Love and Justice: The Foundations of Gudina Tumsa's Social Engagement and Leadership

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Abstract

Different groups have laid claim to the legacy of Gudina Tumsa, a prominent Ethiopian evangelical theologian and church leader. Some consider him a prophet, others a theologian, still others a martyr, and many more a political activist. Gudina stands out among Ethiopian evangelical leaders of recent decades. As such he defies neat categorization into existing labels. Unable to reconcile his religious conviction and social engagement, many evangelicals describe him as controversial. Scholars have tried to explain his politically engaged leadership by referring to the influence of his formative years or his experiences in the United States of the civil rights era. In this paper, I argue that Gudina's unique leadership was informed and shaped by his deeply erudite understanding of the theology of Christian realism that dominated theological and ecumenical debates earlier in his career in the 1960s. Understanding his intellectual foundation not only shows seamless consistency between his faith and his social engagement but also explains the roots of the holistic theology he championed and the adaptive leadership he provided in uncertain times for his church.

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Introduction

The end of the era of official atheism in Ethiopia in 1991 brought into focus not only the role that persecution plays in church growth and in fostering theological vitality, but also a debate over the appropriateness of a Christian's involvement in politics. The life and ministry of Gudina Tumsa, former general secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) who was martyred in 1979, became a subject of controversy following the launching of an effort in the early 1990s to revive his legacies and the publication in 2003 of his writings and scholarly studies of his theology and leadership. A consensus has now emerged that Gudina was an influential leader regarding the critical national issues Ethiopia confronted in the second half of the twentieth century. The question of whether he was a devout church leader or a nationalist politician is a subject of continued debate.

Theologians who knew and worked with Gudina view him as a theologian of profound intellect and a church leader who was cut short by an ungodly tyrant. Øyvind M. Eide, professor of practical theology at the School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger, Norway, remembers him as a rising African theologian. He writes: "his murder brought to an end the possibility of creative and visionary theological reflection in the church, which was so much needed in Ethiopia at the time. It was a blow to African theology as well as to the worldwide church. His theology, which grew out of African soil, remains of great interest" (Eide 2001: 291). Gerd Decke of Berliner Missionswerk compares Gudina to the German theologian martyred by the Nazis:

> Like Dietrich Bonheoffer, Gudina Tumsa was killed because of his political engagement on the basis of his Christian witness. After his second arrest, when the possibility opened, with the help of President Julius Nyrere of Tanzania, for him directly to go into exile, Gudina responded to the temptation with these words: "How can I leave the country, my church, as a shepherd of this flock?" A few weeks later, he is murdered (Decke 2008: 20-21).

Evangelical Christians among whom Gudina worked view him as a prophet who brought them the Good News and shared in their suffering. Rev. Girma

Arfaso, one time president of South Central Ethiopia Synod of the EECMY recalls: "Gudina Tumsa is our St. Paul. [He and his wife] showed our people Jesus Christ—they shared our hunger, our sufferings. [Gudina] came to Kembata and Hadiya not only as a preacher and prophet, but also slept in our huts, climbed mountains with us. … He instructed us, and even today we follow his advice and example" (Gudina Tumsa Foundation 2003: blurb).

On the other hand, activists who knew Gudina's profound distaste for unchecked power maintain that he was a nationalist who supported their cause to liberate the Oromo people form tyrannical rule. For instance, Lencoo Latta, a leader of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), claims that Gudina was an inspiration for the Oromo nationalists of his generation. He is quoted as saying: "The OLF was created in his house. Because the secret security officials were spying on the politically active Oromo, the house of a church leader was selected. However Gudina did not participate in the establishment" (Decke 2009: 21). Gudina's real connection to this case might have been Baro Tumsa, his younger brother and one of the well-known founders of the OLF. He was perhaps instrumental in selecting his home for its presumed safety.

Each of these groups has compelling reasons to claim Gudina as a source of inspiration. The man lived his life as a theologian guided by a strong sense of morality who also accepted his role as a prophet to speak against injustice. He did not see any inconsistency between being a faithful Christian and an advocate for justice. As early as 1971, he had made it clear that the social and political aspects of the human condition cannot be separated from the religious dimension. In the Ethiopian context, he argued, "people are tormented with fear of spirits [and unjust rulers] and they want to accept the new religion of *love and justice* [my emphasis]" (Tumsa 2003: 133). In Gudina's thought, the gospel applied both to the temporal aspect of life on earth and the timelessness of the next. In other words, the redemption that flows from God's eternal love must not becloud the indispensible role that the gospel of justice must play in the present dispensation.

Yet his contemporaries felt that politics was a domain best left to politicians and activists. Some of his closest co-workers in God's vineyard seem genuinely conflicted accepting the notion that a church leader can be

politically engaged without compromising his faith.[2] Even Gerd Decke, someone who knew Gudina and studied his works, seems to join the skeptics in wondering about what motivates Gudina Tumsa. He writes: "Gudina Tumsa was controversial in his church - and he still is. Was he closer to a charismatic church leader of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus or a political hero of the Oromo, a Christian martyr or "a nationalist?" (Decke 2009: 21). The more pertinent question, even for his friends, is whether Gudina Tumsa was a politician masquerading as a Christian leader.

Some scholars have attempted to locate Gudina's political engagement in his formative experience of witnessing the dehumanizing impact of poverty and the depredations of social parasites on the people of Bojii in western Wallaga, the region where he grew up.[3] Others have suggested that his presence in the United States during the height of the civil rights movement had made him sympathetic to the plight of the downtrodden. Still others have surmised that Gudina was inspired by Dietrich Bonheoffer's life and theology.[4] In my view, Gudina's actions and decisions as a leader were guided by deeply-held theological beliefs. If as some have suggested that the civil rights movement influenced Gudina in any way, it is not in regard to an awareness of the fact of the existence of oppression but of the irony that citizens of an advanced democracy that also claimed Christian ethical heritage were capable of sanctioning political and economic dispossession against fellow citizens. This realization was not Gudina's personal revelation but an elaborate theology developed by Reinhold Niebuhr, an American Protestant pastor and social activist described as "arguably the outstanding American theologian of the twentieth century" (McClay 2002).

[2] Quite interestingly, this view comes from Emmanuel Abraham, a man who spent a life time in government. His views are nuanced, of course. He maintains that he was never a politician in his life, insisting that he was a technocrat who rendered public service without being involved in the vices of governing. In contrast, Gudina was a contrarian, to say the least, who spoke against the Ethiopian government on political issues. Interview: Emmanuel Abraham, Addis Ababa, January 29, 2011.

[3] For a concise biography of Gudina Tumsa, see Ezekiel Gebissa, "Guddinaa Tumsaa," *Dictionary of African Biography*, edited by Emmanuel K. Akyeampong and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 509-511.

[4] Many have found similarities between the lives of Dietrich Bonheoffer and Gudina Tumsa (Wee 2010:15-51; Harms 2010; Eide 2003; Hirpo 2005:161; Eshete, 2008).

In this article, I argue that Gudina's political engagement was in keeping with Niebuhr's theology of Christian realism.[5] He was acting out of a theological tradition rather than following a political ideology, a nationalist impulse or a hidden commitment to a secular agenda.

While I argue Christian realism is an important source of influence, I do not suggest Gudina's theological inspiration is exclusively Niebuhrian realism. It is entirely possible that Gudina might have been influenced by Lutheran themes that pervaded theological discussions at Luther Seminary during his time as a student there. Students from the time indicate that Niebuhr's ideas were frequently discussed at formal and informal events. The implication of my argument here is that Gudina was inspired by a theological tradition that goes back to the Hebrew prophets through St. Paul, St. Augustine, Martin Luther and other representatives of this tradition of which Reinhold Niebuhr was its contemporary spokesperson in the 1960s (Jodock, E-mail communication March 27, 2012; April 4, 2012).[6] Here my purpose is not to debate the soundness of Niebuhr's theology but to show that it has profoundly influenced, informed and shaped Gudina's thinking

[5] As far as I know, Øyvind Eide is the first to relate Gudina's theological thinking to Reinhold Niebuhr. Citing Gudina's college mates and coworkers, he reports that Gudina was immersed in studying Niebuhr's works when he was at the Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and that he frequently spoke of Niebuhr in conversations. Furthermore, he suggests Niebuhr's influence on Gudina is evident in his hermeneutical model and his ethics. As such, Eide has done more than anyone else exploring the depth of Reinhold Niebuhr's influence on Gudina's thinking. His explorations, however, are cautious and tentative, perhaps because of the controversy over Niebuhr's theological commitment arising from an inaccurate characterization of Niebuhr's legacy that arose after the publication of a highly controversial book by Richard Wightman Fox (1985). Niebuhr's legacy has been restored since the 1980s and he is considered an influential theologian today. Those interested in a brief rebuttal of Fox's characterization should read, for example, Gilkey (1988: 263-276).

[6] Darrell Jodock was Gudina's classmate at Luther Seminary in the 1960s. He reports that John Victor Halvorson, professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary in those days, was a great devotee of Niebuhr's thought. Halvorson once showed Jodock a letter from Niebuhr in which he expresses his theological identity as a Lutheran. We can infer that, though Niebuhr was not Lutheran by church affiliation, he often identified himself theologically as Lutheran.

and actions in the same way it has several theologians living under authoritarian political systems of the developing world.[7]

Niebuhr's Theology of Social Engagement

Niebuhr's career was devoted to bringing attention to the forces that shape and limit human possibilities. His theology seeks to bridge the gap between the biblical vision of God's Reign and the realities of modern society. The source of his ideas could be his father's pietism and belief that Christians had to work for social improvement in addition to evangelization may have inspired him to the ministry and social activism (Fox 1996: 7).[8] As a pastor in Detroit in the 1920s, observing the appalling working conditions in American automobile factories (Niebuhr 1929) and his experience through two world wars, the nuclear age, and the Cold War, convinced him of the reality of human beings' capacity for evildoing (Lovin 2007: 59). Niebuhr combines political with much broader theological ideas giving rise to what came to be called Christian realism, a theology that maintains biblical faith gives vision and direction to human capacity for self-transcendence, and humans are best able to challenge and channel their creative and imaginative power when they have a firm purchase on what really is going on around them (Lovin 1995).

The point of departure of Christian realism is thus recognition of the sinful reality of human nature. Realizing the finiteness of life, Niebuhr says, humans try to escape the ensuing anxiety though egoistic self-assertion, using power as a means of protection against competitors and developing ideologies to justify this power. As such, Niebuhr says, individuals depend on an illusory sense of self-assured security rather seek transformation by divine judgment (Niebuhr 1941, Niebuhr 1953). This propensity of self-deception, according to Niebuhr, emanates from pride (sin), making selfishness an inescapable reality of being human. However, Niebuhr

[7] In the non-Western world, Christian thinkers like Kikoyo Takeda Cho of Japan, M. M. Thomas of India, and Ade Adeghola of Nigeria were a few of those who had come under the influence of Niebuhr's thinking and served on the WCC committees dealing with issues of church and society. For American politicians and other leaders influenced by Niebuhr, see (Harries & Platten 2010: 1-2).

[8] For biographical details, see (Fox1996; Stone, 1992; Gilkey 2001: 3-15). For an introduction to Niebuhr's thoughts, see (Lovin 1995; Lovin 2003).

reiterates, humans are created in God's image and endowed with unselfish impulses, which, when reason prevails over their instinct to survive, affords them the ability to consider the interests of others and the capacity to have a measure of sympathy and a sense of justice (Niebuhr 1932).

The individual's capacity for unselfishness, Niebuhr contends, does not directly transfer to human institutions, which have less capacity than individuals for self-transcendence to consider the needs of others (Niebuhr 1932: xi-xii). The collective egoism of a group is so powerful that the tendency toward compassion that is inherent in the individual is eminently more difficult to obtain in social institutions. Such dynamics are most evident at the level of a nation, where the need for dignity and security leads citizens to believe that state institutions and authorities can provide them. As power expands, the ruling authority increasingly escapes criticism, to the extent that political institutions or leaders become the only source of judgment on which everything else in society depends. Niebuhr describes this phenomenon as political idolatry, adding that it is neither a deficiency inherent in certain cultures nor the result of unique historical circumstances but a reality that applies to all kinds of political systems. The advantage of democracies over totalitarianism is not that they escape those limits, but that they are better at course-correction (O'Donovan 2002: 41).

In Niebuhr's view, the contemporary theologies had failed to avert the human tragedies of his time and to work towards changing political systems that tend to concentrate power and emasculate citizens of any rights. Some deferred any action for alleviating human suffering to God's ultimate judgment, the effect of which was a pious commendation of unjust systems. Others were unjustifiably optimistic that ultimate love can usher in God's Reign on earth (Niebuhr 1935: 128-131). For Niebuhr, neither the hope of eschatological redemption nor the sentimental allure of ultimate love was sufficient to meet the contemporary needs of humans for social justice. Instead he argued that any hope for human flourishing will depend upon humans' ability to strip away scripturally-unjustified expectation of freedom from the anxiety of life and look directly at the facts of human existence and deliberate upon them honestly (Lovin 2003: 489-505, Niebuhr 1953: 190-191, Niebuhr 1934: 84-116).

Niebuhr's theology emphasizes the limitation of humans to fulfill the promise of love. For him, sacrificial love is neither a representative case nor a realistic possibility in history because it calls for consistent selflessness

that humans are rarely capable of (Niebuhr 1996: 68). As such, the love on the cross stands as a warning and judgment upon human moral "failings" and serves only as an inspiration to direct and guide the human moral resolve towards the ideal (Niebuhr 1935: 128). In this dispensation, Niebuhr says, the normative guide for moral action should be justice which actually creates a system that deals realistically with competing assertions of self-interest (Niebuhr 1996: 284-86). Given that neither humans nor human institutions are willing to act in the interest of others volitionally, any endeavor that seeks to equalize social and power disparities will necessarily entail coercion (Niebuhr 1932: 252). The goal is not an ideal society where justice and perfect peace prevail, but one "in which there will be enough justice, and in which coercion will be sufficiently nonviolent to prevent common enterprise from issuing into complete disaster" (Niebuhr 1968: 26-27) Ceding the right to coercive action, Niebuhr asserts, is tantamount to giving an undue preference to tyranny (Niebuhr 1952:28, Niebuhr 1934: 128,148).[9]

In a nutshell, Niebuhr's Christian realism is fundamentally about acknowledging that ultimate victory over man's disorder belongs to God and accepting responsibility for ushering in proximate victories. Niebuhr articulates the promise of new life for individuals and nations through repentance and redemption respectively, and encourages political engagement grounded in a realistic hope exemplified in Jesus Christ that there is meaning in life that transcends the evidence of historical injustices (Niebuhr 1953:111-115). It is because of the hope in Christ and his reign that Niebuhr encourages engagement in human affairs with criticism and responsibility instead of cynicism and pessimism, apathy and withdrawal (Niebuhr 1941: 15). In the words of one of Niebuhr's preeminent interpreters,

[9]The possibility of bridging the gap between ultimate love and the reality of injustice through nonviolent intervention has been manifested in the life of one of Niebuhr's most astute readers, Martin Luther King, Jr. As a follower of Christ, King justified his nonviolent resistance by appealing to Niebuhr's notion of a "coercive nonviolence" that rejects both a passive nonresistance and an unrestrained militarism. For details, see (King 1986: 292). King cites Niebuhr's classic analysis of the promise of nonviolent coercion in social struggle in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 231–56. King often referred to what he learned from Niebuhr. See, for example, the above-cited and (King, 1986: 35–36, 374, 602; King 1986b: 48; King 1986c: 256–57).

> Christian realism is not a general philosophical theism, but an affirmation of statements about God drawn from what Niebuhr called "prophetic religion," the tradition that begins with the Hebrew prophets, who saw God both present in and standing in judgment on human realities with which our moral lives are concerned. For Christians, this realism culminates in Jesus Christ, who makes this divine reality present in the world, reveals God's judgment on it, and finally redeems it for God's own purposes (Lovin 2008: 10-11).

Evidently, Niebuhr's Christian realism is a theology deeply rooted in the scriptures and furthermore in the prophetic traditions going back to the Hebrew prophets. In the following pages, I will discuss the extent of Niebuhr's influence on Gudina's thinking.

Niebuhr's Christian Realism as the Foundation of Gudina's Theology

Broadly conceived, then, Christian realism outlines specific moral directives for concrete actions and policies. Gudina expressed quite vividly his familiarity with and endorsement of Niebuhr's main theological insights in his *Pastoral Letter* (Abraham and Tumsa 2003: 77-81), which some have described as a highly political document (Hoffman 2003). The first EECMY statement on the Ethiopian revolution of 1974, one sees Niebuhr's influence in this document on several levels.

An important element of Niebuhr's theology is the attempt to deal with the human social condition "the way things are" rather than how one might wish them to be. This approach characterizes Gudina's methods in assessing and defining prevailing political conditions. For instance, he prefaces the *Pastoral Letter* by describing the fundamental change that has occurred and what it might portend for Ethiopia in the future. Echoing the French Revolution, he writes: "Ethiopia finds itself in transition. The old regime has gone. Ethiopian Socialism has been proclaimed. New economic policies have been announced. Hopes and expectations have been awakened. However, as the structures of the old society have not been fully replaced, confusion, uncertainty and hesitation are widespread" (Abraham and Tumsa 2003: 77). Three decades later a careful political observer cannot help noticing how prescient Gudina's observations were now that the

superstructure of the Ethiopian political system has withstood the blows of two revolutions—in 1974 and 1991.

Further, Niebuhr advocates an approach to political and social realities from a Christian anthropological perspective which accents the doctrine of original sin and the testimony of history regarding human selfishness. That is, when it comes to plays for power, human selfish instincts tend to dominate human relations in social and political contexts. Despite this realization, Niebuhr encourages human individuals and groups, Christian or otherwise, toward self-transcendent possibilities. In his *Pastoral Letter*, Gudina strikes the same tone, accenting optimism about the inspiration of the cross. He writes: "In order to liberate man from the power of sin, selfishness, death and the evil one, Jesus Christ died upon the Cross. God is the God of all creation, the God of history. He has called into being a people to serve Him in the world. He liberates this people from oppression, brings them into the judgment, defeat and exile, and restores them time and again" (Abraham and Tumsa 2003: 81). Using classic Niebuhrian language, thus, Gudina encourages Christians to reject pessimism and cynicism and to serve God through engagement in human affairs.

While encouraging engagement, Niebuhr cautions against unrealistic hope that societal structures (for example, classes, nations, or governments) could be reformed easily. In the *Pastoral Letter*, Gudina did not prejudge the promise of the revolution, stating that "the church welcomes the opportunity the new situation presented to advance the cause of a more just society" (Abraham and Tumsa 2003: 80). He held out hope that the capacity of individuals for self-transcendence might prevail over the inherently selfish nature of human institutions. Yet he did not lose sight of the experience of history, underscoring that Marxist ideology has caused spiritual and material destruction elsewhere in the world. More pointedly he writes: "Ideologies cannot be considered as absolute. Complete allegiance is due to God and God alone. We recognize the urgent need of making the people aware of unjust practices" (Abraham and Tumsa 2003: 77-81). He repeats this statement in the *Memorandum*, stressing that "the gospel of Christ could never be replaced by any of the ideologies invented by men throughout the centuries" (Tumsa 2003b:76). In this regard, Gudina shows his understanding of Niebuhr's important insight that institutions are more immoral than individuals.

Niebuhr maintains that, under some sort of what he calls "equilibrated power" (checks and balances), the destructive tendencies of institutions can be overcome and a comparative or relative realization of the transcendent is possible. Neither did Gudina rule out the possibility of self-transcendence in institutions. That is why he encourages cooperation within limits:

> The ECMY envisages that opportunities for development and service programmes will be found in which it will be possible to cooperate with [local] communities in the future [the envisioned "peasant associations" and "urban dwellers' associations" are meant], thus continuing to contribute to the development of the new Ethiopian society. … We welcome the prospect of participation by the people at all levels of decision making, where the power of the people is channeled from bottom to top. We aspire for justice, respect for human rights and the rule of law (Abraham and Tumsa 2003).

What should be underscored here is Gudina's caveat that his encouragement of involvement is conditional. He sees prospects for engagement at the local level, only if ordinary people were empowered and the goal of the revolution was indeed the welfare of the people.

It is the case that Niebuhr encouraged political participation with a view to pursuing achievable, not utopian, goals. Yet it is important to note that his thoughts also contain an eschatological hope that God's direct and dramatic intervention will institute the ideal final form of the Reign. Gudina injects the same tone of hope and realism espoused by Niebuhr about what is possible in history and what is to be attained beyond history. He writes: "The Church is challenged to find itself by giving itself for the true liberation of the whole man. In this, its witness to the Gospel of Christ and its service to man, it teaches that salvation as wrought by Christ must be experienced in this life, but that fullness of life is to be realized at the Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour" (Abraham and Tumsa 2003: 80). This is an essential foundation of Niebuhrian theology of involvement which helps explain Gudina's motivation for engagement, expressed in the Ethiopian context as holistic theology.

The fact that Niebuhr advocated a politically prudential and a proximate form of societal justice should be appropriately interpreted not as an expectation of a lower level of moral or political achievement but as a refusal to allow what is immediately unattainable to stand in the way of

what is actually presently attainable. In the same vein, Gudina hoped to commit the EECMY to God's work even under the difficult situation that the revolution has created when he writes: "Deriving from the poor, the Church rededicates itself to living for others, serving the whole person, meeting his spiritual and physical needs. ... It sees its continuing task to be the full liberation of the whole man. It welcomes the opportunities which the new situation provides for building a more just society" (Abraham and Tumsa 2003: 78). This is an expression of hope based on the declared objectives of the revolution, an endeavor to nudge the revolutionaries to follow through their promulgated programs with action, not an unqualified commitment to work with them under any circumstances.[10] In the end, Gudina's cautious warnings rather than his optimism about human possibilities came to pass, proving Niebuhr's idea that social institutions are virtually not amenable to acting unselfishly when it comes to acquiring and keeping power. In my estimation, Gudina's political engagement and desire for his church to be actively involved in human development projects are based on an elaborate theology combined with the theory of development that dominated his time. Whether the EECMY, which he died serving, lives up to his dream, depends on whether it will encourage a thorough education of its seminarians in Gudina's deeply erudite theology.

Gudina Tumsa and Christian Realism in Practice

Niebuhr's Christian realism shaped not only Gudina's theological reasoning but also his leadership as evidenced in his decisions and actions.[11] The first

[10] Jörg Haustein has recently argued that the *Memorandum* "is a testimony to the general secretary's zeal for political engagement in the new society, perhaps at the risk of over-identification." This is an astonishing statement that completely misrepresents Gudina's moral character and intellectual integrity. Gudina's writings from the early days of the revolution show his profound understanding of the dangers Marxists revolutions have represented historically and the need to protect the church rather than an eagerness to work with a new social order led by atheist ideologues. One needs to examine Gudina's entire works before making outlandish judgments based statements taken out of context only to meet publication deadlines. For details, see (Haustein 2009: 117-136).

[11] I refer to Gudina's decisions and actions because he is the subject of this paper. This is not to ignore the fact that the decisions and actions of the church were collectively made by church officers but simply to recognize the reports of eyewitnesses that Gudina was the primary intellectual force behind those decisions and actions.

relates to Gudina's historically-informed reading of events and his insights in interpreting them in light of scriptures. The second pertains to his leadership as a church official and his political engagement, which, I argue, flows from his recognition of the Niebuhrian notion of the limit of power and human agency. Third, theological realists provide visionary leadership to the extent that they identify opportunities to seize and dangers to avoid. In a church context, they may be referred to as prophets because they speak truth to power and prescribe unpalatable medicines to social problems, even though they are often ignored. Niebuhr himself is described as such (Brown 1992, Brown 2005, Stone 1972 Davies 1948). In the following sections, I will show that Gudina was a prophet who spoke truth as he saw it, only to be ignored by the contemporary church leaders and fellow Christians. His leadership shaped by pragmatism founded on Niebuhr's Christian realism.

Reading events historically and accurately

In his *Pastoral Letter*, Gudina stated: "In its proclamation and prayer, the Church interprets the situation in which it lives and finds in Scripture an understanding of God's dealing with men" (Abraham and Tumsa 2003: 79). This principle embodies his leadership. When he was named general secretary of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (ECMY)[12] in 1966, the church leaders faced multi-layer challenges relating to establishing the EECMY as a national evangelical church. The task was to define the church positively, outlining its national identity and theology, and also contradistinctively against external entities—churches or state institutions—in Ethiopia. The process involved various conflicting claims to reconcile, forces to contend with, and interests to protect (Gebremedhin 2006: 114-117).

The EECMY church leaders were acutely aware that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) which had enjoyed uncontested allegiance of Christians since the defeat of the Catholic challenge in the seventeenth century would oppose strenuously the establishment of a rival Christian church. As a state church, the EOC has historically resorted to calling upon

[12] Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus was the name of the church until 1978, when the term "Ethiopian" was added to the front of the name. There after the official name of the church has been the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). In Gudina Tumsa's writings, the name appears with acronym EEC-MY.

the coercive arm of the state to maintain its exclusive claim to Christianity in Ethiopia. An independent church would also mean freedom from the sway of the foreign missions. This goal worked at cross purposes with the church's mission because the fledgling EECMY had limited resources to meet the challenge of a rapidly growing national church. Finally, becoming a national church meant becoming an independent national institution recognized by Ethiopian law. This meant defining the identity of the church as Ethiopian in its leadership and organization (Jaffero 2006: 91-96). It also meant demonstrating independence theologically, ecclesiastically, and politically from foreign missionaries, from the EOC, and from the influence of the state (Abraham, 2011: 264-265, 268-269, 276-284).

In asserting the independence and integrity of the EECMY, the church leaders had to take into account the political context in which they operated. The church was founded at a time the Ethiopian government was showing signs of political decomposition. A little over a year after the founding assembly of the EECMY in 1959, pent up demand for political and socioeconomic reform was manifested in the form of an attempted military *coup d'etat*. It was a signal that popular demand for radical change was gathering momentum to a point where the continued existence of the imperial government was in doubt. The emperor nevertheless made it clear that nothing was going to change, setting the country on a political trajectory that culminated in a radical revolution in 1974. It was a time when the EOC was being portrayed as an integral part, even as an enabler, of the oppressive practices of the imperial government. The question for evangelical leaders was how the EECMY would cast itself as a different player in the country.

Outside the country, the 1960s was a time when nationalism was sweeping through Africa as several countries became independent upon the withdrawal of European colonial powers. This was also a time of great transformation in the church universal, particularly the deliberations and conclusion of the Second Vatican Council and the popularity of the theology of liberation in Latin America. The world was also experiencing revolutionary changes, spearheaded by a worldwide student movement for political reforms, ushering in an era of profound political and cultural changes in civil and women's rights and environmental activism (Boren, 2001).

Being an independent church would also have implications for the EECMY's relationship with other evangelicals and even the synods that constituted it. At its inception, the EECMY was not founded as a communion of all evangelical (Protestant) churches as envisaged during the dark days of the Italian occupation. What was realized was a denominational church based on Lutheran confessions. As such, the leaders had the daunting task of growing the seed, while protecting it from the vagaries of denominational competition within the evangelical family of Christians, the hostile hand of the EOC, and a nearly paranoid imperial government determined to snuff out any evidence of a democratic process, which, as Tasgara Hirpo observed, the EECMY actually represented (Hirpo 2005: 162). An added dilemma was the reaction of the synods, specifically the Ghimbi Board which became the Western Synod, which were reluctant to sign the founding document of the EECMY in 1958 lest they compromise their autonomy.

For leaders of the EECMY and Gudina Tumsa, the complexity of the challenge meant negotiating the interests of the church against those of the state, foreign missions, other evangelicals, and its own constituent parts. His inclination in favor of independence was evident in his *Report on Church Growth* in which he expressed that the EECMY was fully intent on becoming self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. In the *Report,* he emphasizes that the expatriate missions' long-standing goal in Ethiopia was the renewal of the EOC and that they were opposed to the separation of evangelicals from the established church. He underscores that the EECMY was conceived by indigenous believers during the Italian occupation in the absence of the missionaries and grew under the oppressive imperial era. He argues that indigenous patterns of worship and "theology" developed as people turned to the evangelical faith to cope with the depredations of an oppressive feudal system and express their aspirations for justice (Tumsa 2003a: 126).

Given the longstanding aspiration of the evangelicals, the ideal solution would have been to declare independence outright. It would satisfy the state and deny the EOC an opportunity to label the EECMY as a fifth column entity. Even as he emphasizes the need for independence, Gudina seems quite aware that the EECMY was not in a position to support itself in its rapidly expanding work relative to its growth, noted to be at an annual average rate of 20 percent. Given that Ethiopia is a poor country, he states,

it is not "possible to predict the time when the ECMY will be able to stand on her own," but at that point the church is, he asserts, analogous to a teenager that deserves "all the care that tender age demands so that her mind and spirit may be molded by sound teaching." Left alone, the "adolescent" church's choice would be "a matter of life and death" (Tumsa 2003a: 135).

What was required was not the pursuit of the ideal but a creative solution that would more or less address the needs of all conflicting interests. The solution, called the "Integration of Church and Mission," is a mechanism which actually achieved all the goals without antagonizing any of the parties involved. Signed at the Imperial High Court by the president of the EECMY on one side and representatives of the missions on the other, the integration document demonstrated to the state that the EECMY was an Ethiopian church that would respect the law of the country, thus denying the EOC the grounds to tag the EECMY as a foreign agent. The emphasis on evangelical Christianity as a "religion of *love and justice*" signaled that the EECMY's goal was distinct from those of the EOC and the imperial government. At the same time, the agreement assured the missions that they would continue their commitment, almost unhindered, under the auspices of the national church. Synods that would have been wary of losing their autonomous existence were also assured that they would be responsible for implementation of their development projects. The integration agreement showed that independence was not just a matter of the law but central to the national character, identity and integrity. It recognized that the EECMY itself was not yet self-supporting but this was counterbalanced by the message of self-assurance infused into the invocation of the story of the church's survival without the missionaries during the Italian period. The emphasis on the indigenous origins of the church was meant to serve notice to the missions that the church can survive on its own and their funds cannot be used as a leverage to promote projects the EECMY had not bought in (Gurmessa 2009).

The agreement stands as a vivid example of a realist approach that refrains from the ultimate solution, crafting instead a creative compromise based on the historical and contemporary factors. Gudina and the EECMY leaders harmonized the conflicting claims and responsibilities, keeping an eye on all the interests that were actually at work at that moment, thinking clearly about how these interests relate to one another, and looking beyond their own moral judgments and other people's views to determine what

choices and strategies were available to advance the cause of the church. The agreement contains echoes of Niebuhrian realism of seeing things as they are by balancing the church's desire for independence, its need for financial support, and its wish for workable relationships with other denominations and with the Ethiopian government.

Only a few years after going into effect, this balancing act was challenged by changes in the international ecumenical movement. The mission boards, reflecting the contemporary assumptions about economic development and intent on redressing the exploitation of the colonial period, shifted their priorities of funding development projects in the developing world following rigid criteria of their own. It became clear to EECMY leaders that their independence was in danger of being compromised by the continued control of funds by the mission organizations that preferred to finance selected projects of their own choosing. As such, the mission boards seemed unaware of the desire of churches in the developing world to be independent even as they sought economic assistance from mission boards. The challenge required a new thinking. Gudina Tumsa, who championed the independence of the church only a few years prior, was willing to reevaluate his stance relative to the changing circumstances in ecumenical circles without betraying the importance of independence.

This acute sense of realism is expressed eloquently and powerfully in the now famous document, *On the Interrelation between Proclamation and Human Development* (EECMY Officers 2003). It was EECMY's response to the dilemma presented by the development bias of Western churches. The content showed an intelligent analysis of local, continental, and global events and processes at least in three areas. The first pertains to understanding of humans and their needs, reflects the local situation in Ethiopia and addresses the problem of paternalism that "the West knows what is best," even when it comes to the priorities of the developing world. The second, the persistence of imbalance in Western church assistance which gives precedence to meeting the material rather than the spiritual needs of humans, mirrors the armchair theorizing about development assistance in Western metropolises, showing the West to be out of touch with the needs of the developing world. The third, its assessment of the prevailing situation in Ethiopia and its challenge to the church is prophetic in its emphasis that, before too long, the West might not be in a position to maintain its place as the center of gravity of world Christianity. The

document urged the Lutheran World Federation to give the EECMY's statement due consideration as a way forward for world Lutherans in fulfilling their common purpose of advancing God's mission on earth.

In addition to assessing the prevailing realities, the response was expressed in a theologically reflective way, with political finesse and assertion of principle. It is entirely possible that this formulation was based on praxis-theory-praxis model that Øyvind Eide correctly identifies with the Niebuhrian hermeneutical model concerning the contextual interpretation of the Christian narrative (Eide 2003: 41-42, 49-50). It must be noted nevertheless that the Niebuhrian influence is not limited to traditional (biblical) hermeneutics but also the consideration of social science knowledge for a realistic contextualization of theological understandings of human nature. The use of social science language is a distinctive feature of Gudina's writings in which he rejects views about a distant God and presents one that is active in history and human affairs through people of faith who have surrendered themselves to be his instruments (Tumsa 2003d). This shows that Niebuhr's influence on Gudina's thinking is not limited to the adoption of methods but also the whole theology of the relevance of the gospel to improving the human condition.

This evidently involves political engagement. Gudina is quite clear as to where he stands with regard to political engagement as a Christian. In his view, "apolitical life is not worthy of existence, uninvolvement is a denial of the goodness of creation and of the reality of incarnation" (Tumsa 2003b: 69). In light of this statement, Eide's conclusion that Gudina was not concerned with "the political well-being of a person," (Eide 2003: 47) though indeed not explicitly stated in the 1972 letter, cannot be an accurate reflection of Gudina's theology. Gudina's widely reported refusal to offer liturgical prayer for the reigning monarch while leading worship at the Addis Ababa Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the church's decision to call on the imperial government to reform the landholding system are often cited as examples of Gudina's political engagement as theologically dissonant with his faith. These incidents actually make perfect sense when analyzed in their proper theological context that Gudina's concern extends to the political well-being of a person. With regard to why he skipped the liturgical prayer for the emperor, Gudina is said to have responded either by saying he would have done so if he was able to call the emperor into repentance or that he would not pray for the perpetuation of an oppressive

feudal system. The appeal for land reform and the decision to express full support for the Land Reform Act of 1975 were made with a view to establishing what Gudina called "a more just society" by ending the oppressive system that had kept many in bondage and suffering. In either case, Gudina's actions are consistent with the belief that the gospel has emancipatory power from all inequities and its propagation is the responsibility of all Christians.

This emanates from the Niebuhrian theological position that human individuals who are sinful and unable to bring about God's Reign, but inspired by divine grace and the ideal of the Cross, are capable of self-transcendence (that includes the emperor) and of bringing improvement to social institutions that are inherently self-absorbed. Gudina recognized, again following Niebuhr, the inherent evilness of the social system (the imperial or the socialist) and that it is incapable of selflessness and of carrying out self-directed reform unless it is confronted with coercive nonviolence. These are quintessentially Niebuhrian ideas and are deeply-held beliefs that pervaded Gudina's thinking and his holistic theology, which, I believe, interpreted contextually, is a theology of involvement in human affairs. It is clear that Gudina's political engagement was motivated not by a stealth political agenda but by a commitment to a prophetic tradition of speaking truth to power. In this sense, we should not try to depoliticize Gudina but try to explain his engagement in light of the theology that guided his action.

Leading Change: Adaptive Leadership

The Christian realism that made Gudina Tumsa comprehend the church's mission in history as contextually-guided also shaped his leadership practices. Because of his grasp of events and societal processes nationally, continentally, and globally, Gudina was able to avoid an attitude of a dogmatic leader who would conceive the church's role as one of doing only that which is perfect or that of an ideologue who would not change course in the face of insurmountable resistance. Throughout his tenure as general secretary, Gudina's decisions and actions reflected his keen awareness that his church and his country were in a period of transition and his willingness to design, develop, and deploy appropriate solutions to seemingly intractable societal challenges. He was indeed a leader who understood that he was leading change.

Bridging the gap between what is happening and what is possible is what leading change is all about according to James O'Toole (1995), a leading figure in the field of business ethics and leadership studies. When change requires a leader to challenge people's familiar ways, says O'Toole, leadership can be difficult, dangerous work. Whatever the context of that leadership, many will feel threatened as the leader pushes through major changes (Heifetz and Linsky 2002). Dealing with change and problem solving – these tasks are at the core of what leaders do. They find a way to make change work. Ronald Heifetz (1994) first defined this problem with his distinctive theory of 'adaptive leadership.'

To the extent that adaptive leadership asks leaders to see things the way they are, the material facts of human existence, this conception of leadership comports well with a cardinal element of the theology of Christian realism. As noted earlier, the EECMY in the 1960s was growing amid myriad economic, political, cultural, and theological changes occurring nationally and globally. These problems, according to Heifetz, were not *technical challenges* that could be addressed with known solutions or existing know-how and within the current structures and procedures. They were *adaptive challenges* that required new ways of thinking and working, and required significant (and often painful) shifts in habits, status, role, and identity without which "people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in a new environment" (Heifetz and Linsky 2002: 13). EECMY leaders demonstrated competent leadership navigating the church through tumultuous times, a fact that European Lutheran leaders readily recognized as a distinctive asset of the church (Minutes of Ethiopia Consultation 2006: 57). Gudina was the driving force behind the major church initiatives of those years. I consider Gudina a quintessentially adaptive leader who was an influential church leader in a time of radical change.

An apt case in point in which Gudina provided adaptive leadership informed by the theology of Christian realism is the Ethiopian revolution of 1974. The issue facing the church was to define whether the challenge presented by the declaration of socialism was adaptive or technical. The church leaders initially diagnosed the challenge presented by the revolution differently. Emmanuel Abraham, president of the EECMY at the time, for instance, saw the socialist path that the revolution had taken as resulting from the failure of the EOC to live up to its teaching and its participation in

oppressing the poor. Interpreting socialism as "social justice, community and mutual help," Emmanuel contended that it was "the Gospel and nothing else," and expressed optimism that "Ethiopian socialism would be "combining faith and justice, meeting the needs of the whole human being, not only the material needs." (Johansson and Decke 2006: 17). In this view, the revolution represented a technical challenge, even an opportunity for the EECMY to expand what it has been doing all along, that is, pursuing justice for the whole person.

In contrast, Gudina viewed the revolution as an adaptive challenge for the church. In a language that seems to respond to the president, Gudina wrote his *Memorandum* of July 1975, six months after socialism was declared as the ideology of the revolution:

> The church may continue her activities as if nothing has happened in this country. However, this will be ignoring the complex social issues, a disservice to the cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A church may be aware of the revolutionary changes taking place in the social structure of the society as well as in the minds of the people and neglect making radical decisions demanded by the situation (Tumsa 2003b: 76).

The assessment came after deep reflection. Having identified in the letter to church officers, the areas where he anticipated the church would face serious challenges, Gudina asserted that the revolution was not just a demand for socioeconomic reform. In his view, the revolution was a transformative event that would restructure "all aspects of societal life, philosophies, economy, politics, religion, history, social life as a whole, [and that such a fundamental change is] taking place at very high speed, unprecedented in the recorded history of this country, in a manner, to the best of my knowledge, not forecast by social scientists in our country" (Tumsa 2006b: 56-57).

Conceiving the challenges of the revolution as adaptive, Gudina proposed solutions that would require all stakeholders, especially church employees, to change their attitudes, values, and behaviors. Even though too many church leaders too often address an adaptive challenge as a technical challenge, in the case of the Ethiopian revolution, no one was more clear-eyed than Gudina about what the revolution represented. Not all of the 15 points he raised in his *Memorandum* were new challenges,

although they were now cast in a different light by the fall of the imperial regime. The issues could be subsumed under three main response categories: challenges that required *adjustment*, those that demanded *anticipatory response*, and those that needed *alternative* ways of approaching existing problems.

Looking ahead, Gudina foresaw that the vestiges of the old order, the question of nationalities in particular, would rend asunder the country and the church. In part, the churches' *anticipatory* response was to allow the broadcast of programs on Radio Voice of the Gospel (RVOG) in Ethiopian languages other than Amharic and a decision to establish within the Mekane Yesus Seminary (MYS) a department for cultural and linguistic studies. The purpose was to conduct research that would help the contextualization of the gospel for that historical juncture but also one that would assist the cultural development of Ethiopia's ethnic groups. Both the national university and the government came to realize the significance of such an institute for a multinational country like Ethiopia later, even then for reasons of political expediency. For Gudina, the question of nationalities was a phenomenon fraught with danger for the country. In his *Pastoral Letter*, he requested prayer for Eritrea and called on Christians to pray for peace and reconciliation, urging that animosities be overcome by dialogue, suspicion by trust, and hatred by love (Abraham and Tumsa 2003: 79). In hindsight, we can only recognize his words were prophetic.

Realist that he was, Gudina was aware that the socialist ideology had not delivered on its promises wherever it was practiced, the main cases being Russia and China. Many in the church, however, had a more idealistic response to the promise of class, ethnic, and religious equality ushering in an era of equal access to education, health, and land resources for all Ethiopians. It appeared to them that the socialist vision was consistent with the church's goal of liberating human beings "from eternal damnation, from exploitation and political oppression, etc" (Tumsa 2003b: 76). Providing leadership in this context required *adjustment* of attitude within the church structure in response to the change that had occurred and enhanced awareness about the dangers it entailed. The result was to organize seminars and workshops to educate EECMY members and other evangelicals on the implications of a socialist order for the Christian church. Leaders and staff members of the EECMY synods, various organizations, and members of other churches were given crash courses on socialism in all its social,

political, cultural, and economic ramifications (Gudina Tumsa Foundation 2006).

The most important issue that required *adjustment* was the church's work in development. It was clear that the church's work in this field had improved the conditions of life for millions of Ethiopians through education, medical care, and employment opportunities. Under the newly-issued socialist economic policies, no enterprise of significance was to be allowed to operate independent of government control. Thus, the church's ability to carry on with its development projects without compromising the church's mission and character became increasingly difficult. Gudina saw no common ground: "Unless ways are found to solve these problems and the misunderstandings are corrected urgently, it will bring disaster to the EECMY before too long. It would be wise for the EECMY to hand over these institutions [schools, clinics, etc] to the government departments on a time schedule to be agreed upon" (Tumsa 2003b: 58). The church support would remain but the means of delivery would be indirect. The non-institutional approach, Gudina insisted, will protect the integrity and identity of the church by clarifying its character and motives without diminishing its ability to improve the conditions of life for Ethiopians. The approach was an affirmation of the EECMY as a church engaging the world out of Christian love, not out of subservience or desire to please power (Tumsa 2003b: 59).

In anticipation of the future, Gudina counseled the church to take new measures, in particular with regard to labor unions and its relationship with missions. The latter had been part of the worldwide ecumenical dialogue over ensuring church self-reliance in the developing world, culminating in the proposal by some in Africa to suspend aid for five years—the Moratorium Debate. With the outbreak of a socialist revolution in Ethiopia, which made Western imperialism – and, by extension, foreign missions – the enemies of the revolution, the debate received an added impetus to act urgently. Church leaders had to *anticipate* forced severance of relations with Christian missions based in the West. The proposal had also received support from within the EECMY. For Gudina, the premise of the moratorium, that it would enable indigenous churches to become self-supporting and to assert their identity as independent churches was not applicable to the EECMY since the church had demonstrated its ability to function on its own during the Italian invasion when missionaries were

expelled from the country in the 1930s and early 1940s. The implication is that the church would survive in the event the new Marxist rulers expelled the missionaries and cut off the inflow of funds from the West.

Ironically – and that is an essential feature of pragmatic leaders – Gudina opposed the moratorium, primarily on theological grounds: 1) the work of the church, which the missionaries helped launching, had an emancipatory dimension which, if abandoned, would be tantamount to betraying the very objective of the gospel itself; 2) independence for its own sake is a political goal, a matter of pride (the very root of sin in Niebuhr's assessment); it can never be an acceptable theological aim for the church; and 3) the Great Commission was given to the church universal, which, as a body of Christ, is just a unified entity in the world. In other words, Gudina argued that compartmentalizing the church universal along national boundaries was theologically unsound for it amounts to dividing the body of Christ. Gudina's position was not to deny the reality of nations but to remind Christians the world over that their relationship transcends national boundaries, linguistic affiliation, class status, or gender difference. It is to stress that, despite the fact of national differences, the mission of the churches is mutual and the execution of that mission interdependent (Tumsa and Hoffman 2003: 48-49).

Specific to the Ethiopian situation, in light of the radical turn the revolution had taken, the church had to *anticipate* diminishing funds from the missions, through forced moratorium. Continued reliance on external funds would be ill-advised in view of the EECMY's expressed desire, in Gudina's words, not to be "an agent for rich Mission Organizations, Donor Agencies and Churches" (Tumsa 2003c: 99). As an organization, internal *adjustment* was an impetrative when external contingencies are too uncertain. If the church were successfully to navigate through the emerging political climate of hostility to anything foreign, crude equality for everyone, and uncertain source of budgetary support, the church had no other recourse to making an *adjustment* in the compensation structure of its employees which was based on uncertain assumptions. Gudina proposed a compensation structure where the highest salary cannot be more than 7 times the lowest. The executive committee approved Gudina's proposal with a modification, raising the highest pay to nearly 10 times the lowest. The *adjustment* was based on the need for shared sacrifice ("cost of discipleship"), compassion and the need to live an unimpeachable life ("no

church can afford to live a separate existence from that of the country in which it serves"), and a realistic assessment of the fiscal situation ("no one can live above his means") (Eide 2000: 125). Unfortunately, Gudina's appeal to pragmatic *adjustment* for the sake of the church's survival was not met by a corresponding willingness on the part of the highest paid church officials to give up a small portion of their income in the interest of the common good. Put in Niebuhr's terms, the selfish instinct prevailed.

Gudina was not successful in all of his ventures. As Heifetz and Linsky (2002: 14) state, "the single most common source of leadership failure – in politics, community life, business, or the nonprofit sector – is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive change like technical problems." Gudina's leadership, as we have seen, was not deficient in calling on all stakeholders in the church to step up to the difficult challenges facing the church by changing their attitudes, priorities, and behaviors. But leaders cannot succeed without followers' willingness to yield. We can only imagine where the EECMY would be today had it followed Gudina's adaptive leadership.

Providing a Vision

To address exhaustively Gudina's visionary leadership on various issues, including the Integration Policy, the Moratorium Debate, Christian responsibility, ecumenical issues, etc., would require more space than what is available in just one article. I will therefore focus on a single issue that can serve as a unifying theme of Gudina's endeavors and that lends itself well to examining Gudina's leadership legacy. This pertains to his conception of a church and his vision that the EECMY serve as the proclaiming church that Christ founded.

In response to the exigency of the challenge posed by labor unions in the aftermath of the 1974 revolution, Gudina defined the church as a non-profit-making entity. This formulation does not represent Gudina's view of the church as an institution. In a paper presented to the 16th Executive Committee meeting of the EECMY in 1968, Gudina presented his understanding of how the church ought to see itself and be seen by others. He preferred the term ***ecclesia*** because it signified the "idea of dynamic character, activity, process, movement, involvement and living organism." His vision of a church and the contrast he makes is so relevant for today's EECMY to justify quoting him *in extenso*:

> The church [as an ecclesia], nothing of a nature of its organizational structure was implied. The N.T. [New Testament] interest is not in organizational structures in whatever form they may be, but in people, people created in the image of the God of the Bible, reconciled through the blood of the redeemer, Jesus Christ on the cross. The church as an organization is human institution. The gracious God condescends to use this human institution for the furtherance of his purpose. As human institution the organizational set-up of the church must be subject to critical evaluations. The ever-undesirable ecclesiasticism lurking behind the organizational structures of the Church must be checked and rooted out at any moment in our Church life. In the case of the EEC-MY, a question mark was placed on its organizational set-up … The organizational structure of the EEC-MY must be judged on the quality of service it is rendering to the people of God. The N.T. concern is with the word, the word for whom Christ has died, not with the organizational structure of the Church. This must be kept before our eyes ever, if we were to remain faithful to our call (Tumsa 2006: 120).

In Gudina's vision, thus, the church is a living entity, called into being by God who indwells it, rules over it, and realizes his purpose through it. The Church of Jesus Christ, in Gudina's vision, is a living organism, not just another inanimate organization that has no sympathy for human inadequacies, failures, and travails. The church, defined as an organization, Gudina writes, "denotes the idea of static, inactivity and motionless" (Tumsa 2006: 121). Clearly, such a church should be considered dead, which, according to Gudina, is far from the mind of Christ when he founded the NT church.

In the aforementioned paper, Gudina also expressed concern about the role of the central administration of the church. He recognized the importance of a central administration as a visible ***symbol*** of the unity of the EECMY, as coordinator of the work of the synods, as a unified face to the Ethiopian government, and as a conduit to international relationships. Gudina relates that, in his short stint at the "EEC-MY Headquarters," he had observed that the way the central administration functions seems dominated by the "fashion of the law [rather than] as an assembly of Saints where the Gospel is preached" (Tumsa 2006: 121). Considering the local congregation as the site where the mission of proclamation is carried out, he declares that the central administration, as it was then set up, was "of secondary importance to the life of the Church.

Thus the central administration must be kept to the minimum." Seven years later, in his *Memorandum*, he repeated the clarion call, this time with more specific proposal: "At present there are about 40 people working in the Central Administration. In the light of the changes taking place in Ethiopia, these must be reduced by 50% beginning January of 1976 as concrete steps towards self-reliance" (Tumsa 2003b: 58). This proposal was one of the issues which made Gudina the target of persecution primarily by the labor unions within the church but also many of his co-workers who could not imagine leaving out the sacrificial love they professed. After his martyrdom, his church shelved his counsel against bureaucratization of church administration or any of his ideas perhaps to dissociate itself completely from a "controversial" leader.

Conclusion

In the assessment of this article, Gudina was a prophet who believed the Christian Gospel provides the clearest ethical voice for political realism and gives society its best hope for a better world on both sides of eternity. If he appeared to many people to be a politician *par excellence*, it is because he believed in the prophetic tradition of proclaiming justice to the poor and speaking truth to power. As a church leader, he led through vision, realism, and adaptive learning. His theology and leadership were nevertheless rarely heeded after his martyrdom.

In the three decades after Gudina's death, the EECMY's central administration expanded exponentially, coming dangerously close to the version of church that Gudina deplored. The church has taken a sharp turn away from the symbolic function of the central administration to become hierarchical and heavily bureaucratic and, unbeknownst to those who lead from within, drifted away from the holistic approach which Gudina championed, off course from the pursuit of justice for the oppressed, and from the democratic nature of its original constitution. It has become increasingly susceptible to institutional imitations rather than adaptive learning, to maintaining form rather than responding to divine calling, and to legalism rather than adherence to the essence of the gospel of love and justice. In its structure and operation, it functions more like an inanimate organization rather than the living organism of the Bible that Gudina envisioned. These assertions are claims at the moment, but they can be

empirically substantiated. Even as claims nevertheless, they deserve to be heeded with humbleness and self-transcendence, if anything, as a voice of a prophet who has never fallen silent.

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