

*DOCUMENT 1*

## **The Role of a Christian in a Given Society**

by Rev. Gudina Tumsa

**Introductory Note:** Rev. Gudina Tumsa, General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) – the word “Ethiopian” having been restored to its legally registered name in September 1978 – was arrested for the first time on October 11 and released on November 7, 1978, and detained again from June 1-23, 1979. After his second release, and knowing that if he were to be detained again he most probably would be facing death, Gudina set down in his handwriting what he titled “**The Role of a Christian in a Given Society**”. It can be called his “last will and testament”, his final confession of faith. On July 28, 1979, Gudina Tumsa was abducted off the street as he was walking home with his wife after leading a Bible study in Urael Mekane Yesus Church in Addis Ababa. His wife was released. The original manuscript of what is reproduced here, contained, according to Dr. Yonas Deressa, then working in the Information Office of the EECMY, a preamble or first section setting forth what was understood to be Gudina’s personal political testimony, something which those who were preparing for the General Assembly which followed Gudina’s disappearance six months later, felt would be prudent not to distribute or read. It preceded the longer section distributed and read as a lecture to the EECMY’s 11<sup>th</sup> General Assembly held at Mekane Yesus Seminary in Makanissa, January 23 - 31, 1980. The original handwritten manuscript has not been found. (PEH)

### **Introduction**

A Christian lives in a society, among whom God created, saved from sin and placed him to bear witness to the Gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. A given society cannot be free from the different competing forces like other religions, atheism and pluralism. A Christian is placed by God to live and proclaim the Gospel of Christ

to the people that are in need and difficulty so that they can turn to God to get their needs met and their problems solved.

### **I. A Christian in a Society**

1. A Christian lives in a given society where he carries out the mandate given to him by the Lord of the Church. We have not been given a choice as to where we should be born. We believe that God has placed us where we are to do His will as Ethiopian Christians and to fulfil His purpose. It seems to be proper to speak about what a Christian is prior to speaking about his/her given responsibility. A Christian is a person who is transformed by what the God of the Universe has done in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.
2. The Lord Jesus Christ is the basis for our Christian Faith. What God has done for the salvation of mankind can never be undone, simply because it is the God whom we know in Jesus Christ who has done it.
3. In response to faith in what has been accomplished by the sacrifice of the Son of God for the salvation of mankind, the Christian has tasted heavenly gifts in earthly life. A life of relationship with the Lord of the Church is possible only through faith.
4. When we as Christians state that nothing in the Universe can separate us from the love of God made ours in Christ, it is not bragging\* of human strength, but an acknowledgement of the fact that the relationship our Heavenly Father has established with us through His Son can never be broken (Romans 8:35-39). It is even beyond the ability of death, the greatest enemy of mankind, to destroy the relationship we have with God through our Saviour.

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\* The mimeographed paper in the Minutes of the Assembly has "bringing". From the context, it must be a typing error.

5. When Christ died for our sins on the Cross and became our cure the power of death was broken. The battle was won for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. What is going on in the world between good and evil is not a real war, but the final operation after the war has been won, because death has been destroyed and victory is complete (1 Cor. 15:54). It is only the Christian who can ask the question, "Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your power to hurt?" (1 Cor. 15:55).

Thanks be to God we have complete victory through Him who loved us and sacrificed Himself for us. The most death can do now is to be a stepping-stone for the Christian to be transferred to fullness of life in and with the Lord Jesus Christ.

6. As the theme for this 11<sup>th</sup> General Assembly indicates, we confess "God is with us". In the Lord's Supper He who assures us of His presence renews His covenant with us, thereby forgiving us and ever leading us to fulfilment of His purpose for His world.

7. A Christian has not chosen God, but God has chosen him/her, and in the act of being chosen he/she is set apart for service in the Kingdom of God. Because of what has happened to him/her, the Christian is encouraged to let God transform him/her inwardly by a complete change of mind. Romans 12:1-2: "So then my brothers, because of God's great mercy to us, I make this appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer. Do not conform outwardly to the standards of this world, but let God transform you by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God – what is good, and is pleasing to him, and is perfect."

8. The Christian knows that he/she has been made by an act of God through Jesus Christ. If he/she is holy, God by his grace has made



him/her so. The Christian knows that he belongs to "the chosen race", he/she belongs to "the holy nation", he/she belongs to "the king's priests", he/she is part of "God's own people". All those named belong to the chosen race, ordination as the king's priest, being a member of the holy nation, God's own people, all done by God in order that the Christian may be equipped to "proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called him out of darkness into his own marvellous light" (1 Peter 2,9).

9. Sin is not human weakness; it is rather a rebellion against God the Creator. It is refusal to accept God's gracious gift through his Son Jesus Christ. Sin is a departure from the Father's house in rebellion. It is a denial of one's own source. Sin is an attempt to dethrone the one who rules above. It is a futile effort of mortal man to replace God. The Christian is aware that he lives among people whose lives are ruled by the power of sin.

10. The Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet which the Christian is entitled to enjoy here on earth. By the coming of our Lord the new age has dawned on us. He has inaugurated the Messianic Age, the sole rule of God has started; the demons are cast out; the Gospel is preached to the poor; the blind are given sight; the lepers are cleansed.

In participation in the Lord's Supper three things come to mind:

- a. What has been written about the Messiah by the Prophets has been fulfilled.
- b. The power of God is at work, all because the Son of Man has shed his blood as ransom for many, thereby making the forgiveness of sin a reality for those who respond in faith.

- c. The third aspect of the Lord's Supper is expectation of the Lord's Return to subject all things to Himself. Recollection of God's mighty deeds in the past, experiencing forgiveness of sins today and expecting the Second Coming of the one who has shed his blood for us, is a way of being equipped for a life of witness in society.

## **II. A Christian is Responsible to God and Man**

1. In the preceding paragraphs and in part one of this paper attempts are made to show what a Christian is. A Christian is a transformed person by believing the Gospel of Christ (justification), and is in constant process of being transformed (sanctification) by the power of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the Christian. God has counted the believer as righteous without any contribution on his/her part, with the exception of accepting the gracious gift of God through the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. The Christian is made a citizen of the kingly rule of God. By belonging to the realm of that rule, the Christian is charged with the responsibility to proclaim: "The right time has come, the kingdom of God is near. Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News" [Mark 1:15]. In carrying out this assignment from heaven to be fulfilled on earth, the Christian is aware of two things. The first is that the risen Lord is ever present within, and secondly that the Christian is never alone. He has joined, as a companion of Jesus Christ, millions of Christians who have responded in obedience to the command of the Head of the Church and are engaged in working for the acceleration of the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. The Creator and Redeemer of the Christian has total claim on the life of the one who confesses him as Lord and Saviour. When the Christian confesses that Christ is Lord, he proclaims that Jesus Christ

is the King of Kings, the President of Presidents, the Chairman of Chairmen, the Ruler of Rulers, the Secretary of Secretaries, the Leader of Leaders and the Head of the Heads of State. Christ is the Lord of the universe and the one who guides historical developments to their right fulfilment according to the purpose of the Creator. At the same time, he guides us both collectively and individually in such a way that the hairs of our heads are well known to him, so that we can relax in carrying out the Commission he has given to his church. This assignment has the first and top priority in the life of the believer.

4. To promise second place to the Lord (anyway, the Lord would never accept second place in human life) is openly to worship idols and is a breach of the first Commandment "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20: 3).

5. It has already been stated in this part of this paper and in the preceding paragraphs that a Christian is citizen of the kingly rule of God in this Messianic Age. A Christian is also a citizen of a given country and as such is under the laws and policies of the country of which he/she is a citizen. Should the Christian obey the laws and policies of his country? There can be no doubt about obeying government. Two classic examples should be sufficient (Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-14). All authority is given from above, from God. Whether those in authority believe it or not is not the issue. The Christian knows that anyone in a position of authority is placed there by the God who is the source of all authority and power. According to Romans 13:2, "Whoever opposes the existing authority opposes what God has ordered; and anyone who does so will bring judgment on himself."

6. The Christian does not only obey the authority of the State; he does more than that, he/she shows honour and respect to the person in authority. A Christian does not stop with paying what is due to



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the State, such as various taxes; he does more than that by being honest and by fulfilling the demands of the State for the sake of conscience.

7. Considering the present special situation of our country, the Christian should not think only in terms of paying tax as if it were sufficient. The Christian should invest his/her money, time, knowledge and life, as well as anything else he may treasure, in the interest of his/her country. A Christian knows that his/her country is God's gift to him/her and his/her posterity. The Christian is part of Society, and as such he/she should cooperate with governmental as well as other organizations, such as Rural and Urban Associations, in working for the well-being of the Ethiopian people. Everything possible should be done by the Christian in contributing to the current Green Revolution, so that hunger, one of the three enemies of developing countries, should be done away with.

8. When speaking about obedience to the authority of the State and making contributions of whatever we may have to change the living conditions of the Ethiopian masses for the better, it seems to me to be unfair to pass without expressing my opinion on what I call a very sensitive issue in our situation. The sensitive issue is that there are Christians who debate on the recitation of "slogans". In the program of the National Democratic Revolution of Ethiopia three archenemies are listed, namely Imperialism, Feudalism and Bureaucratic Capitalism. These are systems to which the Ethiopian masses are firmly opposed. Today, "Down with Feudalism", "Down with Capitalism", "Down with Imperialism" mean simply that as Ethiopians we do not want to live under these systems any longer. As a matter of fact, Feudalism, Capitalism and Imperialism are things of the past as far as the Ethiopian masses are concerned. There are other numerous slogans which have cropped up during the various stages of the Revolution to inspire people in the progress of the Revolution and to urge them to do their part with enthusiasm.

The writer has talked with Christians who believe that reciting slogans is a betrayal of their Christian faith. With all due respect to those who consider repeating slogans as a denial of their commitment to the faith, I think that they are of non-religious significance, and if slogans are of a non-religious nature, joining with others in reciting them will have no effect on one's Christian commitment.

9. A Christian should know the essentials of his faith. Ignorance of the central theme of the Scriptures should not be identified with Christian commitment. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the centre of our faith. The Old and the New Testaments bear witness to him. We do not believe in a person who died almost two thousand years ago and remained in the grave, but we believe in a person who gave his life as ransom for many and who was raised from death for our justification. In my opinion a Christian has to make a choice only when he is faced with the demand not to confess Christ as Lord, and when he/she is denied the right to teach in his name (Acts 4:16-20). Many things were considered "adiaphora" (non-essential for salvation) by the early church, but when it concerned the denial of the person of Christ as Lord, the believers preferred physical death to earthly life and went for martyrdom. The term martyrdom is derived from a Greek word which means witness. Martyrdom means a believer witnesses for Christ by dying.

10. A responsible Christian does not aggravate any situation and thereby court martyrdom. It is the duty of the Christian to pray for the peace of the country where he is placed by the Creator, and work for the well-being of the society of which he is a part (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Something that we could not sufficiently remind ourselves of is that to be a Christian is not to be a hero to make a history for oneself. A Christian goes as a lamb to be slaughtered only when he/she knows that this is in complete accord with the will of God who has called him to his service.



11. It should be clearly understood that the Good News of Jesus Christ can never be seen as a part of the systems that came about at the various stages in the process of historical development in world history. The Gospel is the power of God working in the human heart with a view to transforming man and thereby putting him in a right relationship with God, who is the source and goal of his life, regardless of the stage in the process of historical development at which man finds himself. The Christian Gospel refuses to be identified or to be considered as part of Feudalism or Capitalism, and as such it cannot fade away with these systems, since by its nature the Gospel of Christ is totally different from them. Christ himself is the Gospel. There is no Gospel apart from his presence with us in our daily labour. Christ is the living Lord who was raised from death by God the Father. A living person cannot be identified with any impersonal system. A person can work in any system, and the living Lord Christ commands us to go out and proclaim His presence, the Good News. He forgives us our sins and saves us from the bitter experience of sin. Only a living person can perform such things.

12. Recognizing that our day and age is quite different from that of the first century of the Christian era when the apostles of Jesus Christ travelled around the Middle East and Europe preaching the Good News of Christ, my assumption is that there are some principles in the New Testament which we should make use of in order to get our cue to be able to chart our way with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Right at the beginning of his ministry Jesus of Nazareth was faced with opposition. At times his opponents, the Pharisees, the Sadducees and searchers of the law, wanted either to arrest him or to kill him. To enable them to achieve their purpose, the opponents of Jesus addressed to him various questions. From some of his replies we learn that Jesus knew the wish of the Evil One, but avoided confrontation to show he was someone great (Matthew 4; Matthew 6). Whenever they wanted to arrest him, Jesus left them and went to another district to carry out his ministry (John

7:44 and 8:59). The supreme purpose of Jesus was to know his Father's will at every step he was taking and do that will at the right time. Jesus was always in touch with his Father and received guidance for the actions he had to take in the interest of man. When the hour came for him to be sacrificed for the sin of the world, he knew it was the will of God and said, "Father! Your will be done" (Matt. 26:39). A Christian should stay in prayer for guidance, so that he/she knows the will of God for any action he/she may take. If this is not the case, one may be considered as giving oneself for what is less than the will of God, which is human adventure, heroism.

13. A glance at the book of Acts provides us with the basic information that Paul of Tarsus, the apostle of Christ to the gentiles, followed in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus in a life dedicated to constant prayer, searching to know the will of God as he carried out his missionary task. As we know it, Paul did not hesitate to proclaim the whole truth of the Gospel of the one who called him to be a missionary, the preacher of the Good News of Christ. The world in which Paul understood his ministry was sophisticated in the Greek philosophy of that age and in the Judaism of the time. At this period in world history the Roman Emperors were worshipped as gods. It was in such a tense situation that Paul had to proclaim Christ as Lord, but always avoiding, as much as possible, confrontation or aggravation of the situation. To be sure, Paul was ready to reason with the Jews and the Greeks, but this was a challenge not an aggravation. Whenever he saw the situation aggravated, Paul had to change his tactics (Acts 23:6-9). This is to say that Paul did not preach the Gospel of Christ to create an opportunity for himself for posing as a hero. The supreme purpose in the life of Paul was to know the will of God and follow it regardless of the cost it might entail for his life (see Acts 21:1-13 when he went to Jerusalem). Paul was the seeker of the will of God, and once he was assured of that will, he was ready to submit to it wholly as his Master did. The will of God is the goal of the Christian's life.



### **III. Conclusion**

It must be crystal clear to the Christian that he/she has a double purpose to live for:

- a. As someone has said, when a person is called to follow Christ, that person is called to die. It means a redirection of the purpose of life, that is death to one's own wishes and personal desires and finding the greatest satisfaction in living for and serving the one who died for us and was raised from death (2 Corinthians 5:13-14). In other words, the Christian has been crucified with Christ and has no life which he claims to be his own. The life the believer leads is a life of faith, and the risen Lord lives in him. (Galatians 2:19). It is a life set free from the power of sin, and it is beyond the capacity of death to destroy it. Because it has its source in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, that resurrection life is at work in the life of the believer. Being in Christ the Christian is already the possessor of eternal life by being placed in a new order of existence, where the law of life is the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:13). And where the power of the resurrection of the Lord is at work, and the life of the Christian is a life of witness to the risen Lord.
- b. It has been stated that a Christian is a citizen of a given country and as such under the laws and policies of that country. Because he is under the laws of the country of which he is a citizen, it is his duty to pray for the peace of that country and cooperate with his fellow-citizens for its well-being. The only limitation to his cooperation or obedience to the laws of his country is if he is commanded to act contrary to the law of God (Acts 5:29).

Source: EECMY 11<sup>th</sup> GA, 1980, Minutes GA-11-55-72, Doc. 3