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**Change and Survival in the Oral Poetry of the tāmari**  
*Meseret Kebede\**

**አጠቃሎ**

የአብነት ተማሪ ሥነ ቃል - በኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋሕዶ ቤተክርስቲያን የአብነት ትምህርት ቤት ተማሪዎች በቃል የሚፈጠር፣ የሚከወን፣ ከትውልድ ወደ ትውልድ የሚተላለፍና የሚጠበቅ የሥነ ቃል ዓይነት - የአብነት ተማሪዎችና ሊቃውንት ቤተክርስቲያን የአብነት ትምህርት ቤቶችንና የአብነት ትምህርትን በሞትና በተለያዩ ምክንያቶች እየተወ. በመሄዳቸው የአብነት ትምህርት ቤትና የአብነት ትምህርት ለመጥፋት መድረሳቸውን እንዲሁም የቤተክርስቲያን መንፈሳዊ አገልግሎት አደጋ ላይ መውደቁን ይጠቁማል። ቃል ግጥሞች ቤተክርስቲያን የምትሠጠውን አገልግሎት ለማሻሻልና የአብነት ትምህርትንና ትምህርት ቤትን ሕልውና ለማርዘም ለውጥ እንደሚያስፈልገው ይሰብካሉ። ተማሪዎች ከረሀብና ከእርዛት፣ ከቃል ትምህርትና እንደ መምህራቸው ለመሆን ከሚያደርጉት ጥረት ጋር ሲታገሉ ቆይተው ትምህርታቸውን ቢያጠናቅቁም የአብነት ትምህርት ቤት በመክፈት ደቀ መዛሙርት ማፍራት፣ በቤተክርስቲያን የተለያዩ መዋቅሮች ውስጥ በመግባት ማገልገልና ራሳቸውን የሚችሉበት ገቢ ማግኘት እንዲሁም ከኅብረተሰቡ ክብርን ማግኘት አልቻሉም። ቃል ግጥሞች ቤተክርስቲያን የትምህርቱን ዕሴት ከፍ በማድረግ ወደ ተቋሙ የሚገቡ ተማሪዎችን መሣብ የሚቻልበትን አቅም መፍጠር እንደሚገባ ያሳስባሉ።

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## I. Introduction

*tāmari* refers to students of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Traditional School. Formally, these students are called *yäyābēnät tāmari* after the traditional church school they are attending; and commonly people call them *yāqolo tāmari* to refer to the usual “food” that the students eat to survive.

Church scholars who studied and wrote books on the traditional school and its education methods, recommend the church to revise the curriculum, improve the teaching methods and ensure survival. According to these scholars, this helps to attract students who have already developed interest in modern education and retain those students who have already joined the traditional school,

Assessments/surveys conducted and documentary films<sup>1</sup> produced by *Gedamante ena yeabenet temehret bet mereja ena makuakuamiya*<sup>2</sup> department of Mahebre Kidusan<sup>3</sup> and the Association’s publications<sup>4</sup> reveal that the traditional schools and the traditional schooling are on the verge of extinction. The church’s religious services are also at risk as scholars and students are abandoning it due to various causes and their need to have a better life. These groups also propose making the schools self-sufficient in food as well as income matters to prevent the anticipated risks and ensure the continuity of improved church service.

However, such interventions do not take into account the oral poems. Have the students and the scholars realized that the traditional education and its tradition are in the verge of extinction; and the church’s religious service is at risk? What caused this danger? What solutions do these poems propose? This paper tries to answer these questions based on selected poems.

The selection of poems<sup>5</sup> is based on the message that the poems convey. Most of the oral poems in this paper have been collected and most of the interviews have been conducted for an MA thesis in 2002. For this purpose, 219 poems were collected. Out of 219, 40 are on education related problems, and the rest deal with economic problems. 38 of the poems deal with memorization, perfection and scarcity of resources. The contributors of the poems or interview informants began every session with either economic/financial or food related poems. The author also added some poems<sup>6</sup> that she had collected after the thesis was finalized. For the purpose of this paper, poems which the researcher believed have the potential to convey the inner most feelings of the traditional student have been selected and analyzed.

<sup>1</sup> መግባቶ (Mahətot)፣ ምዕራፍ (Məwraf)፣ በሸዳ (Bəšada)፣ አብነት (‘əbənät)፣ አብነቱ ያለ አብነት

እንዳይቀር (‘əbənät yalə ‘əbənät Endayəqār) are the documentary films.

<sup>2</sup> *Gedamante ena yeabenet temehret bet mereja ena makuakuamiya* department is one of departments in responsible to rehabilitate monasteries and traditional church schools to generate their own income in a sustainable manner.

<sup>3</sup> Mahebre Kidusan is an association organized by higher education centers students. It is organized under the church, The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Sunday School Department. The Association is organized under different departments responsible to undertake various activities.

<sup>4</sup> ስምዖን ጽድቅ ዘኢርቶዶክስ ተዋሕዶ «ያለ አብነት ትምህርት የቤተክርስቲያን አገልግሎት የለም»፣ ፲፮ ኛ ዓመት፣ ቁጥር ፲፱/ ቅጽ ፲፮፣ ቁጥር ፻፹፣ ከሰኔ ፲፭-፴/ጳጳሪ፣ ገጽ ፲፫።

<sup>5</sup> The oral poems along with their context originally have been collected for MA thesis - Meseret Kebede, “Oral poetry of the Tāmari,” M.A. Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2004. The thesis divided the 219 poems collected for the purpose into two parts: education and economy related problems. The category for education related problems includes poems that reflect the student’s reaction on his first days in school, the daily schedule, and factors that affect memorization and make the traditional education less effective. The section on the economic problems comprise poems that demonstrate the effects of the economic problem on the life of the traditional student and his relationship with different groups of people.

<sup>6</sup> Poem number 3, 15, 16 are cases in point

In order to facilitate follow up information on the situation of the traditional schools, additional information has been collected from periodicals published by Mahebre Kidusan: Hamär magazine – a monthly magazine - and Séma S’édq newspaper – a fortnightly newspaper. These periodicals publish articles on the traditional school and the situation of the students. The periodicals, especially their editorials, stress the need to make the schools self-sufficient to maintain and expand the Church’s apostolic services.

## II. Review of Related Literature

Scholars like Fekade Azeze<sup>7</sup> define oral poetry as orally composed, performed, transmitted and recorded poetry. It reflects people’s philosophy, belief, value,<sup>8</sup> etc. The contents of the poems convey the world view, understanding and interpretation<sup>9</sup> of the community’s surrounding. The composers record their or their groups’ day-to-day experiences and articulate their aspirations, wishes, warnings, solutions.

Finnegan says that people compose oral compositions for different purposes: functional as well as of aesthetic value.<sup>10</sup> Oral poets compose oral poetry for therapeutic effect,<sup>11</sup> inculcation,<sup>12</sup> enjoyment,<sup>13</sup> excitement and esthetic pleasure<sup>14</sup>, exhaustion avoidance by letting out tension and frustration.<sup>15</sup>

Oral poetry of the *tāmari*<sup>16</sup>, which is composed, transmitted and recorded orally by the traditional school students of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, is also composed for more or less similar purposes. It is composed for entertainment and relaxing the mind,<sup>17</sup> to transmit moral values and acceptable behavior and to communicate the inner most feelings like regrets, frustrations and other feelings of the *tāmari*.<sup>18</sup>

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church trains the *tāmari* in its traditional church education centers with the aim of preparing church scholars and religious service providers. Church scholars state that spiritual schools host students who join to study the everlasting word of God in order to serve Him and the Church. David G. Scalon in Imbakom also explains that the Church trains its disciples “... to prepare a clerical class highly proficient in biblical interpretation and religious doctrine adept in the shaping of exceptionally sophisticated poetry, in reproducing church music, and in performing traditional religious dances.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Fekade Azeze, *yäsénäqalé mäméréya* (Addis Ababa: Bole Printing Press, 1991 E.C.), p. 86.

<sup>8</sup> Kipuri, Naomi, *Oral Literature of the Maasai*, (Nairobi, East African Educational Publishers Ltd, 1993), p.198.

<sup>9</sup> Chesiana, *Oral Literature of the Kalenjin*, (Nairobi, Heinmann Kenya Limited, 1991) p.20.

<sup>10</sup> Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*, (Cambridge University Press. 1977), p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Chesiana, p.20.

<sup>12</sup> Emenyonu, Ernest N. (ed.), *Literature and Social Consciousness*, (Ibadan : Olusey Press Ltd, 1989), p. 99

<sup>13</sup> Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*, (Cambridge University Press. 1977), p. 230.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>16</sup> Meseret Kebede, “Oral poetry of the Tāmari,” (M.A. Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2004),

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* annex 4.

<sup>19</sup> Imbakom Kalewold / *’alāqal*, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education*, (USA Teachers College Press,1970) P.V

As these scholars point out, the spiritual student, in parallel to studying God's word, praises the Lord in poetry, church music performance and dance, paints traditional paintings, binds books, copies the scriptures, helps others, produces some handicrafts to generate income to buy, mostly, text or reference books like *Dəgg<sup>wa</sup>*,<sup>20</sup> and goods like salt and sometimes to pay for medication.<sup>21</sup> Although the main purpose of the Traditional Church School is to train church scholars, in the pre-modern education era, it also had a significant role in shaping the minds of the citizens and enhancing scholarship in Ethiopia.<sup>22</sup>

The education is given in the Nebab bet, Qene bet, Zema bet and Metsehaf bet. In the Nebab bet – Reading school or “House of Reading”, students learn to identify the alphabets and learn to recite prayers like the *Wəddase Maréyam* and books like the Psalms of David; and in the Zema bet, students learn how to praise God in Church music and use Church musical instruments like the Sistrum. The traditional students increase their Ge'ez proficiency in Qene bet. In this school, students memorize and conjugate Ge'ez verbs, learn by heart the different formulas of Qene,<sup>23</sup> and compose and interpret the Qene orally in Amharic. Specializing students perform Qene for their teachers to analyze and evaluate critically examining what the students recollect and what they have learnt so far.<sup>24</sup> In Metsehaf bet, students study the Old and New Testament and other sacred books by rote and imitate their masters as perfectly as possible.

Students join these schools voluntarily, or forced by external factors. Let me explain these situations with examples.

**A. Voluntarily:** the students who join school on their own will, are more or less purpose oriented. They believe that they are respecting and fulfilling the will of God; they wish to serve God and the Church; they will be blessed like the Saints and become a scholar/respected member of society. Such kinds of students are devoted and would like to dedicate all their time and life to education and church services.

“ትምህርት የጀመርኩ ሰሞን ትእዛዝ እየበዛብኝ መማር ሳልኝል ቀረሁ። ትምህርት እየቀረብኝ ከጓደኞቼ እያነሰኩ ሄድኩ። በዚህ የተነሳ ከነርሱ ዘወር ብሎ ወደ ሌላ ቦታ መማር ይሻላል ብዬ ወሰንኩ” ቀለመወርቅ ይትባረክ ።<sup>25</sup> “When I started education, I could not dedicate my time and energy to education due to the workload at home; subsequently, I became a laggard. So, I decided to join a school far from my parents and peruse my education single mindedly” said Qelemework Yetebarek.

<sup>20</sup> *Dəgg<sup>wa</sup>* is a field in the Zema study. *Dəgg<sup>wa</sup>*, a text, is a source of all the Church songs and hymns. The content is derived from the Bible. The Church scholars say St.Yared composed *Dəgg<sup>wa</sup>* with The Holy Spirit's guide. Predominantly, it addresses the advantage of prayer and alms giving.

<sup>21</sup> Meseret Annex 4

<sup>22</sup> Haile Gabriel Dagne, “The Ethiopian Orthodox Church School System,” *The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life*, (Addis Ababa 1997), p 90

<sup>23</sup> Qene is an orally produced, performed and transmitted piece of unique poetry/prose.

<sup>24</sup> Alemayehu Moges, “Language Teaching and Curricula in Traditional Education in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church,” (B.A. thesis, HSIU, Faculty of Arts. 1972), p.7 .

<sup>25</sup> Meseret Annex 4

**B. Forced by external factors:** family members, neighbors or certain incidents may compel an individual to join the traditional school. The students of the former type are devoted to fulfill the family and/or friends’ wishes. They have the responsibility of ensuring the continuity of the tradition in their family.

“ከቤተሰቡ ክህነት ያለው ቤተሰብ በመጥፋቱ አያቴ ከልጅ ልጆቻቸው ካህን ልጅ እንዲወጣ ጥረት ቢያደርጉም ሳይሳካላቸው ቆይቷል፤ በኋላ ግን በዚህ ግፊት ተነሣሥተው እኔ እንድማር ተደረገ”<sup>26</sup> መምህር አክሊለ ብርሃን ተመስገን። “*Since non was a priestly person in his family, my grand father exerted all efforts to have one from his grand children. His efforts were in vain. Due to this pressure, I was later on made to learn*” Memehar Aklile Berehan Temesege.

Sometimes, students develop the desire to join school when they are tired of problems at home, lose their parents, have no one to turn to or face pressure from society. “ከዕለታት በአንደኛው ቀን በሬዎቼን ጠምጄ ሳርስ ሁለት አርሶ አደሮች ‘ይህ ልጅ አባቱ ካህን ነው፤ ተምሮ የአባቱን ዳዊት ከተሰቀለበት እንደማውረድ ከዚህ ከእኛ ጋር አፈር ይገፋል’ እያሉ ሲያሙኝ ሰማሁና በማግስቱ ወደ ት/ቤት ገባሁ”<sup>27</sup> መጋቤ ምስጢር ገብረ ወልድ ወልደ ሚካኤል። “*One day while I was tilling the land, I heard two farmers gossiping about me saying ‘His father is a clergy man. Instead of learning and continuing the tradition, he became a farmer like us. The next day, I left for school’*” Megabe Mesetir Gebre Wold Wolde Michael.

The Church’s traditional education system has unique features. It is highly dependent on memorization which encourages perfection. It is also infamous for scarcity of resources and hardship.

**Memorization:** The education system in the traditional school is highly dependent on learning-by-heart. Students are expected to learn everything by rote, except in the Qene School where students are expected to be as critical and observant as possible to compose original Qene based on the respective feast day, incident and the like.

**Perfection:** Students from different social and educational backgrounds join traditional school. Senior students teach the juniors whereas the master checks on the junior students’ progress periodically. The meal-mates<sup>28</sup> check on each other whether every member of the group prays, attends classes and church services regularly. They also support each other to be morally and psychologically strong and manage to complete their education. Such kinds of practices result in highly trained and qualified traditional students who devote their time and energy to acquiring much knowledge and skill to provide service for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. So, the masters say, poor quality was and is not as such a concern for them.

<sup>26</sup> ስምዖን ጽድቅ ዘኦርቶዶክስ ተዋሕዶ «መከራ የለሎት ትምህርት ቤት ነው» ፲፰ኛ ዓመት፣ ቁጥር ፲፩/ቅጽ ፲፰፣ ቁጥር ፪፻፲፰፣ ከየካቲት ፲፮-፴ ጳጳሮች፣ ገጽ ፳።

<sup>27</sup> ስምዖን ጽድቅ ዘኦርቶዶክስ ተዋሕዶ «አረጋዊው ባለቅኔ» ፲፰ኛ ዓመት፣ ቁጥር ፲፩/ቅጽ ፲፰፣ ቁጥር ፪፻፳፫፣ ከሚያዝያ ፲፮-፴ ጳጳሮች፣ ገጽ ፳።

<sup>28</sup> Meal-mates refer to students who collect food in turns and share the food. The purpose of the grouping is mainly to have meal together so that they develop strong interpersonal relationship and support each other in bad times. The students may not necessarily be of the same batch. The group could be a mixture of tutors and tutees. Students and scholars interviewed for the MA thesis said that such kinds of students consider each other like family. Some of them even visit each other after they complete education.

However, currently, due to interference from the Church’s higher officials, the traditional schools especially the specialized schools<sup>29</sup> (*masémäsékäréya* or *yämésékér téméhérét betoč*) like *taYéka nägäst bäyata lämaréyam* seem to be burdened with enrolling unqualified students. Scholars like Megabe Mesetir Gebre Wold Wolde Michael, a retired Qene scholar in *taYéka nägäst bäyata lämaréyam*, fear that this situation may affect the reputation of the institution and become a threat to the traditional education system and the church. He said “... በቤተሰባዊነት መልኩ እየተመረጡ ዳዊት ሳይደግሙ ወደ አብነት ትምህርቱ የሚመጡ ተማሪዎች እነሱ ተቸግረው እኛንም ያስቸግራሉ። ይህ ደግሞ ለቤተ ክርስቲያን የወደፊት አገልግሎት አስቸጋሪ ነው። ... ቤተ ክርስቲያን ከብባት ያለው በዓላማ የመጡ ሰዎች ሳይሆኑ ምንደኞች ናቸው። ምንደኝነት ደግሞ ዓላማን ያስታል፤ ... ።”<sup>30</sup> This means “Students who are selected on family basis suffer and make us suffer. These students have not even recited the Psalm. Such trend is a threat to the Church’s future service. The people surrounding the Church are not objective driven, but personal benefit oriented. Obviously, benefit seeking brings about mission drift”.

**Scarcity of resources:** Since students have no sustainable income, no one around who gives them financial support and they do not get scholarship from the Church, they have to depend on the charity of others to get their daily bread. But begging is not as effective as it used to be. The recurrent drought, along with other factors, threaten the continuity of this practice as a source of food and income, and thus creating a severe lack of resources.

If the Church were to allocate budget, they would at least have decent meals, shelter, clothing, reference materials and pocket money. Besides, the teachers would also have salary to support themselves and their families would maintain their esteem and devote their energy to serve the church.<sup>32</sup> However, the responsibility to sponsor the traditional students fall on the shoulders of each student as well as the community around the *qolo téméhért bet*.

Meager income and the resulting poverty are adversely affecting the teaching-learning process in the traditional schools. This resulted in, not only, scarcity of resources (food, clothing, shelter and educational materials) but also compels the *tāmari* to desert the traditional schools, and flee to the big cities in search of sustainable income, a better life and sometimes results in conversion to other denominations and religions.

Marigeta Zewengel says, “የተማሪ ዋና ዓላማው ባለሙያ መሆን ነው። ተምራ ምን ሆኖ ለሁሉ የሚል የለም። ስለ ገንዘብ የሚያስብ የለም። አቋቋም ቅኔም የሚማር ቢሆን ዋናው ነገር ባለሙያ መሳሉ ነው። ... ስለ ገንዘብ አሁን አሁን ነው ማሰብ የተጀመረው።”<sup>33</sup> “The main goal of a *tāmari* is to become a professional. No one worries about his future after his completion of education. Nor does anyone cares about money. Whether he learns about *qene* or *yaq<sup>wa</sup>q<sup>wa</sup>m*,<sup>34</sup> the point is his becoming professional. Worrying about money has started only recently.”

<sup>29</sup> Specialization schools (*masémäsékäréya* or *yämésékér téméhérét betoč*) are church traditional schools responsible to certify students who want to specialize in *Qene*, *Zema*, etc and become teachers. These schools are not meant for beginners but for scholars who have attended, graduated and thoughtful students and wanted to have certificate.  
<sup>30</sup> ስምዖን ጳጳስ ለክርስቲያኑ ተዋሕዶ «ከረጋዊው ባለቅኔ» ፲፰ኛ ዓመት፣ ቁጥር ፲፭/ቅጽ ፲፰፣ ቁጥር ፪፻፫፣ ከሚያዝያ ፲፮-፵ ጳጳስ፣ ገጽ ፱።  
<sup>31</sup> *äb.näi téméhérét* is a type of education given in and around churches/monasteries and training centers to create skill among students/ *tāmari* so that they serve the Church in *Qene*, religious songs and dance, etc.  
<sup>32</sup> ስምዖን ጳጳስ ለክርስቲያኑ ተዋሕዶ «መከራ የጸሎት ትምህርት ቤት ነው»፣ ፲፰ኛ ዓመት፣ ቁጥር ፳፫/ ቅጽ ፲፰፣ ቁጥር ፪፻፵፣ ከነሐሴ ፲፮-ጳጉሜ ፮ ቀን ጳጳስ፣ ገጽ ፱።  
<sup>33</sup> Meseret, Annex 4.  
<sup>34</sup> *aq<sup>wa</sup>q<sup>wa</sup>m* is a field of study in the traditional school where students learn to sing in choir the rhythmical movements with the use of the choir instruments like the *Sistrum* /the prayer-stick/ and with the movement and clapping of the hands.

The problem of income continues even after graduation. The Church's structure can not afford to support the traditional scholars properly. A graduate from one of the schools neither receives employment in one of the Church's institutions or in the Churches, nor opens a school or receives a decent job outside the Church context. This fact leads the students and their teachers to despair. When students compare their situation to the graduates of modern schools, they join the modern schools and migrate to the cities deserting the traditional schools and further more some parents discourage their children to join traditional school.

**III. Oral poetry of the tāmari:** This refers to poems created, performed, transmitted and recorded mouth-to-mouth by the tāmari. These imaginative poems express the mind set, experiences, wishes, furies, and expectations, etc of the tāmari. The poems advocate change to ensure the survival and development of the traditional school. Below, I will discuss oral poems that focus on the major problems of the tāmari.

**A. Memorization:** The following poems of the tāmari, although they admit that learning by heart is tiresome, they are not against oral study. However, the poems convey depending on oral transmission may not guarantee preservation and knowledge transfer, as the number of students joining *yabénät téméhért bet* is gradually decreasing. Moreover, scholars are dieing away at an alarming speed without recording their accumulated knowledge.

ተማሪ ሲሊኝሁ ተማሪ አ ቅሉ፣ (1)  
 ተማሪ ደስ ይላል ዝማሬና ድን ሲቃኝ በቃሉ፣  
 ደግሞ ያነባሉና ዓይኖቹ መጸሕፍትን በሙሉ።

*Säm*<sup>35</sup>

Although the “tāmari” is in everybody’s mouth,  
 Don’t look down upon him.  
 He recites as well as reads books.

*Säm*

Although the “tāmari” is in everybody’s mouth,  
 Don’t look down upon him.  
 He lifts the spirit to the heavens while he is reciting *Zəmmare*<sup>36</sup> and *Dəgg*<sup>wa</sup> ;

*Wärq*

Although the “tāmari” is in everybody’s mouth,  
 Don’t look down upon him.  
 While he is reading books, words of scriptures rain down with tears (sorrow).

እንግዲህ መቃብር ቶሎ ቶሎ ተማር፣ (2)  
 ድን ተሸክሞ መጣልህ መምህር።

*Säm*

Well then grave, learn quickly;  
 Since a teacher is coming towards you carrying *Dəgg*<sup>wa</sup> .

*Wärq*

Well then grave, be pardoned quickly;  
*Dəgg*<sup>wa</sup> is coming towards you.

<sup>35</sup>*Säm* *ənma* *Wärq* is a technique in qene or poetry. It helps the composer to express his ideas in “elevated style” (Mengistu Lemma: 1988). It is a means of attaining layers of meaning through “minimum of words” (Levin; 1972: 7) and figurative languages.

<sup>36</sup>*Zəmmare* is one of church’s music books. *Zəmmare* means praise. *Zəmmare* hymns are sung by groups of Zema scholars at the end of the Mass to praise the Eucharist.



አራት ሰው ሞተ ተቀበረ ዛሬ፤ (3)  
 ድን፣ ጸመ ድን፣ መዋሥዕት፣ ዝማሬ።

*Säm*  
 Four people died and buried today  
*Dégg<sup>wa</sup>, S'omä Dégg<sup>wa</sup>, MäwasYét and Zémmare*

*Wärq*  
 A man died and was buried today  
 A scholar of *Dégg<sup>wa</sup>, S'omä Dégg<sup>wa</sup>37, MäwasYét<sup>38</sup> and Zémmare*

በደንብ መዝግቡት አማርኛችንን፤ (4)  
 ሁልጊዜ በመቁጠር አልቋል ጊዜያችን።

*Säm*  
 Record our Amharic (oral poetry) properly ,  
 We have lost our head due to *got'ära*<sup>39</sup>.

*Wärq*  
 Record properly our tradition,  
 Alas, in vain, we finished our time counting the years.

Students, who joined traditional Church schools on their own free will or forced by some external factors, seem to get used to the oral study. However, what seemed to create the feelings sensed in the above mentioned poems is the denial of expectations. Haile Gabriel Dagne argues that students in addition to acquiring knowledge join schools to become a respected members of the society. But gradually “... graduates of the church schools have lost their traditional elite status in the social order”.<sup>40</sup> Even in the context of the Church most of the graduates will not get a high position in the Church’s hierarchy. They may not even receive positions like Church administrator; or permission to provide clerical services or open schools to train disciples.

The absence of alternatives compels the students to remind concerned people the value of traditional education and call for change. Poem No. 1 calls for attitudinal change. For example, the *Säm* of Poem 1 expresses the previous status of the students and the scholars of the Church. Before the introduction and expansion of modern education the Church used to play the role of knowledge transferring agency. Furthermore, the students were influential members of the community. The composer claims respect due to his considerable role in the spiritual life of the laity: people consult the traditional students on spiritual issues; students praise God reciting *Dégg<sup>wa</sup>* and *Zémmare*. While reading the sacred books, the traditional student sheds tears either due to happiness from what he has contemplated or to beseech God to purify and cleans the laity from their sin.

Couplets 2 and 3 show the type of *Zema* scholars the Church has. Some of the scholars are specialists of a particular *Zema* field and others specialize in various *Zema* subjects. For example, the character in Couplet 2 is a *Dégg<sup>wa</sup>* specialist. However, the character in Couplet 3 is a specialist in four *Zema bet* special disciplines: *Dégg<sup>wa</sup>, S'omä Dégg<sup>wa</sup>, MäwasYét and Zémmare*. According to an informant, the composer of Couplet 2 is a *Dégg<sup>wa</sup>* student who lamented the death of a well-known young *Dégg<sup>wa</sup>* teacher, from whom he had hoped to learn a lot.

<sup>37</sup> *S'omä Dégg<sup>wa</sup>* is a *zema* text that consists of praise and prayers allotted for each Sunday in the period of Lent.

The scholars say they are composed by St. Yared, the founder of the church’s music.

<sup>38</sup> *Mäwasét* is another book of *Zema*. It deals with the baptism, crucifixion, death, the rise of Jesus Christ, resurrection ... a hymn sung at funerals and memorials services of the dead.

<sup>39</sup> *got'ära* refers to the practice of *gene* composition and study.

<sup>40</sup> Haile Gabriel Dagne, P.81.

The death of such kinds of scholars, the couplets infer, regretfully presupposes, the closing of traditional schools, the discontinuation of valuable Church sacred services, skills transfer and knowledge transmission.

Realizing the consequences, it seems, the anxious student composed couplet 4. The composer calls for change in the way knowledge is transferred in the traditional school, *i.e.* to record the knowledge and pass it on to the next generation through writing. *Dégg<sup>wa</sup>* is a Zema book which students study orally. Although St. Yared produced is, scholars say, it has developed through time as specialists kept developing the text. It seems the composer is conveying that the education system should involve writing as well as modern types of recording. The *wäraq* of this couplet enlightens policy makers about the feelings of the student on spending lots of years at school. This is because the students have witnesses that their friends who studied at modern schools were able to support themselves, change their style of living, and receive respect from the society, while the graduates from traditional schools experience the opposite.

**B. Perfection:** The students hope to become perfect, like the scholars around his place of origin, in his family or his teacher and ultimately to inherit heaven. The Zema student, for instance, should imitate his master as perfectly as possible. The Qene student should also develop his language, poetic and interpretative skills at the same time. The students believe that prayer, regular church service and class attendance make their wishes become reality. Therefore, every student tries to lead his school life as diligently as possible.

ወይኔ ተግሪ ስኖር ተጠንቅቁ፤ (5)  
ቁራሽ እቀምሳለሁ ከውሻ ነጥቁ።

Woe! I, the *tāmari*, while live with utmost care;  
Eat a morsel snatched from a dog.

The composer seems regretful that the caution he took is ineffective due to the severe poverty. The students have to fight and snatch a loaf of Injera<sup>41</sup>. Eating snatched Injera from dogs is considered disgraceful. The students have to fight with dogs, which are not the favorite animal of the Church, and which the society associates with disgrace. To keep the student graceful, the traditional school culture does not allow too much drinking and over indulgence. When there is plenty, the food will be saved for the next meal or for the meal-mate. But all this does not help the students to receive respect from the society.

Moreover, eating Injera snatched from a dog seems the bitterest experience in the student's life. The "utmost care" on line one refers to the precaution that the students are taking to keep themselves clean, so that they might become bright. In the school tradition cleansing of the soul is believed to open the mind to acquire religious knowledge easily. The students also respect school rules such as regular prayer, class attendance and religious service provision, in the belief that it is rewarding. Poverty, however, seems to rob of all the students' strength.

ስሙኝ ልንገራችሁ የበደለኝን በደል ቅዳሴ ይሉት ምቀኛ፤ (6)  
አሳስሮኝ ቀረ በመክፈልት ዳኛ።

*Säm*

Hear me, let me tell you what an envy did to me;  
Unjustly, he made a judge to sentence me in prison.

<sup>41</sup>*Injera* is a staple food in Ethiopia that is circular in shape similar to pan cake. It is made from a cereal called *Tef*. Injera is baked in a clay-pan.

*Wärq*

Hear me, let me tell you what *qéddasse*<sup>42</sup> did to me;  
He made *mäkfält*<sup>43</sup> to sentence me in prison.

በሀይለ በረዶ ግዕዝ ምትሃት በታወከ ጊዜ ማህፀኗ፣ (7)  
ገብስ እርጉዚቷ ቆንጆ ቀረች በሽፍኗ።

*Säm*

When it hailed, the covered unripe barely dropped on to the ground,  
And it decayed enclosed in its cover.

*Säm*

When the students conjugate the Ge'ez (the verbs),  
The proud/reluctant student (who never asks assistance and keeps covering his  
mouth with his toga) remains ignorant of Ge'ez.

*Wärq*

When a fever attached a beautiful pregnant (woman),  
The pregnancy ended in miscarriage.

The main subjects of these poems must complete their education overcoming all the impediments. However, they were not fortunate enough to succeed. Couplet 5 and 6 discourage discontinuing education by indicating the consequences. The subject in couplet 5 expressed his regret for reaching such a decision. A priest or deacon who performs *qéddasse* gains something in the form of salary (either in cash or in kind), is served decent food and receives a warm reception in the *Dädzäsälam*.<sup>44</sup> These benefits deceive the *täinari* to cut classes and/or drop out of school.

Sometimes students become uncertain whether they are able to complete their education or drop out of school and begin some job to improve their life. They may not be strong enough to reach a decision. The dilemma prevents them from attending their education wholeheartedly. This could deter them from putting all their efforts on their education. Sometimes this could be misunderstood as pride. They may not be courageous enough to consult somebody as dropping out of school is not a decision to get appreciation from schoolmates.

The 'pregnant barely' in couplet 6 represents students who have started learning and dropped out of school, according to the informant's explanation. He says that a pregnant barely, an unripe seed of barely, when it is affected by hail, decays enclosed in a cover. According to Memher Dagu Alem, a lecturer in Holy Trinity Theological College, teachers do not allow a student to leave school before he completes the *qene* lesson. They are afraid that such kind of student remains uneducated, becomes a person with little knowledge of *qene* and disturbs the Church people imagining he is better than the others. Or, he engages in witchcraft or sorcery in order to have sustainable income. In order to experience the honor that the scholars get, the unqualified and the less educated try to associate themselves with scholars by wearing the turban.

<sup>42</sup> *qéddasse* refers to liturgy.

<sup>43</sup> *Mäkfält*. is a meal served in church after service.

<sup>44</sup> *Dädzäsälam* is a hall in a church compound where *Mäkfält*. is served.

However, discussing theological matters in the presence of scholars and refuting religious questions of the laity becomes difficult for them. Consequently, retreat from scholastic discussion scenes follows.

**C. Scarcity of resources:** The poems record the impact of inadequate food supply, lack of sustainable income, and un-preparedness of the Church to improve the situation of the traditional school, the students' life and the value attached to the schooling.

The scarcity of resources is severe enough as to drive the students into a deep sense of despair. In the previous subsection, we discussed how tough the poverty is: it tempts the students to drop out of school and focus on earning an income.

For a person, to lose parents and siblings is the most saddening experience in one's life. The following poem expresses that the grief caused by having nothing to eat is more painful than the pain caused by death of family members.

አእሳት ከወንድም ሞት ከናት ካባት መርዶ፣ (8)  
እጅግ ያሳዘናል የካፋ ባዶ።

More than the death of the sister,  
More than the death of the brother,  
More than hearing the death of the parents,  
Having an empty *Kofada*<sup>45</sup> saddens more.

No one is around to provide sustainable support and financial assistance to the *tāmari*. Although begging exposes the student community to contention with dogs and harassment, the gain from begging is subsistence and the dependency on the charity of others creates humility. Begging remains a main source of food. An empty *Kofada* presupposes hunger. Coming home with an empty *Kofada* could also mean starving meal-mates. This adds to the misery of the student's life. The gravity of the poverty forced the composer to look back at the good old days when he used to be served a decent meal. When he realized that he had not experienced similar pain when he left them, he expresses how scared he is to have an empty *Kofada*.

In order not to completely depend on begging and alleviate the effects of the problems related to educational needs through their own effort, the students are engaged in handicraft and petty trade. They travel to remote areas in search of raw materials for the handicraft. «ከንደኞቹ ጋር ቀርከህ ለማምጣት ከዋድላ ተነስተን አመድ በር ወደሚባል ቦታ ሔድን። ከዚያ ተሽክመን አምጥተን ወልዲያ ሸጥነው»<sup>46</sup> መምህር አክሊል ብርሃን ተመስገን። “From *Welediya I and my friends went to a place called Amede Bere*<sup>47</sup> to fetch bamboo. Then we sold it in *Welediya*” Memher Aklile Berehan Temesegen.

To increase the income from the sale, they add value. For example, they make mats from the bamboo, sell it and buy blankets, educational materials and cereals for *qolo*<sup>19</sup>. However, the income is not always adequate to lead calm school life. The availability of markets and security is a problem. The students have to travel to distant places. Sometimes thieves steal what they have or beat them. Since the students are not professional businessmen, they have less bargaining power. Besides, often do not have market information.

<sup>45</sup>*Kofada* is the bag used by the *tāmari* to collect food. It is usually made of straw.

<sup>46</sup> ስምዖን ጽድቅ ዘአርቶዶክስ ተዋሕዶ «መከራ የጸሎት ጎምህርት ቤት ነው» ፲፰ኛ ዓመት፣ ቁጥር ፲፩/ቅጽ ፲፰፣ ቁጥር ፪፻፲፰፣ ከየካቲት ፲፮-፴ ፳፻፫፣ ገጽ ፱።

<sup>47</sup> From *Welediya* to *Amede Bere* is about 240 km.

The scarcity of resource depressingly exposes the students to disrespect. The society, although provides considerable support for the *tāmari*, is, at the same time, the source of their discomfort.

ለልመና ስሄድ ከስድስት ሰዓት ላይ፣ (9)  
የኩቲባ እናት የገረድ አታላይ፣  
«ሰርተህ ብላ» አለችኝ ደጃፍ ደጃፉን ላይ።

At twelve, when I went to beg,  
A sister of *Kotiba*,<sup>48</sup> an undependable maid, scoffed me;  
“Work and earn money for your living” while I was gazing at the gate.

Maids, although misunderstood the *tāmari*, usually give Injera to the traditional students. The maid is represented by *Kotiba* to refer to her negative actions. According to *Týamérä Maréyam* - Miracles of St. Mary – in Egypt, a maid called *Kotiba* insulted the Holy family especially St. Mary and threw Her Son to the floor. This is considered as a terrible act in Church teaching. The students believe that while begging they are imitating the Holy family to receive Jesus Christ’s and His mother’s blessing. Traditionally, a visit by a *tāmari* is considered to bring blessing from the Virgin Mary and/or the Holy Family. It is to bless the home that they say «በእንተ ስማ ለማርያም፣ ስለ እመብርሃን ብለው» meaning, “In the name of Mary, for the sake of the Mother of the Light” when they go begging.

The following oral poems seem to clear misconceptions and encourage society to treat them respectfully. They express the reasons why traditional school students face the humiliation and starvation: faith and education - to ensure knowledge transfer and produce disciples for Church service, to support themselves and receive the reward (heavenly as well as earthly).

ቁራሽ እንጂራማ መች አጣሁ ከቤቴ፣ (10)  
ሃይማኖት ብዬ እንጂ ይህ ሁሉ ልፋቴ።

I do have a loaf of Injera at home,  
Nevertheless, it is for the sake of faith that I faced such weariness.

በጣም ያስገርማል የተማሪ ነገር፣ (11)  
ለምኖ ተምሮ ይሆናል መምህር።

Surprising the fate of the *tāmari* is.  
Although a beggar he was in the school,  
He becomes a teacher, at last.

እንዲህ መከራ አይቶ ለፍቶ የተማረ፣ (12)  
በየትም ይኖራል እንደተከበረ።

He who survived the hardship in school and completes education,  
Honorably lives wherever.

The major characters in the above-cited poems imply the presence of a loaf of Injera in their respective home. The characters probably wanted to assert that they left their home, not because their parents are unable to support their own children, but for a valuable cause, to attain a goal, *i.e.*, to complete their education, serve the Heavenly Father and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, as the purpose of the church education is to produce clerical service providers.

<sup>48</sup> According to *Týamérä Maréyam*, *Kotiba* is Egyptian maid who scoffed at St. Mary when she fled to Egypt along with Her Son. It is said that the maid scoffs at St. Mary saying that she should have worked and earned Her own income rather than begging.

The main preoccupation of most of the traditional students is to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, serve the Church, and become esteemed people. From my observations, students have started to join the modern schools not only to acquire knowledge but also to get additional skills that enhance their competence to earn an income and change their standard of living. This means they have started to think about being competent in worldly life as well. Moreover, the changes that the traditional students observe in their peers who completed modern education and graduated from the Church’s theological education centers seem to negatively affect their attitude towards traditional education.

For example, a scholar Memher Aklile Berehan Temesegen realized that there were gaps in his religious skills in order to provide service. The church needs qene specialist poets, critics and teachers to assist religious singers, Zema specialist religious singers, y’Aq<sup>wa</sup> q<sup>wa</sup>m specialists to train and accompany the singers and so forth. One day, his friend invited him to a congregation and asked him to preach a sermon. From the experience, he confessed, he learnt a good lesson and improved the way he trained his disciples: he trained them how to preach in addition to the usual traditional education.

ከዚያ በፊት በማኅበርም ይሁን በጉባኤ አስተምሬ አላውቅም። በወንበር ከማስተማር ውጪ። ቁሜ ልናገር ብል የምናገረው ጠፋኝ። ድንገርግር ብዬ ተቀመጥኩ። ይህ ትዝ ይለኛል። ከዚያን ጊዜ ጀምሮ ለካ እንደዚህም አለ አብነቱን ብቻ ሳይሆን ስብከተ ወንጌልም ያስፈልጋል ብዬ በስብከተ ወንጌል ራሴን እያለማመድኩ ዘወትር መዘጋጀት እንዳለብኝ ተገነዘብኩ፤ ከዚያም ማስተማር ጀመርኩ። መምህር አክለለ ብርሃን ተመስገን።<sup>49</sup>

*“I had no previous experience in preaching in congregations except teaching disciples in the traditional school. When I stood to preach, I could not utter a single word as I became confused. I remember this. After that incident, I realized that as a spiritual father, I should also engage in preaching in addition to teaching disciples in the traditional school. Then I learnt that I should prepare myself for the purpose and started to teach.”* Memher Aklile Berehan Temesegen.

Delivering God’s word is one of the duties and responsibilities of a church scholar. They are disciples of God. They have to teach the laity what they have received from Him.<sup>50</sup> However, the preoccupation with rote memorization and the lack of exposure to the world outside the traditional school made the teachers and students and motivated them to seek other skills, share them and provide diversified services. This indicates that the Church should revise, regularly, the courses in the traditional school. Through out the history of the traditional scholarship, the practice, mainly, has been transferring what was known to the coming generation - the students. But this does not mean that there were not innovations. Scholars of the various sectors have contributed a lot to develop scholarship. Therefore, context-based amendments should be done for the survival of the traditional school scholarship and preservation of the tradition.

ተማሪና ዶሮ ሲሞት ነው ኩራቱ፤ (13)  
በህይወት ሳለማ ጥሬ ነው እራቱ።

The *tamari* and the chicken get respect when they pass away;  
While they are alive, they get only grains for dinner.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid P.9.  
<sup>50</sup> Malaty, Tadros Y.(Fr.), “Pastoral work in the life of Fr. Pishoy Kamel”, (1979, 42).

ተምራ ነበረ ሳላይ የእናት እጅ፣ (14)  
 አሥራ ሁለት ዓመት ዋሽራና ጎንጅ፣  
 በማታ ልመና መሆኑ ከፋ እንጂ።

*Säm*

I had studied, without having any motherly care,  
 For twelve consecutive years at *Wašära*<sup>51</sup> and *Gonj*,<sup>52</sup>  
 Pity! I have to beg at night.

*Wärq*

I had studied, without having any motherly care,  
 For twelve consecutive years at *Wašära*<sup>51</sup> and *Gonj*,<sup>52</sup>  
 Pity! I am begging even in my old age (at the dusk of my life).

Couplet 12 shows the negligence of the church officials towards the *tamari* and the traditional schooling. Traditional education is a tool for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church to attain its spiritual mission. The couplet reveals that the Church has not valued this institution. According to the couplet, the student who has been neglected throughout his life will become a celebrity when he passes away. High-ranking church officials attend the funeral service; long prayers and *qene* compositions color the funeral ceremony. Similarly, after the scholar passes away, people tell about him, and pay their due respect politely in selected words. The poetry communicates the negligence of the Church people towards traditional knowledge which has motivated some students to convert from the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church to other faiths.

After graduation, the situation of most of the students does not change. They may not receive a sustainable income, and remain dependent on others' charities. As far as the composer of couplet 13 is concerned, informants said that the graduate of a traditional school can not support himself even though he is a *qene* scholar. He is dependent on the charity of others, not because he hasn't exploited every means available, but because he hasn't got the opportunity to support himself.

According to Marigeta Aemere Mashasha, another informant, this person was a certified and highly qualified *Qene* master. He studied nothing but *qene*. If he had studied *qéddasse*<sup>24</sup>, he might have been employed in one of the churches. A clergyman who participates in *qéddasse*, at least has a meal or an allowance to support himself. Unfortunately, this scholar had spent all his energy and time on *qene*. After graduation, he approached a head of a church to get either employment or permission to establish a *qene* school adjoining the church. But the head declined to accept the proposals. He told the scholar that the church needs only teachers who teach children the alphabet, as *qene* is not marketable.

Marigeta Aemere adds that some heads act under the pretext of "the market value of *qene*" to avoid such kinds of scholars politely. Those heads of churches that are not educated and can't stand scholars, especially *qene* scholars. According to the Marigeta's explanation, these heads are insecure around scholars. Besides, some of them are too proud to be guided by other scholars. Another informant, Marigeta Mengestu, said uneducated priests do not know what to quote from the Bible, which *qéddasse* to recite, what to preach and so on. Scholars know the weakness of these people. Some of the scholars attack, in words, the heads of churches, while others look down upon them. This situation creates tension between these groups of people. Therefore, to be on the safe side, some heads of church prefer to avoid such scholars.

<sup>51</sup> *Wašära* is a place for *qēñē* School.

<sup>52</sup> *Gonj* is another famous place for *qēñē* School.

Member Degu Alem Kassa, a scholar in the Holy Trinity Theological College, complains that the Church is appointing uneducated clergy as heads of churches. This prevents the Church from discussing the issue and bringing solutions to raise the hope of the scholars and attract students. Marigeta Aemere adds that only the luckiest scholars get permission to open schools or/and employment in the Church. Even so they are mostly underpaid or unpaid. These scholars have to depend on the assistance that they get from their students. The students take turns to collect food for their teacher or do some other household works. Sometimes, scholars may have farmland. If the scholar has land, the students till the land in turn. The dissatisfaction in their life and the despair force the scholars to discourage their children to study *yäyabénät téméhért*. They also somehow make them drop out of the traditional school, change their professions and migrate to cities deserting the traditional school.

ድን፣ ጸመ ድን ስንማር በከንቱ (15)  
ሸማ መሥራት ኖሯል ለሰው ልጅ ትምህርቱ።

We were learning *Dégg<sup>wa</sup> S'omä Degg<sup>wa</sup>* in vain,  
Oh! Waving was what a man should have learnt.

ድን፣ ጸመ ድን ሲያደርጉን ከርታታ (16)  
ሸማ መሥራት ኖሯል የሚያደርገው ጌታ።

While *Degg<sup>wa</sup>, S'omä Degg<sup>wa</sup>* sent us off  
Oh! It is waving that makes one noble/ rich?

ንቦች ሊቃውንት አዲስ አበባን አይተው እየቀሰሙ ሊውሉ፣ (17)  
እየሄዱ አለቁ ብር ብር እያሉ።

*Säm*

Bees, seeing new flower,  
Fled to collect (pollen and nectar), through out the day.

*Wärq*

Scholars (learning about the situation of the scholars) in Addis Ababa;  
They migrated to the city in search of better income.

The avoidance of the scholars and the financial insecurity after graduation compelled the traditional students to question the value of spending all their time and energy on the traditional education. The students realize that belittled professions like weaving better in more income generating than traditional education. The income is so attractive that in comparison it makes the wavers live like a noble or a rich person. So, to improve their life, they start to look for better options.

When the students hear the rumors about the comfortable life and the news of better opportunities in the big cities, these scholars migrate to these places in search of a better life. Although they receive better payment, their migration affects scholarship severely. Schools have been shut down, students have been dispersed in search of teachers, hope and change, and the Church is experiencing challenges due to the lack of qualified clergy to serve the laity.

አንተ ወልደ እግዚአብሔር ስማኝ ልንገርህ፣ (17)  
በመናፍቅ ድንጋይ አለቀ ሕዝብህ።

*Säm*

Son of God, hear me, let me tell you;  
Your people have been exterminated by the stone of renegade.



*Wärq*  
 Son of God, hear me, let me tell you;  
 Your people have been remitted.

The “stone” represents the teaching of the members of the other churches. A stone, he explains, hurts or wounds the person whom it is thrown at. Likewise, their teaching affects the religious state of a person. This situation, it seems, worries the students, for the conversion rate is unexpectedly high. Since everything at the moment seems out of their hand (as some of them lost their closest friends before they realized it), they begin to realize that they should look for a solution and appeal to God. The involvement of the ultimate authority should, at least, make the *tämari* secure. The *tämari* needs the Church’s security badly. This is because anything that affects the wellbeing of the Church, affects them, for the Church provides the traditional student with the essentials for life. To ensure the security of the Church, he has to exhaust every possible alternative.

The deep-rooted nature of the problem makes the struggle against the closing of traditional schools difficult. For instance, the Church allocated allowances for selected traditional schools. The Mahebre Kidusan *Gedamante ena yeabenet temehret bet mereja makuakuamiya* department also provides project-based support, pocket money to the students and allowance to the scholars to make the monasteries and churches that host traditional schools self-sufficient; and to encourage that the school society does not abandon the schools.

The Department’s board chairperson Alemtsehay Meseret explains the department “... የአብነት መምህራኑን በበዓታቸው ለማቆየትና የቤተ ክርስቲያን ትምህርት ቀጣይነት እንዲኖረው ለማድረግ ሲባል ድጎማ ይደረጋል። ...”<sup>53</sup> “provides incentive to motivate the scholars to stay at their school.”

However, such kinds of interventions are only temporary solutions for the chronic problem. The projects should encourage those students who have started education, at least, to complete what they have started. Or encourage those scholars like Liqe Gubae Admassu Webetu who are determined to survive the challenges and keep teaching. But the allowances or the project based support may not be attract new students or even may not guarantee that students have a better life after completing their education.

“... አንድ ቀን የቤተ ክርስቲያን አስተዳደር ወደ አብነት ት/ቤቶች ፊቱን አዙሮ የሊቃውንቱን ድካም የሚመለከትበት ጊዜ ይመጣል”<sup>54</sup> ሊቀ ገብኤ አድማሱ ወብቱ። “There may come a time when the Church administration pays attention to the traditional schools and values the efforts of the scholars ” Liqe Gubae Admassu Webetu.

<sup>54</sup> ስምዖን ጳጳስ ዘኦርቶዶክስ ተዋሕዶ «ማኅበረ ቅዱሳን ገዳማትና አድባራትን ለመደገፍ በሚያደርገው ጥረት ተጨባጭ ለውጦች እየተገኙ ነው» ፤፳፮ኛ ዓመት፣ ቁጥር ፳፫/ቅጽ ፲፰፣ ቁጥር ፪፻፴፩፣ ከነሐሴ ፲፮-ጳጉሜ ፮ ፳፻፫፣ ገጽ ፲፩።

<sup>55</sup> ስምዖን ጳጳስ ዘኦርቶዶክስ ተዋሕዶ «የሚጸፉ እጆች ለሚያነቡ ዓይኖች መሪ ናቸው» ፤፳፮ኛ ዓመት፣ ቁጥር ፱/ቅጽ ፲፰፣ ቁጥር ፪፻፲፮፣ ከጥር ፲፮-፴ ፳፻፫፣ ገጽ ፰።

**Conclusions and recommendations**

The oral poems reveal that the students have already realized the dangers facing the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the Church's services and the traditional schools. Traditional Church Schools are centers which prepare qualified Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church religious service providers in poetry, religious song, dance, religious books commentary, etc. However, the graduates, who have devoted their energy and time to their studies hoping to receive the opportunity to serve the Church, may not have the chance to achieve this purpose and earn a reward to support themselves; or if they have the chance, the reward may not be as attractive as they expected it to be. The absence of appropriate training in certain skills deprives them of competing with modern education school graduates. This compelled the students to drop out of school, discourage others not to join traditional schools and make them to look for other options to improve their social status. Therefore, they proposed solutions in a poetic manner. The poems advise the audience to record knowledge from the scholars, encouraged their peers to enhance their capacity and increase their ability to generate an income in a sustainable manner, and also appeal to God to find a solution for the problems.

The Church administration is entitled to make revisions of the curriculum of the traditional schools, and assign appropriate professional training for particular jobs. They should assess resources identify the gaps and limitations affecting the Church's services and use the findings to take appropriate measures to preserve as well as develop the schools and improve the religious services of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, working strategically to retain the social status of the graduates of the traditional schools used to have. Institutions like Mahebre Kidusan should also work on capacity building among the traditional students and improving the involvement of the traditional school graduates in the Church's activities in a sustainable manner. The poems reflect that it is not only the poverty during their school time that is affecting the attitudes/decisions of the students but also the severe poverty after completing their education. Scholars who have the interest and the capacity to benefit from vocational training and other kinds of professional assistance should take the lead in examining the problems and sharing the results to ensure the survival of the traditional church education through improved service provision.