

THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND AFRICAN IDENTITY

The Significance of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in African Spiritual and Cultural Identity



Emperor Haile Selassie I & Abuna Basilios

By Augustine Somuah



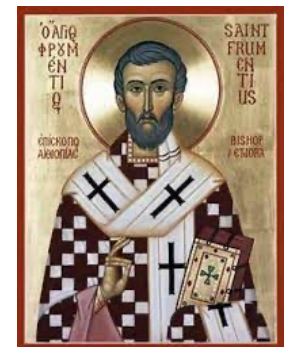
ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TEWAHEDO CHURCH (EOTC)

- One of the oldest Christian institutions in Africa, with over 1600 years of history
- A center of spiritual guidance, traditional education, and cultural preservation
- Christianity formally established in Ethiopia in the 4th century CE



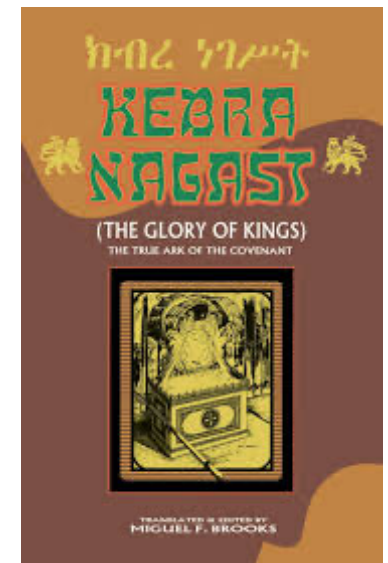
ROOTS OF CHRISTIANITY IN ETHIOPIA

- Frumentius, a Syrian Christian slave, converted Prince Ezana and the royal court
- King Ezana (c. 327–357 CE) declared Christianity the state religion
- Frumentius became the first Abun (bishop), linking Ethiopia with the Coptic Church
- Judaic elements already present, easing Christian acceptance



SHAPING ETHIOPIAN IDENTITY

- The Ark of the Covenant legend (Kebra Nagast) tied to national identity
- Christianity shaped culture, ethics, and norms
- EOTC was sole provider of education for centuries
- Art and architecture (e.g., Lalibela) rooted in Church traditions
- Ge'ez remains the liturgical language



THE CHURCH AND POLITY: A DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP

- Dominant role in state formation and monarchic legitimacy
- Defended Ethiopia from foreign threats
- Held authority to anoint emperors
- 1974 Derg regime removed Church from state affairs
- Still a vital moral and social voice



EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE I – DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

- Crowned in 1930; last Christian Emperor of Ethiopia
- Received Orthodox upbringing, ordained as deacon
- Pushed for native bishops
- Founded Holy Trinity Theological College (1944)
- Convened 1965 Addis Ababa Oriental Orthodox Conference



ABUNA BASILIOS – FIRST ETHIOPIAN PATRIARCH

- Appointed through Haile Selassie's advocacy
- 1951: Consecrated as Archbishop by Coptic Pope Yosab II
- 1959: Elevated to Patriarch-Catholicos by Pope Cyril VI
- Finalized full autocephaly of the EOTC



CONTEMPORARY ROLE AND CHALLENGES

- Still highly influential amid religious pluralism
- Modernization debates: media, music, outreach
- Competition for land, symbols, public space
- Social media platforms used for protest, debates, mobilization



CONCLUSION – ENDURING LEGACY

- EOTC remains central to Ethiopian identity and history
- Biblical and cultural ties enhance spiritual prestige
- Drives economic and cultural sectors
- Church-state relationship evolved but influential



THANK YOU!





Q & A, Contribution and Discussion