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August 15-2016

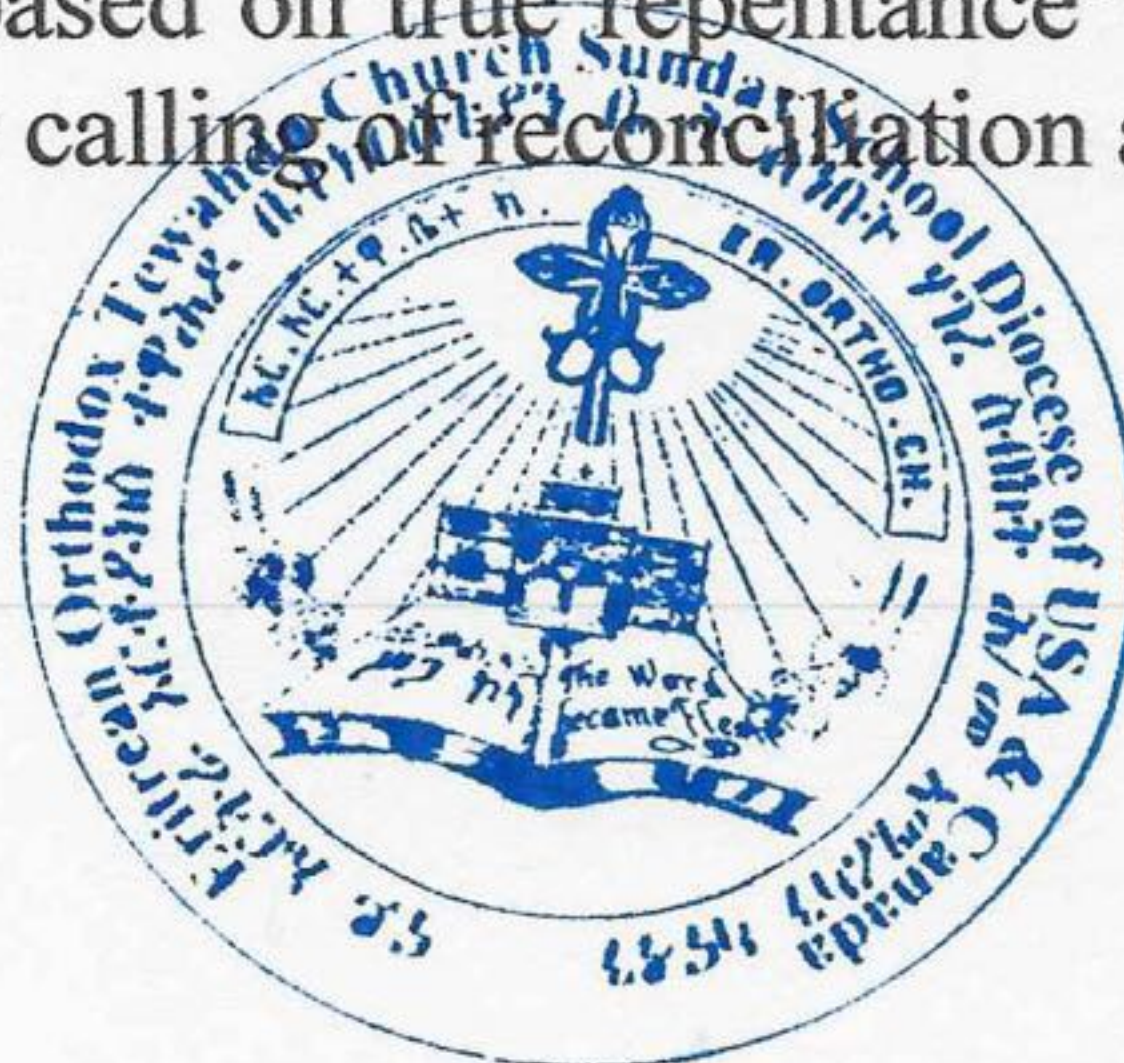


**Response to “Eritrean Diaspora Northern America, Europe and all Middle East diocese?” [the renewal movement] : a call for Coptic Church to respond appropriately and urgently to an independent and autonomous Eritrean Orthodox Church Unity.**  
**An awareness call to all believers and Oriental Orthodox Churches**

On August 08/2016 the Eritrean Holy Synod has issued a statement of unity and love within the Church under the title of “Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.” [Ps. 85:10]. The press release started by reminding that the 3rd Patriarch **Abune Antonios** was removed by the Holy Synod from his post 10 years ago due to issues that happened under his patriarchal watch. After much efforts of the Church scholars and monastic fathers [and prayers of all the believers]- unity and reconciliation has once again been declared within the Church. According to the press release, His Holiness **Abune Antonios** has taken responsibility for all his actions that happened knowingly or unknowingly under his watch, which were the reasons for his removal from his post by the Holy Synod. The Holy Synod, after reminding the forgiving nature of the Church, had a colorful spiritual filled exchange of reconciliation, kisses of peace, and forgiveness among the members of the Holy Synod.

This event, for almost all believers and especially to the followers of the Eritrean Tewahdo church, has been the most anticipated news and the prayer of believers throughout the world. Most people believe that this step as a hope of light that would bring unity and reconciliation within the Holy Church. However, recently we have seen few people dominating the media promoting and preaching division over unity and hatred over peace. Our wish is that these people would have considered and thought deeply enough to welcome the progress the Church is making. Even if they have a concern, they would have made the case without propagating division and hatred toward the Church and Church fathers.

As most of you know, this Atlanta based self-appointed “Diaspora Archdiocese of North America, Europe and the Middle East” has released a statement objecting the calling of the Holy Synod as “Human manipulation and not based on true repentance”. Not only they have released a disingenuous statement regarding the Holy calling of reconciliation and peace of the Church but few





of its members including priests also have been propagating distrust and hatred of the Holy Eritrean Church and its Synod.

The Sunday School Objections are the following:

Some critical questions we must have when hearing this group are: Under whose authority [and for who] are they claiming/ addressing their statement? As we all know the Eritrean Orthodox Church has its autonomy from the Coptic Church, when the late Pope Shenouda III of Alexandria was the Patriarch of Holy See of St. Mark in 1993. Since then, the Eritrean Tewahdo Orthodox Church has been one of the six Oriental Orthodox Churches. This Atlanta based group has called itself the Eritrean “Diaspora archdiocese of North America, Europe and the Middle East”. It has been functioning sometimes as a Synod and other times as a Diocese for Eritrean Orthodox tewahdo “few” people in Diaspora!? But with what authority? Who gave the power to this group? The answer is simple - It is the sister Church -the COPTIC Orthodox Church. The Coptic Church has assigned its own Bishop, of Eritrean origin, His Grace Abune Mekarios, as bishop of this group. This historic wrongdoing of the Coptic Church toward the Eritrean Orthodox Church has caused a spirit of divisiveness within the Eritrean Church and also has many consequential implications.

a. The Coptic Church knowingly or unknowingly has interfered in an independent and autonomous Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church. With what authority, and which agreement, has the Coptic Church assigned a bishop to Eritrean believers residing outside the country? [If we look in history when the Coptic Church has a stand against the Ethiopian Church Patriarch during the Derg regime- Did they assign a bishop to Ethiopian believers outside the country? No!] Why are they doing it now to the Eritrean Church? This shows how much they undermine and underestimate the power of the Holy Synod of an independent and autonomous Eritrean Church. If they [Coptic Church] truly care for the wellbeing of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church, they should have worked with their fellow counterparts [the Holy Synod] and resolved it peacefully without creating division within the members of the Holy Church. Historically, the Coptic Church will be responsible not only for the fraction of the Holy Eritrean Church but also for magnifying it further by appointing its own Bishop to ordain priests, deacons and establish a separate Diocese that is not accountable to anyone.

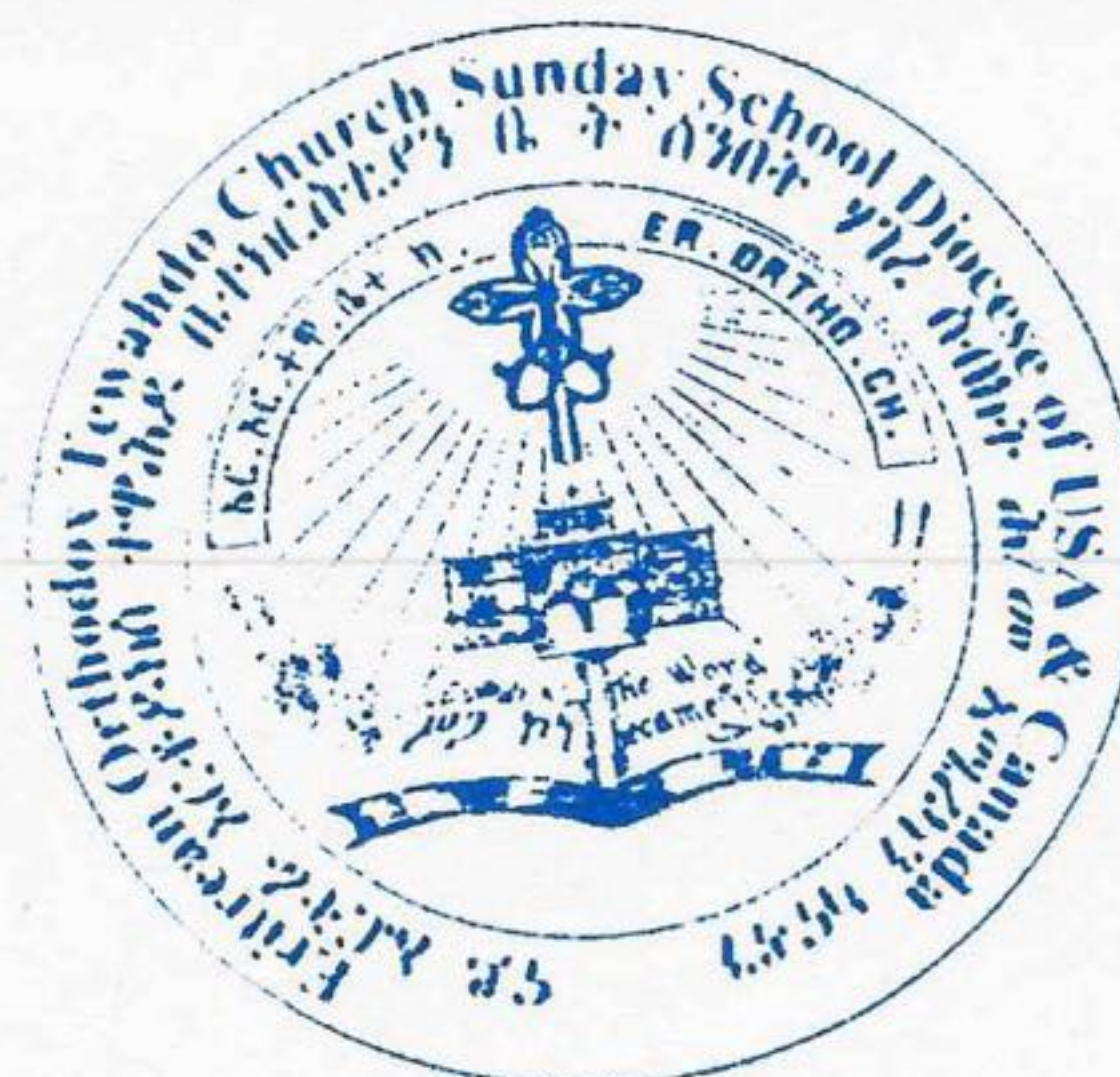
b. The Coptic Church directly or indirectly has promoted divisions within the Eritrean Orthodox Church believers by being a shield for a few people, under His Grace Bishop Mekarios, on the premise that they are the “true advocates” for His Holiness **Abune Antonios**. This few self-appointed Diocese of America, Europe and the Middle East diocese has used the opportunity to promote erroneous teaching that took roots within the believers and Church that would require lifelong work, if that, to bring it back to original place. For example, the illegitimate appointed Bishop for Eritrean people by the Coptic Church has been seen clearly teaching





contrary to the Eritrean Church Holy Tradition, Church practices, and its local Saints. How could a person who grew up in this kind of “church” be united easily with the majority peacefully when the right time comes?

- c. There is a proverb common in the Eritrean culture, “Don’t judge before listening the two side of a story”. The Coptic Church has accepted this group solely on the premise that they are the outcasted member for “a better and righteous cause/reason”. However, what the Coptic Church did not know and “has not tried” to know, is that these people are the main reason why **Abune Antonios** is in a place where he is now. Most of them, especially those in power of the “The Diaspora diocese of North America, Europe and the middle East” were members of the” renewal movement” as known as the “Tehadiso movement” that was exposed, and corrected by the Holy Synod under His Holiness Abune Philipos, the 1st Patriarch of Eritrea in 1995. [We have tangible evidence proving that these people are part of the Renewal movement within the Eritrean Church]. Its members including priests have been seen teaching direct contradiction about Holy Tradition, Church practices, and Saints of Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church publicly [ask and we would gladly give you the evidence]. Again, the Coptic Church will be responsible for allowing to take roots of this kind of teaching within the Holy Church of Eritrean Orthodox. [ Knowing the history of Indian Orthodox Church and its division, they should have known better].
- d. The renewal movement in Eritrea started well before the Church’s independence. The mission of this movement is to reform the Eritrean Orthodox Church to be more like the Protestant Church in its doctrine, worship and its practices. After the Church’s independence and autonomy, this group continued its erroneous teaching within few churches particularly in Asmara. We have proven evidence of this movement from before independence; and sadly we want to report to you that many of the clergy especially in power of the Diaspora Northern America, Europe and the Middle East Diocese were not only part of this movement as a leader but also have been seen teaching messages consistent with the renewal movement in their preaching, worship services as well as in not upholding the Holy tradition of the church. As we mentioned above, this group was exposed, corrected and dismantled by the order of the Holy Synod under His Holiness 1st Patriarch of Eritrean Orthodox Church Abune Philipos in 1995 after the Church scholars found grave heresies within their teaching and not upholding the Holy Tradition of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. The continual of this group’s teaching within Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church here in diaspora has become the main reasons for believers to renounce their most holy faith/fathers and defect to accepting Protestant [ism] or to not adhere to the teaching and Holy Tradition of Eritrean Tewahdo Orthodox Church.





- e. The group- Diaspora Northern America, Europe and the Middle East Diocese represent very minor of the Eritrean Orthodox believers in diaspora, to be exact, not more than 3- 5%. We represent more than 60 churches [>90% of Tewahdo Orthodox believers] here under the Diocese of North America and Canada Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church.
- f. Now the so called “Eritrean Diaspora Diocese” are propagating against the Holy Synod’s decision based on unfounded ground and inexcusable reason that **Abune Antonios** might have been “manipulated” and the decision might have also been made under “government involvement”. For those who follow the way this group and their methodology, this is not surprising. Instead of rejoicing that there is a greater opportunity for a united Church [ and His Holiness could come to his old seat], they have started to divide the believers along political lines. We don’t want to comment on any political views because that is not the Holy Church’s calling, nor is it for anyone serving in the Holy Church. The main reason why this group is voicing their opposition is because when unity comes, there will not have a place for their renewal movement teachings inside the Eritrean Orthodox Church. **WE SHOULD EMPHASIZE THAT THE HOLY CALLING OF THE SYNOD FOR RECONCILIATION IS BASED ON FORGIVENESS INCLUDING THESE PEOPLE.** We love all of them, and with the prayer of Saints and grace of God, we hope to come to the Holy Apostolic Orthodox Church as one. However, we reject their erroneous teaching about the Church, and its practices. Our ultimate hope is that they hear and accept the timely calling of a heartfelt forgiveness of the Synod at once with a repentant spirit.

We could have said more. However, In light of reconciliation and Church unity call of the Holy Synod of Eritrean Orthodox Church, [WE] Believers of Eritrean Tewahdo Orthodox humbly ask **THE COPTIC CHURCH** to make things right once and for all by doing the following:

1. By revoking the illegitimately assigned -its own- Bishop to shepherd the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo believers.
2. In light of the recent circumstance, if need to be, the Coptic Church official **MUST** resolve any issue with their counterpart Eritrean Tewahdo Holy Synod instead of prolonging the division within the Church by interfering into an independent and autonomous Eritrean Orthodox Church.
3. Since the Coptic Church has had a major role in promoting this separate “Eritrean Diaspora Diocese” group, and with the leverage that they have within this group, the Coptic Church should work more than usual [or anyone] to bring unity in Eritrean Orthodox Church. It is a time where the Coptic Church **OUGHT TO** undo all the historical mistakes she has done to its sister Church and the Church fathers of the Holy Synod of Eritrean Orthodox Church. The Coptic Church should also prepare this group to come and join the Holy Eritrean Orthodox





Church with repented spirit for the sake of forgiveness with an understanding that this group has been promoting a renewal movement within the Eritrean Church and its members.

4. All the Six Oriental Church need to be aware of this development, and should pray and work diligently for the Unity and Strength of Eritrean Orthodox Church and its Synod.

May God bless Our Church.

May the Intercession of the Mother of God, St. Mary, Angels and Saints be with all of us.

The Sunday School of Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Diocese of USA and Canada.

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