who are main source of important information. The written sources have been crosschecked with the oral information. An attempt has been made to make a fair selection of informants and the majority of them have an eyewitness accounts for the information they provided.

Chapter I discusses the people and land of the study area and the process of conquest and incorporation of the area to pre Ethiopian empire. Chapter II of the thesis is devoted to the socio-cultural features of the Sidama people. Chapter III deals with the broader context of Christianity including Protestantism and their beginning and introduction into Ethiopia. Chapter IV deals with the main theme of the study that is the introduction and expansion of Protestant Christianity in Wondo Genet. Selecting three largest Protestant denominations, Hiwot Berhan, Kale Hiwot and Mekane Yesus Churches of Wondo Genet *Woreda*, this chapter analyzes and describes their introduction in the study area, their growth and social and religious activities and their challenges in a given period.

# Chapter I

## Geographical and Historical Background

### Geographical Background of the Study Area

The Sidama are a Cushitic speaking people settled in southern Ethiopia<sup>1</sup>. The Sidama were living with in Sidama *Teqlay Gezat* (Province) during the Imperial regime and in Sidamo *Kiflehager* during the *Derg* period. After 1991, the Sidamaland became one of the nine zones of the South Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State. The Sidama area is rich in natural resources, diversified climate, fertile land and attractive landscape<sup>2</sup>.

Wondo Genet is located in southern Ethiopia situated at 271kms from Addis Ababa and 21kms southeast of Shashemene town and 23kms distance from the region's capital city, Hawasa<sup>3</sup>. In Wondo Genet, we find the famous hot springs, which are good for health and indigenous Ethiopian forests has surrounded the area. It is home to an arboretum (tree cultivation area: an area planted with many types of trees for study, display, and preservation) and a Forestry College founded in 1977 with Swedish assistance that is currently called as Wondo Genet College of Forestry and Natural Resources. Spices, aromatic and medicinal plants are also conserved and their qualities researched by the College<sup>4</sup>.

The *woreda* lies on low-lying rift valley which is part of the Great East African Rift Valley where active geological processes evidenced. The *woreda's* absolute location is at around 7°1'N and 38°3'E. The relative location or boundaries of the *Woreda* are in the north Arsi Zone, in south town of Tula, in eastern part Arsi Zone and in western part also Arsi Zone. The *woreda's* catchment area suggests that it is located in an elevation between 1686 and 2619 above sea level<sup>5</sup>.

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1. Zerihun Doda Doffana. "Dagucho [*Podocarpus falcatus*] Is Abbo!" Wonsho Sacred Sites, Sidama, Ethiopia: Origins, Maintenance Motives, Consequences and Conservation Threats". (PhD Dissertation, University of Kent 2014) pp. 1-5

2. Girma Negash. "The Arsi and the Sidama: A History of Inter-Ethnic Relations along Their Borderlands, Ca. 1900-1991" (MA Thesis, Department of History, AAU, 2001), pp. 1-2

3. Gashahun Gamburo. "Wondo Genet Wabishebele Resort Center", (BA Thesis, Department of Wild Life Management and Economic Tourism, Wondo Genet College of Forestry), 2009, p.5; Wondo Genet Woreda Population Affairs Coordination and Implementation Sector.

4. Gashahun Gamburo, p.5

5. Mesfin Melese and Kembata Fetera "Seminor Research on Site Selection for Urban Area Development in the case of Wondo Genet

6. Wosha Town. (Department of Natural Resource and Environmental Studies, Hawassa University Wondo Genet College of Forestry 2012. :p5: Wondo Genet *Woreda* Population Affairs Coordination and Implementation Sector Written Information

In the *woreda*, there are thirteen *kebeles* and two municipalities; a high population density is found in the Beja kebele, it is around 14,325 people/Km<sup>2</sup> and the smallest number of people lives in BaboChororaKebele, which is around 4,617 people/Km<sup>2</sup>. Ethnically, the majority of the population of the *woreda* belongs to the Sidama ethnic group that is 55%. Next to Sidama are the Guji and Arsi Oromo covering 40% of the people living in the Wondo Genet area. In addition, 5% of people are from different ethnic groups such as Amhara, Silte, Hadya, Kembata and others<sup>6</sup>.

Regarding the climate of the Wondo Genet area, in most of the area sub-tropical agro climate type prevails. Most of the area is both temperate (38.4%) and sub-tropical (61.56%). The rainfall distribution is that short rain fall occurs during spring and the major rainfall comes in summer and stay for the first two months of the autumn season. The rainfall range of the *woreda* is 1163-1500mm. The average annual rainfall is 1200 mm per year with mean annual temperature of 19°C and the average elevation of the *woreda* is 1686-2609 meters above sea level<sup>7</sup>.

The total area of Wondo Genet *woreda* is about 14702 hectare. Out of these 2929 hectares of land is covered by forest of which 2380 hectares is natural forest and 549 hectares is covered by man-made forest. Out of this 346 hectare is privately owned forest and the rest is covered by roads and other lands used for various purposes. The economy of the entire Sidama Zone, including Wondo Genet *woreda* is based on the subsistent sedentary cultivation of growing plants and animals rearing which is a mixture of both farming and cattle rearing<sup>8</sup>. The common types of land in the area were arable land, grazing land, natural forest, and plantation forest<sup>9</sup>.

Grazing land is normally very scarce in the area. Roadsides, natural forests and plantations are used as grazing land. Most of the rural population of Sidama, Guji and Arsi are dominantly cattle breeders. However, almost all ethnic groups are involved in both cultivation of land and cattle rearing because of suitable climatic condition and rich arable land. Some groups of the population are also engaged in trade. The main cereal crop produced in the area is maize (*Zea mays*), followed by the *teff* (*Eragrostis tef*). *Ensete* (*Ensete ventriculata*) is also staple food for the area, while Chat (*Catha edulis*), sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*) and various fruits such

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7. Wondo Genet *Woreda* Population Affairs Coordination and Implementation Information; Mesfin Melese and Kanbata Fetera, 2012, pp.5-

8. Wondo Genet *Woreda* Population Affairs Coordination and Implementation Sector Written Information.

9. Mesfin Melese and Kanbata Fetera. 2012. p6

as avocado (*Persea Americana*), banana (*Musa acuminata*) and others are major cash crops of the *woreda*<sup>10</sup>.

### **Land and People: The Sidama**

Various historians and scholars from different fields have given detail analysis and assessment of various sources and theories about the origin of the Sidama People. In his thesis, Alemaw claims that the Sidama are Cushitic language speaking peoples in the Horn of Africa and their ancestors lived in the region before the medieval period of Ethiopia. After analyzing the assumptions and conclusions of many notable writers on the history of Sidama and southern Ethiopia such as G.Sergi, Conti- Rossini, Tadesse Tamrat, Braukamper, L. Lange and E.Ullendorff, he suggested his speculation. He asserts that although the Sidama people exist on their current place since before the 16th century, they and the land currently they settled are results of peoples' movement and inter-mingling with various peoples from different areas following the sixteenth century historical developments<sup>11</sup>.

Linguistically, the Sidama are one of the Cushitic language speaking peoples of Ethiopia. The Sidama People share similar culture, language and historical ties with the majority of the people in the Horn of Africa<sup>12</sup>. According to Hammer, there are two ancestral fathers for the Sidama People known as Bushe and Maldea. Descendants of Bushe claimed to have come from Ankober of Shoa while that of Maldea from Gurage land. On the other hand, Ernico Cerulli as quoted by Braukamper stated Bale as the original home of the Sidama. Braukamper himself stated that the medieval state of Dawaro was the original home of Maldea and Dawa, the area in southeast of Sidama, as the original home of Bushe. In contrast to this, Stanely claimed that Bale the initial home of Sidama People before they came to the present territory<sup>13</sup>.

Sources indicate that the Oromo population movement and its pressure played its own role to the formation of the present Sidama territory and their socio-political composition. Alemaw Kifle describes that the Sidama are divided into thirteen clans or sub-groups. These thirteen sub-groups have descended from two ancestral groups namely Bushe and Maldea. Malga, Yanase,

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<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, p.6-7

<sup>11</sup>Alemaw Kifle. "A History of the Sidama People, C.1889-1974"(MA Thesis, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 2005), pp.1-7.

<sup>12</sup>Endale Ashene, "The Socio-Cultural History of Sidama People" (BA Thesis, Department of History and Heritage Management, Wolaita Sodo University, 2011), p. 2.

<sup>13</sup>Seble Mitike. "Cultural History of the Sidama Women: From Conquest to the Early Years of the Revolution" (BA Thesis, Department of History, Debu University, 2000), p.17.

Shabadino, Asarado, Hollo, Arbegona, Harbe, Garbicho and Hadicho, which are totally nine, are said to have descended from Bushe. The other four Hawela, Sawola, Qewena and Alata trace their origin back to Maldea<sup>14</sup>.

Gradually, through historical development and process, the Sidama particularly the Bushe Sidama modified their existing institutions the *woma* (a village head) and *mote* (head of clan) and adopted *luwa* (age set organization) system that is similar to that of the *gada* system. It is assumed that probably the Sidama inherited it from the Borana Oromo, which seems for the purpose of expansion and to dominate economic and socio-political conditions within the society<sup>15</sup>.

The eight Bushe clans except the Hadicho clan called themselves Yemerecho, which means the “pure Sidama” stock, who are the ruling and landowning groups. These Yemerecho Sidama clans took over the leading position that was enjoyed by the earlier Hofa, the Maldea and Hadicho clans. Following their establishment as a leading Sidama group, the Yemerecho clans confronted with stiff resistance launched by the Maldea Sidama group<sup>16</sup>.

The Maldea, who were relatively large in number, challenged any impositions and sanctions from the powerful Yemerecho groups. These two Sidama groups were involved in prolonged armed struggle. However, gradually the Maldea sub-groups emerged victorious in the power struggle and came to be known as the Wolabicho Sidama that means liberated ones. This victory of the Maldea group against the domination of the Yemerecho provided them a right to share power and resources and to react independently from that of the Yemerecho interest<sup>17</sup>.

The Hadicho sub-clan from the Bush Clan who were ex-landowning group became unfortunate and failed to afford means of existence and recklessly looked for other alternatives to get their daily income. Hence, they were forced to become potters, tanners, blacksmiths and daily laborers. It was also believed that the Hofa people that include Fardano, Kusai, Mutalle, Hagawo and Dordana clans had settled in the present Sidama territory. However, through time these people assimilated to the Sidama.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Alemaw Kifle, 2005:19.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.18-19.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 20-21.

According to sources, the most important events of the 16<sup>th</sup> century that affected the Sidama was war led by Immam Ahmad Iban Ibrahim the Oromo Population Movement and the Christian state expansions. These historical events were responsible for the formation of the current socially stratified Sidamas: Yemerecho (elite), Wolabicho (liberated) and Hadicho (marginalized). Gradually, the Sidama found themselves categorized into thirteen Sidama clans under the above three major groups. This condition made the Sidama people unable to form common defense force against their adversaries, as we will see in the next chapter<sup>19</sup>.

Betena, who is from the Sidama ethnic group and worked with, different scholars, mentioned that most of the Sidama People claim to have come from the east and southeastern parts of Ethiopia crossing the River Dawa. Some claimed that their origin was from Harar and they crossed Bale and arrived at Sidama<sup>20</sup>.

Markos Tekle on the otherhand, quoting various writers explains that the Sidama are one of the members of the Cushitic-speaking groups that are indigenous to the northeastern part of Ethiopia. Then the people moved towards the south and southwest to settle in Dawa, which is the first place where the Sidama ancestors were said to have settled and became distinctively identified from other Cushitic-speaking families. At a later stage, the Sidama moved towards the northwest and began to live in their present territory<sup>21</sup>.

According to Girma Negash, when the Oromo crossed the Wabishebele River around the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, they encountered non-Oromo inhabitants like the Hadiya and the Sidama. In fact, the first non-Oromo people first encountered and fought with for territory and grazing land was the Sidama<sup>22</sup>.

Markos summarizes and singles out two factors that pushed the Sidamas to the current settlement area from Dawa. These are lack of suitable grazing and agricultural land and pressure from the Oromo People around the Dawa River<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.10-13.

<sup>21</sup>Markos Tekle, "State-Society Relations and Traditional Modes of Governance in Ethiopia: A Case Study of Sidama" (PhD Dissertation, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Addis Ababa University, 2014), pp.54-55.

<sup>22</sup>Girma Negash, pp.15-20.

<sup>23</sup>Markos Tekle, p.54-55.

As mentioned already, there are different views and opinions among scholars concerning the place of origin and the settlement of the Sidama People to their present location. This is mainly due to the absence of written materials on the Sidama People. Therefore, there are speculative arguments developed in oral traditions, explorers, travellers' accounts, ethnographic, linguistic and other works. However, for me the analysis of Betena and John Hammer and other scholars that assert the Sidama originated from east and southeast part of Ethiopia and settled around Dawa River and then moved to their present territory seems acceptable since it is supported by other scholars, indigenous writers and oral informants.

Because of the absence of written sources, the naming of the land and the people is still controversial. Trimingham used the name "Sidama" to call the completely southern Ethiopian people from the River Wabishebelle in the east to the valleys of Sobat and Didessa in the west. Cerulli, Italian linguist who conducted a research on the language and history of the Sidama people used the name "Sidama" for the Sidama proper such as Hadya, Kembata, Tambaro, Alaba and Gedeo<sup>24</sup>.

In the work of Alemedia, which is edited by Beckingham and Huntinfford, the authors used the name "Sidama" to represent all peoples of southwest Ethiopia while "Sidamo" was used to represent a single tribe or people. In a similar way, Stanley used the term "Sidama" for the people who occupied the area between Lake Hawassa in the north and the town of Dilla<sup>25</sup>.

To avoid confusion, Braukamper limits the "Sidama" for the present Sidama People and "Sidamo" for the respective former regional administration that encompassed many ethnic groups<sup>26</sup>.

Betena used the name "Sidama" for both the land and the people occupying the area between Lake Hawassa in the north and Lake Abaya in the southwest. In strengthening his firm stand, he said, "No other people call itself Sidama except this specific group."<sup>27</sup>.

Proponents of the Hamatic hypothesis such as G. Selgman, G.Sergi and their supporters such as Hammer and Ullendorf, Braukamper and Stanley assert that the Sidama people are the

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24. Seble, p.1.

25. *Ibid*, pp.1-2.

26. *Ibid*, p.20.

27. Endale, p.3.

descendants of the immigrant Hamites (Cushitic speaking peoples), Europeans who came to Africa crossing the Red Sea either from Asia or from Arabia in the BCs<sup>28</sup>.

Others opposing the above hypothesis claim that the Cushitic people are indigenous to Africa, particularly the northeast Africa and therefore, the Sidama are the indigenous people of Africa, not people who came from out of Africa. Conti-Rossini and Tadese Tamrat, who are proponents of this view, without indicating the place from where the Sidama People originated, underline the settlement of the people in northeast Africa just before the fifteenth century<sup>29</sup>.

Although except speculative attempts made by many scholars to indicate the original homeland of the Sidama People, it seems very difficult to show exactly where the Sidama ancestors had lived before the sixteen century. The history of the Sidama People after the sixteen century is well documented compared to the ancient history of the people. Alemaw Kifle after he made a thorough and detailed analysis of sources including the oral tradition reaches to proper conclusion which many authors and the writer of this research support. Alemaw supporting the ideas of Haberland, Hamer, Markos and others claims that for long period the Sidama had lived around Dawa before the sixteen century.

In the sixteen century, the expanding Oromo pushed them inland to the southeast. Because of the sixteen-century massive expansion of the Oromo in around Juba and Genale Valley, forced the Sidama to move westward and occupy their present territory and settled in the east of Lake Abaya. As we said above in the Wondo Genet *woreda* next to the Sidama, the Guji and Arsi Oromo and other ethnic groups such as Amhara, Gurage and others also live together. Particularly, the Guji Oromo number is higher than other ethnic groups. In the present area of Wondo Genet, the first people that settled in the area were said to be the Guji Oromo. The Guji Oromo came to the place from the area called Lepise Midegudu Kurkuru<sup>30</sup>. The group came from two directions: one group came from upper areas via Langanu and settled at Edo Wotachi. Another group, which came from the lowest area, settled at Chapa and Qella Kerma and around the sixteen century and settled in Wondo Genet. The livelihood of people of

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28. Alemaw Kifle, p.1.

29. *Ibid*, p.2.

30. *Ibid*, pp.9-10.



the area including the Guji Oromo was mainly based on the rearing of cattle. Agriculture started in the area after the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>31</sup>.

On the other hand, Wako Dubo summarizes that during the Oromo expansion of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Guji known as the Middle Borena, expanded to the Jamjam highland that was controlled by the Sidama. The Guji expanded to the north up to the areas of Hawassa and Wondo Genet areas but were checked or repulsed by Emperor Gelawdewos troops (1540-1559) and moved to the south into their current region. The AlabduGuji or called the Northern Guji nowadays live around Hawassa, Wondo Genet and Arbaminch. Like the Borana Oromo (the South Oromo), the Guji expanded and settled in their present surrounding areas<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, from the information I collected it seems that both the Sidama and the Guji came from their original homeland Bale and Borena respectively and settled in Wondo Genet area around the 16th century.

The Guji are divided into two confederacies: The Northern Guji (Alabdu) which is further divided into two sub-clans (Otu and Shelo) and the Southern Guji that comprises Uruga, Mati and Hoku clans. The Northern Guji are presently settling around Hawassa, Wondo Genet and Arbaminch while the Southern Guji settled below Sidama and Gedeo inhabited areas in Hagere Mariam ( BuleHora), Bore, Shakiso, KibreMenegest, Uruga, Tore and Solomo *woredas*<sup>33</sup>.

Other informants based on oral information maintained that the Sidama were living in the highland places of the area while the Oromo inhabited the lowland areas. Gradually, the Sidama came from the mountainous areas and settled in the lowland areas. While most of the Guji Oromo are pastoralists and moved from place to place in search of water and grazing land, the Sidama who tend to agricultural activities controlled the area of Wondo Genet coming from mountainous areas<sup>34</sup>.

Informants *Ato* Demese and *Ato* Birhanu claim that before the 19<sup>th</sup> century the belief of the Guji Oromo of the Wondo Genet area was *waqefena*. They prayed slaughtering animals and calling the place names in the areas and some natural creatures such as mountains and rivers. They perform rituals like sacrificing animal blood on the graveyards of ancestors and families. In addition, the Guji Oromo give special place to cattle. When they move from place to place, there

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31. Informants: *Ato* Demese and *Ato* Birhanu.

32. Wako Dubo, *Guji Social Conventions and Laws of Society Rehearsed at the 22 th Bokko Assembly*, (Addis Ababa, April 1998), p.14.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Informant: *Ato* Wotecha Teshete.

is a ritual called *huluqa*. In the process of the *huluqa* aritual, they slaughter cattle and in two directions hold a leaf of palm and all cattle pass through that hole. This is performed to pray and beg their god to protect and bless their cattle. After the nineteenth century, universal religions such as Islam and Christianity were introduced to the people<sup>35</sup>.

## **The Sidama People Socio-Political Organization and the 19<sup>th</sup> century Conquest by the Forces of Emperor Menelik II**

The Sidama had their own administration, traditional judgment procedure and money (*womasha*) for transaction purposes before the conquest of Emperor Menelik at the end of the nineteen century. They had practiced administration among the various clans based on their community life with their own rules, laws, consent and conventions. The administrative structure was organized under clans and was called *Mote* (clan head) which was equivalent to king. Under the *Mote*, there were local elders. These elders have also their own authority of hierarchy. Each authority level has its own duty or responsibility. *Garo* (elderly council) who were assistants or advisors to the *Mote* in the administration work assisted the *Mote*, the clan head, or the king<sup>36</sup>.

Besides, there was indigenous council of people representatives known as *Shengo*. The *Shengo* is similar to the modern day parliament. There was active participation of the members of the *Shengo* in its activities such as sharing ideas among themselves and ruling the Sidama people properly by appointing efficient leaders. The *Shengo* did not have a written constitution. It was guided by the oral constitution (unwritten constitution) which was handed over by generation and learnt by all involved by heart. *Mote* was involved in overall secular political and administrative issues, provision of justice, conflict resolution and the like<sup>37</sup>.

The *Womma*, holder of another high rank, was responsible for overseeing religious and cultural issues. On the other hand, the *Luwa* system involves in administrative and cultural aspects of the Sidama society. Particularly, *Luwa* was responsible for defense activities of the society. The defense administration is handled by “*Godaana*” or “war leader”<sup>40</sup>. However, there have been variations in the power and responsibilities of such cultural and political positions across clans and over the years. Following the conquest at the end of the nineteenth century, these and other

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35. Informants: *Ato Demese* and *Ato Birhanu*.

36. Endale Eshine, pp. 6-7.

37. *Ibid.*; Informants: *Ato Demese* and *Ato Birhanu*.

traditional Sidama administration and cultural features and organizations were dismantled or modified<sup>38</sup>.

Many writers believed that the late nineteenth century's territorial expansion of Emperor Menelik II was a continuation of the expansionist policy of the Kingdom of Shewa. King SahleSilassie of Shewa (1813-1847). Grandson of SahleSilassie Emperor Menelik, who was King of Shewa(1865-1888) and Emperor of Ethiopia (1889-1913) enlarged and completed massily. Emperor Menelik was motivated by religious, economic and political factors. The Great Famine of Ethiopia (1889-1892) is also taken as one factor that initiated Menelik to expand southwards to conquer new lands and relocate for his starving forces into unaffected and resourceful regions<sup>39</sup>.

The earliest attempt to conquer Sidama land was done in the year 1889 by Beshah Aboye, who was a relative of Menelik when he entered into the Sidama territory at the head of a contingent, which numbered 1000-2000. Beshah was the first to lead an expedition into the Sidama land<sup>40</sup>. He camped at Laku, and faced challenge from the people to maintain control of the land<sup>41</sup>.

Thus, Beshah moved further into the highland of Shebedino and settled at Shisha that later developed to towns in the Sidama ethnic area. Presently, it is located southeast of the present day Yirgalem. Shishah is known as the first town in Sidama founded by the Shewans. However, in his stay at Shisha, *Dejjazmach* Beshah Aboye faced a series of resistance and attacks particularly when he was not in the area from the rebel Sidama groups. Finally, with their due effort the Sidamas were able to evacuate the forces of Beshah from their land in the mid of 1889<sup>42</sup>.

However, Beshah's expedition was followed by the second more effective expedition by *Dejjazmach* Leulseged Atnafseged after two years in 1891. *Dejjazmach* Leulseged was more successful in subjugating the Sidama People and establishing garrison towns in Sidama

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38. Endale Eshine, p.7.

39. Alemaw Kifle, pp.30-31; Girma Negash, pp.17-20.

40. Seble Mitike, pp.16-17.

41. Girma Negash, pp.18-21; Alemaw Kifle, pp.29-32; Seble Mitike, pp.15-18; Tsehay Berhane Selassie, "Menelik II Conquest and Consolidation of the Southern Provinces" (BA Thesis, Department of History, AAU, 1969), pp.15-22.

42. Seble Mitike, pp.16-17.

provinces such as Kella in Garbicho and Bule in Gedeo land. He was also able to get the submission of Sidama *Motes*. The Sidama called him Lulsa or Qurumsa, which means logical<sup>43</sup>.

Almaw, based on the Sidama oral history, states that when Menelik's forces came to the area the Sidama People were busy fighting one clan against the other. When Menelik's forces approached the Sidama territory, they sent a message that contains a request for peaceful submission. In the past time the autonomous Sidama *Motes* (clan leaders), had no experience of reacting together against their common enemies. However, due to the dangerous situation they came together and discussed on the message sent from the Menelik forces. The Sidama *Motes* such as Balich Noro of Yanase, Gasare or Lelo, Dulacha and Cuko of the Alata *Motes* were highly concerned with the issue, made a long and warm debate on the matter, and looked thoroughly at all available alternatives. Nevertheless, due to absence of interest to have common defensive power, failed to reach a consensus and common agreement<sup>44</sup>.

Thus, each *mote* had shown interest to respond independently in line with interest of his own clan either to submit or resist than reacting together against their common enemy. Lastly, the meeting ended up without tangible conclusion. Most sources agree that the loss of common defense front and cooperation among the Sidama clans was the main reason for the early conquest of the Sidama by the force of Emperor Menelik with small resistance<sup>45</sup>.

For long time, *Dejjazmach* Balcha was appointed as the governor of the Sidamo Province in 1897-1909, 1911-1914 and 1916-1927 replacing *Dejjazmach* Lulseged's rule and marked the actual incorporation of the Sidama land to the empire of Menelik. In the period between 1909 and 1911, Balcha was removed from the province and *Ras*Tessema Nadew and *Dejjazmach* Teferi (later Emperor Haile Selassie I) were appointed as governors of the Sidamo Province. Scholars of the subject agree that Balcha was given the traditional Ethiopian title of *Dejjazmach* and the fertile land of the Sidama as a reward for his huge devotion and patriotism at the battle of Adwa<sup>46</sup>.

Balcha first settled for a brief time at Bule and later he founded his own capital at Abara located at south east of Hagere Selam. He ruled his first two terms (1897-1909, 1911-1914) from this

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43.Alemaw Kifle,p.34.

44.*Ibid*,p.31.

45.Alemaw Kifle, p.32; Seble Mitike,pp.16-17.

46.Seble Mitike, pp.16-18; Almaw Kifle,pp.41, 43.

capital of Abara. When he was appointed as a governor of Sidamo for the third time in 1917, he moved his capital from Abara to Hagere Selam called locally Hula<sup>47</sup>.

The arrival of *Dejjazmach* Balcha Safo to the Sidama area indicates that before the introduction of the *gebbar* system in the Sidama area after the incorporation, there was a communal land holding system. Land ownership belonged to the clans. Every male member of a clan had a right to inherit land through kinship from his ancestors. However, gradually, after the incorporation, particularly after the 1920s following the growth of cash economy and privatization of land, land alienation expanded and the Sidama divorced from their land and the *neftenna-gebbar* system dominated<sup>48</sup>.

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47. Almwaw Kifle, p.41.

48. Seble Mitike, p.17-18; Betena Hotesa, *Sidama Hezben Bahilu*, (Addis Ababa, 1991), pp.131-133.

## Chapter II

### Some Socio- Cultural Features of the Sidama People

Culture can be defined as the sum total of learned beliefs, values and customs that serve to regulate the behavior of members of a particular group or people. Each individual perceives the world through his own cultural lens. Culture is learned, changeable and adaptable<sup>1</sup>.

The Sidama people have rich tradition and cultural life. Among these are marriage ceremonies and arrangements, resolution of conflicts between individuals and groups, religious practices, celebration of culture-based holidays and ceremonies like New Year festivals (*fiche*), classification of generational system or *luwa*, adherence to the *yakka* institution serving as Ombudsman for women, *gudumale* and *mura* institutions, and mourning rituals and traditional religion<sup>2</sup>. These colorful customary norms, social values and religious beliefs distinguish the Sidama from other ethnic groups.

### The Traditional Belief of the Sidama

In the traditional beliefs of the Sidama, there is an order that the Sidama conceptualize the spiritual universe. The Sidama belief consisted of a group of deities in rank order. Accordingly, it was consisting of the sky deities, dead elders such as *anuayana* and *akakoayana* or *akakos* and spirit beings (*qallichas* and others). The most important sky deity is Magano, the creator who created all things including man<sup>3</sup>.

The Magano is the most important sky god. The Magano, after creating the people quarreled with them because of their selfishness and reluctance to accept the inevitability of death. Then, he returned to the sky where he created the sun, moon, and stars to overcome darkness and give light. His companion in the sky is Banko, the thunder and lightning deity. Like the creator Banko who lived for a short time upon earth, before returning to the sky, he gave the people the power to protect their land in return for observing certain food taboos<sup>4</sup>.

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1. Endale Eshine, p.18.

2. *Ibid*; Markos, p.58.

3. J.H. Hamer, "Practice and Change: An Episode of Structural Disjunction and Conjunction among the Sidama of Ethiopia" *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol.58, No.2, 1985, pp.62-65.

4. *Ibid*, pp. 63-64.

Below these deities of ultimate power and control are the spirits of the dead elders. These spirits of the founding clan ancestors established "*halaale*", which could be translated as "the true way of life." The term *halaale* mainly referred to exhibit good quality of life or behavior in connection to giving evidence in disputes, faithfulness in conforming to norms of mutuality, and avoidance of jealousy and generosity. Moreover, *halaale* refers to the pursuit of a true way of life and it is a highly observed socio-cultural value among the Sidama. The members of the community in general, and elders in particular, are expected to live according to the principle of *halaale* that represents an "acceptable level of moral standard"<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, J. Hamer claims that this moral code, *halaale*, continues to provide the basis for distinguishing 'good' and 'evil' to the present day. For him, the Sidama believe they will flourish as long as they were obedient in conforming the rules of the agreement to Magano.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, J. Hamer indicates that the Sidama believe that lesser spirits come from Magano and they are responsible to solve the problems of everyday life. While lesser spirits control local events, Magano provided the moral code of *halaale* from the beginning. It is a set of principles sufficiently flexible to be reinterpreted to fit changing social contexts. Though many of the Sidama people agree that lesser spirits come from the Magano, they believe that *halaale* takes precedence over the activities of lesser spirits. The spirits may solve individual problems, but *haalale* is concerned with issues of community harmony. Thus, the Sidama have always used rituals including sacrifices involving all members of the community to call upon the Magano to help resolve community crises such as drought, severe illness, and threats to social cohesion. Individuals, on the other hand, invite ritual leaders, relatives or friends to call on spirits for resolving personal problems<sup>7</sup>.

When the elders decide that a person from the community has violated the rules of the *halaale*, through evidence of wrongdoing or admission of guilt, the elders first as initial stage impose a small fine, payment of which shows sadness for having broken community rules<sup>8</sup>. If the individual is reluctant to admit wrongdoing and return from his way, or not willing to pay the prescribed fine, he may face ostracism (*Sira*). To make him shameful and people refuse to work,

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>J.H. Hamer, "The Religious Conversion among the Sidama of Northeast Africa" *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol.72, No.4, 2002, p.601.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

eat or associate with him. If the *Sira* failed to bring the criminal to confession and pay the necessary social readmission fine, the elders, will take the last measure as mediators between Magano and ordinary humans and will literally refer the matter to the creator. This is done in the form of a curse: '*Haalalu* and Magano will follow you.'<sup>9</sup>

It is believed that Magano will punish the stubborn by destroying his health, bringing sickness for his children and cattle, the loss of material wealth, and failure to produce more descendants in his own or his children's generation<sup>10</sup>.

The Sidama believe that "*halaale*" is the gift of the founding ancestors and the dead elder communicates through dreams with the living elders, regarding obvious transgression of the traditional principle. They believe also that all men will receive dream visits from deceased fathers requesting that their spirits be fed and reminding them of their obligations to honor the living elders and respect the "true way of life" or *haalale*<sup>11</sup>.

Writers on the area are unable to ascertain the views of the Sidama on the after death concept and are either influenced by Christians and Muslim traders or are parts of the original story of Magano's gift of the moral code. Nevertheless, some of the Sidama People suggests the existence of a gate (*robotutla*) in the sky (*imihaso*). On each side of this gate there is a ditch, one of which having a great depth and the other filled with fire. There the Magano asks the deceased if during their lifetime on the earth they have had sexual relations with close relatives or taken money from them and if they have been kind to others in the community. If the answers are unacceptable, these people spend eternity trying to balance between the two pits, always fearing a fall into one or another. Those who have abided to the *halaale* code, especially about family members, are permitted to pass through the gate into an eternity of ease and peace<sup>12</sup>.

The traditional Sidama People have two important groups who have administrative and religious power in their traditional way of life. These are ritual chiefs whose principal functions were to conduct and supervise spiritual sacrifices and mediate disputes between sub-clans and elders who are powerful to make policy and settle disputes on a consensual basis at various organizational

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid*, p.601.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, pp.601-602.

<sup>11</sup>J.H. Hamer, 1985, p.64.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibidr*, 2002, p.602.



levels ranging from the hamlet and neighborhood through the clan. All men are also eligible for elder position based on promotion through the generational class system<sup>13</sup>.

John Hamer 2002, in his paper that deals with the religious conversion process among the Sidama People, assesses about the traditional belief of the Sidama and their conversion to Christianity after their incorporation to the central government of Ethiopia. Like that of Alemaw, he states that the role of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the pre-World War II period did not involve proselytization of the Sidama due to limitation of power. The Church's attempt to evangelize the people significantly increased in the Post-1941 forward. He explains that although during the period of Italian occupation, the fascist Italians supported Catholicism, there is no any indication of the Sidama People's conversion to Catholic Christianity in large number<sup>14</sup>.

Generally, sources indicate that the traditional Sidama's religious belief is polytheistic, including belief in nature "god of mountains and rivers" and god of ancestral spirits as mentioned above. However, today the Sidama traditional belief is diminishing because of the introduction and spread of Christianity and modernization<sup>15</sup>.

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13.Ibid, 1985, pp.63-66; J.H.Hamer, 2002, pp.601-605.

14John H, 2002, pp.602-606.

15.Endale, Eshine, pp.27-29.

## The *Luwa* System

*Luwa* is one of the Sidama cultural institutions, which are still practiced by the society. It is a mechanism of mentoring, training and initiating the youth to take up multifold social, economic, cultural, ritual, and political roles. In the system, males make participation to get social status, greatness in rank and transition to efficient elderliness. Moreover, it is an institution in which each male member gives administrative and social services to the society. It is most probable that this system might have been adapted from the Oromo's *gada* system<sup>16</sup>.

*Luwa* is a generational class or age-set system that serves as an instrument of transforming generational leadership. It is administered by an age system where each grade rotates every eight years. The *luwa* system has social, cultural, political and military dimensions and passes through five generational cycles revolving approximately every eight years. Therefore, one full cycle of *luwa* is forty years. The five cycles are Fulasa, Darara, Mogisa, Wawasa, and Hirbora. *Luwa* is administered by democratic rules and principles and its leader is known as *gadana* (. The deputy of *gadana* is called *jalawa*. The Sidama have indigenous defense system, which is organized under the *luwa* system. This was because of the threat of constant conflict with neighboring ethnic groups such as Wolaita and Arsi Oromo peoples for more cultivable and grazing lands<sup>17</sup>.

### ***Fiche and Chembalala: New Year Festival and Calendar of the Sidama People***

*Fiche* is a New Year festival in Sidama. For the people of the Sidama, it is the most celebrated cultural holiday, which is based on formulation of the Lunar Calendar. The Sidama calendar has twelve months in a year. Each month is divided equally into 28 days. This is because in the Sidama calendar, each week has only four days and each month has seven weeks instead of four weeks of the Gregorian (European) and Ethiopian official calendars. In addition, a thirteenth month known as *fooqais* was introduced, which seem to make the Sidama calendar fit to the Ethiopian Calendar<sup>18</sup>.

The names of the twelve months of the calendar are *Badheessa* (March), *Dotteessa* (April), *Onkoleessa* (May), *Ella* (June), *Maaja* (July), *Woxawaajje* (August), *Wocawaaro* (September),

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16. Endale Eshine, p.18.

17. *Ibid*, p.19; Markos Tekle, p.60-61.

18. Endale Eshine, p.20; Markos Kifle, p.59.

*Birra* (October), *Bocaasa* (November), *Sadaasa* (December), *Arfasa* (January), and *Amaje* (February). March is considered as the beginning of the New Year that is marked by the celebration of *Fiche*. The festival has no fixed date and it rather rotates throughout all the months of the year. *Dikko*, *Deela*, *Qawadoo* and *Qawalanka* are the names of the four days in a week<sup>19</sup>. Some writers say that each name of the four day represents the name of traditional market places in Sidama. In Sidama calendar, a year has less than the 364.25 days. That is why *fiche* festivity always takes place at different days in less than a time span of a year, which means before 364 days of a year<sup>20</sup>.

The *ayanto* are the wise elderly people who are gifted in systematically constructing the calendar and fixing the date of *fiche*. They also take responsibility for coordinating all other associated social, cultural and ritual functions. According to informants, after the *ayanto* fixed the date, the local clan heads announce the New Year day to the people at market place. In the meantime, the Local priests and clan leaders together with elders begin fasting one month before the *fiche* festival to beseech God for his mercy and blessings so that the people will celebrate the holiday peacefully.<sup>21</sup> Then they announce saying “New Year has come, celebrate your *Fiche*: feed your cattle *bole* (mineral soil), let what you eat be agreeable to you”.<sup>22</sup> Family members and cattle pass through the gates, as a sign of fare well to the old year and welcome to the New Year. In the evening, villagers will gather in an elder’s house to dine together where he tests every prepared food and spits on the ground uttering the blessing “Happy New Year”, let *Fiche* keep us together. After the ritual of blessing, the cultural food in Sidama known as *boresema* that is prepared from inset and butter will be served<sup>23</sup>.

*Chambalala* is part of *Fiche* celebration that refers performing cultural dances and plays as well as children’s visit to neighborhoods and relatives to be offered with *boresema*, a special food made from *Enset* (false banana) immersed with butter. *Chambalala* is cultural New Year celebration. It comes after *Fiche* in the next day of *Qawalanka*, the last day of the week. On the day, young people go from one house to another singing traditional songs and dancing traditional rhythms. The youth sing saying “*ayiidechambala*” which literally means, “Happy New Year”

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19. Markos Kifle, p.59-60; Endale Eshine, p.20.

20. Endale Eshine, p.20.

21. *Ibid*, p.21.

22. *Ibid*.

23. *Ibid*.

and “we have come to your house to wish you a happy and peaceful new year”. The head of the house people, usually the mother responds to the youth singers saying “*ille, ille...*” which means, “welcome, welcome and we wish you a happy new year too”<sup>24</sup>.

What makes the *Fiche* festivity different from other festivals and ceremonies is that on the ceremony the food, which is served, is made only from milk products and Enset. On that occasion, slaughtering any kind of animal is traditionally prohibited. On *Fiche* days, cattle are fed with better grasses, mineral or salty soil locally known as *bole*. Slaughtering an animal on *Fiche* ceremony is believed to bring disease and death on cattle<sup>25</sup>.

### **Gudumale and Mura Institutions**

According to my informant *Ato Nure Nuka*, *gudumale* and *mura* institutions are traditional Sidama courts which were practiced since the Medieval period to resolve various problems and punish criminals in the society. These institutions were mainly practiced in the place called *Wujigera* in *Melge woreda*. The people solve various problems and punish criminals using elders of the region. At initial stage, any man can present his case to *gudumale* elders who are organized by nine main known elders and representatives from each *kebele* (the lower administrative structure of the government) were also included based on the issue presented. After investigating the problem and hearing the matter from each person, the accuser and the accused or defender, they pass decisions<sup>26</sup>.

If anyone has complained about the decision passed by the *gudumale*, he could apply to *mura* (*seberchelot*) or higher court and could get final decision. This practice had stopped working during the *Derg* regime. However, after the EPRDF government seized power and enshrined in the constitution the idea of fostering the cultures of the peoples of Ethiopia, the Sidama People resumed the practice of *gudumela* and *mura* institutions<sup>27</sup>.

### **Yakka Institution**

In the Sidama community, women have great place. *Yakka* is an indigenous socio-cultural institution that works on defending the rights of women. Women themselves organized and led it

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<sup>24</sup>.*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>.*Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>.Informant: *Ato Nure Nuka*.

<sup>27</sup>.*Ibid.*

as a special institution set up to protect women from domestic (internal) violence by their husbands or family members. All members of the institution are women engaged in preventing domestic violence, abuse and mistreatment. *Yakka* also strives to get the attention of the community working to solve problems affecting women urging the community leaders to involve and interfere in protecting women from maltreatment. When the community fails to react and solve a given problem, members of the *yakka* act to the extent of protesting and rioting against the offender in various forms<sup>28</sup>. However, even though this kind of institution existed in the Sidama People, the women of Sidama did not escape from abuse and exploitation by the male members of the community.

### **Death and Funeral Ceremony**

The Sidama People generally regarded death as part of the plan of God for man. It is believed that God send the spirit of death traditionally known as “*ayama*”, to end the life a human being when his or her time on earth has already expired. The Sidama traditional culture considers death, like birth a rite of passage and great life crisis for the individual, family and community. Culturally, among the Sidama, the loss of individuals is experienced through a deep grief<sup>29</sup>.

In case of an old man, culturally he should be visited and cared for by his wife (wives), sons and brothers who are also responsible for washing his corps when he dies. Then, his oldest son or one of his brothers closes his eyes, molds his mouth to a normal position and brings his hands together. His body is then washed, anointed with butter wrapped in a garment and is kept for three to five days before burial as a sign of his old age<sup>30</sup>.

In case of the death of an important old man and woman, the passing away is temporarily kept secret until the elders discussed the timing and condition of the burial rite and of the funeral. It is then the duty of the *murricha*, meaning head of *edirto* announce to the village traditionally known as olla. He sends messengers to the various sectors of the olla and other places where close relatives of the deceased live, in order to announce the sad news and invite the members for the funeral<sup>31</sup>.

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28.Markos Tekle, p. 61.

29.Endale Eshine, p.27.

30.*Ibid.*

31.Endale Eshine, p.27.

According to the cultural tradition of the Sidama People, the deceased family and the *olla* facilitate all the necessary objects and functions for the burial rite. The olla leaders assign teams of gravediggers and those groups take responsibility of site selection and take excavating the tomb<sup>32</sup>. The body of the deceased is usually placed in a coffin and is carried to the burying site by a procession of weeping and wailing. As indicated above, on the ceremony of the funeral men overcome by a very deep pain and other relatives and friends express their grief by weeping and wailing. The children of the deceased express also their very deep grief by wailing repeating expressions of sorrow<sup>33</sup>.

Following the burial ceremony, a funeral meal traditionally known as the members of the olla organization will supply “waasa”, an enset stable food with milk and will be served. The guests who attended in funeral ceremony sit on the grass in front of the deceased house, grouped by age and sex, while stable food, *waasais* placed in front of them and invited them, to feed it. After the ceremony, the guests return to their homes by saying a mourner “*misse*” meaning be recovered<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup>.*Ibid*, p.28.

<sup>33</sup>.*Ibid*, p.28.

<sup>34</sup>.*Ibid*, pp.28-29.

## Chapter III

### The Introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia

According to traditional sources, before the coming of Christianity to Ethiopia, the people of Ethiopia worshiped different traditional gods and some are followers of Judaism. Christianity was introduced during the 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>. In the early years of the Aksumite period, the people worshiped various gods such as the Greek gods (Sea god) inherited from Greek, a snake worship which came from Persia, the South Arabian gods (Sabean gods) such as Astar, Sin (the moon god), Shames (the sun god), etc. Still today on one of the states of Aksum, a symbol of engraved serpent is found<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to tradition, the *KibreNegest* (The Glory of Kings), one of the sources of traditional laws of imperial Ethiopia, records the introduction of Judaism in the tenth century BC. It accounts the visit of Queen Sheba (Mekeda) to King Solomon of Israel in Jerusalem. Although this not proved by other historical sources, *Kibre Negest* maintains that she conceived a son from the king whom she called Menelik who is said to have become the first emperor, Menelik I, and founder of the Ethiopian Solomonic dynasty<sup>3</sup>.

After Menelik I grew up, it is said that he had visited his father in Jerusalem and in his return to home accompanied by many Israelites and descendants of the Lewi tribe who brought with them the Ark of the Covenant. According to the legend and tradition, from this time onwards the practice of Judaism started in Ethiopia side by side with practice of polytheism. Historical sources indicate that the people known as Felasha who were living around Lake Tana and who were practicing Judaism religion are believed to be descendants of the Israelites<sup>4</sup>.

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1. World Vision-East Africa, *Ye Ethiopia BeteKristian Tarik Be Wengel AmagnochEyeta (A History of Ethiopian Church in the Evangelical Churches Perspective)* (Kenya: 2013), p.11.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Sergew Hable Selassie and others (Ed), *The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life*, (Addis Ababa, 1997), pp.1-2

4. *Ibid.*, 2-3.

There are different historical versions about the beginning of Christianity in Ethiopia. Some based on the biblical scripture of Acts 8:27 claim that at the time of Christ, Queen Kandake (Hyndeke) ruled the Kingdom. At that time, Apostle Philip baptized in Jerusalem, one of her officials called Eunach in the Bible, although his actual name is not mentioned. According to these sources, the Eunach was the first man to bring Christianity to Ethiopia<sup>5</sup>.

Others believe that the introduction of Christianity is associated with the coming of the two young Syrian brothers-Frumenatius and Aedesius. Many writers quoting a Greek historian Rufinus in around 410AD, account that Meroppius, a merchant and some say him a philosopher from Tyre, an ancient city and capital of the Phoenicia kingdom on the eastern coast of Mediterranean Sea, set out a visit to India accompanied by his relatives the above two young brothers<sup>6</sup>.

Because pirates African coast of the Red Sea, Meroppius and all his followers were massacred except the two brothers- Frumenatius and Aedesius. The boys were taken in to Ell- Amida, the King of Aksum at the time. While they were growing, the king was impressed by their wisdom and he appointed Frumenatius his secretary and his brother Aedesius his cupbearer. After some time, when Aedesius returned to his country, Frumenatius agreed to stay in Aksum and carried out his task faithfully. Some years later, Frumenatius began to turn towards matter of faith. Preaching King Ezana and Saezana (his brother), sons of king Ell-Amida, he baptized them. In around 330AD King Ezana became the first Christian king of Ethiopia. Frumenatius set off for Alexanderia and reported the condition to the Coptic Church bishop<sup>7</sup>.

Athnadius, the head of Coptic Church of Egypt called the priests and discussed about the issue of the presence of Christians in Ethiopia. He then decided and consecrated Frumenatius Archbishop of Ethiopia. Frumenatius returned to Ethiopia being the Aksumite Empire's first Archbishop, and was given the name *AbuneSelama* (Father of Peace) and *KestaeBirhan* (Revealer of Light). In the fourth century AD Christianity, became the official state religion of the Axumite kingdom, which stayed up to the demise of the Imperial Regime in 1974<sup>8</sup>.

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5. World Vision-East Africa, pp.14-15.

6. John Cumbers, *Count It All Joy: Testimonies from A Persecuted Church* (Kearney: Moris Publishing, 1995), p.3; John Cumbers, *The Red Terror: Missionaries Experiences in Communist Ethiopia*. (Charlotte: Moris Publishing, 1996), 1-15.

7. John Cumbers, 1995:2-4.

8. *Ibid*, p.3.



The coming of the so-called “*TeseatuKidusan/ZetegnuMenekosat*” or “The Nine Saints” in the 5<sup>th</sup> century from Syria during the reign of the Aksumit King TazenaWolde Ameda (Son of Almeda) has significant place in the history of Christianity in Ethiopia. They were forced to migrate to Ethiopia and Egypt when they were persecuted by the Byzantine Empire because they rejected the decision of the Chalcedon Congress held in 451. They were regarded as the main source of evangelization in the country. These groups were well known for their contribution of religious life and the foundation of monasticism in Ethiopia. They learnt Geez language and along with Ethiopian scholars translated many religious books from Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek languages into Geez language of Ethiopia including translation of the Gospel of John into Geez. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has designated many Churches by the name of these saints among them the significant are *Abba Gerima*, *Abba Pentelion*, *Abba Aregawi* and others. This Coptic Church of Ethiopia eventually came to be known as Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC)<sup>9</sup>.

Christianity became state religion and the church came to be related and worked together with the imperial state of Ethiopia mainly after the restoration of the Solomonic Dynasty by YekunoAmlak in 1270. The kingdom began to expand southward into the area populated by speakers of the Cushitic languages. Particularly the grandson of YikunnoAmlak, Amde Seyon (1314-1344) was successful in controlling the commercial trade activities of the then Islamic kingdoms of Ifat, Dawaro, Bali, Hadiya and others of the the region. Through his military power, he gained control of important trade routes to the Red Sea and seized political hegemony over much of south Ethiopia including the area known as Damot. The same work was also performed by his successors such as Zara Yaqob (r 1434-1468)<sup>10</sup>.

This Ethiopian or the then Abyssinian expansion into the south was not confined only to military and economic spheres. Along with their territorial expansion, they introduced the Orthodox Christianity to the areas. In addition to the forceful expansion, Abune Tekle Haymanot expanded the Orthodox Christianity to the south Ethiopia through evangelical work since the thirteen century<sup>11</sup>.

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9.Wondiye Ali. *Be Mekera Wist Yabebech Betekristian (A Church that has flourished through tribulation)*, Getachew Belete (Ed) (Addis Ababa: SIM. 2008), pp.10-11.

10.E. Paul Balisky, *Wolaita Evangelists: A Study of Religious Innovation in Southern Ethiopia, 1937-1975* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2009), p.52.

11.*Ibid.*

Paul Balisky claims that the imperial conquest of the south by Emperor Menelik II in the 1880s and 1890s was one catalyst for religious change in the south. Following the massive military conquest of Menelik in south Ethiopia many Orthodox Churches were constructed, evangelization was carried out and the peoples were influenced in different ways to embrace Christianity and abandoned their traditional beliefs<sup>12</sup>.

### **The Protestant Missionaries in South Ethiopia**

When Ethiopia was engaged in war between the Muslim Sultanates led under Imam Ahmed Gagn and the Highland Christian Kingdom and later civil war between the Tewahedo Orthodox section and the new Catholic embraced groups, reformation movement of the Protestants swept Europe. After the reformation, some European Christians planned to preach the gospel and came to Ethiopia<sup>13</sup>.

Fekadu Gurmessa claims that the early missionaries in Europe and America believed that the Eastern Churches, including the Ethiopian Coptic or Orthodox Church, have lost the true faith because of their isolation from other Christians and encirclement by Muslims. Thus, the Protestant missionaries planned to introduce renewal, which is like the European Reformation type into Ethiopian Churches. For Fekadu, Peter Heyling, who was from Lubeck, Germany and the first evangelical missionary that came to Ethiopia during the time of Emperor Fasiledes in the seventeenth century aimed to bring this renewal in the country<sup>14</sup>.

Peter Heyling was unable to do his work and when he was on his way to return to his country through Swakin, the Ottoman Turks assassinated him. After the death of Peter Heyling and the next two centuries because of the civil war and death of many peoples and due to the Turkish control of the areas and the outlets, foreign missionaries were unable to enter into Ethiopia. After the traveler James Bruce wrote about Ethiopia in around 1782, a revival of interest for Ethiopia started in Europe. Therefore, the Church Missionary Society of England and Chrishona Mission of Switzerland tried to send missionaries to the “ancient African Christian country”, Ethiopia. However, they were not successful. In the 1830s and 1840s, many missionaries such as Sameul Gobat, Christian Kugler, Eizenberg and Ludwig Krapt had come to Ethiopia and attempted to

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12. *Ibid.*, pp.85-87.

13. *Ibid.*; Wondiye Ali, pp.11-21.

14. Fekadu Gurmessa, *Evangelical Faith Movement in Ethiopia: Origin and Establishment of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2009), p.78.

introduce evangelical Christianity into the country. They worked in areas of Adwa in Tigray and Gonder. They distributed the Amharic Bible and preached the gospel. Nevertheless, due to various reasons mainly opposition and personal reasons such as sickness many of them left Ethiopia and went to other countries<sup>15</sup>.

Sources indicate that the first effective missionary initiative for Ethiopia was taken in Sweden by “Sweden Association for Mission”, following the spiritual revival of the nineteenth century. The Swedish Missionaries aim was to start missionary work on the northern border of Ethiopia and they later planned to reach the Oromo in southern Ethiopia. Their mission began to bear fruit in 1903 when the Swedish Pastor Carl Cederquist got permission from Menelik II to begin work in Addis Ababa<sup>16</sup>.

Carl Cederquist started his evangelical work side by side with educational and health services to the people of Addis Ababa. He had informal Sunday spiritual meetings with his students. These meetings laid a base for spiritual knowledge of his students and for plantation of the first formal Protestant Church in Ethiopia by the name Mekane Yesus Church in 1921. Since the 1920s and mainly after 1941 many missionary groups were working in Ethiopia and spreading the Protestant faith in southern Ethiopia<sup>17</sup>.

### **The Sudan Interior Mission Evangelists in the South Ethiopia**

The SIM (Sudan Interior Mission) was the first missionary organization that introduced evangelical Christianity in Southern Ethiopia in the 1920s. This missionary organization was established in 1893 in the City of Toronto, Canada. The founders were Walter Gawans, Rowland Bingham and Tomas Kent. The objective of the mission as its name indicates was to spread the gospel to the African countries found below the Sahara and above the Equator, which at that time were generally known as Sudan<sup>18</sup>.

When the leaders of the mission came to West Africa in around Niger to accomplish their goal, Walter Gawans and Tomas Kent died with sudden illness. Rowland Bingham also suffered from

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15. *Ibid.*; Wondiye Ali, pp.39-43.

16. Tage Anderson, *A Brief History of the Mekane Yesus Church* (Haderslev: Modersmalts Trykkeri, 1979), p.13.

17. *Ibid.*, pp.13-14.

18. Wondiye Ali, p.61.

the disease of malaria, stopped the mission, went to Nigeria (Lagos) in 1895, and returned to his country<sup>19</sup>.

In 1898, R. Bingham founded the first council of SIM. After several ups and downs in the activities, the mission started its work and became successful in Niger in 1924, Burkina Faso, the former Upper Volta, in 1930, Sudan in 1930(before the independence of Sudan when the region was under British colonization) and in Ethiopia in December 1927. The SIM began its work in Ethiopia together with the renowned American Physician and missionary Dr. Tomas Lambie. Dr. Lambie who led the mission in Ethiopia was not new to Ethiopia. Before working with SIM, he had served with the American United Presbyterian Mission in Sayo, Wollega and in Addis Ababa since 1919<sup>20</sup>.

Other expert missionaries, who were with T. Lambie party, were persons such as Mr. and Mrs. George Rohad (husband and wife) formerly worked with the African Inland Mission in Kenya and Reverend and Mrs. C. J. Rasmussen, who had also worked with the Danish Mission in Aden. In addition to these veteran missionaries, new missionaries to the enterprise like Glen Cain of Australia, Walter Ohman and Clarence Duff of the United States of America were involved<sup>21</sup>. Because of unsettled political situation of the country and opposition from the leaders of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the movement of the SIM was delayed and finally on March 7, 1928 the missionaries were granted permission to move to south of Ethiopia where their target of ministry was. When the group arrived in the town of Hossana, Dr. Lambie found his former patient and friend *Dejjazmach* Meshesha of Wollega, who was at the time governor of Hadiya district. Here the missionaries were invited to start medical work in Hossana<sup>22</sup>.

Dr. Lambie heard when he was in Hossana that his former friend *Dejjazmach* Biru who had helped him in treating his wife of accident while *Dejjazmach* Biru was governor in Wolega *Teqlay Gizat*. Then, Lambie went to Wolaita's capital Sodo and met his former friend, Yigezu. The missionaries welcomed by *Dejjazmach* Yigezu and settled at Ottona on the northeast outskirts of the town<sup>23</sup>.

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19. *Ibid.*

20. E.P. Baulisky, p.107; Wondiye Ali, pp.66-68.

21. E.P. Baulisky, p.107.

22. Wondiye Ali, 68-78.

23. *Ibid.*

The missionaries liked their center of Ottona at Wolaita Sodo and built there clinics and houses for the missionaries and started their evangelical mission by making Ottona their southern headquarter. From Wolaita, they began spreading the gospel to the surrounding peoples of Sidama, Gofa, Kembata and Hadiya<sup>24</sup>.

The missionaries established their settlement in the Sidama area called Garbicho, which was given by *Dejjazmach* Biru, the governor of Sidamo. The missionary Mr. Glen Cain settled there. Mr. George Rohad and his family liked to serve in Wolaita for unknown reasons. The Missionaries established a center in the town of Hossana at Dubancho and Mr. Clarence Duffsettled there. In June 1929, they left Dubancho, found a new suitable area at Lambuda, and made it their center in Hossana. In addition, later in 1929, they opened a new station in Mareko. Next to these areas in south, the missionaries spreading their faith reached up to Gofa in south and Jima in southwest Ethiopia<sup>25</sup>.

When we see the first converts who received the first gospel message from the missionaries, *Ato* Geneme Hunde, *Ato* Hoshe, *Ato* Gambe, *Ato* Artesa, *Ato* Futesa and *Ato* Balamo were the first converts in the Sidama station. In the Kemabata and Hadiya areas, the first two converts who helped a lot the missionaries were *Ato* Ertro Dada (known as *Ato* Shigute Dada) and *Ato* Sebro later renamed as Josef by the missionaries were the first converts. Next to them *Ato* Tulero, *Ato* Babo and *Ato* Shafiso were added to the converts. Later, *Ato* Muluneh was added. The first converts of Wolaita station were *Ato* Biru Dubale, *Ato* Godana, *Ato* Ginja, *Ato* Arebo, *Ato* Kona Koba, *Ato* Wolde, *Ato* Choram and his wife Pakare and later *Ato* Desta, *Woizero* Diasa accepted the gospel and were among the earliest converts<sup>26</sup>.

The first baptism ceremony by SIM missionaries took place in Sidama Homacho on December 25, 1932. The decision of the baptism date and persons to be baptized was decided after strong debate and discussion conducted in the month of May 1932. The debate was conducted to be sure on the change of the life of the new believers. In addition, to refine whether they learnt properly the basic teachings of the new faith and related issues like their marriage alliances, holiness and other matters. The first baptized believers were *Ato* Beae Tiso, *Ato* Tebisa Bunta, *Ato* Deqemo Debu and *Ato* Sida Debu, Dr. Lambie and Mr. Cain baptized the believers. After this baptism

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24. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-99.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 85-99.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 118-121.

ceremony, the second baptism ceremony took place in the same station of Homacho after one year in the month of July 1933. Then, the new religion of Protestantism began to spread to other regions of Sidama including Wondo Genet and other ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia<sup>27</sup>.

### **The Conversion Process of the Sidama to Protestantism**

Before we discuss about the introduction of Protestantism and establishment of Protestant Churches in Wondo Genet area, it would be worth to see some general points on the conversion process of the whole Sidama People including the Wondo Genet area. Many sources and informants from the study area raise many ideas about the conversion process of the Sidama people. John Hamer summarizes and mentions many important factors that attracted the Sidama people to embrace the Protestant Christianity. According to him, the first attraction is that the missionaries preached one deity, God. The Sidama in their traditional belief believed in polygamy and worshiped many deities and spirits including ancestral and living elders in their shrines. The teaching of one supreme God became attractive to the people of Sidama and the surrounding people<sup>28</sup>.

The other is the eagerness of the missionaries to impart their knowledge from the Bible in a language that is known by the people. The then ruling groups of the Christian kingdom conducted the expansion of the Orthodox Church and teachings of the Bible to their subjects, the Sidamas. They conducted preaching and praying in the Geez language, which was not understood by the Sidama. The Sidama believed that the Amhara became strong because of the knowledge they got from the Bible. Thus, the teaching of the Bible by missionaries in their vernacular language was attractive and acceptable to the Sidamas.<sup>29</sup>

The missionaries also opposed and taught the people against offering sacrifices and rituals to their dead and living elders. The people used to provide surplus food for the rituals that exhausted and affected the economy of the people. By looking those who accepted the Protestant sect of Christianity and became free from that routine offer of rituals, many people became attracted and opened their heart for the gospel<sup>30</sup>.

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27. J.H. Hamer, p. 66.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*, 71.

30. *Ibid.*, p.p. 67 and 72.

The construction of schools and health centers in the missionaries' centers and giving services to the people was also another attractive point to the teachings of the missionaries. The teaching was against clan deities, polygamy, alcohol drinking, slavery and inequalities of people. Although these teachings led to conflict with traditional authority and local administrators, gradually turn by turn on individual basis, the people accepted the Protestant sect of Christianity. Besides, by giving adequate time to their work the newly converted Christians productivity improved because the Christians produced new values of work and responsibility<sup>31</sup>.

When the life and ways of the converts were considered as a threat to the social cohesion and undermining the elderly authority and the new converts were ostracized by the society, they established their own new associations extending beyond the formal gatherings of the church and reinforced their unity and cooperation. They formed small reciprocal labor exchange group of fifteen to twenty men. These groups were not only effective in providing assistance to subsistence agricultural activities, but were especially efficient in harvesting coffee production. These situations boosted their economic activities. Moreover, the Protestant Christians participated in selected activities, which are not directly against their basic Christian teachings and beliefs. Gradually, this cooperation and solidarity created unity and understanding among traditionalists and converts. In this way, gradually but surely Christianity took foot stage in the Sidama land and spread over the whole region including the study area through times in the study period<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup>.*Ibid*, 70-72.

<sup>32</sup>.*Ibid*.

## Chapter IV

### The Introduction and Expansion of Protestant Christianity in Wondo Genet

As explained in the previous section, the Sudan Interior Mission missionaries introduced the first Protestant Evangelical Christianity to the Southern Ethiopia around 1928. Up to the time of Italian Fascist Occupation, the missionaries had spread their faith and established churches in southern Ethiopia including the Sidama Province<sup>1</sup>.

From 1928 to 1937, the SIM missionaries were involved in preaching, teaching and healing in the province of Sidama. By the time the missionaries left Sidama and the whole of Ethiopia in 1937, there were less than fifty baptized Protestant believers in Sidama. The goal of SIM evangelists was to establish new religious communities. To achieve their goal, the SIM preachers preached the gospel of Jesus, translated scripture passages into vernacular languages like *Sidamegna*, and taught the emerging community of believers the basic of Christian belief and practices<sup>2</sup>.

After the SIM missionaries left the country because of the fascist occupation in 1937, the responsibility of doing the above missionary and Christian activities rested up on the first local elected elders and Ethiopian evangelists up to the time of the return of the first missionaries with the help of the British army and the Ethiopian patriots in 1941. In this regard, the Wolaita evangelists had played pivotal role in spreading the gospel to the areas of Sidama and other southern regions such as Gofa, Gamo and others<sup>3</sup>.

Yosef Mena has described the role of the Wolaita evangelists in expanding and preaching the gospel among the Sidama People. He says Evangelist Amochu and Evangelist Taddese, while they were preaching the Good News (Gospel) in Sidama; Sidama bandits assassinated them. A person called Lolamo Abero assisted the Wolaita evangelists in translating the Bible into Sidama language. After looking the sacrifice paid by Evangelist Amochu and Tadesse, many other Wolaita evangelists became willing and inspired to go to Sidama to preach the gospel. Particularly, in the 1950s many Wolaita evangelists such as *Ato Aldabo Anshibo*,

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1.E.P.Baulisky, p.85.

2.*Ibid.*

3.*Ibid.*, pp.154-155.



*Ato* Sorsa Sumamo, *Ato* Tasew Hebena and *Ato* Alemu Gutule had served in Sidama. After these persons, another batch of Wolaita ministers sent to Sidama areas at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. Some of them were *Ato* Sidibo, *Ato* Ayele, *Ato* Fenta Altamo, *Ato* Torogedem, *Ato* Sawel Salgado, *Ato* Taltamo Sebere and others. The Churches established by SIM missionaries were called Kale Hiwot *Betekerstian* (Kale Hiwot Churches) and continued After these their relation with SIM after all power of the church administration was given to the Ethiopians<sup>4</sup>. In the same manner from Homacho SIM center, the gospel was introduced to Wondo Genet area. In 1948, many other additional missionaries came to the area, established their centers in Sidama, and then moved to Wondo Genet. Today, there are many Protestant Churches in Wondo Genet *Woreda* such as Hiwot Birhan Church, Kale Hiwot Church, Mekane Yesus Church and many denominations. For the purpose of this study, the researcher has selected three largest Protestant Churches found in the *woreda* to analyze their introduction, growth and social activities. These are the Hiwot Birhan Church, Kale Hiwot Church and Mekane Yesus Church of Wondo Genet<sup>5</sup>.

#### **Wondo Genet Hiwot Birhan Church: Establishment and Growth**

Wondo Genet Hiwot Birhan Church is organized under Ethiopian Hiwot Birhan Church, the head office of which is located in Addis Ababa. The Church was established by the Swedish Philadelphia Church Mission (SPCM), which came to Ethiopia and started work in 1960. The founder of the Mission was the Valla Church of Sweden<sup>6</sup>.

The Valla Church of Sweden made a conference in February 1957, decided to send twenty willing missionaries who were selected from fifteen other Churches, and sent to Ethiopia. Before that, the Church had published a News Paper called “*Ethiapien Kallar*” which means “Ethiopian Calling” and wrote many interesting things about Ethiopia like hospitality, cooperativeness and

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4. *Ibid.*, pp.112-114

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ye Hiwot Birhan Church 50th Golden Jubilee Anniversary, July 1960-2010, Especial Edition* (Addis Ababa, 2010), p.19.

others. Those who read the paper had become interested to go to Ethiopia as missionaries and others were willing to support the missionary work financially<sup>7</sup>.

The pastor of the Valla Church, Pastor Bertel Lindisdit and the congress of the Church selected Eluf Hogland, Karl Ramsrand and Arvid Malvern to be sent to Ethiopia as missionaries. The missionaries came to Ethiopia in May 1957 to process license of work and get land for station. The three missionaries planned to start their work at three different areas in the country. Mr. Arvid Malvern in Addis Ababa, Karl Ramsrand in Maselo, in Bale and Eluf Hogland in Jimma. However, when the license process delayed, all of them returned to their country. Later, while the Jimma and Addis Ababa churches started the work as planned getting permission from the government, the Maselo project was not allowed by the government for unknown reason. Instead, the government allowed them to work in Hawassa, the capital of the Sidamo Province. Thus, Karl Ramsrand moved to Hawassa after the government granted him work permission and got land in Hawassa in November 1960. In the year, missionaries opened technical school that started giving vocational and automotive work training for the youth of the area<sup>8</sup>.

In January 1962, formal worship, Christian practices and rituals started in the present big hall of the Hawassa Hiwot Birhan Church (known as the Mobil Hiwot Birhan Church) and praying chapel was constructed. Another missionary known as Owe Walberg came to Hawassa in 1968, assisted Mr. Ramsrand, and organized the activities of the spiritual work. In addition to him, the local evangelist *Ababa* Kemeru who came from Wolaita as the SIM missionary, met with Ramsrand, agreed to work together, and served as the first evangelist of the Swedish Philadelphia Mission in Hawassa. Next to him, another person from the Sidama Province called *Ababa* Dukamo Qanqura joined the work and became one of the first elders of the Church<sup>9</sup>.

Later, the Church set out as a custom of the area a “*Mahber*” (a group of the above three Churches that were organized together to support each other) in summer of 1964 and they established the first formal leadership which contained three local persons and Mr. Ramsrand. Fifteen to twenty Churches organized the *Mahber* at that time together. The three first elected leaders were the late Evangelist Shagna Anjajo, *Ato* Gebeyhu Lera and the late Evangelist

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 21.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 21.

Milkias Borena. In 1972 based on the scripture on John 8:12 the Swedish Philadelphia Church Mission (SPCM) changed the name of the Worancha *Mahber* which is found on the way to Wondo Genet from Hawassa in Sidama in to Hiwot Birhan Church and gave all the leadership authority to the Ethiopians. Then, all Churches established by the missionaries found in Abela (in Sidama), Hawassa, Addis Ababa, Jimma, Addis Hiwot and other local Churches accepted the name and called their Churches “Hiwot Birhan Church”<sup>10</sup>.

The Church had established Bible Schools in Hawassa, in Addis Ababa, the Pentecostal Bible College and many training centers in Sidama and Jimma and also Technical schools were opened in Hawassa and Zeway. Missionary Harald Johansen opened the Zeway Technical School in April 1969. The “Save the Children Sweden” in cooperation with the Swedish Philadelphia Mission agricultural center was established in Addis Hiwot in Sidama on 600 hectares of land and using the Awash River irrigation produced vegetables and fruits for the surrounding communities. Mr Set was the director of the agriculture project<sup>11</sup>.

Generally, the missionaries in addition to preaching and teaching works they were involved in social activities and supporting the community by opening schools, health centers and agricultural sites. Vocational schools were opened in Zeway, Hawassa and Jimma; Health centers in Worancha, Wondo Genet, Kibish, Jimma, and Addis Hiwot. Forest development sites and projects were established in Worancha, Loke, both in the Sidama Province and in areas of Guji Oromo, Hostel service was given in Jinka, South Omo and in Addis Ababa. The Hiwot Birhan Church carried out projects supporting orphans who lost their families by HIV and helping, rehabilitating ex-soldiers, and other several social services<sup>12</sup>.

According to informants, in 1962 the first Hiwot Birhan Church was established in Wondo Genet at the place called Chapa. The founders were *Ato* Kebede Geda, *Ato* Kemere and *Ato* Dukemo Qanqura. These persons preached the gospel in the area and got converts. In addition to their converts, the Chapa Mekane Yesus Church members quarreled with their missionaries because of administrative issues and they left out the Church. When they were unable to settle their problems, they permanently divided into two groups and one group joined Hiwot Birhan Church.

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<sup>10</sup>. *Ibid*, pp.23-25.

<sup>11</sup>. *Ibid*.

<sup>12</sup>. *Ibid*.

In this way, the number of the believers increased and the Chapa Hiwot Birhan Church consolidated<sup>13</sup>.

One of the founders *Ato Dukemo Qanqura* granted the land on which the Chapa Church built. *Ato Dukemo* said that during the imperial time the new converts give a piece of land from their possession for building of Church or praying hall<sup>14</sup>. *Ato Dukemo* remembers that when they plan to build a Church there was great challenge from the land owners who were known as *balabats*(rist holder) or *balegasha* (owner of certain amount of hectare land).He remembers that in 1974 when the Ethiopian revolution was about to start, a certain balabat challenged them destroying and burning praying houses. When he did it frequently, they decided not to accuse him because the house is God's house and so that they let God himself accuse him and passed away the matter to God. Immediately in the time, the revolution broke out and his produced crop that was stored in his store and all of his lands were confiscated. In this manner, they were watching the miracle and judgment of God<sup>15</sup>.

Among the Churches established in Sidama area such as AdisHiwot, Hawassa, Chapa Protestantism spread to other *woredas* and towns of Sidama. Particularly from Hawassa and Chapa, the new faith spread to Wondo Genet. *Ato Woticha Teshite* one of my informants who was among the first founders of Wondo Genet Hiwot Birhan Church says that he came from Hawassa to Wondo Genet after he was converted to Protestantism and began to preach in Wondo Genet. In 1963, he invited the Philadelphia missionaries to Wondo Genet in a place called Edola and from his personal land gave some portion to the missionaries and on the land the missionaries opened center to help children who were orphans and then they first built Hiwot Birhan Church in Nole and then built another in Edola<sup>16</sup>.

The Edola Hiwot Birhan first Church was built in traditional way using traditional materials such as grass and wood and this kind of house is known as *gojjo* (hat). They built the Church in night due to fierce opposition from the *melekegnas* (local administrators). The *melekegnas* opposed the

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13. Informant: *Ato Wotecha Teshite*.

14. Informants: *Ato Dukemo Qanqura*.

15. *Ibid.*

16 Informant: *Ato Woticha Teshite*.

building of the Church because it was constructed without their permission. They forced them to destroy the fence of the Church and imprisoned them for some time<sup>17</sup>.

*Ato Wotecha* remembers that before the beginning of the Protestant Churches in Wondo Genet, the people practiced traditional belief, Islam and Orthodox Christianity. He says that his mother was *qalicha* (witchcraft) and people used to come to her and worship the spirit, which was inside her. Later, he said that his mother accepted Jesus Christ as her personal savior and became one of the converts in the area. In the area of Wondo Genet, many people who suffered from various sicknesses were healed because of praying and healing ministries and abandonment from various harmful practices such as alcohol drinking, intoxication and many people's social and economic problems were solved and their life blessed<sup>18</sup>.

Informants Pastor Gemechu and *Ato Shiquru Labato* claim that, formerly there was continuous clan conflict among the Sidama people. However, after the spread of the new faith, the people became peace seeker and clan conflict and violence in the area diminished. Hence, many people accepted Protestantism<sup>19</sup>. However, *Ato Alebachew Melese* the Orthodox follower did not accept the above idea; rather he believed that the conflict among the clan was minimized due to the strong measures that were taken by the *Derg* regime<sup>20</sup>.

On the other hand, an unpublished source written by Wondo Kella Hiwot Birhan Church written in 2007 by the Church leaders' claims that a woman that God used to start Hiwot Birhan Church in Wondo Genet was a Swedish woman missionary and nurse called Brite Bergfelt. This missionary in 1964 renting house in Wondo Genet opened a clinic and started preaching the gospel to the people of Wondo Genet. Later, after one year gaining land from a woman *balabat* called *Woyzero Menetela* built a clinic and a house for herself. On the walling area of the Clinic, the missionary started worship programs along with some thirty of her converts and formed a small congregation<sup>21</sup>.

In Wondo Genet, a man who was one of the early converts named Evangelist Teshome Qariso was visiting and serving on this worship program. On a certain day in 1968, one missionary

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<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>Informants: Pastor Gemechu and *Ato Shekuru Labacho*.

<sup>20</sup>Informants: *Ato Alebachew Melese*.

<sup>21</sup>Hiwot Birhan Church, p.11.

whose name is not mentioned came to Wondo Genet from Sweden to visit BriteBergfelt. While he was visiting the missionary, Evangelist Teshome and *Ato* Didimos Jinjima, who were at the time working in the clinic of Mrs. BriteBergfelt asked Mrs. B. Bergfelt her will to ask the missionaries to support them to construct a chappel. Mrs. Bergfelt agreed and the two men asked the missionaries to support them to construct a chapple explaining the problem of worship house in the *woreda*. The missionaries, after hearing the request of the evangelists and the new believers promised that after he went to his country and discussed the matter with some of his friends in Sweden, he would give answer for their request<sup>22</sup>.

After the missionary went to his country and coordinated support from the Christians in Sweden sent them support for the construction of the Church building. After that, a land, which was about 1000 square meters, was purchased from a local *balabat* and the current building of the Church was constructed and completed in 1973 by supervision and follow up of a missionary named Bent Enersen. Those Christians scattered over the areas of Entaye, Nole and Alkasa begun to worship together in the new building after the completion of the new building<sup>23</sup>.

In the time, those persons who were working in the clinic were serving the Lord in their extra time. They were preaching about the saving work of Christ to all people who came to the clinic seeking medical treatment. Many people accepted Christ as their personal savior. In this way, the number of believers increased from time to time. The Church was growing physically and spiritually. Evangelist Teshome Qareso and Evangelist Belachew Jala were giving their full time for preaching the gospel and serving the Church. Missionary Bent Enersen was also serving as a leader of the Church<sup>24</sup>.

When Emperor Haile Silassie was deposed and replaced by the military junta in 1974, the condition became tight for the Protestant Christians. Therefore, the missionary who was considered as a father of the Church, Mr. Bent Enersen was forced to leave the country. The missionary, before he left Wondo Genet, he appointed the following believers as leaders of the Church. They were 1) *Ato* Didimose Jinjima, 2) *Ato* Lemma Menso, 3) *Ato* Habtu Shkuru, 4) *Ato* Chelge Wesho and 5) *Ato* Wotango Hama.

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<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

When the number of the laity of the Church of Wondo Kella Hiwot Birhan grew, the believers who were worshipping in the Church coming from other areas such as Entaye, Nole and Alkasa and other areas asked the Church to establish their own churches in their respective areas. They were allowed and thus established Churches in the above mentioned areas<sup>25</sup>.

In general, Ababa Dukemo established the first Hiwot Birhan Church at Chapa in 1962. Then, from Chapa to Busha, from Busha to Edola, from Edola to Kella, from Kella to Weshia Hiwot Birhan Churches were founded and expanded<sup>26</sup>.

When we see the administrative structure of Hiwot Birhan Church, we find at the bottom level local churches. According to the legislation of the Church, local Churches have high-level independence. Above a local church, there is *Kilil*, which is organized by five and above five churches together to administer their administrative issues. This is the next higher administrative body of the Church. A group of local churches numbered from five to nine could establish *Kilil*. The National Head Office, which is located in Addis Ababa, is the next highest administrative body above the *Kilil*. The Head Office is responsible to administer the Church at national level. Next to the Head Office, there is a Board, which comprises around fourteen persons elected from different regions (*Kilils*) of the country. The responsibility of the Board is to supervise the work of the Head Office (the executive body) and hear any applications and complains against the Head Office and settle problems<sup>27</sup>.

Regarding the income of the Church the contribution of the members in the form of gifts (alms) and *asrat* (tithe) are the major sources income of the Church. When members of the churches work in the plough of one member, he will pay one Ethiopian *birr*. That *birr* will be given to the Church for spiritual work. Some income was also generated from handcraft and agricultural products such as milk and milk products, poultry, fruit and vegetables. In Hawasa Church, vocational and academic trainings were given to members of the church. At Gale, vocational training was also given<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup>*Ibid*, p.2.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid*.; Informant: Ato Dukemo Qanqura.

<sup>27</sup>Ethiopian Hiwot Birhan Church, *Ye Ethiopia Hiwo tBirhan Betekeristian Yeteshashalew Metedaderia Denb* (Ethiopian Hiwot Birhan Church Improved Legislation) (Addis Ababa: 2013), pp.15-17

<sup>28</sup>Informants: Ato Dukemo Qanqura, Ato Ture Loke and Ato Tulu Galore.

In the time particularly between 1981 and 1991, the Church, besides its own social activities in cooperation with World Vision International Organization had performed many developmental activities, which benefited the community such as donation of cows, sheep, goat, hen, seeds of fruits and vegetables. In addition to the Wondo Genet *Woreda*, the Church expanding its ministry had established Hiwot Birhan Church in Bale Zone Dodola *Woreda* where Islam is dominant religion sending its missionaries and evangelists<sup>29</sup>.

Informant claims that they built the church during the imperial regime with great effort and by begging the local administrators not to destroy the new church particularly the church covered with iron sheet. During the time, the local administrators and *balabats* opposed the building of churches in the area. During the *Derg* period, there was great pressure and harassment by the government on the church members. The local leaders were forced to close churches, imprisoned and torched ministers and threatened all the church members. However, the Church leaders by convincing the administrators to teach the community secular education, they organized worship programs and practiced Christian ceremonies. In addition, by abiding the order of the government officials wisely they conducted their programs. Informants claim that when the *Derg* officials or the rulers of the surrounding areas assigned by the *Derg* government call them for a meeting at Kella *kebele* or in other place, they used to obey and go to the meeting and after they finished the program they return back to the church and conduct their spiritual secession. In addition, when the persecution was fierce in towns of WondoGenet and other major towns like Shashemene and Hawassa, they took some of their expensive materials to rural churches to hide not to be confiscated by the military government. They took their materials and equipment after the downfall of the *Derg* government<sup>30</sup>.

In addition to the above social and development services, the Wondo Genet Hiwot Birhan Church missionaries who came from Canada towards the end of the *Derg* regime (1989/90) had constructed a bridge in the *woreda*. Moreover, they helped the people in distributing cattle, goat and sheep freely to strength their economic capacity. They supported the community to keep their health by constructing toilets and teaching about personal hygiene. In the Church, the missionaries had also taught children Basic English language skills like reading, writing, and

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<sup>29</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>*ibid.*



mathematical knowledge<sup>28</sup>. Due to the missionaries' involvement in social and developmental activities at the beginning years of the Church and the local evangelists massive preaching and teaching through time, the Church expanded in the area<sup>31</sup>.

### **The Establishment and Growth of Wondo Genet Kale Hiwot Church**

As we have seen above, the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) missionaries in southern Ethiopia founded the Kale Hiwot Church (KHC) or Word of Life in 1928. The SIM missionaries established their Churches first in the four sub-provinces in southern Ethiopia namely Sidama, Hadiya, Kambata and Wolaita. Particularly, the station of Ottona in Wolaita Sodo was the main site and served as the head office of the southern evangelical works by the missionaries. Thus, the Wolaita Kale Hiwot Church is the first Kale Hiwot Churches that laid the foundation for the Church's expansion at a national level.<sup>32</sup>

The Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church (EKHC) is divided into eight administrative zones and the Sidama Kale Hiwot Church (SKHC) represents one of them. The SKHC has been involved in various ministries since its foundation in 1928/29. Besides its main goal of evangelization, it has developed its capacity and has participated in development activities such as school building, establishment of grind mill, clinic and agriculture. The Amharic name "Kale Hiwot Church" was given to SIM Churches in 1962/63<sup>33</sup>.

My informants *Ato* Qechene Udise and *Ato* Shamena Dalecho explained that before the establishment of Kale Hiwot Church by SIM missionaries and local evangelists in Wondo Genet, there was Orthodox Christianity in the area but most of the people practiced traditional religion and worshiped water bodies, grass and wood and also worshiped witchcrafts and *qalichas*. Particularly, on Abaro peak or mountain and in around the area of Wondo Genet Hot Spring, there were known witchcrafts known as Wotiso and Workinesh respectively<sup>34</sup>.

Other informants *Ato* Ture Loke and Tulu Galore told me that before the introduction of Christianity in the area, the people worshiped their creator by slaughtering cattle, shedding blood, and praying for their children and country. They worshiped wearing *buluko*, traditional

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<sup>31</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>32</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>Informants: *Ato* Shamena Dalecho and *Ato* Qechene Udise.

cloth made of cotton. They were also pouring milk in rivers and lakes and sacrificing cattle and they were blessing each other<sup>35</sup>.

When Protestantism was expanded in the area, the witchcrafts fled the area to another place due to loss of acceptance by the society. Before the introduction of Kale Hiwot Church, which is the earliest Church in the *woreda*, besides traditional religion there were the followers of Orthodox Christianity. The Abo Orthodox Church was the earliest Orthodox Church established in and around Kella area in 1888. Next to Abo, Michael Church was founded in 1889 at a place called Bussa on the way to the meat-processing factory. After the Orthodox Christianity the next Christian Church planted in Wondo Genet was the Kale Hiwot Church that was established by SIM missionaries and local evangelists mostly by the evangelists who came from Wolaita<sup>36</sup>.

When the informants explained about the beginning of the Church, they said that before the foundation of Wondo Genet Kale Hiwot Church, the Church was established in Shashemene 01 *Kebele* and Kuyera. Three missionaries and physicians by the name Dr. Tomson, Dr. Toshe and Dr. Barilo were working together in spreading gospel besides giving medical services in Kuyera, Yirgalem and Wolaita respectively<sup>37</sup>.

Dr. Tomson came from Kuyera to Wondo Genet and preached the gospel by giving medical services side by side. He brought another person *Ababa* Tirkaso to help him in evangelizing work-renting land from Princess Tenagne Work Haile Selassie, the daughter of Emperor Haile Selassie. On the land, by planting coffee he expanded his evangelizing work in the *woreda*. He and *Ababa* Tirkaso planted the first Kale Hiwot Church first in 1955 in around the hot spring. The owner of the land where Church had been built was *Ato* Teka Mekuria. In addition to praying and worship service, in the Church they served the children by teaching the English language and other subjects<sup>38</sup>.

Next to the *File Wuha* (Hot Spring Area) Church, another Church, Edola Kale Hiwot Church was founded at Edola in 1956. When a *balabat* or landlord in the area challenged the believers by farming the land that was served as a gateway to the Church and throwing decayed potato on the

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<sup>35</sup>Informants: *Ato* Ture Loke and *Ato* Tulu Galor.

<sup>36</sup>Informants: *Ato* Qechene Udise and *Ato* Shamena Dalecho.

<sup>37</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>38</sup>*ibid.*

believers, the congregation decided to change the place and built another Church at a place called Wosha in 1958 and the Church named Wosha Kale Hiwot Church was established. The informants claim that while they were worshipping at Wosha Church, they used to go monthly to *File Wuha* Church to participate in the Lord's Super or *Yegeta Erat (Kidus kurban)* ceremony<sup>39</sup>.

Foreign missionaries and local missionaries from Kembata and Hadya spread the gospel in Wondo Genet areas and when the number of the persons that accepted the gospel increased; they established Churches in their respective areas. During the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie, Protestant churches were not expanding in Wondo Genet due to the influence that came from the balabats. Local missionaries, who came from Kembata and Hadya areas, were preaching the gospel and the society believed and begun to follow Christ. According to them, these missionaries were *Ato* Matthewos Hemencha and *Ato* Aba Bole. They brought the Kale Hiwot Church to Wondo Genet. However, most of those missionaries who preached in Wondo Genet came from Wolaita<sup>40</sup>.

According to testimonies of informants, another preacher known as *Ababa* Shamena along with the above local missionaries spread the gospel and Kale Hiwot Church's faith in the areas of Busa, Chuko, Kalala, Wosha, Kechemma and Shasha areas. The Church was first planted in the *hotspring* area. However, the government ordered them to move to other area claiming that the area was preserved for coffee plantation. Thus, they moved down to the areas of Edola and Shasha. In 1956, they planted Edola Kale Hiwot Church. A peasant called *Ato* Philipos granted the land to the Church. *Ababa* Segaro and *Ato* Philipos were among the founders of the Church. Particularly *Ababa* Segaro had played a significant role in the expansion of the Church<sup>41</sup>.

At the beginning, the churches were named after the name of the person who was first converted and built the church along with other believers. For example, they mention Wetera Kale Hiwot was called Church of Tadese Tesho; Weya Kale Hiwot: Church of Eyu; Edola Kale Hiwot: Church of Segaro Gada; Edola Hiwot Birhan: Church of Teshete Wotecha and Kechemma Kale Hiwot: Church of Mamo Kabiso<sup>42</sup>.

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39. *Ibid.*

40. Informants: *Ato* Ture Loke and *Ato* Tulu Galero.

41. *Ibid.*

On the other hand, the Emperor Haile Silassie's good attitude towards the missionary groups had been another factor for the expansion of the missionaries' works in the south Ethiopia. A letter that was written by a Missionary group, which was known by name Baptist Bible Fellowship, indicates this idea. The letter, which was written by this group, indicated the good will of Emperor Haile Silassie I towards this Missionary group to establish different churches and preaching gospel to the Ethiopian societies. They built different mission schools and a number of health centers. For all this activities, the Emperor gave them land in different parts of Addis Ababa. They were given land at Arat Kilo in front of Birhan-na Selam printing enterprise and another in the Bolle area<sup>43</sup>.

Regarding the income of the Church, the informants claim that at the beginning of the Church, the missionaries were giving service of grinding mill and health services to the community by very small amount of payment. The income was used for evangelical activities. However, the basic source of the income of the Church was the payment and contribution of the members in the form of gift (any free gift of the believers in the form of cash or kind), *meba* (gift of the believers on worshipping programs as they wished or have) and *asrat* (one tenth of income payment of the believers)<sup>44</sup>.

Besides, the Church gave formal educational service to the children of the community up to grade two. When the children complete grade two, they will go to *Abo* Church area, join lielt (Princes) Tenagne Work School, and attend their education there up to grade six. After, they completed grade six, there was no junior and high school in the area and any student, who has interest and capacity to continue further his/ her education, would go to Shashemene and pursue his/her education. This educational service of the Church continued throughout the imperial and the *Derg* regimes in the support of the Noregean Missanaries and the community. In the imperial time, the whole community was contributing one *birr* for the school to support the budget. It continued in the same way in the period of the socialist government. After the end of

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<sup>42</sup>.*Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup>.*Archive, A letter from Baptist Bible Fellowship to Emperor Haile selassie, on September 5, 1965.*

<sup>44</sup>.*Ibid*

the *Derg* regime each parent started to pay for his children a limited amount of payment which continued as a trend up to present time<sup>45</sup>.

According to informants, there was some opposition against evangelical believers in Wondo Genet from Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) leaders and local political administrators in the period of the imperial and *Derg* regimes. The proprietors also opposed the expansion of evangelical Churches because they thought that the new faith would make the people disobedient to them and change their attitude. A lawyer called Abebe Bushura claimed that to deal with the opposition of the land owners and the influence of the Orthodox Church leaders; he was going up to the Emperor of Ethiopia high court and called for religious freedom of the people<sup>46</sup>.

The proclamation of 1944 that was entitled “regulations of the establishment of missionaries” was a major break through on the life of the Sidama and Wondo Genet believers. The proclamation has the intention of “*Hager Yegara; Haymanot Ye gel*” (Nation is for All; Religion is Personal). Thus, because of the proclamation and the change of the Ethiopian leaders’ attitude on religion, the impact and persecution on converts had minimized a lot although the dominance of the EOC continued until the end of the feudal state in 1974<sup>47</sup>.

The persecution was fierce in the time of the Italian Occupation and the *Derg* regime. The Italians, although they wanted to support Catholicism in Ethiopia, they forced the people to deny their Protestant religion saying “we are both God and Government”. They torched the believers asking them “who can save you? Christ or Us?” They considered evangelical believers as agents and spies of Britain and America and harassed them<sup>48</sup>.

The *Derg* regime after declaring the socialist or communist ideology rejected the existence of the creator God. Following the 1974, Ethiopian Revolution tried to determine and control religious activity of the people. The *Derg* leaders suspected that by using religion particularly the evangelical faith, enemy of the revolution mainly the American imperialism may use them as agents and could penetrate into the nation. They concluded also wrongly that believers have no

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45. Informant: Ato Qechene Udise and Ato Shamena Dalecho.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Ministry of Pen, *Negarit Gazeta*, 3rd year No.2 (Addis Ababa: August 1944), pp.125-128.

48. Informant: Ato Shamena Dalecho.

love for their country. The government confiscated the wealth of the Church including the Holy Bible. Believers knew this time as “*Yemekera Zemen*” (Time of Persecution/Suffering)<sup>49</sup>.

Therefore, they made the Protestant faith followers their major target and many believers in Wondo Genet were imprisoned, tortured and the Church was closed from 1979 up to 1990. Singing and worshipping in public was forbidden. When the *Derg* politicians ordered the people to chant slogan by raising their left hand, the cadres watch all the people and if they found someone who did not raise hand, they would punish and imprisoned him. Then, all the Kale Hiwot Churches that were located at File Wuha, Wosha and the Churches in Shashemene and Kuyera were all closed<sup>50</sup>.

The SIM foreign missionaries, who were working in Wondo Genet area such as Dr. Tomson, were ordered to leave the country with in twenty-four hours in 1975 and they left the country. In the time, when the Church was closed since 1979-1990, the believers continued their worship and ministry by using different tactics. Some of the tactics were, grouping all Church members into many small groups that contain each group about six believers. By using these groups and using coffee ceremony as a pretext of their gathering, they were worshipping the Lord in their houses. In addition, by giving a pretext of adult education underground they were conducting worship and biblical teachings and trainings<sup>51</sup>.

However, aimed these all challenges and influences, the Church was growing physically and spiritually. When in Wondo Genet area the population of the dwellers of the *woreda* increased, the number of the converts and members of the churches also increased. When the number of new convert's increased and praying houses crowded they planed to open and build new Churches on the nearby areas of the believers and in this manner, the number of the churches increased. Excluding churches of other Christian denominations, there were around nine Kale Hiwot Churches in Wondo Genet *woreda*. Among these, the Church of Qechema, Wotera, Woshaa, File Wuha, Entaye, and Bete Menegest area built in the time of the imperial regime<sup>52</sup>.

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49Ato Qechene Udise

50Informant: Ato Shamena Dalecho

51Informant: Ato Qechene Udise

52Informant: Ato Shamena Dalecho and Ato Qechene Udise

## **MekaneYesus Church of Wondo Genet and its Expansion**

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, various foreign missionaries, who came from mainly Europe and North America and Ethiopian Christians, began preaching the gospel in Ethiopia. These joint efforts led to the foundation of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church MekaneYesus (EECMY), which was instituted as a national Church on January 21, 1959<sup>53</sup>. Among these major missionaries and real believers that established the EECMY were the following:

The Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM) that came with a vision to reach the Oromo People with the gospel could not access the Oromo People. Thus, it was forced to stay at the Red Sea in Eritrea for about forty years before it could proceed to Addis Ababa in 1904<sup>54</sup>.

The German Hermannsburg Mission (GHM), currently known as the Evangelical Lutheran Mission, also planned to reach the Oromo people with the gospel and began to send its first missionaries to the Oromos who settled in the west direction as early as 1926. Its vision was fulfilled after seventy years when its first group of missionaries arrived in Addis Ababa in 1927<sup>55</sup>.

The Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM), the main target of which was to reach the Sidama People along with the other groups in the southern Ethiopia. This party began its work in 1949 in the Sidama, Gamo Gofa and the Bale provinces<sup>56</sup>.

The Presbyterian Mission (PM) began its work in the western part of Ethiopia in 1919. Its mission was to reach the peoples of the southwestern parts of Ethiopia.

The first pioneer missionary of this group was Dr. Thomas Lambie, who later performed great evangelical work with SIM in south Ethiopia<sup>57</sup>.

The Danish Evangelical Mission (DEM) came with a vision to reach the peoples of South Eastern part of Ethiopia and began its work in Bale in 1948<sup>58</sup>. The American Lutheran Mission

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53 Senbeto Wakene, "The Historical Development and Practice of Self Reliance in Ethiopian MekaneYesus Church with Special Reference to the Central Gibe Synod" (MA Thesis, School of Mission and Theology, University of Stavanger, 2010), pp.23-24.

54 *Ibid.*, pp.26-27.

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Ibid.*

(ALM) came with a vision to reach the peoples of the northern parts of Ethiopia. The mission began its work in Wollo, Gonder and Tigray in 1958. However, this mission was not successful in its work in the mentioned areas due to strong base and opposition from the Orthodox Christian authorities<sup>59</sup>.

Norwegian Mission Society (NMS), with a vision to reach the Gumuz People in the Blue Nile Basin, as well as the Oromo People living along the border of Sudan and came in 1971<sup>60</sup>. Therefore, as we said above these missions organized their work and established the EECMY in 1959. All the missions organized together were adherents of the teaching and doctrines of Luther. Thus, it was easy for them to form unity and establish one church in Ethiopia<sup>61</sup>.

Since the 1970s, the EECMY is known for her theme, "Serving the Whole Person", later on often quoted and referred to as "Holistic Ministry". The theme is to mean to give spiritual service and answer the physical or development need of the society to whom they preached the gospel. This theme has been throughout a guiding principle for all the Church's work, be it evangelism or development. The concern is not only for the spiritual need, but also for the physical and human needs of the person. Thus, the Church have been involved and carried out tremendous development and social works like schools, clinics, bridges and roads in the country besides preaching of the gospel<sup>62</sup>.

According to Seble, the Norwegian Lutheran missionaries came to Sidama mainly to offer what they call rehabilitation program (after World War II) which included both material and spiritual works. The first group came to Sidama in February 1949<sup>63</sup>.

Merkena Meja, who was an evangelist of the Church in the area fixes the year of the arrival of the Norwegian Lutheran missionaries in 1939EC/1947/48. In their earlier years, they spent most

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<sup>59</sup>. *Ibid*, p-28.

<sup>60</sup>. *Ibid*.

<sup>61</sup>. *Ibid*.

<sup>62</sup>. *Ibid*

<sup>63</sup>. *Ibid*



of their time for practical work in changing the society through their hard and extensive work on education, medical work and gospel preaching<sup>64</sup>.

On the other hand, a magazine published by the Lutheran Mission Association of Ethiopia holds similar idea with that of Merkena Meja. It states that the first Lutheran Missionaries, who came to Ethiopia on August 2, 1948, moved from Addis Ababa to the province of Sidama on their own vehicle on February 7, 1948 and arrived after three days of travel at Yirgalem, the then capital of the Sidama Province on 09 February 1948. Among the missionaries who arrived in Sidama we find 1) Mr. Magnar Magroy 2) Mr. Albert Bredvey 3) Mr. Gudmund Vinshena and 4) Omond Birkland. They were given license by the government bodies to do missionary activities first in the areas of Yirgalem, Dila, Negele Borena and in the areas of Gidole. In addition to spiritual activities, they were involved in social and welfare activities such like opening health centers, hostels, orphanage centers and schools for the community. Up to 1959 within ten years after their arrival, they were able to establish around ten preaching stations that later developed to local churches<sup>65</sup>.

The Missionaries began education among the Sidama people initially for preaching the gospel. They understood that if the people could not write and read, it is impossible to transmit Biblical knowledge. Before the coming of the missionaries, there were few schools in Sidama such as *Ras Desta Elementary School* in Yirgalem, which was established around 1943. However, it was open only for the children of ruling groups and for few Sidamas who were privileged groups or *balabats*. Nevertheless, the missionaries planned to open school for all classes of people including the poor. They opened a school in Hache in 1960 up to grade six<sup>66</sup>.

When the NLM missionaries started its evangelistic work in Ethiopia, particularly in southern Ethiopia, in 1948, they established elementary schools and clinics at various remote and rural

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64. Merkena Meja. *Ye Ato Merkena Meja Ye Gile Tarikena Ye Wolaita Kale Hiwot Betekeresetian Tarik* (Personal History of Ato Merkena Meja and the History Wolaita Kale Hiwot Church). Addis Ababa: SIM, 2008, pp.10-18.

65. Qes Tibo Arsicha, *Lutheran Mission Association of Ethiopia 50th Golden Jubilee Anniversary, July 1948-July 1998*, (Hawassa: 1998), pp.3-

66. Qes Mengesha Nacha, "Ye Chapa Mahbere Memenan Ameseraretana Ye Agelegelot Tarik" (History of the Chapa Church Establishment and Ministry) 2015, p.1.

places, as education and medical facilities were the development demand of government of the time. In 1948, the NLM received permission from the Ministry of Interior to build schools and clinics in Yirgalem, Dilla, and Negelle because the evangelical movement was also an educational movement that aimed to spread educational activities in the countryside of Ethiopia. At that time, there were only very few schools in southern Ethiopia, which centered in provincial towns and did not serve the broad mass of rural population. The region was far from almost any educational services and opportunities in all dimensions and aspects. Thus, the NLM took the initiative to reach the rural population with education, which was a demand of the time that the NLM could not ignore. Accordingly, the first schools were built in Hagere Mariam, Yabello and Negelle in 1950, followed by schools in Dilla, Yirgalem and Dodola in 1952<sup>67</sup>.

Besides, social and development activities, the missionaries through gospel preaching cultivated fellow Christian brothers and sisters. New converts began to build their own churches in every village and they taught the word of God, worshiped the Lord every day, and involved in evangelical activities. In this way, evangelical Christianity spread to each *woredas* of Sidama. Institutions under the name “*mahbers*” or fellowship, which were organized by a number of Churches located around the same areas, appeared at the expense of the old traditional Sidama *mahbers*<sup>68</sup>.

Four local evangelists who came from Wolaita and Kembata introduced the belief of the Norwegian missionaries to the people of the Wondo Genet in 1948. The names of these evangelists and preachers are *Ato Shamebo Qalbero*; *Ato Anbamo*; *Ato Gute Wachamo* and *Ato Shiferaw*<sup>69</sup>. The above evangelists, preaching the gospel came to Wondo Genet and first settled at Busa and continued their evangelistic work. There at Busa, when they preached, the gospel four persons called “fathers of faith” in the area named *Ato Biru Adera*, *Ato Fikre Gose*,

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<sup>67</sup>NLA Archive, a letter Fol.No.103,File No. 01, Ref. N 2942/3309, written on December 28,1948 by the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts to Ministry of Interior; EECMY Archive, a letter No Folder No., No File No., Ref. No.2341/50/400/87 written on June 11,1987 from SES to EECMY central office; Tolo, P.138; Bakke, P141.

<sup>68</sup>*Qes Mengesha Nacha* “Ye Chapa Mahbere Memenan Ameseraretana Ye Agelegelot’Tarik” (History of the Chapa Church Establishment and Ministry) 2015, p.1.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*

*Ato* Damot Tasho and *Ato* Keae Goma accepted the gospel and became the first believers in the area<sup>70</sup>.

A person called *Ato* Reke Lamacha from Chapa after he heard about the news of the gospel, he went to Busa and became Protestant and returned back to Chapa and in his turn preached the new faith in Chapa. Because of his preaching the gospel in Chapa, other new people embraced the evangelical faith and among these men, *Ato* Gelgelo Beriso was the first. *Ato* Gelgelo, which is called by the people of the Chapa “Patriot of Gospel”, gave his land for the building of the Church where a small church was built<sup>71</sup>.

When the Chapa Church was built in July 1948, the number of the believers was not more than thirty or forty. Gradually, the number of the believers increased to hundreds. According to the unpublished paper of the Church, the first four believers of the Busa and the first believers of the Chapa congregation had suffered a lot for embracing the new faith, from the then local administrators and *balabats*. Particularly the then military group called *nechlebash* torched, harassed, and imprisoned them.<sup>72</sup>

However, amid of this persecution strong believers went to Yirgaem Town, contacted with a missionary called Mr. Magroy, and discussed the matter. The missionary gave them adequate advice and strengthened them. Motivated by the advice they encouraged themselves, assigned a new missionary known as Tenewo Chanqalo, and continued their work of preaching and teaching. In this way, the Church of Chapa grew fast, nominated other eight evangelists, and consolidated the missionary work in the area. The believers grew from forty to hundreds<sup>73</sup>.

In Wondo Genet area Next to Chapa, other Mekane Yesus Churches of Geragoro, Gerariqeta, Dereba, Aruma, Chamo, Tula, Busa, Soyema Qeqele, Goyeqe, Chuko, Shifama, Entaye and Wosha were founded. Many of the Churches, around eighteen Churches were established during the imperial period between 1948-1974. Other Churches by the names Soyama-Chuko, Elala, Ano, Haro, were established in the time of the *Derg* regime since 1980-1990, underground

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<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*

because, during the *Derg* regime the expansion of Protestant Churches and official opening of churches was prohibited<sup>74</sup>.

During this period, the role of Luteran World Federation in disseminating Biblical teachings and lessons through their radio program known at that time “*Bisrate Wongel Radio*” was crucial. By using this radio-broadcasting, they were able to teach Biblical teachings to all Christians across the country including the study area and strengthened and encouraged Christians who were under tight pressure and persecution from the communist government. It seems that the government allowed the transmission of the religious program through the radio so that the missionaries and the Mekane Yesus Church were involved in many socio-economic and relief projects which were useful for the community<sup>75</sup>. In addition to this the missionaries used film like “THE JAVA HARVEST” for evangelization as well as expansion of gospel.<sup>76</sup>

After the first churches were established, the Norwegian missionaries came to Wondo Genet and were involved in the gospel work mainly by supporting the work financially, by paying monthly expenses for the evangelists, allocating budgets for social and development works and assisting the churches in building of prayer houses or halls. The first preachers and evangelists preached in Wondo Genet areas first in Chapa, next in the areas of Wita and then in the place called Homecho<sup>77</sup>.

*Kibur Ato* Amanuel Abraham, the former president of Ethiopian Mekane Yesus Church in 1964, purchased the present Wondo Genet Mekane Yesus Chapel land. The Wondo Genet Mekane Yesus Church hall was also built by the support of the missionaries. The names of these missionaries were Mr. Clover, Mr. North, Mr. Sana, Mr. Levors and Mr. Chegnezsem. *Ato Wolde Amanuel* inaugurated the newly built Church building in 1968. At the time Reverend GudinaTumsa, who was the general secretary of the Church and was murdered by the military junta that is *Derg*, was also present in the ceremony<sup>78</sup>.

As it is said above, the Wondo Genet Mekane Yesus Church had also played a significant role in the expansion of education. The Church had opened a school up to grade three in 1967 in Wondo

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<sup>74</sup>Informants: *Ato Gebiso Gedisa; Ato Asefa Gebiso; Ato Esatu Enja.*

<sup>75</sup>NALA, File No.12.48.12. 1954-1964.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.8.1961.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup>Informants: *Ato Berasa Gemeto; W/ro Abebech Lelemo.*

Wosha. The church was also giving vocational and agricultural trainings in 1968 in Wondo Wosha. A missionary called Mr. North was teaching agriculture. Another missionary, Mr. Klove, was teaching handcraft and vocational subjects. In the *Derg* period, the school was upgraded up to grade five. The Church was also rearing cattle and pigs and they were selling their products such as milk and meat at cheap price to the community. They had also poultry farm and provided the society with chicken, egg and other products at reasonable prices<sup>79</sup>.

Seble, in her paper describes that the Sidama women were discriminated, undervalued and exploited like other women living in other parts of Ethiopia and Africa. In the Sidama Community, male elders were given leadership position using their elders' council<sup>80</sup>.

The Sidama culture prohibits the participation of women mainly in the *luwa* system. Nevertheless, there is an amazing legend of the Sidama people, which states that there was a queen (*Motitee*) called Fura that ruled around the 14<sup>th</sup> or the 15<sup>th</sup> century with a strong hand in medieval period. In her times, the Sidama were a female dominated society unlike the recent and existing reality. Beside the social and economic exploitative situation, the Sidama women were also exposed to several harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, food taboos (Sidama women were not allowed to eat with their husbands)<sup>81</sup>.

Although the government and other stakeholders played their own role to tackle the problems of women, the missionaries of all churches and particularly the Norwegian missionaries played a significant role. The missionaries changed the life of several women in Wondo Genet area through education. They enabled many women to read and write<sup>82</sup>.

The Mekane Yesus Church had contributed much in improving the life of women. My informant told me that in 1969, the missionaries were teaching women about various vocational skills. The names of those female missionaries who trained them skills were Mrs. Marta and Rahel. They were producing sweaters and kids' cloths by their own hands not only for their children but also for sale. Every week they were working for themselves and on Fridays, they worked for the Church, produced many clothes, sold on bids for members, and were generating source of

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<sup>79</sup>Informants: *Ato Gebiso; Ato Asefa Gebiso; Ato Esatu Enja; Ato Ati Taye.*

<sup>80</sup>Seble Mitike, pp.6-7.

<sup>81</sup>*ibid.*, pp.8-15, 21-22.

<sup>82</sup>Informant: *W/ro Abebech Lelemo.*

income for the Church and themselves<sup>83</sup>. Similarly, the health services provided by missionaries played also decisive role in the life of the Sidama women. After the opening of clinics and hospitals, in Wondo Genet and other remote and rural areas, the Sidama women got exposure to modern medical treatment during delivery and other medical treatments<sup>84</sup>. They also provided vocational and technical training to the community in their workshops about woodwork, metal works, fine arts and various technical trainings for women. In addition, they gave trainings on different agricultural activities. Especially, the Church had vocational skills training center at Wondo Genet in an area where today's Wondo Genet Forestry College exists. The houses constructed at that time exist today on the campus<sup>85</sup>.

In this training center, many young believers, who completed their grade eight formal education, were selected from other Sidama *woredas* such as from Aleta Wondo, Chuko, Yirgalem and other areas and trained in the boarding training center where dormitory and dining service was also given. Before the beginning of the daily works, there was praying and sharing ideas from the Bible<sup>86</sup>.

Because of various disagreements that occurred between the Church and the government, the Church was closed down in 1981. One of the disagreements was that the Church ministers opposed to chant socialist slogans raising their left hands and saying such as “Down with Imperialism” and “We will make nature under our control” and other slogans. Particularly in 1980/81, the farmers associations that were in the surroundings of the WondoMekaneYesus Church confiscated all the agricultural lands of the Church and other properties. Around the aforementioned year, some six persons of the Church were also imprisoned. The Church was lastly opened towards the end of 1990<sup>87</sup>.

The MekaneYesus Church's source of income was similar to the above two Protestant Churches of Wondo Genet. The main source of income was the contribution of the members of the Church in the form of tithe, gift and *meba*, *asrat* and *bekurat* (giving the first born of cattle or the first income of any income or work to god or church). In addition, the founding missionaries also

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<sup>83</sup>Seble Mitike, pp.24-25.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid*, pp.24-25.

<sup>85</sup>Informants: *Ato Alebachew Mesele, Ato Ati Taye and Ato Yohannes Berego.*

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid*.

supported the Church's activities in building churches praying halls, health and educational centers and paying the monthly payments of evangelists. The main types of expenses are allowances for evangelists and preachers, church building expenses, evangelical works and worship facilities and equipment and other necessary expenses to the evangelical works<sup>88</sup>.

## **Some Common Features of the Protestant Churches in Wondo Genet**

### **Missionary Work**

Foreign missionaries who came from Europe, North America and other part of the world, first started all the three Churches (The Hiwt Birhan Church, Kale Hiwt Church and Mekane Yesus Church). In addition to their main religious agenda, the missionaries also worked in the community where they go to preach in their profession mainly in education, medical care and other social services. At that time, it was believed that a man to be a missionary he/she had to have one or more additional skill or profession such as teaching, construction work or had to be a physician so that he can approach the community by giving service and preach the gospel<sup>89</sup>.

The missionaries explain the teachings of their faith and try to inspire devotion to Jesus. The major duties of the missionaries were to lead worship services, preach the gospel or sermon, translate the Bible to Sidama language, write religious materials, organize the church and guide converts in the practice of the faith. The founding missionaries of the churches had attempted to do the above-mentioned duties and works in their respective communities they served<sup>90</sup>.

The missionaries approached the people in similar way by participating in social services like funeral and marriage ceremonies. They also tried to attract people by giving gifts and free medical care or services and by preparing conferences. They showed generosity and charitable behavior to all Protestant or non-Protestants. This attracted the society to accept the new belief without opposing<sup>91</sup>.

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<sup>88</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>89</sup>"Missionaries" *World Book Encyclopedia* (Chicago: Ascot F. Company), Vol.13, pp.620-623.

<sup>90</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>91</sup>*ibid.*

## Socio-Economic Contribution

The newly introduced Protestant religion made a vital change in the social and cultural life of the people because the followers of the new religion modified traditional ways of performing social activities. The Protestants established their own members association to help each other in religious ceremony and other social life. They also prohibited some harmful practices like polygamy, women genital mutilation, smoking *gayiya* (tobacco leaf used as a cigarette) chat, and other activities. They also contributed their own share in creating cohesion within the Society, avoiding harmful traditions and reducing bad conducts such as being bandit, theft, and ethnic or clan conflicts and wars. For example, the ethnic hostility and conflict between the peoples of Sidama and Wolaita and between the peoples of Arsi and Sidama have been minimized and the practice of mutilating the sex organs of males by all warriors and other neighboring communities have also diminished since many of the people were converted to the Protestant faith<sup>92</sup>.

The place where the current Mekane Yesus Church was constructed is found in a border area between the Sidama and Guji Oromo. The area was an area of conflict between the two peoples due to competition for grazing land for their cattles. In order to control the conflict, a police station was set up there in 1965. Following the establishment of the Church in the place, the conflict had been minimized. Besides, they have avoided some traditional ways of religious practices such as offering sacrifices and gifts to ancestors, mourning ceremonies damaging themselves in weeping etc. All of these are the merits of the introduction of the new faith in the study area<sup>93</sup>.

With regard to economic activities, many sources and informants indicate that the new faith had also significant impact on the growth of the economy of the people by teaching them how to manage money and time, strong work habit and careful management of material things. On the other hand, training also given to the society on different fields such as, vegetable production, poultry production and modern way of cattle breeding and handcrafts to increase their income. Most of the churches and the early missionaries worked making five basic development strategic plans which are educational services and building of schools, giving medical services by establishing clinic, works on infrastructures like road, bridge, pure water and opening different

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92. Informant: Pastor Tesfaye Kamiso and Ato Dukemo Kankura.

93. *Ibid.*



workshops and training centers in metal work, wood work and handcraft. In order to implement the strategic plans, the missionaries used different mechanisms such as financial aid from abroad and contribution from the community, which aimed at giving basic technical expertise and awareness to the society to achieve better environment and improve the life of the society<sup>94</sup>. They also planned to minimize poverty rate and worked along with the government in relief and rehabilitation programs, pure water supply, sanitation, irrigation, vocational training and so on. Because of these social and economic activities and improvements, the Protestant Church increased in numbers and organization and widely expanded to the district and village levels in Wondo Genet and the whole the then Sidama Province<sup>95</sup>.

## **Internal and External Challenges Encountered the Protestant Churches in Wondo Genet**

### **Internal Challenges**

The Protestant Churches of Wondo Genet were not free from challenges though they grew physically and spiritually since their inception to the end of the *Derg* regime. Internal challenges came mainly from the members, leaders, missionaries and priests. Even though the members of the Protestant Churches are known for their love and support for each other, there are times of internal crisis due to different causes mostly raised by carnal or carnal Christians and leaders who give priority for world of life. Among these internal problems, some observed problems are lack of unity and cooperation (among members and churches), doctrinal differences and divisions are some of the few problems manifested<sup>96</sup>.

Spiritual revival and the various interpretations of the scripture mainly on charismatic or spiritual gifts of Holy Spirit have been also another cause for disagreements and disintegration among members of Churches and among different Protestant Churches or denominations in Wondo Genet and elsewhere in southern Ethiopia<sup>97</sup>.

### **External Challenges**

External challenges came to the Protestant Churches in Wondo Genet *Woreda* from different directions. The first challenge came from the traditionalists or conservative members of the

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<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup>Informant: Pastor Gemechu.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*

Sidama and Guji Oromo societies that did not want to lose the earlier traditional religious practices. The conservative members of the society did not want to accept positively the changes and new modes of life introduced to the society by the new faith of Protestantism. They wanted the survival and existence of their indigenous cultural practices<sup>98</sup>.

The other challenge that came to each member of the new faith and the whole churches was from different corners such as families, relatives, government bodies, Ethiopian Orthodox Church in fear of competition and in need of dominance and *balabats* during the time of the imperial regime, by prohibiting land for Protestant Church building. *Kebele* authorities and cadres during the *Derg* regime were calling assembly on the Sabbath day/Sunday/.All these external challenges carried out particularly on the new believers from family, social associations like “*idir*”, marriage alliances and social groups, were strong challenges for new believers to stand on their new religion<sup>99</sup>.

In addition to these challenges, the political conditions in the study time (the Imperial and Socialist governments of Ethiopia) were not suitable for the members of the Protestant faith. Both regimes hindered the practices and growth of the new faith. During the time of Haile Selassie, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was state religion and was highly favored and other religions were discouraged<sup>100</sup>.As we said above, the imperial government was not happy with them due to fear of their competition against the Orthodox Church and fear of loss of obedience of the peasants and the society to the government and the religious dignitaries. The socialist government hated the Protestant faith followers for they did not accept and cooperate with the socialist ideology and suspicion of their close relation with the western world.

During the *Derg* period, particularly after its adoption of socialism as the official ideology of the government in April 1976, all Protestant activities were banned and all spiritual activities became under a strict control of the socialist state. The *Derg* planned to assign each top leadership position of all religious institutions with its affiliated leaders. When the religious institutions refused to accept this aim of the government, it took horrible measures and killed many religious leaders. It can be mentioned the assassination of *Abune* Tewoflos, Patriarch of the Ethiopian

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<sup>98</sup>Informant: Pastor Tesfaye Kamiso and *Qes* Mengesha Nacha.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*

Orthodox Church in 1979 and the murder of *Qes Gudina Tumsa*, the General Secretariat of Mekane Yesus Church of Ethiopia are most notable and terrible in Ethiopian history<sup>101</sup>.

### **Basic Doctrinal Similarities**

All the evangelical churches assessed in this paper have more or less similar Biblical foundation. All believed that salvation is achieved through faith in Jesus Christ. They believe in Trinity, which means God is one revealed in three personalities that is God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They believed in the second coming of Jesus Christ. They believe also in the resurrection. They accepted baptism after faith in full emersion. The only church that has difference in this regard is Mekane Yesus Church. Mekane Yesus Church baptizes infants, which other churches do not believe in infant baptism. The churches discussed in this paper are also members of the Union of Ethiopian Evangelical Churches (UEEC), which is established nationally embracing all evangelical churches. They share together conferences, Biblical trainings, worships and have time of general discussions together on various common issues organized from higher level of federal offices down to *woreda* and *ketema* (town) level unions of the churches. In most of the towns of the country, they share common grave yards given by the government for Protestant Churches' communal use<sup>102</sup>.

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<sup>101</sup>M.Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia, 1974-1985*(Addis Ababa: University of Addis Ababa, 2000), pp258-259,111-112 and pp.147-148.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*

## **Conclusion**

People in Wondo Genet area experienced continuous political, social and religious changes. For many centuries, they were ruled by local chiefs based on traditional system and practiced an indigenous religion. The invasion of Emperor Menilik's soldiers brought a period of big changes. Waves of transformation, and later, modernization followed. Changes also came in religion. The EOC and its priests settled in new small communities or garrison towns and had relatively little impact on the religion of the indigenous people of Sidama apart from officials and settlers.

The main theme of this study was the history of the introduction and expansion of Protestant Christianity in Wondo Genet woreda. The introduction of the religion has relation with evangelization activities of the SIM missionaries and local evangelists who came from Wolaita and Kambata areas. Next to SIM, the Swedish Philadelphia Church Mission (SPCM) and the Noreigean Luteran Mission as (NLM) have played key roles. The SIM missionaries had founded Kale Hiwot Church, the SPCM planted Hiwot Birhan Church and the Lutheran Mission Association laid foundation for the establishment of the Mekane Yesus Church.

The people of the area before the introduction of the Protestant faith worshiped various traditional deities and spirits including ancestral and living elders in their shrines. The new religion became attractive for the people because of a number of reasons. The teaching of one Supreme God, the teaching of the Bible by the missionaries in their vernacular language, the teaching of the missionaries against the offering sacrifices and rituals to their dead and living elders that was economically harmful to the people was among the factors that attracted the people of Wondo Genet to the Protestant Christianity.

The Italian colonial officials had targeted and persecuted the Protestant followers during the period of occupation (1936-1941). Nevertheless, they had more opportunities and growth after 1941. Protestantism challenged to a greater degree the traditional religion and penetrated into the society. Besides preaching the gospel, they used education, health services and trainings to get close to the society and Protestantism had a significant impact on people's culture and religion. Education laid a ground for Protestantism and Christian leadership and exposure to modern education. Medical services paved the way for Protestantism, changed folk religious beliefs

about cause-effect relationships in sickness and helped many people suffering from physical illness.

The Protestant churches established in the *woreda* involved in social activities such as education, health and other economic activities, which were profitable to the community. These social activities of the missionaries and later the churches paved the way to get acceptance by the people of the *woreda* and the number of the followers and the churches increased at large scale within a short period. The new faith increased through time although there was opposition and challenge from different groups such as government, balabats or property owners and conservative traditional religion followers.

Protestantism established a uniform religious framework and grew in number of followers. The extensive conversion of the indigenous people to Protestantism faith did not take place without opposition. The Protestant believers were attacked both by representatives of traditional society as well as by the local authorities and the Orthodox clergy. The persecution against the Protestant religion followers became even stronger and harsh in the Derg regime.

The Protestant churches of Wondo Genet provided different holistic ministries like elementary and basic schools, clinics and boarding houses for those students who came from far and remote distance. While all these and other developmental and social services of the missionaries on one hand served as a means for the proclamation of the word of God and supported the church growth, on the other hand, the holistic approach served the material needs of the society. It assisted the church to get influence over the people to accept the new religion and brought progress among the people.

Despite the changes, the expansion of the protestant faith eroded the traditional cultural values and made many people to abandon their previous religion. The spread of the Protestant faith aroused fears among those of the non-Protestant religions. The local officials and traditional office heads jointly with priests of the Orthodox Church persecuted converts. As said above, particularly, the *Derg* regime persecuted the protestant Christians, torched, and imprisoned and confiscated their lands and properties and closed down the many of the churches from 1980 to 1990. This was because the *Derg* officials assumed that the Protestant Churches had relations

with western countries and they did not accept its socialist ideology and principles. As a result, many converts suffered imprisonment without trial for refusing to renounce their new religion.

## Glossary of local Terms

*Asrat*: one tenth of income payment of the believers for the Church

*Ayanto*: astrologist and the man in charge of Sidama calendar, who fix the date of Fiche-ceremony.

*Balegasha*: owner of certain amount of hectare land

*Balerist*: land owners

*Betemengest*: palace /Ras Desta recreational place/

*Buluko*: large traditional cloth made of cotton mainly worn by old men.

*Chambalala*: part of the Fiche celebration that refers performing cultural dances and plays as well as food sharing during Fiche celebration in the Sidama.

*Deiazmach*: high-level military rank of Ethiopian imperial regimes in Amharic (commander of the gate).

*Fiche*: a New Year festival in the Sidama based on formulation of the Lunar Calendar

*File-Wuha*: hot spring

*Gadana*: leader of *luwa*

*Garo*: council of Elderly People, who were assistants or advisors to the *Mote* in the administration work

*Gayiya*: a plant used as a cigarette.

*Gebbar*: tenant

*Godaana*: the defense administration or war leader of the Sidama

*Gojjo*: traditional house made up of grass and wood (hut).

*Gudumale* and *Mura*: traditional Sidama courts which were practiced since ancient times to resolve various problems and punish criminals in the society.

*Hadicho*: marginalized

*Halale*: principles of ultimate truth and justice in the Sidama language.

*Huluqa*: ritual process by which holding a leaf of palm in two directions and allowing all *cattle* to pass through that hole.

*Ille, Ille*: Welcome, welcome and we wish you a happy new year.

*Kebele*: the lower administrative structure of the government.

*Kilil*: a group of local churches numbered from five to nine.

*Luwa*: generational class or age-set system in Sidama.

*Meba*: gift of the believers on worshipping programs as they wished or have.

*Melekegna*: local administrator during the period of Emperor Haile Silassie

*Merigeta*: leader of *kine*, *zema* and *kidassie* in the Orthodox Church

*Moote*: head of clan in Sidama.

*Motitee*: queen

*Mura*: represent higher court and could pass final decision in Sidama.

*Murricha*: head of *edir* (social organization of people to support each other at times of crisis, - mainly when occur death of family members).

*Nechlebash*: armed forces of the government that wear civil cloth not military uniforms during - the period of Emperor Haile Silassie.

*Olla*: neighbor hood in Sidama language.

*Qalicha*: witchcraft

*Qurumsa*: logical

*Songo*: indigenous council of people representatives similar to the modern day parliament in - Sidama.

*Utuba*: land tenure system in the area.

*Waqefena*: Ceremony of traditional belief in which pray performed by slaughtering animals and - calling place names and natural creatures such as mountains and rivers.

*Waasa*: a funeral meal made up of an inset with milk supplied by the members of Olla in Sidama.

*Woma*: a village head in the *gada* system.

*Woreda*: district administration.

*Yakka*: an indigenous socio-cultural institution that works on defending the rights of women.

Yegeta Erat: Lord's Supper.

*Yemerecho*: the "pure Sidama" stock, ruling and land owning groups.



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## List of Key Informants

No	Name of Informants	Age	Date of Interview	Place of Interview	Remarks
1	Abebech Lelemo Horu (Woyizero)	70	Feburary 13, 2017	Wondo Wosha	She was one of the first student of vocational school under MekaneYesus Church
2	AlebachewMesele (Ato)	72	Feburary 16, 2017	Wondo Basha	Elder in Orthodox Church knows about the history and expansion of Orthodox Church
3	AsefaGebisoGedesa (Ato)	70	Feburary 15, 2017	Wondo Wosha	Is knowledgeable about the culture and religious history of the people of Sidama and MekaneYesus Church
4	AtiTaye (Ato)	69	April 27,2017	Edola	Knowledgable about foundation and expansion of Kale Hiwot Church
5	BerasaGemetoRigeru (Ato)	84	Feburary 13, 2017	Wondo Wosha	Elders of the MekaneYesus Church who know about the Church's history
6	Birhanu Adi (Ato)	68	March 14,2017	Bussa	Spokes man of Wondo Woreda and knowledgeable about history of Guji Oromo
7	Demesie Dembi (Ato)	57	Feburary 21, 2017 March 14,2017	Wondo Kella	Wondo Genet Woreda Culture and Tourism Office Head.Knows about the culture and traditional practices of the Woreda
8	DukemoQanquraDichasa (Ato)	92	March 29, 2017	Gemeto Galle	Is an expert in traditional and cultural history of the Sidama people
9	EsatuEnjaWoyamo (Ato)	67	Feburary 15, 2017	Wondo Wosha	Narrates very well the history of the MekaneYesus Church
10	GebisoGedisaBuchela (Ato)	98	Feburary 15, 2017	Wondo Wosha	Knows well about the religious history of the sidama people
11	GemechuShelemo (Pastor)	58	Feburary 23, 2017	Wondo Kella	He is a Pastor of the HiwotBirhan Church. He knows about the Churches' history, source of income and her relation with other churches
12	HegisoHeyamoHoyabo (Ato)	98	Feburary 26, 2017	Wondo Wosha	Knows about the foundation and expansion of MekaneYesus Church and history of the Sidama people

13	MengeshaNachaGodana ( <i>Qes</i> )	56	March 20, 2017	Hawassa	Knows very well about the introduction of Christianity in the <i>Woreda</i>
14	MilkiasFantuchaSege ( <i>Ato</i> )	66	March 19, 2017	Edolla	One of the elders of the Kale Hiwot Church
15	Nure Nuka Abate ( <i>Ato</i> )	83	March 28, 2017	Wondo Basha	Is knowledgeable on the economic and cultural history of the people of sidama
16	QecheneUdiseHursisa ( <i>Ato</i> )	78	Feburary 25, 2017	Wondo Wosha	An old man that remembers well about foundation and expansion of Kale Hiwot Church
17	Shamena Dalecho Degaga ( <i>Ato</i> )	95	Feburary 25, 2017	Wondo Wosha	An old man that have ample knowledge and information about the history of Kale Hiwot Church and culture of the Sidama people
18	Shekuru Labacho ( <i>Ato</i> )	72	Feburary 23, 2017	Wondo Kella	Knows about the introduction of Protestant faith in the area
19	Tesfaye Kamiso Ushe (Pastor)	66	April 10, 2017	Hawassa	He Knows well about foundation and expansion of Hiwot Birhan Church in the area.
20	Teshome Qareso ( <i>Ato</i> )	94	March 11, 2017	Wondo Basha	Knows more about the foundation and expansion of HiwotBirhan Church
21	Tulu Galore Geda ( <i>Ato</i> )	66	April 18, 2017	Edolla	Knowledgeable about the foundation of Kale Hiwot Church
22	Ture Loke Lencha ( <i>Ato</i> )	70	April 18, 2017	Edolla	Knowledgeable about Kale Hiwot Church of the area
23	Wotecha Teshite Daye ( <i>Ato</i> )	89	March 8, 2017	Edolla	Has good knowledge about the beginning and growth of Hiwot Birhan Church in the area
24	Yohannes Berego ( <i>Ato</i> )	83	April 13, 2017	Wondo Wosha	knowledgeable about the beginning of MekaneYesus Church in the area and establishment of Wondogenet College of Forestry

# Appendix