

WHY undermine THE Holy Synod?

RESPONSE TO RENEWAL [TEHADSO] MOVEMENT BASED ON ATLANTA ON HOLY SYNOD.

Holy Synod by definition is:

“the highest legislative body in the church, empowered to make ecclesiastical laws and issue statutes governing all ranks of the clergy. It is the highest judging authority to pass judgment in all cases of infringement of church doctrine. It also considers appeals against its judgments. It is the highest authority responsible for safeguarding faith and doctrine, interpreting this faith in the light of established ecclesiastical tradition. It is the primary source of church ritual. Its decisions are final, but may be reviewed in the light of changing circumstances.”¹

Holy Synod includes the assembly of all bishops including the patriarch. The highest power in all Orthodox Churches lies in the Synod rather than in a single person such as the patriarch. Historically, the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church since being autocephalous [Independent] from the Coptic Church in 1993 has 10 bishops including 4 patriarchs. The main reason why we are trying to explain this is due to the many questions raised from the Atlanta based Tehadiso [Renewal] movement about the power and legitimacy of Eritrean Orthodox Holy Synod. This group as it was exposed by the Sunday School of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Dioceses of USA and Canada recently², is a continuation of the Renewal Movement “Tehadiso” within the Eritrean Orthodox Church that existed before the Eritrean Independence. It was exposed, corrected, and dismantled by the order of the Holy Synod under His Holiness 1st Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church Abune Philipos in 2001 after the Church scholars found grave heresies within their teaching and not upholding the Holy Tradition of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. This group represents a very slight percentage of Eritrean Orthodox believers [6 Churches to be exact] in USA and Canada. The Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church Under the Holy Synod represent 53 churches in North America.

The main question that the Tehadiso movement has raised is “How could a Synod be called Holy without a Patriarch?”. One of the techniques that the Renewal movement is historically known for is using whatever opportunity granted to arise in the Church to manipulate and reach their divisive goal. Obviously, now they are using the case of Abune Antonios to undermine/challenge the Holiness of the Synod and ultimately of the Church as a whole. According to the Holy Tradition and Teaching of the Church, the holiness of the Synod drives from the **Holy Church**

¹ The practice of Authority and Jurisdiction in the Coptic Orthodox Tradition by Metropolitan Bishoy
<http://www.stgeorgephilly.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Practice-of-Authority-and-Jurisdiction1.pdf>

² <https://english.eritreantewahdo.org/?sermons=sunday-school-statement>

which was cleansed once and for all with the blood of our Saviour and God, Jesus Christ. The Church will also live pure without blemish through the work of the Holy Spirit in the Holy Sacrament. *All graces flow from God through Her through the Holy Sacraments she provides.* As it is always the case with the brand of a renewal movement, this group desires to implant a new teaching within the Holy Church by raising doubts about the Holiness of the Synod without the patriarch. First and foremost, a patriarch is one of the many bishops that was selected to lead the Church along with the other bishops. The Holiness of the Synod drives **only** through the **Church** not from the Patriarch. For example, in case of death of a Patriarch, the Holy Synod doesn't cease to be Holy. The Synod would still function with Holiness as equally as when the Patriarch was alive. In all Orthodox churches by-laws, the Holy Synod³ can convene for a regular assembly and take appropriate actions if more than half of the bishops ask for a meeting while the Patriarch refused to call for one. This is all to say that though the Patriarch plays a major role in the leadership role of the Church, his absence neither make the Synod less holy nor does it make its [Synod's] decision less effective or without power. The idea of propagating and elevating the Patriarch as a source of Holiness, and any decision taken without him as ineffective, is not consistent with the teaching and Holy Tradition of the Oriental Orthodox Church. It just confirms who this group is and what their motives are as the Renewal "Tehadiso" movement.

The Renewal "Tehadiso" movement has been trying for so long to "modernize" or reform the Eritrean Orthodox Church to be more like the Protestant church in its entirety since before Eritrean Independence. It has failed before. Now, after hibernating for so long within the Church as a repented group, once again it has started their erroneous teaching particularly in the diaspora using the case of Abune Antonios as a coverup. Their teaching of Christ as a mediator/intercessor, neglecting the importance/significance of the Saints, and not upholding the Holy tradition and practices/rituals of the Church have been well documented within the Church. The main reasons for the Atlanta based Renewal "Tehadiso" movement to undermine/challenge the Holy Synod have many consequential implications to the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church and its believers.

1. Undermining/challenging the Holy Synod so that there is no authentic power to stop them from renewing [Tehadiso] the Church. When one wants to uproot a belief system or institution, one needs to take away the head or the source. The Holy Synod is the ultimate legislature and executive body of the Church. If they "manage" to undermine the power of the Holy Synod, they can do whatever they want in every way they can to reform the church. Therefore, their first and foremost objective is to make the Eritrean Orthodox believers doubt, question and mistrust the Holy Synod using the case of Abune Antonios

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<https://www.google.com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.stgeorgephilly.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2FThe-Practice-of-Authority-and-Jurisdiction1.pdf>

to further their agenda. As it is mentioned in the first paragraph, the Holy Synod has the highest responsibility for safeguarding the faith and doctrine, interpreting this faith in the light of established ecclesiastical tradition. If they undermine the Holy Synod's power and legitimacy through any means, they will have the ultimate power to decide what is right about the faith and its practices, and hence finish their agenda of making the Church in their like and image: Protestant. What they usually forget is that Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ's promise to the Church saying, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." [Mt. 16:18].

2. Using the case of Abune Antonios, this group has been portraying a misleading leadership hierarchy of the Patriarch in orthodox Church so as to undermine the spiritual power of the Holy Synod. As mentioned above, the role of the patriarch is always attached to its colleagues or bishops in the Synod. 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 Synod⁴ and other times as a Diocese for "few" Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo people in Diaspora that are not accountable to anyone. Their main objection is that since Abune Antonios has been removed from his position as a patriarch by the Holy Synod, the Synod no longer has a spiritual power and legitimacy to govern, oversight, and defend the Church. They have already started working as a group that has power that equate the Synod in their decision as well as in action. But where did they come up with this idea if not to mislead and create doubt about the Holy Synod within the believers. According to the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Holy Synod has the ultimate power in everything pertaining to the Church's affair. If the Patriarch falls from grace or does irreparable damage to the Church, the Holy Synod, as it is in the case with Abune Antonios, could take any measurement to protect and safeguard the teaching and Holy tradition of the Church. For example, one of the few reasons for the removal of Abune Antonios from his post was that after he became the Patriarch, Abune Antonios continuously defended and allowed the renewal movement in a few Churches in Asmara to take roots after they were previously exposed and dismantled in 2001 by the Holy Synod. The Holy Synod, consistent with protocol agreement between the Coptic and Eritrean Orthodox⁵, has a responsibility of safeguarding the Holy Church of Christ even from within the Church and has taken the appropriate action in different levels at different times. The Bible warns the bishops to "take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood".[Acts 20:28]. This is to say that neither an

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http://tewahdo.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1691:2016-02-15-17-29-43&catid=63:2008-08-24-02-53-16&Itemid=75

⁵ https://www.google.com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Ftewahdo.org%2FtewahdoChurch%2FProtocol_Eng.pdf

individual bishop nor the patriarch but the Holy Synod has absolute power in the Eritrean Orthodox Church.

3. Undermining the Holy Synod ultimately leads to the destruction of the Church, and thus would be easy to bring the believers to other non orthodox religious groups. As we tried to overemphasize in this article again and again, it is the Holy Synod who leads the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit that drives from the Church in her Holy Sacraments. The Renewal “ Tehadso” movement by erroneous teachings are not only taking the faithful to the hall of the Non orthodox churches and other belief system but also putting wrong teachings about the Holy Synod in the mind of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo believers. This eventually would lead to distrust and disobey to the Holy Church. One of the tactics that has been recently employed by this group is that of calling a bishop who is a member of the Holy Synod “aba-name- of the monk” instead of His grace “..”as if he doesn’t have the rank. For starters in the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church, the graceness of one’s rank whether be it a priest or a deacon, cannot be taken away by any individual except by the Holy Synod. The Renewal Movement has a twofold objective in doing so- one is to discredit a member or a bishop as unqualified or disgraced that would result in ultimate rejection of any Holy Synod’s decisions that the bishop involved. Hence, the Renewal movement not only spreads doubts about the teaching/authenticity of the bishops teaching/recommendation and decisions but also teaches to reject and disregard the teaching of the Church in general. This has been their plan, mission and final goal from the beginning. This is the main reason why the Holy Synod released a statement recently about standing firm in faith within the Holy Church.^{6,7}
4. This group has been projecting the Holy Synod as political institution⁸ and its bishop⁹ as a politician to have the high ground on spiritual matters in hoping so to be sole preserver of the Holy faith. From time to time, this Renewal movement throughout its publications, has painted the Holy Synod’s decision as statement of either politically motivated or influenced by the government. This not only puts the faithful to mistrust the Church but also made political people to have a platform¹⁰ within the Holy Church. This kind of

⁶ <http://lisantewahdo.org/index.php/16-2015-07-31-06-18-02/512-27-2008>

⁷ <https://english.eritreantewahdo.org/?sermons=stand-firm-in-the-faith-1-cor-1613>

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http://tewahdo.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1725:the-current-situation-of-patriarch-antonios-of-eritrea&catid=88:church-news&Itemid=171

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http://tewahdo.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1707:2016-05-16-19-01-41&catid=64:2008-08-24-02-53-39&Itemid=80

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<http://assenna.com/%E1%88%98%E1%8A%A5%E1%88%A8%E1%88%9D%E1%89%B3%E1%8A%95-%E1%88%93%E1%89%80%E1%8A%9B-%E1%88%98%E1%89%A5%E1%88%AD%E1%88%85%E1%8A%95-%E1%8A%95%E1%8A%A3%E1%89%A1%E1%8A%90-%E1%8A%A5%E1%8A%95%E1%8C%A6/>

rhetoric has been used as a tool of dividing the faithful within the church along political line, paralyzing the Holy Synod and finally weakening the Holy Church to make the faithful vulnerable, be manipulated easily and leave the Holy Church for their agenda of protestantism. 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. However, **we object with utmost sincerity for any political group to use Abune Antonios's case to further their agenda and divide the faithful.** All Church affairs including the ongoing process of reconciliation [Abune Antonios's case] within the Church are spiritual¹¹ **and would ask ,in the name of God's mercy, of any political group to leave the Church alone and allow the Holy Synod to function appropriately.**

5. **Undermining and challenging the legitimacy of the Holy Synod would allow the renewal movement to create a new "synod" here in abroad that could be used to promote its agenda in every way.** This group has been seen functioning as a "[holy synod]" under a Coptic Bishop of Eritrean Origin, His Grace Abune Mekarios¹², to issue statement directly contradicting the Eritrean Orthodox Holy Synod. First and foremost, His Grace Abune Mekarios doesn't have any legal rights to represent the Eritrean Orthodox Church nor does he have a power to address the Eritrean Orthodox faithful as a shepherd. Because the protocol agreement signed between the Coptic and Eritrean Orthodox Church, in Article 5, doesn't allow for any Bishop of individual church to interfere in one-another church's affairs¹³. Not only that, according to the recent Sunday School of Eritrean Orthodox Dioceses of USA and Canada statement the illegitimate appointed Bishop for the Eritrean people by the Coptic Church has been seen clearly teaching contrary to the Eritrean Church Holy Tradition, Church practices, and its local Saints¹⁴. Above all, he has been establishing dioceses¹⁵ without any legitimate power and ordaining many clergy that have been known to be protestant¹⁶. With what power and right is he functioning as a shepherd of the Eritrean Orthodox Church in diaspora?! Even though the huge historical mistake applies to the Coptic Church, it is very sad and unfortunate that this Renewal "Tehadiso" movement has used the Coptic Church effectively as a means to meet its goal.

¹¹ <https://english.eritreantewahdo.org/?sermons=stand-firm-in-the-faith-1-cor-1613>

¹²

http://tewahdo.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1691:2016-02-15-17-29-43&catid=63:2008-08-24-02-53-16&Itemid=75

¹³ http://tewahdo.org/TewahdoChurch/Protocol_Eng.pdf

¹⁴ <https://english.eritreantewahdo.org/?sermons=sunday-school-statement>

¹⁵

http://tewahdo.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1023:a-diocese-in-the-european-nations-has-been-established&catid=88:church-news&Itemid=171

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http://tewahdo.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=780:deacon-professor-habtu-ghebre-ab-is-ordained-a-priest-&catid=88:church-news&Itemid=171

Throughout history, every Church has passed through some ups and downs; however attacking the highest legislative body of the Church and its bishops to make the faithful vulnerable to manipulate and bring them to a different protestant denomination take precedent by this Renewal Movement. Based on recent Sunday School statement there is unequivocal evidence of this group as a continual of renewal movement that existed before Eritrean Independence which was exposed, dismantled by the Eritrean Holy Synod ; and now it has 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. This group in trying to delegitimize the Holy Synod not only attempts to break the faithful from the Holy Church in hoping of reforming them to protestantism, but also has gave the Church's platform for politicians to use for their end game. In Conclusion, 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 Holy Synod, 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. For **all politicians** who want to use the crack in our Church for their end goal, we ask them plainly and humbly, in the name of our merciful God, **to leave** the Holy Church, its Bishops and the Holy Synod **alone**. Lastly but not least we publicly ask His grace **Abune Mekarios** of Coptic bishop to be an agent of God-send reconciliator instead of deep rooted divisiveness within the Church.

May God bless and bring peace to our Church.

The blessing of the Mother of God, St Mary, Angles and all Saints be with all of us.