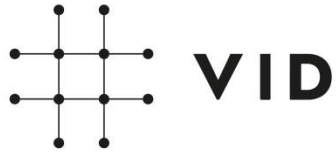# Confirmation Ministry in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

A Critical Assessment

VID

**CONFIRMATION MINISTRY**

**in the**

**Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus**

**A Critical Assessment**

Ebisse Gudeta

VID Specialized University

Stavanger

Thesis for the Degree Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)

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## Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to Almighty God, my creator, my savior, my source of wisdom, knowledge and understanding. I also dedicate this work to the amazing EECMY women and women missionaries who tirelessly labored in preaching the Gospel and rendering diaconal ministry, but were denied recognition and opportunities for further studies and participating in decision making.

## Declaration

I declare that the present thesis is my own work and that all published or other sources of material consulted have been acknowledged in notes to the text or the bibliography. I confirm that the thesis has not been submitted for a comparable academic award.

Signed: Ebisse Gudeta

Date: 25 April 2022

# Acknowledgements

Tadelee Fida and Miss. Almaz Wlatagi for their assistance , prayer and encouragement during my studies.

I also render special thanks to my husband Addisu Higu and his whole family for his patience, love, encouragement and prayer throughout my study. Last but not least I want to acknowledge the love and the patience of my children Bekawak Addisu and Jallel Addisu ,my source of encouragement, God Bless you Bekisho and Jalle!

## Names and titles

In Ethiopia people are presented with first name + father's name, and sometimes grandfather's name, as in Ebisse Gudeta Abdissa. I follow common practice with first name + father's name tradition in text and references.

The official language of Ethiopia is Amharic. Ethiopian law recognizes ethnic languages and their established norms of spelling names. As I work within two Ethiopian languages, I will use the Amharic norm and transcribe the names to English according to common practice. Ethnic traditions of spelling will be used when I refer to authors.

Non-Ethiopians are presented with first name + family name the first time they are mentioned in the text. If their names recur, I only use family name. Full name will be found in references. Ethiopian culture is formal as to the use of titles (Mr., Mrs., Rev., and Dr.) A recurring use of titles in the text will burden it unnecessarily. Therefore, in general, I have adopted a policy of leaving out titles. Referring to persons quoted from research interviews I use titles as this is of importance in that context.

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ALM | American Lutheran Mission |
| AUPM | American United Presbyterian Mission |
| CEEC | Conference of Ethiopian Evangelical Churches |
| CO | Central Office |
| DASSC | Development and Social Services Commission of EECMY |
| DEM | Danish Evangelical Mission |
| EEC | Ethiopian Evangelical College |
| EECMY | Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus |
| EPRDF | Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front |
| EOTC | Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church |
| Eva. | Evangelist |
| GHM | German Hermannsburg Mission |
| ID | Informal Discussion |
| JLP | Joint Literature Program |
| LMC | Lutheran Mission Committee |
| LWF | Lutheran World Federation |
| MYS | Mekane Yesus [Theological] Seminary |
| NLM | Norwegian Lutheran Mission |
| NMS | Norwegian Missionary Society |
| Rev. | Reverend |
| SEM | Swedish Evangelical Mission |
| SIM | Sudan Interior Mission |
| TEE | Theological Education by Extension |
| NESH | National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and Humanities in Norway |
| YDCS | Yemisrach Demts Communication Service |
| YDLC | Yemissrach Dimts Literacy Campaign |

## Abstract

Anchored in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20), teaching is one of the core functions of the Christian church. In the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), confirmation ministry, which is the focus of my study, has the function of basic Christian education. It is a requirement for full voting and communicant membership in the church.

The teaching ministry of congregations has traditionally been a sub-discipline under the overarching umbrella of Practical Theology. In line with recent developments in Practical Theology I make human experience, in this case the experience of confirmands and confirmation teachers, the starting point and focus of my enquiry. The core task of my thesis is: *An investigation and critical assessment of contemporary confirmation ministry in two EECMY congregations*.

The EECMY, established in 1959, has experienced rapid numerical growth in membership, and has at present (2020) more than ten million members. Because of the great growth confirmation classes are attended by huge numbers of confirmands. My findings show that the large number of confirmands is seen as a sign of God's active blessing of congregational ministry. Many of the confirmands are grateful for the teaching. However, my research also reveals challenges that prevent confirmation ministry from fully serving its intended purpose. The large numbers of confirmands thwart attempts to personalize instruction or engage in active learning strategies. The pedagogical approach, basically the lecturing mode, a great diversity of age, along with varied educational and religious backgrounds, complicate the educational situation. A shortage of qualified teachers and the lack of a standardized curriculum have led congregations to develop ad-hoc strategies for confirmation instruction. These issues combine to present a real threat to the passing-on of the core theological convictions of the EECMY to the next generation of church members. As a result, confirmation ministry is encountering limitations in serving its purpose.

My findings are eye-openers to understanding the dynamics between membership growth and membership management, which undoubtedly ought to alert the EECMY to reflect critically on its current practice of confirmation ministry.

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# 1 Introduction

Christian education is central to the life of a living and growing church. The ministry and service of any church reflects the quality of the education given to its members.[1] In the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) confirmation ministry has, in most cases, the function of basic Christian education (see 1.2). It is a requirement for full voting and communicant membership in the church. It is therefore of central concern that the education of confirmands as part of the church's total ministry is well taken care of. In this regard the focus of this study is Confirmation Ministry. This study is located within the discipline of Practical Theology, in which Christian education is a sub-discipline (see 1.4).[2] This study is an investigation and a critical assessment of confirmation ministry in two congregations of the EECMY (see 1.5). The assessment will identify some key themes and challenges of general importance, which also may have a bearing to the church's total education ministry.

A characteristic of Practical Theology is its beginning point in human experience.[3] An observation of a teaching session in one of the congregations will therefore set the stage.

## 1.1 Encountering the field

I went to an EECMY congregation to commence my field study. The Minister showed me the classroom where the confirmation teaching took place. When I entered the room, six of the confirmands were present, while others stood outside the classroom, chatting. The room is equipped to serve for various purposes. It is furnished as a worship hall. It is therefore filled with benches, and no tables. The glass windows were painted dark and remained closed all the time. The room gradually filled with confirmands of different age groups, comprised of teenagers, adults and elderly people, I also observed mothers caring their infant children. Eventually, the room was crowded with more than sixty confirmands. Many of the confirmands carried their Bible and a notebook while others came without.

The teacher introduced himself, mentioning he had a long time of voluntary service in the congregation. After a short opening prayer, he announced that the subject he was going to teach was the "Ten Commandments." Hearing the topic, the attention of the confirmands changed, and they started to whisper to each other, but no one dared to speak out. I noticed something was wrong, but I could not discern the reason until a girl sitting next to me, whispered to another, "We haven't completed the topic from last week." The other girl expressed uneasiness on her face. It seems the previous teacher had not completed the topic designated for last week's lesson and this teacher was introducing a new topic.

As the confirmands kept on mumbling, the teacher demanded attention. He neither showed interest in the cause of their discomfort nor did he set aside a few minutes to refresh

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[1] Andre Karamaga, Foreword, in, *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, eds. Isabel Apawo and Dietrich Werner (Regnum series in global Christianity, Regnum, Oxford, 2013).

[2] Richard R. Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2005). 10.

[3] John Swinton & Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, (London, SCM Press, 2006), v.

the memory of the past lesson. Restoring attention, he started his lecture by asking a confirmand to read from Ex 20:1-17. He begun to explain how the Ten Commandments came into being. His explanation gave a background on the covenant between God and the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He discussed the Israelites' enslavement in Egypt, followed by a miraculous exodus and an experience in the wilderness where the Lord gave the Ten Commandments to His people through Moses. Before moving to the next topic, he asked the confirmands to rise and sing a song. Though it was energizing for a sedentary and suffocated class, they were not familiar with the lyrics nor the melody of the song. He resumed his lecture. He explained the Ten Commandments are divided into two parts: commandments 1-3 deal with the relationship between God and His people, while commandments 4-10 are about the relationship between humans.

He jotted down three points on the importance of the commandments using the blackboard. First, the Ten Commandments teach good morals. Second, they provide guidance on how to live with our neighbours and third, they instruct on principles of worship. The teacher did not bring any teaching materials or books along except his own notebook and the Bible. Most confirmands were busy taking notes, while others listened attentively. A majority of the confirmands were bending over their notes writing his lecture word for word. Others seemed to struggle to strike a balance between listening and writing.

The teacher stressed that those who are not Christians are free to live as they want to live, but the people of God should live according to God's command. In explaining the significance of the commandments, he mentioned that even the laws of government were derived from the Ten Commandments. He underlined the knowledge and observance of the Ten Commandments is important for both a spiritually and socially healthy life. Then he asked one of the confirmands to read from Col 2:16-17. Another confirmand was requested to read from Ps 119:33-59. In the light of the latter, the significance of obeying commandments was explained. Accordingly, he deduced that happiness, wisdom, and eternal life are consequential effects of obedience. Confirmands were told that obedience and fear of the Lord is the essence of being a Christian. He added that adhering to the commandments was crucial for their relationship with God. Then he promised to give a detailed explanation of each commandment in the coming classes.

Finally, the teacher opened the floor for questions and clarification. More than ten confirmands raised their hands. Only two got the chance to ask. The first question was by a young confirmand, "Is it possible to keep all the commandments and lead a life free of sin?" The second question was by an adult confirmand: "Why does the Adventist church celebrate Saturday instead of Sunday?" The teacher tried to respond to the first question, saying no one is free from sin; it is only the blood of Christ that makes us free from sin, but we are children of God, called to live a holy life. We, therefore, should obey His commandments. He promised to answer the second question in the next class, mentioning there was no time to answer all the questions. Lastly, he asked the class to stand and end the session by praying the Lord's Prayer.

My brief encounter offers a profile of existing realities related to the teaching practice of confirmation ministry. The ministry is attended by a great number of people comprised of different age groups, academic levels, and religious backgrounds. A majority of youth as well as adults came to the classroom with their Bibles and notebooks, took notes and read the Bible texts while others were just listening. Most of those only listening were adults and elderly who

might not have been familiar with formal education.[4] Those who seemed familiar with Scripture reading, singing, and praying, might be those who come from Christian families, baptized in the EECMY, and had attended children's Sunday school, while those who attended the class without much participation seemed to be new converts from a variety of different religious backgrounds.

Observing the class raised many pedagogical questions: Why were they so many in one class? Why were they not divided into smaller groups according to their age, educational level, and religious background? The monologue of the teacher left the confirmands in a state of disengagement; who has the responsibility for the teaching? Who is monitoring the theological content of the lectures? The absence of textbooks and teaching material to conduct a proper learning process also raises concerns. The teacher was teaching from handwritten notes while the confirmands were taking notes. Is there any standard curriculum for confirmation teaching? Is there an outlined outcome in the curriculum? Where does this process lead the confirmands?

My first field experience generated many urgent questions. If such a brief snapshot of reality raises so many concerns, a deeper exploration of the existing realities of confirmation ministry would surely unveil more urgent questions, which beg for ecclesiastical and academic intervention.

## 1.2    Background

The social and political history of Ethiopia contributes to contemporary social realities within the EECMY. For this reason, this section will present the background of the EECMY with a focus on the significance and the practice of confirmation ministry.

### 1.2.1    Aspects of Ethiopian church history

Ethiopia is situated on the Horn of Africa. The boundaries of modern Ethiopia were established in the second half of the 19th century when the ancient Christian kingdom in the north expanded to the south and west to include a great number of non-Christian ethnic groups. In 1993 Eritrea was established as an independent state, thus altering the border in the north.

In 2021 Ethiopia had more than 100 million inhabitants of whom approximately 40% are orthodox Christian, 20% evangelical Christian and 30% Muslim and about 0.6 follow

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[4] Formal education: refers to "the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded 'education system', running from primary school through the university…" Peter Baguma and Irene Aheisibwe, Issues in African Education, in Handbook of African Educational Theories and Practices: A Generative Teacher Education Curriculum, eds. Bame Nsamenang and Therese M. S Tchombe, (Cameron: Human Development Resource Centre, 2011), 23.

traditional religious practices. [5] Due to the influence of Christianity and Islam, the Ethiopian traditionalists have no place in the traditional historiography of Ethiopia. They are remembered in their role in the discussions of the syncretic nature of Orthodox Christianity and Islam.[6] At present there is a resurgence of traditional faiths, mainly due to religious freedom.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC), belonging to the oriental churches, was established in the fourth century.[7] The content and form of faith and worship of the EOTC reflected not only traditions which it had received from the Early church, but also unique responses to the rich variety of cultures amongst which it operated over the centuries. As such this church may be seen as an African expression of the Christian faith. The aim of the

The event that incited the establishment the evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia was 18th century evangelical revival movements in Europe. From their perspective Eastern churches including EOTC had drifted away from the true faith. As a result, they needed European reformation type renewal.[8] This led to initiatives where Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries came to revitalize the EOTC.

Peter Heyling, the first Lutheran missionary to Ethiopia, arrived in 1634, where he engaged the clergy in Bible-study in Greek and Hebrew.[9] He translated St John's Gospel into Amharic. Until then, Ge'ez was used for Bible-reading and liturgy. This language was only understood by priests and scholars.[10] Heyling initiated a movement within the EOTC that linked up with protestant missionary enterprises in the 19th century.[11] There is a direct historical line from Heyling to the founders of the EECMY, which underlines the significance of these early Western influences on Ethiopian Christianity for our contemporary context for ministry.[12]

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[5] Ethiopian Orthodox 43.8%, Muslim 31.3%, Protestant 22.8%, Catholic 0.7%, Traditional 0.6% other 0.8%. Ethiopia, Retrieved from https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/static/9226bc2764d67ed8634602588bc77090/ET-summary.pdf. On 02.06.2022.

[6] Maresha Mengeste, *The Possibility of a Religiously Inclusive Historiography of Ethiopia* (Ph.D. thesis, Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, 2016). 22-24.

[7] Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia Resistance and Resilience* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 16.

[8] Fekadu Gurmessa,*The Evangelical Faith Movement in Ethiopia and the Establishment of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus,* Transl. and ed. by Ezekiel Gebissa. (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2009), 78-79.

[9]Arén, Gustav, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: Origins of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Stockholm: Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia XXXII, EFS Förlaget, 1978), 34.

[10] Mekane Yesus Seminary, *History of Christianity in Ethiopia: With Emphasis on the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (*Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: M YS, TEE Diploma Program, 2007), 36.

[11] Johnny Bakke*, Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions within the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia XLIV, Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1987), 15.

[12]Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers, 37.*

Missionaries from Church Mission Society (CMS) worked through translation and distribution of the Bible and Christian literature.[13] Their reports caught the interest of other mission organizations, among them, the German Hermannsburg Mission (GHM) and the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM).[14]

The GHM envisioned work among the non-Christian Oromo people as early as 1849; however, due to resistance by the emperor it took more than half a century to accomplish their plan.[15] The SEM arrived in 1866, also aiming to reach the Oromo. Not being permitted to travel through the empire, they settled on the coast of what was then Egyptian-Ottoman territory.[16] Here they established a community, a school and a clinic. Some of the school children were freed slaves. Among them were Onesimos (Abba Gammachis) and Aster Ganno Salban. They translated the Bible, hymns, and *Luther's Small Catechism* into Oromo. These translations are still used. The SEM also took care of excommunicated priests of evangelical conviction from the EOTC in Eritrea.[17] Even though the priests and the SEM missionaries had no plan to plant a new church, the antagonism they faced by the EOTC forced them to establish a small congregation, named Bethel in 1878.[18]

### 1.2.2    *The role of confirmation*

In the Bethel congregation, the validity of EOTC baptism was never questioned, nor was rebaptism of orthodox Christians ever considered.[19] Therefore, for these former orthodox Christians, confirmation became the gateway to fellowship in the evangelical church. If the person had a non-Christian background baptism and confirmation was the requirement for membership. Confirmation instruction thus took on the role of the catechumenate, or basic Christian education. Because of this, confirmation became the decisive factor in preparation for Holy Communion and church marriage.[20] The confirmation practice at Bethel became the norm for the EECMY.

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[13] CMS was established in England in 1799. Samuel Gobat, Johann Ludwig Krapf, and Karl Isenberg were sent to Ethiopia. Fekadu Gurmessa, *Evangelical Faith Movement*, 79.

[14] Karl Ludwig Krapf worked in Ethiopia from 1837 to 1842. Through his travels he learnt about the Oromo people, their language, history, and culture. Krapf emphasized the need to evangelize the Oromo as a gateway to reach other African countries. Arén, *The Evangelical Pioneers*, 73.

[15] Fekadu Gurmessa, *The Evangelical Faith Movement*, 141-144.

[16] MYS, *History of Christianity in Ethiopia, 51*.

[17] Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers,* 221.

[18] Ibid, 221.

[19] Ibid. 166-167.

[20] Ibid. 224.

In the 20th century, several missions established a presence in Ethiopia (see 4.3). The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) developed an extensive effort in Southern Ethiopia from 1927 onwards. Their work resulted in the Kale Hiwott Church. All missionary societies were engaged in education. In the EECMY confirmation ministry was combined with literacy. The Bible and *Luther's Small Catechism* were the main source material.[21]

Evangelical missionaries were expelled during the Italian occupation (1936-41). But indigenous leaders took responsibility. They established the Conference of Ethiopian Evangelical Churches (CEEC).[22] The CEEC held annual meetings on a regular basis between 1944 and 1958. This endeavour ran into difficulties due to denominational differences.[23] In the end an evangelical church was established on a Lutheran confessional basis (see ch, 5). The EECMY was instituted as a national church in 1959, taking its name from the first evangelical congregation in Addis Ababa, *Mekane Yesus*, meaning the *place of Jesus*.[24]

Synods with a Presbyterian confession were integrated as full members of the EECMY in 1974.[25] It may, therefore, be correct to say that the EECMY is formed by the Lutheran and Presbyterian confessional traditions. This study relates to traditional Lutheran synods, and therefore, will continue to refer to the EECMY as Lutheran.

After its establishment as a national church, the EECMY played an important role both in the spiritual and the social development of the country. From the early sixties to the mid-seventies, the EECMY was engaged in a nationwide literacy campaign that involved more than half a million students.[26] In 1972 the EECMY wrote a letter to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) raising the question of the interrelation between proclamation of the gospel and human development.[27] The letter caught international attention and has had a profound history of influence in the EECMY.

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[21] Ibid. 224.
[22] Olav Sæverås, *On Church-Mission Relations in Ethiopia 1944-1969: With Special Reference to the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Lutheran Missions* (Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia, Oslo: Lunde, 1974), 40-41.
[23] Ibid. 62, 75.
[24] Ibid. 251.
[25] Emmanuel Abraham, *Reminiscences of My Life*, (Oslo: Lunde, 1995) 278-282.
[26] Yemissrach Dimts Literacy Campaign, (YDLC), started its operations in Ethiopia in 1962 with financial help from LWF. 1.672 schools with a total of 151.000 students were in operation. Margareta and Rolf Sjöström, *How Do You Spell Development: A study of a Literacy Campaign in Ethiopia* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1983), 17.
[27] The essence of the EECMY letter to the LWF has five points: 1. An integral human development, where spiritual and material needs are seen together. 2. The division between proclamation and development is harmful to the church. 3. The development of the inner person is a prerequisite for a healthy development of the society. 4. The cooperating agencies are forcing the African church to follow priorities other than their own, 5. The donor agencies ought to review their criteria for allocation of assistance.

In the 1970s, church leaders felt a need to unify the diversified Christian education curriculum inherited from the various missions.[28] The developed curriculum had three foci: a) instructing new converts in basic biblical knowledge, b) teaching on spiritual growth, and c) preparing confirmands for further ministry in church and society.[29] However, the dissemination and application of the curriculum was hampered due the pressure from the communist regime (1974-1991). Christians were persecuted, churches closed, and properties confiscated. Confirmation instruction had to be given in secret.[30]

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) that came to power in 1991 brought religious freedom to the country. This, among others, meant a right to establish institutions of religious education. EPRDF policy of religion brought great opportunities to all evangelical churches. However, the EECMY faced new challenges such as disagreements regarding the language of worship, explosive membership growth without necessary resources for training, external religious influences, and the negative impact of globalization and secularization.[31] Current membership of the EECMY stands at more than ten million (2021).[32] This makes the EECMY the world's largest Lutheran church.[33]

## 1.3    Review of related literature

After sketching the historical context of the EECMY, it is also important to survey the literature as a context for this study. According to John W. Creswell a literature survey seeks to accomplish several purposes including: sharing the results of other studies that are related to the one being undertaken, relating the study to the larger ongoing dialogue in literature, filling in gaps and extending prior studies, providing a framework for establishing the importance of the study as well as a benchmark for comparing the results with other findings.[34]

In Ethiopia, there are two large evangelical churches and some smaller churches. The Baptist, Kale Hiwott Church, has an extensive program for pre-baptism education. Many studies in the field relate to this church. There is no room to expound on this research here, but footnotes will connect to relevant literature. The current study concentrates on research relevant

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[28] EECMY. 5th *General Assembly Minutes, April 23–27, 1967*. EECMY Archive, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
[29] EECMY. Christian Education Section, Annual Report 1997, EECMY Archive, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
[30] Øyvind M. Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia: The Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church 1974-1985,* (Eastern Africa Studies, Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 221.
[31] EECMY, Still Serving the Whole Person*, 2013-2917,* 8-9.
[32] EECMY Department of Mission and Theology Annual Report, Addis Ababa: Ethiopia, 2021.
[33] International Lutheran Council, EECMY, Retrieved on 30th August 2019 from, https://ilc-online.org/tag/eecmy//
[34] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th. ed. (London: Sage, 2014), 57.

to the EECMY. Outlining certain knowledge gaps in this field of research will help to show the relevance of this research. I will also refer to some studies of relevance with regards to confirmation from churches in the Western world. These have limited relevance to this study.

### 1.3.1 EECMY Studies

Previous studies on the EECMY have generally focused on the establishment, historical development and growth of the church. Only a few like Johnny Bakke's study on Christian ministry, and Sheferaw Sadi's on Theological Education by Extension (TEE) have focused on theological education in particular, and none on confirmation. I will, however, refer to studies on the EECMY that describe the research context.

Gustav Arén has written two major studies on the origins of the EECMY. Arén, in his books entitled Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: Origins of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (1978), and Envoys of The Gospel in Ethiopia: In the Steps of the Evangelical Pioneers (1999), did a pioneering and comprehensive study on the pre-history of the EECMY.[35] Though he did not make confirmation a focus of attention, he shows how confirmation ministry became the most important educational activity in the evangelical congregations.

The study by Gammachuu Danuu, one of the senior ministers in Wollega, wrote a book entitled, *How Did we get the Gospel of Christ? 1866-1991* (2012).[36] His work describes how the gospel took root in the western parts of Ethiopia, the first twenty-eight years by indigenous witnesses and later together with missionaries from Sweden, Germany and Norway. Gammachu Danuu's book does not give much information regarding confirmation, but he mentions the number of those who were confirmed in the new congregations.

The study of Olav Sæverås, *On Church-Mission Relations in Ethiopia 1944-1969* (1974), gives an account of the efforts made to form a united evangelical church, the formation of the EECMY and the integration of the institutions (schools, hospitals, clinics, projects) run by the cooperating Lutheran missions in 1969.[37] He also indicates how the different mission and the EOTC traditions influenced the identity and the ministry of the EECMY at the early stage. Thus, Sæverås' research is important, both for understanding the Lutheran identity and for an evaluation of variations in theology and practice of confirmation ministry in EECMY congregations.

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[35] Arén, Evangelical Pioneers, 1978, Arén, Gustav, Envoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia: In the Steps of The Evangelical Pioneers, (Studia Upsaliensia LXXV, Stockholm, EFS Förlaget, 1999).
[36] Gammachuu Danuu, *How did we get the Gospel of Christ? 1866-1991*, (Addis Ababa, Finfinne Publ., 2012).
[37] Sæverås, On Church-Mission Relations.

The study by Margareta and Rolf Sjöström, *How Do You Spell Development? A Study of a Literacy Campaign in Ethiopia,* presents the educational context and an evaluation of the EECMY Literacy Campaign (YDLC) in Ethiopia from 1962-75.[38] The campaign helped large numbers of Ethiopians to read and write. Their study also explains the Ethiopian government policy on education and the impact of the YDLC.

Johnny Bakke's book on *Christian Ministry in the EECMY* (1987) focuses on patterns and functions of ministry.[39] He shows how ministry was influenced by cultural practices of local people and the practices of the EOTC. He also describes how different mission traditions played a role in shaping the ministry of the church. Though Bakke's study does not discuss confirmation, it is a valuable resource for this research in describing both African traditional and Ethiopian orthodox patterns of education and theological emphasis of different mission societies.

The study by Eskil Forslund, *The Word of God in Ethiopian Tongues* (1993), presents preaching in the EECMY.[40] This is done against the background of theological emphasis in the EOTC. His study also indicates how the preaching and the teachings of the EECMY are influenced by the theology and tradition of EOTC like for example the preparation before taking Holy Communion. Forslund's study is relevant in discussing the teaching about the sacraments.

Øyvind M. Eide's book, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia* 1974-85 (2000) examines church - state relationships, especially during the time of the Marxist-Leninist government of Ethiopia.[41] Eide focuses on the evangelical churches' role in the political dialectics between centre and periphery. As a case study, his book focuses on the western part of the country, which is one of my study areas. The study describes the role of education and the contribution of mission schools in changing the society. He also discusses the importance of confirmation for church membership and the role of *Luther's Small Catechism* in confirmation teaching and in the theological foundation of the EECMY.

Arne Tolos' study, *Sidama and Ethiopian: The Emergence of The Mekane Yesus Church in Sidama* (1998) focuses on the early development of the EECMY in the Sidama area.[42] The study identifies political, social, and cultural preconditions and the extent to which the gospel

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[38] Sjøstrøm, M & R. *How do you spell.*
[39] Bakke, Christian Ministry.
[40] Eskil Forslund, *The Word of God in Ethiopian Tongues. Rhetorical Features in the Preaching of the EECMY*, (Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia LVIII, The Swedish Institute for Missionary Research, Uppsala, 1993).
[41] Eide, Revolution and Religion.
[42] Tolo, Sidama and Ethiopia.

impacted the religious and socio-political life of the Sidama people. Here the missionaries used education and schools as instruments in the service of the gospel.

In recent years a number of studies have been conducted on the EECMY history, theology and ministries. I will mention some of these in what follows.

The study by Sheferaw Sadi concentrated on the evaluation of Theological Education by Extension (TEE) in the EECMY. The study evaluates the aims and objectives, the andragogy, and the outcomes of TEE from an educational perspective. The findings of the study shows that apart from its great importance of training lay workers for the fast growing church, a high number of participants drop out due to financial problems, difficulties in attending discussion seminars, difficulties with course materials, language problems, inability of group leaders to give effective support to the learners and the failure to attract sufficient female learners. As Sheferaw's work is connected to theological training in the EECMY some of his findings are relevant to my thesis.[43]

The study by Bakure Daba, *An Examination and Assessment of the Role and Status of Women in the 'Holistic' Ministry,* investigates and analyses where, how, and why women are silenced in the ministry of EECMY.[44] The study reveals that women are denied opportunities to participate fully in the four key areas of decision-making, evangelism, leadership, and ordained ministry, for theological and cultural reasons. This research is of relevance in explaining and discussing the cultural reasons for how women confirmands are perceived and their participation in confirmation teaching.

Tesso Djalata's thesis on *Contextualizing Church Planting among the Oromo Society* (2011)*,* explores the reasons why church planting of the EECMY has not been effective among the non-evangelized Oromo.[45] His findings reveal that the church planting strategy of the EECMY has only helped three million to become evangelical Christians from a population of more than thirty million. The main reasons for being ineffective is the Oromo's strong preservation of their culture and tradition and fear of the persistent EOTC persecution of evangelical Christians and the EECMY mission approach.

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[43] Sheferaw Sadi, "Theological Education by Extension. In the EECMY, Towards Relevant Programs," (PhD thesis, Birmingham, 2015.

[44] Bakure Daba, "An Examination and Assessment of the Role and Status of Women in the 'Holistic' Ministry of the EECMY ,"(PhD thesis, University of Chester, 2011), 4.

[45] Tesso Djalata, *Contextualizing Church Planting Among the Oromo Society: With Particular Reference to the EECMY,* (PhD Thesis, University of Chester, 2011), 4.

Yacob Godebo's study, The Impact of the Charismatic Movement and Related Tensions on the Traditional Lutheran Worship of the South-Central Synod of the EECMY since 1991, points out that the charismatic movement has positive as well as negative impact. [46] He argues for the need to enter into dialogue with a view to shape the worship and communication of the church in line with its context. Even though the impact of the charismatic movement on the educational ministry is not dealt with, some of his findings are relevant for a discussion on the theological foundation of the EECMY confirmation ministry.

Temesgen Nagassa's study, *The Influence of Evangelical Christianity on the Development of the Oromo Language in Ethiopia* (2011), investigates the role of the EECMY in the development of the Oromo language. The findings indicate that church activities have contributed to the maintenance and development of the language. This study also examines the obstacles to the development of the language, including the conflict that arose in 1995 over the use of the language in the EECMY. The study facilitated the discussion and analysis of findings related to confirmation teaching language.[47]

Masresha Mengeste's study, *The Possibility of a Religiously Inclusive Historiography of Ethiopia* (2016) emphasizes that Ethiopian religious historiography is not developed in an inclusive way.[48] His investigation shows that Traditional, Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, and Evangelical communities were ignored in the religious history of Ethiopia, while the EOTC appears as the only indigenous state religion. His thesis does not address Christian education and has little relevance to my work except some historical facts about the role of the EOTC in the social and religious history of Ethiopia.

A study by Lalissa Daniel, *An Investigation into the Implications of Confessional Subscription to the Lutheran Confessions,* focuses on exploring the implications of the Lutheran confessions for the EECMY.[49] His findings indicate that, contrary to its commitment to the Lutheran Confessions, the EECMY leaders and theologians lack doctrinal depth. There is an emergence of theological teachings postures alien to the Lutheran Confessions. These are incompatible with the doctrine of justification, the doctrine of the Trinity and the Church. These

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[46] Yacob Godebo, *The Impact of the Charismatic Movement and Related Tensions on the Traditional Lutheran Worship of the South-Central Synod of the EECMY since 1991.* (PhD thesis, University of Chester, 2011), v.
[47] Temesgen Nagassa, *The Influence of Evangelical Christianity on the Development of the Oromo Language in Ethiopia.* (PhD thesis, University of South Africa, 2015).
[48] Maresha Mengeste, *The Possibility of a Religiously Inclusive Historiography of Ethiopia* (Ph.D. thesis, Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, 2016).
[49] Lalisa Daniel, *An Investigation into the Implications of Confessional Subscription to the Lutheran Confessions on the Understanding of the Triune God and Church Fellowship in the EECMY*, (PhD thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, 2017).

teachings put more emphasis on Pneumatology than Christology. The findings of Lalissa Daniel are of relevance for my discussion on the doctrinal foundation of confirmation ministry in the EECMY.

### 1.3.2   Studies of confirmation in Lutheran churches

As for confirmation ministry, most of the sources I could access were written in the Western context. However, issues discussed in many of these sources are relevant to my research.

A study by the Lutheran Churches of America is titled *Lutheran Churches Reconsider their Theology and Practice of Confirmation.*[50] The focus of this study is to examine the theological, historical and practical aspects of confirmation and to make recommendations for a uniform practice. Arthur C. Repp's study, *Confirmation in Lutheran Churches*, is a comprehensive study and discussion of confirmation. The study examines the historical and theological development of confirmation in detail. Even though the study does not include the development of confirmation in Africa, some of the issues regarding the theology and structure of confirmation are relevant.[51] Riitta Virkkunen's report, on *Confirmation in the Lutheran Churches Today,* contains important information about confirmation ministry.[52] The discussion of the report includes the spiritual and social significance as well as the ecclesiological and educational importance of confirmation.

*Confirmation: Engaging Lutheran Foundations and Practices* forwarded by Margaret A. Krych, examines the theological, historical and educational foundations of confirmation ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA).[53] The study equips leaders to meet challenges in confirmation ministry. The study also identifies the key issues and concerns of today's confirmation ministry planners. A book written by a team of authors on the topic *Confirmation Work in Europe*, comprises the results of the first international comparative empirical study in seven European countries.[54] The study follows the insights of contemporary education as well as recent developments in theology. The authors discuss planning and teaching experiences, motivation and experience of the confirmands, religious change during

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[50] *The Report of the Joint Commission on Theology and Practice Confirmation*, (Lutheran Church in America, The American Lutheran Church, and The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod,1970)
[51] Arthur C. Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1964),
[52] Riitta Virkkunen, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Churches Today: Report of Studies on Confirmation in the LWF member churches in 1979-1986* (Geneva: LWF Department of Studies, 1986).
[53] Margaret A Krych, ed. "Confirmation: Engaging Lutheran Foundations and Practices," (Foreword), in Pfeiffer, A., *Lutheran Theological Journal*, Minneapolis, MN, Fortress Press, 1999.
[54] Friedrich Schweitzer et al, *Confirmation Work in Europe: Empirical Result. Experiences and Challenges: A Comparative Study in Seven Countries,* (Gutersloh: Guetersloher Verlagshaus, 2010).

the confirmation period, gender and confirmation work, and the role of confirmation in the civil society.

The study by Kati Niemelä, *Does Confirmation Training Really Matter?*[55] examines the significance and effect of confirmation training in young peoples' lives in Finland. I found some of the findings relevant to my research, especially the discussion about the outcome of confirmation ministry. Morten Holmqvist explores religious learning in the context of confirmation in the church of Norway. The findings of the thesis show that religious learning takes place within three distinct logics. These include religious learning as belief, religious learning as practice, and religious learning as faith.[56]

The mentioned studies on confirmation are helpful in describing and discussing the history, theology, and practice of confirmation ministry in Lutheran churches. But some of the studies are old and lack contemporary information on the theology and practice of confirmation. Another limitation is that confirmation ministry in the Western world aims at teenagers and youth while, in the EECMY, it is a ministry for all age groups. Although the studies mentioned relate to Western churches, they are relevant to some degree to my research.

The absence of comprehensive studies on confirmation in the EECMY shows the knowledge gap and the need for research. This study will serve as a contribution towards a fuller understanding of the challenges facing EECMY confirmation ministry.

## 1.4   Theological framework

This study opened with observations of an episode in the life of the church. An episode is an event that emerges from the flow of everyday life and evokes explicit attention and reflection.[57] The beginning-point in human experience and its desire to reflect theologically on that experience is a characteristic of Practical Theology.[58]  As this approach guides the overarching methodological structure of this study, I will give a short presentation of the reasoning behind the approach. This methodological approach will shape the objectives and research questions.

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[55] Kati Niemelä, *Does Confirmation Training Really Matter? A longitudinal Study of the Quality and Effectiveness of Confirmation Training in Finland* (Tampere: Church Research Institute, 2008).
[56] Morten Holmqvist, *Learning Religion in Confirmation: Mediating the Material Logics of Religion: An Ethnographic Case Study of Religious Learning in Confirmation within the Church of Norway (Unpubl. PhD. thesis, MF, Norway 2015)*
[57] Richard R Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, (Eerdmans., UK, 2008). 12.
[58] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, v.

### 1.4.1 *The hermeneutical circle*

Practical Theology emerged as the craft of church management and the channel through which the theories of biblical and systematic theology flow. Gerben Heitink writes:

> Practical Theology owes its origin to Schleiermacher, the first modern theologian, who, recognizing the value of the Enlightenment, wanted to build a bridge to modern humanity by reflecting on the Christian faith on the basis of the experience of the subject. Schleiermacher organized theology as historical, philosophical and practical theology and suggested that "practical theology is the crown of theological study.59

This subjective aim of practical theology has shifted towards an empirical direction partly because of the rise of social sciences, which helped to speak about the church in a descriptive and explanatory language, based on its actual situation.[60] Practical Theology has, therefore, seen a shift from applied theology to an investigation of religious praxis as its primary task. It has emerged as a theological theory of action in recent decades.[61] Scholars in recent times, in particular Don F. Browning (*A Fundamental Practical Theology,*1991) have reformulated the task of Practical Theology in the direction of an empirical, descriptive and critically constructive theory of religious practice.[62] This critical dimension is pursued in close cooperation with other disciplines in the field of cultural studies. This disciplinary rigor prevents Practical Theology from wishful thinking and contributes to empirically based theory building.[63]

Browning discusses the rebirth of Practical Theology in relation to the development of practical philosophy and emphasizes the importance of practical wisdom. Based on Hans-Georg Gadamer's school of thought, Browning has brought historical thinking, hermeneutics and practical reason or ethics into closer relation.[64] Developments in the understanding and application of hermeneutics has influenced theology in general and Practical Theology in

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[59] Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993).103.

[60] Carl I. Nitzsch, (1787-1868), was the first practical theologian who proposed an empirical approach in the discipline. Defining practical theology as the "theory of the church's practice of Christianity," Nitzsch argued that both the historical and doctrinal concepts are not the proper source of practical theology, but its essence is rather "the grounding, development, and mediation in the actual life of the church, its experience and action. Because of Nitzsch, practical theology became an "empirically inspired theory of action. Heitink, *Practical Theology, 45-46.*

[61] Heitink*, Practical Theology, 104.*

[62] Don S. Browning, A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals, (Minneapolis, MN, Fortress Press, 1991).

[63] Friedrich Schweitzer and Johannes A. Van der Ven, eds. *Practical Theology International Perspectives* (Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1999), XIV.

[64] Schweitzer and Van der Ven. eds. *Practical theology,*54-55.

particular. [65] Gadamer advocates interpretation as a fundamental human act and a significant way of being in the world. He argues for what he calls "the fusion of horizons" between the world of the interpreter and the world of the text.[66] According to Gadamer, we recognize the authority of a text by engaging with it in textual explication and interpretation, by entering into a dialogical relationship with the past. It is this movement of understanding that requires us to engage with the text or experience in a productive way.[67]

The hermeneutical circle developed by Gadamer further explains the interrelationship between understanding, interpretation, and application. For him every understanding involves interpretation, and all interpretation involves application.[68] This understanding underlines the hermeneutical process. Gadamer's hermeneutical model integrates both theory and practice. According to Browning, Gadamer's model implies a practice-theory-practice model of understanding, which gives the entire theological enterprise a thoroughly practical cast.[69]

Gadamer's concept of understanding, interpretation and application plays a decisive role in the practice of Christian education, because Christian education is not limited to understanding text and interpretation, it necessitates application in one's own life. Accordingly, Christian education aims at teaching and forming values and behaviours that are biblically based, theologically sound and faithfully lived out.[70] In such a way Christian education involves knowing, being, and becoming.

### 1.4.2 Definitions

John Swinton and Harriet Mowat's *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (2006) grounds their approach to church practices, such as confirmation ministry, on the hermeneutical approaches of Gadamer and Browning. They define Practical Theology as:

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[65] Traditionally hermeneutics is taken to have its origins in problems of biblical exegesis and in the development of a theoretical framework to govern and direct such exegetical practice. Hermeneutics was then developed into a more encompassing theory of textual interpretation in general … set of rules that provide the basis for good interpretive practice no matter what the subject matter. Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last ed. September 17, 2018. Retrieved September 24th 2015 from http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gadamer/

[66] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical theology*, 113-114.

[67] Hermeneutics, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last edited September 17, 2018. Retrieved September 24th 2015 from http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/.

[68] Schweitzer and Van der Ven, eds. *Practical Theology*, 55.

[69] Don S. Browning, "Toward a Fundamental and Strategic Practical theology," *in Practical Theology*, ed. by Friedrich Schweitzer and Johannes van der Ven, Frankfurt /M, 1999, 55.

[70] MYS, *Christian Education: An Introductory Course*, (MYS, TEE diploma program, Addis Ababa, 2006), 5.

critical, theological reflection on the practices of the church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in Gods redemptive practices in and for the world.[71]

The authors assert that Practical Theology is a discipline which is fundamentally hermeneutical, correlational and theological. It is hermeneutical because it recognizes the centrality of interpretation in the way that human beings encounter the world and try to read the texts of that encounter. It is correlational because it tries to hold together and correlate the complex realities of the situation, the Christian tradition and other sources of knowledge. It is theological as it locates itself in the world as it relates to the unfolding of the Gospel.[72] Therefore, unlike other branches of theology, Practical Theology is characterized by a methodology that involves empirical data as the starting point in doing theology. Based on Browning, Swinton and Mowat have proposed a model on how empirical research can be integrated in practical theological research. This model informs the current study of the practical theology that shapes the teaching ministry of confirmation in the ECCMY.

Teaching is one of the core functions of a Christian church, anchored in the Great Commission of Mt 28:19-20. The EECMY teaching ministry at the congregational level is comprised of: Sunday School for children from the age of four to twelve; a pre-confirmation course that is a short introductory course designed for new converts; the mandatory confirmation course, including those who are baptized in the church as well as new converts; and a post-confirmation discipleship course intended to train members for congregational ministries. The confirmation course is that which initiates the confirmand to full-fledged membership. Though children automatically become members when they are baptized into the church, confirmation is a requirement to take part in Holy Communion and congregational ministries.

EECMY's aim of confirmation ministry is to help confirmands grasp basic Christian teaching and identify with the life and ministry of the church.[73] It involves helping the confirmands gain: basic knowledge of the Bible; understanding of the sacraments; knowledge of the privileges of church membership and living responsibly as a confirmed member.[74] Confirmation is referred as "*Ye emnet Matsnya Thimert*", the literal translation "a teaching for

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[71] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 6.
[72] Ibid. 76.
[73] EECMY, *Christian Education (Tehimirte Kiristina): Level I and II: Teacher's Manual* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: EECMY-Department for Mission and Theology, 2014), 40.
[74] MYS, Christian Education, 208.

faith confirmation." Catechism is the Lutheran basis for teaching basic Christianity,[75] For this research I use "Confirmation ministry" based on a Lutheran understanding and definition. This definition reads:

> Confirmation ministry is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church which helps the baptized through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission.[76]

Therefore, "Confirmation ministry" is my working designation for this research. I also use terms like "confirmation teaching" "or "confirmation course" in referring to the subjects/content, the duration of the teaching and the teaching practice.

### 1.4.3  Core task and research questions

A hermeneutical approach to a complex church practice such as confirmation ministry ought not to be seen simply in terms of answers to one or several research questions but is rather a hermeneutical process of understanding, including both empirical data, interpretation and reflection.[77] The core task of my thesis may be formulated as:

> *An investigation and critical assessment of contemporary confirmation ministry in two EECMY congregations.*

The concepts of 'critical' and 'assessment' implies estimation of the quality of ongoing confirmation ministry. The core task requires a consideration of sub-tasks, with specified research questions attached to each task.

*The empirical-descriptive task.* Starting with observation of contemporary practices, the first sub-task is to develop a systematic approach in order to answer the question, *what is going on in confirmation ministry in the congregations in focus?* To assist me in my enquiry I make use of tools for qualitative research methods (see ch, 3).[78] Based on initial observations and a small pilot study I developed a questionnaire addressed to both confirmation teachers and confirmands (see appendix). The questions focused on:

- Opportunities and challenges of membership growth in relation to confirmation ministry;

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[75] Luther's preface. Retrieved on 02/13/2022  from  https://catechism.cph.org/
[76] Robert L Conrad and Margaret F. Krych, ed., *Confirmation: engaging Lutheran foundation and practices,* (Minneapolis MS. Fortress Press), 96.
[77] Osmer, Practical theology, 1-29.
[78] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 81.

- Confirmation teacher and the Teaching methods they apply;
- The Content and doctrinal foundation of confirmation ministry;
- Teaching manuals and the duration of confirmation ministry and;
- The outcome of confirmation ministry and the confirmands attachment to the congregation.

As seen from my presentation of the findings, chapters 6-14, my questionnaire produced results of interest. The empirical-descriptive task helped me to get a broad understanding of how confirmation ministry is practiced in the two EECMY congregations. As the analysis of informant's answers progressed, I realized that the pedagogy of religious instruction was the heart of the matter. The development of an educational theory and the investigation of educational traditions in Ethiopia was therefore broadened.

*The interpretive task*: The second sub-task refers to the cultural-contextual interpretation of the results of the descriptive-empirical investigation. The main question is: *why is this going on in this way*? To answer this question, the educational contexts of confirmation ministry in Ethiopia are explored (see ch. 4). Context includes traditional approaches to education (African traditional and Orthodox Church), the educational policy of the state, the legacy of the missions, and the educational policy of the EECMY. This context involves cultural, religious, and socio-political backgrounds of influence.

*The normative task*: In a practical theological hermeneutic, the third sub-task is theological reflection. As this involves biblical, historical, and systematic theological considerations, it is seen as a normative task. The main question is therefore: *what ought to be going on*? In a research thesis like this, the normative task will be handled with care. The reason for some normative reflection is rooted in the EECMY's confessional base as a Lutheran church. Normative issues therefore surface in the informants' responses and must be accounted for. Interpreting these responses requires critical assessment.[79] However, as the emphasis of my thesis lies on the pedagogical aspects of education, I will limit my interpretation of these responses in relation to educational theory. A reflection of this kind is necessarily part of a 'critical assessment' but is not normative in a theological sense.

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[79] Ibid. 96.

*The pragmatic task*: The fourth sub-task aims at a reformulation or a revised form of practice. The main question is therefore*: how might we proceed in light of what we have interpreted*? This is the task where findings, interpretation and discussion are drawn together to produce a more authentic practice.[80] This task lies beyond my approach.

## 1.5 Field work and situatedness

The choice of research congregations was deliberate. Most congregations of the EECMY are situated in rural areas. Here a parish minister and a couple of evangelists may cover 5 to 10 congregations. These congregations would be quite uniform as to ethnic composition, pre-evangelical background, and mentality. I therefore opted for two congregations that have more resources in trained personnel, a more diversified age composition, religious background, and education. I therefore focused on towns. As the EECMY has its largest following in the western and southern parts of the country, I chose one congregation from each area.

### 1.5.1 Bethany congregation

Western Ethiopia has a relatively uniform ethnic composition with the Oromo in the majority. As mentioned above, Lutheran missions from Sweden (SEM), Germany (GHM), Norway (NMS) and a Presbyterian mission from USA, (AAPUM) worked mainly in the west. I deliberately chose congregations with a Lutheran background.

Bethany congregation has several ministers, trained at either one of the two regional seminaries (Diploma level) or Mekane Yesus Seminary (Bachelor or Master level). The congregation also has evangelists with Bible-school training. In addition, the congregation engages a group of lay educators.

The towns reflect what I would call modern Ethiopia in the sense that a broad range of educational levels are present in the population as well as in a confirmation class, from illiterate to university graduates.

The towns have a mixed population where orthodox and evangelical Christians are in the majority, but with a substantial influx of Muslims and some of the population adheres to traditional African religion. A confirmation class will, in most cases, be composed of youth with an evangelical family background, adults with an orthodox background and perhaps a few Muslims and traditionalists.

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[80] Ibid. 96.

The congregation has integrated the Pentecostal-charismatic movement in the sense that theology and practice reflect traditions formerly unknown to the Lutherans. This has led to an emphasis on healing, exorcisms, prophecy, a new eagerness in sharing the Gospel with others and the rise of large numbers of highly devoted lay workers. At the same time, it has led to conflicting perspectives on education, whether teaching/pedagogy can be learned or is a gift of the Spirit. This important tension is discussed in the course of this study. The confirmation course lasts for one year.

### 1.5.2 Rehoboth congregation

Rehoboth is a fast-growing congregation found in the southern part of Ethiopia. Lutheran missions from Norway (NLM), Denmark and Iceland worked in this part of the country. Compared to the synods in the west, the congregations of the southern synods have a slightly different ecclesiology and liturgical traditions. This difference is seen in the congregation's free worship style and focus on lay ministry. The congregation has several ministers, evangelists and lay educators.

The religious composition of the town presents a high number of evangelical and orthodox Christians. There are some Roman Catholics as well as Muslims and traditionalists.

The ethnic composition of the town is very diverse, with five major and many smaller language groups. Amharic is the official language and the language used for confirmation instruction.

The confirmation ministry of the congregation lasts six months. The congregation also conducts a six-month pre-confirmation course for all who want to attend confirmation courses. This course gives an introduction about salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The confirmation course focuses on the church's doctrine and Christian ethics. Only ordained and trained ministers teach confirmation classes because it involves the teaching about the church's doctrine.

### 1.5.3 The role of the researcher

Chapter 3.7 presents an extensive reflection on situatedness and research ethics. At this point I therefore limit my reflection to a couple of points.

I am a member of the EECMY and a teacher at Mekane Yesus Seminary. I grew up in an EECMY congregation, serving as a choir member, prayer group member and voluntary preacher. I studied theology at Mekane Yesus Seminary. I also taught confirmation class during summer holidays.

As ethnically Oromo I am culturally and linguistically closer to Bethany than the Rohoboth congregation. Doing research, however, I benefitted from access to both congregations because of my background. Communicating with leaders, observing, and conducting interviews were made without serious problems.

As for language I was able to communicate both in Amharic and Oromo. This was helpful in relation to access to both leaders and confirmands.

Initially I had some hesitation, as research is not common in these settings, and my role as a female researcher might not be taken seriously due to gender insensitive attitudes in the society. However, frequent attendance to the confirmation classes and, understanding the social setup like the hierarchy between elders and young, gender roles etc. helped me to respect prevailing values and norms. This enabled me to establish genuine and respectful relationships with the research participants. Attending confirmation classes as a "participant observer"[81] led to most teachers and confirmands considering me as an expert in the field. Being aware of this challenge to not overly influence the field of research, I put much effort in giving detailed explanations to the teachers until they understood and accepted my role as a researcher (see 3.7).

At the same time, the nearness to the research context represents a professional challenge. A conscious attention to research ethics (see 3.7), methodology and theory has hopefully mitigated any barriers to an appropriate level of objectivity.[82]

## 1.6   Thesis structure

Chapter one provides a general introduction to the thesis. The thesis is then divided into two major parts.

Part one deals with Theory, Method and Context organized into four chapters that include: (2) the theoretical framework, (3) methodology, (4) educational context and (5) theological context.

Part two of the thesis provides an extensive presentation of findings, observation, interpretations and assessments, organized into nine chapters: (6) membership growth and confirmation ministry, (7) confirmation teachers, (8) teaching methods, (9) content of confirmation teaching, (10) confessional foundation, (11) teaching materials, (12) the duration

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[81] Barbara B. Kawulich, *Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method [81 paragraphs].* Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, (2005). 6 (2), Art. 43. Retrieved  24th March. 2014 from http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0502430.

[82] Steinar Kvale, and Svend Brinkmann, Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research: Interviewing (London: Sage, 2009), 2.

of confirmation course, (13) the aim of confirmation ministry, and (14) the outcome of confirmation ministry. The final chapter (15) provides a summary and conclusion of the thesis.

## Part  I          Theory – Method – Context

The first part of the research deals with theory, method, and context (2-5). The theory part (2) is concerned with the theory underpinning the research while the chapter on method (3) develops qualitative research as a tool within the larger methodological framework of Practical Theology (see 1.4). The research context is divided into two chapters: the educational and the theological context of confirmation ministry. The educational context (4) mainly focuses on the different educational practices, including the shifts in the educational policy of the country.  The theological context of confirmation will be highlighted by sketching the historic development of confirmation at different stages of the Christian church and the Lutheran theology of confirmation, including the EECMY understanding and practice. In this chapter I will give a short presentation of Ethiopian orthodox and Pentecostal-charismatic theology. Both theologies influence the peoples' perception of the meaning of confirmation even though the church's Lutheran confessional basis stands firm (5).

# 2 Theoretical frameworks

Theory is "a way of thinking and a model of how things work, how principles are related and what causes things to work together."[83] Research needs to be supported by a theory because it influences the way data is produced, analysed, and discussed.[84] My theoretical framework focuses on education and learning so that it may assist me in interpreting and assessing the findings of this research.

Finding an appropriate learning theory that is consistent with my research was a challenging task as almost all learning theories are based on age and emphasize specific aspects of learning, such as cognitive or behavioural aspects. In the case of the EECMY, the variation in age, educational level, and religious background of the confirmands makes it difficult to find an appropriate theory.

Despite the challenges, a theory is a necessity, both to interpret and assess the findings of this research. Hence, I have adopted an adult learning theory called Transformative learning theory, developed by Jack Mezirow.[85] Transformative learning theory, with some limitations, has important aspects which assist me in the interpretation and assessment of my findings.[86]

## 2.1 Introduction

Approaching my thesis from a theoretical perspective I found the article "On Two Metaphors for Learning and the Dangers of Choosing Just One", by the Israeli educational theorist Anna Sfard useful as a starting point. Sfard identifies two metaphors that guide our work as learners, teachers and researchers.[87] The *acquisition metaphor* is characterized as 'acquisition of something' or 'the act of gaining knowledge'. The language of 'knowledge acquisition' makes

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[83] *How People Learn*. Retrieved 20th February.2015 from web.stanford.edu/class/ed269/hplintrochapter.pdf1,

[84] David Scott, *Education: Epistemology and Critical Realism* (London: Rutledge, 2010), 11.

[85] Jack Mezirow (1923- 2014) is an American sociologist and Emeritus Professor of Adult and Continuing Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. He is widely acknowledged as the founder of the concept of transformative learning. Jack Mezirow et al, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Theory in Progress (*San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000*)*.

[86] Mezirow first articulated his theory in 1978 after a qualitative study of women returning to college or workplace after extended absence. The major theoretical finding was the identification of transformation as a central learning process occurring in the personal development of women. By becoming critically aware of the context, biographical, historical, and cultural, of their beliefs and feelings about themselves and role in the society, the women could affect change in the way they had structured their assumptions and expectations. This change constituted a learned transformation: the process resulting from it was designated transformative learning. Mezirow et al, *Learning as Transformation, xi-xii.*

[87] Anna Sfard, "On Two Metaphors for learning and the dangers of Choosing Just One", Educational researcher, March 1998, pp. 4-13. The American Educational Research Association.

us think about the human mind as a container to be filled with certain materials and the learner as becoming an owner of these materials.

Sfard then presents an emerging metaphor characterised as a *participation.* The catchword of this metaphor is 'knowing' which indicates action. This noun replaces the notion of knowledge as something fixed that is transferred from the teacher to the student. This seemingly minor linguistic modification signals a foundational shift in educational theory. The new terminology indicates that all learning takes place in a context. The context points towards cultural embeddedness and social mediation. Here the learner is seen as a person interested in participation in certain kinds of activities rather than accumulating possessions. Learning a subject is conceived of as a process of becoming member of a community.

### 2.1.1    *The acquisition metaphor*

In an article by Aweke Shishigu Argaw, historical and philosophical perspectives on education in Ethiopia are discussed.[88] Aweke traces a consistent philosophy of learning back to the introduction of Christianity in Ethiopia in the fourth century. Education aimed at training clergy and teachers for church service.[89] The pedagogical form was the lecture, the teacher speaking and the students memorizing. In this system knowledge was and still is considered fixed and unchanging and thus to be learned by heart. There is no room for practical skills. Teachers were and still are authorities expecting submissiveness from their students.[90]

Western forms of education were introduced to Ethiopia in the 19th century.[91] Teachers from the west introduced new pedagogical ideas, but the ingrained orthodox philosophy of education prevailed. The authoritarian teacher-student relationship was enforced by the feudal socio-political system. In addition, Aweke shows how inherited pedagogical traditions were reinforced by the way students were prepared for exams. The exams were designed in a way that rewarded students who were able to memorize and imitate the information that was given to them by the teacher.

The government that came into power in 1991 tried to discard the old philosophy of education by focusing on more pragmatic approaches, such as problem solving, experiential learning,

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[88] Aweke Shishigu Argaw, "Foundation of Curriculum in Ethiopia: Historical, Philosophical, Psychological and Sociological Perspectives." (A paper presented in [Annual International Educational Conference] Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia), 2015.
[89] Ibid,
[90] Teklehaimanot Haileselassie: "The Cultural Foundation of Education in Ethiopia.*"* Retrieved 24th October 2016 from http://chora.virtualave.net/culturalfoundation.htm.
[91] Bharu Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century, (*Eastern African Studies, Oxford, James Currey), 2002, 13.

inquiry methods etc. However, the reception of new educational theories was hampered by a non-conducive environment, large classes and low student engagement.[92] As a result, the majority of teachers follow traditional educational models.

During the field observations of teaching sessions described in the introduction, I noticed that knowledge was transferred from the teacher to the student by a method of lecturing. The students listened and were meant to memorize what the teacher said. Ethiopians like myself will likely recognize this experience as the practice that spans all levels of formal education in Ethiopia. In chapter 4 I will give a broad presentation of this educational context.

### 2.1.2   *The participation metaphor*

Sfard presents the participation metaphor as a new development in educational philosophy and pedagogical theory. However, it may not be as new as she thinks. Her outline reminded me of how I was taught by my mother, my family and my neighbourhood as a child in settings of informal education. Social settings such as communities and households operated with their own mode of knowledge transmission. Throughout the informal setting of childhood, I acquired vast knowledge of my culture, language, stories, poems, proverbs, songs and ethics by participatory method. Additionally, participating in family devotions, Sunday-school and church choir gave me profound insight in how the Christian faith was lived.

When formal schooling at the age of seven, previous learning and knowledge acquired by informal, participatory education was not deemed to be valuable. Instead, I was seen as an empty box to be filled with new and more important knowledge. Against this background the encyclopaedic work by A. Bame Nsamenang and Therese M. S. Tschombe, *Handbook of African Educational Theories and Practices*, breaks new ground. The handbook raises fundamental issues concerning the re-conceptualization of education and its goals in the African context. It explores Africa's philosophical worldviews, values and beliefs and suggests ways in which these can provide a critical framework for educational research. In an introductory chapter they say something of interest:

> Africa's forms of cultural identity and patterns of education deserves investigative understanding and focused enhancement and incorporation of their positive elements into school curricula.[93]

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[92] Aweke Shishigu Argaw, "Foundation of Curriculum in Ethiopia,"
[93] Nsamenang & Tchombe, *Handbook*, 9.

This kind of education is referred as "African traditional education" and the practice is similar in most African countries.[94]  According to Julius Gathogo, African traditional education is "informal, utilitarian and practical… it consisted in handing down to successive generations the arts, folklore, myths and traditions of the community."[95] It is a system that developed over centuries in response to physical, agricultural, ecological, political and sociocultural challenges. Knowledge, skill and attitude is learnt for survival, protection, maintaining unity, to preserving the cultural heritage of the ethnic community and to prepare the young for adult roles and responsibilities.

Traditional African modes of education fit into Sfard's understanding of what she calls an emerging paradigm in education. "Participation' is almost synonymous with "taking part" and "being a part," and both of these expressions signalize that learning should be viewed as a process of becoming part of a greater whole."[96] Perhaps we could say that the so-called emerging insight is nothing but a rediscovery of my mother's pedagogics.

### 2.1.3   *Negotiating the metaphors*

The two theories, expressed in concepts of acquisition and participation, seem to describe almost irreconcilable extremes. Sfard is aware of this and raises the question of possible bridges. She suggests the terms *transfer* and *transformation* as promising.

Taking this lead, I investigated the pedagogical possibilities of my seminary's engagement in Theological Education by Extension. As a theoretical base of this program, the TEE produced a manual on Christian education. Studying the manual one looks in vain for the name of an educational theory guiding the venture. However, the manual acknowledges the importance of cultural forms of transferring knowledge and the dialectic between the situation and the actor. This current thesis takes this dialectic as its theoretical basis, or "a way of thinking and a model of how things work, how principles are related and what causes things to work together".[97]

Transformative learning theory, with some limitations, has important aspects which assist me in the interpretation and assessment of my findings. I will present the theory in two sections.

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[94]  Ibid, 24.

[95] Julius Gathago, Historical Development of Christian Education in Eastern Africa: The Example of Julius Krapf, in, Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner (ed.), Regnum studies in Global Christianity: Handbook of Theological Education in Africa. (Oxford, UK:  Regnum Books International), 2013,39.

[96] Sfard, "On two metaphors," 6.

[97]  MYS, Christian education, 80-85. *How People Learn*. Retrieved 20th February.2015 from web.stanford.edu/class/ed269/hplintrochapter.pdf1,

The first will define the meaning and outline the core aspects of transformative learning. The second will suggest the advantages and limits of applying this particular theory.

## 2.2 Transformative learning theory

Transformative learning was influenced by different philosophies.[98] Mezirow defines transformative learning as:

> The process by which we transform our taken for granted frames of references (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets), to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change and reflexive, so that they may generate beliefs and opinions, that will prove more true or justified to guide action.[99]

Based on this definition, transformative learning is the type of learning that mainly focuses on bringing change in the way people think. In turn, transformation guides their action. For Mezirow, learning is "a process of using prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of meaning of one's experience, as a guide to future action."[100] This kind of learning involves two domains, one of which is instrumental learning, to control and manipulate the environment or other people; the other is communicative learning, to learn what people mean when they communicate with others which often involves feelings, intentions, values, and morals.

According to Mezirow, "transformation refers to a movement through time of reformulating structures of meaning by reconstructing dominant narratives."[101] Transformation requires participation in constructive and reflexive discourse such as "specialized use of dialogue devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of justification of an interpretation or belief."[102] The discourse helps the learners to reason, reflect, argue, and interpret from different viewpoints, and construct new meanings. This takes place through effective participation in a discourse. For Mezirow, participating in such discourse requires emotional maturity, awareness, empathy, and control. He also acknowledges that cultures and societies differ in the degree to which critical reflection and discourse are encouraged.

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[98] including the concept of paradigm shift by Thomas Kuhn (1962), the theory of conscientization by Paulo Freire (1970), the development of critical theory by the Frankfurt school of German philosophers, and domains of learning by Jürgen Habermas (1971). Mezirow et al., *Learning as transformation*, 7-8.
[99] Ibid. 7-8.
[100] Ibid. 5.
[101] Ibid. 19.
[102] Ibid. 10.

The other important element of the theory is what Mezirow calls the frames of reference. He defines a frame of reference "as the structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions… it provides the context for making meaning."[103] This frame of reference comprises different perspectives and has to be designed both by the learners and educators. Based on his findings Mezirow states ten phases in which transformation takes place in the process of learning. These include:

- Experiencing a disorienting dilemma or life changing event.

- Undergoing self-examination, questioning the disorienting experience.

- A critical assessment of assumptions.

- Recognizing that one's discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change.

- Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions.

- Planning a course of action.

- Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans.

- Provisionally trying out new roles.

- Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.

- A reintegration into one's life conditions dictated by one's new perspective.[104]

These phases are not thought as sequential stages but experiences that suggest the process of transformation is taking place. The role of critical thinking and reflection is the most crucial element in the transformation process. Mezirow also puts emphasis on human experience as the starting point and a content of transformative learning. In sum, Mezirow's theory underlines the process of making meaning from our experiences through critical reflection and dialogue as key elements in the process of learning.

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[103] Ibid. 16-17.
[104] Ibid. 22.

In the next subtopics, I will discuss the advantages of Mezirow's theory in relation to my research. I will also point out some of the limitations and explain how I intend to mitigate those limitations in order to serve as an underlying pedagogical theory for this thesis.

## 2.3 Advantages

Mezirow's theory is applicable to my research for the following reasons:

### 2.3.1 *The focus on change*

Mezirow defines "learning as the process of using prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of meaning of one's experience, in order to guide future action."[105] Thus, the main concern of transformative learning theory is on how people change, and how educators can nurture change. Though all educational activities aim at change, transformative learning theory focuses on change that is deeper, lasting, and effective. The theory looks to "perspective-transformation" as an overall outcome of education. Perspective transformation transcends cognitive development, in that a change in perspective effectively influences an individual's entire personal outlook and subsequent behaviour. In short, "transformational learning shapes people; they are different afterwards, in ways both they and others can recognize."[106] One of the aims in confirmation ministry is to facilitate change in the confirmands' lives, change in their understanding of Christian faith, transformation of their spiritual, ethical and social life, not merely cognitive acquisition of information about the Christian faith. For this reason, the theory of transformation will be one of the tools to discuss and analyse the outcome of confirmation ministry.

### 2.3.2 *Participatory learning*

Another significant quality of Mezirow's theory is the participatory approach to learning. This means that instead of being instructed by educators only, the learners actively participate in the process of making meaning through experience, sharing, and reflection. Therefore, the dialogical method of learning has an advantage in promoting participation to achieve the intended objectives in confirmation teaching. Through dialogue, confirmands can be encouraged to discuss different issues, solve problems, examine and test the Christian faith, and

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[105] Ibid. 6.
[106] Sharan B. Merriam and Gabo Ntseane, "Transformational Learning in Botswana: How Culture Shapes the Process," *Adult Education Quarterly,* Vol. 58 No. 3, 2008), 183-197.

come to a more authentic knowledge of the Bible. My research investigates the teaching method(s) applied by confirmation teachers. Mezirow's focus on participatory learning will be one of the lenses that enables me to look at the teaching approaches applied by confirmation teachers.

### 2.3.3   Frames of reference

According to Mezirow, the frame of reference guides the learners to the desired transformation. In Mezirow's explanation the frame of reference is comprised of different perspectives and the learners play a role in designing and developing them.[107] That means it is not only the educators or the books that serve as the sources of knowledge. The learners also have opportunities to create frames of reference. Involving the learners in designing the "frame of reference" also motivates the learners to participate actively in the teaching - learning process, it helps the educators to understand the need and the context of the learners and also to discover new issues or subjects that should be included.

In the EECMY context the "frame of reference" for confirmation ministry is designed by the congregations. The Bible and the church's tradition are the main sources. However, Mezirow suggests, building a frame of reference that includes different perspectives facilitates good understanding and interpretation that leads to transformation. Though the Bible and church tradition are the main epistemological sources to design a frame of reference for Christian education, the culture and the context of the learners also play an important role. Thus, the theme of engaging learners in the process of designing the frame of reference will serve as one of the analytical tools to discuss and analyse my findings of the content of confirmation courses and the confirmands involvement in their own learning.

### 2.3.4   Human experience

The learner's experience is the starting point and subject matter for transformative learning. According to this view, faith is a performative and embodied act, which means the gospel is not simply something to be believed, but also something to be lived. Human experience is a place where the gospel is grounded, embodied, interpreted, and lived out.[108] Therefore, human experience is an integral part of the educational process as it also facilitates the hermeneutical interpretation of Scripture and our traditions. In confirmation teaching, reflecting on experience

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[107] Mezirow et al., *Learning as Transformation,* 16, 19.
[108] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 5.

helps the confirmands in two ways. First, the confirmands get new insight by sharing and reflecting on their previous experiences in the light of the gospel. Second, they learn Christian ways of life by participating in the practice of the congregation. Mezirow's focus on experience serves as a lens to interpret and discuss my findings in this regard.

## 2.4 Limitations

Numerous studies have pointed out major theoretical and empirical tensions associated with Mezirow's theory.[109] Some of the limitations will be listed below in the following subtopics.

### 2.4.1 Individual and social change

Mezirow emphasizes personal transformation to a greater extent than social transformation. This does not mean that he does not encourage social transformation, but he overlooks the powerful social forces that influence transformative learning.[110]

The idea of individual transformation, apart from the social forces that influence personal transformation, does not seem plausible, neither from the Christian nor the cultural perspective of the research context. Though Christianity appreciates personal faith and transformation in respect to the individual's relationship with God, it also encourages the kind of transformation that comes through participating in a community of believers. The focus is on "learning to live and believe in unity and fellowship with one another."[111] This implies that Christianity encourages fellowship with God and other Christians as a norm for a transformed Christian identity.

The focus on individual transformation also has limitations when applied to some cultures. In the Ethiopian context, like in other African societies, collectivism is the norm of life rather than individualism. The "we" concept has more value than the "I", as Mbiti affirms, "… an individual can only say 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am."[112] Thus collectivism or collective unity is appreciated over individualism. Thus, I will use Mbiti to dialogue with Mezirow in order to strengthen the communal aspect of the African context.

### 2.4.2 Overlooking the context in learning

Context refers to the personal and socio-cultural factors that influence the process of transformative learning. Mezirow recognizes that learning is situated in a social context, but he

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[109] See W. Edward Taylor, "The Theory and Practice of Transformative Learning: A Critical Review." *ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education* (Information Series no. 374), 1998. "An Update of Transformative Learning Theory: A Critical Review of the Empirical Research" (1999-2005), *INT.J. Of lifelong Education*, Vol. 26, No 2(2007), 173-191.

[110] Taylor, "The Theory and Practice of Transformative Learning", 22-23.

[111] *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Volume 1, A-D, (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1999), 443..

[112] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 106.

gives less emphasis on addressing the relationship between context and transformative learning. This point of view will be amended in my research because learning is always shaped and influenced by its context. Especially in Christian education, contextualization takes incarnation as its foundation and point of departure for communicating the Christian message to different cultures. The Christian message must take root in local contexts in constructive dialogue with the culture so that people can apply the message to their daily lives.[113] Therefore, this research will give more emphasis to the function of context in the teaching - learning process.

### 2.4.3 Focus on rationality

According to Mezirow, examining the very nature, consequences, and origin of the meaning of our perspectives leads to perspective transformation. This view has been criticized, partly due to its overly Western view of epistemology and particularly due to its separation from experience.[114] Christian faith asserts that reason has the role of building upon what is known through revelation. However, if rationality is taken as the only source of knowledge, then any part of Christian belief or teaching that could not be proven by reason, would not be counted as rational and must be discarded. Moreover, if priority is given to reason, revelation comes second.[115] Therefore, in this research rationality will be taken as one aspect of learning supported by experience and practice in the teaching - learning process and in discussing and analysing the teaching methods applied in confirmation classes.

### 2.4.4 Emphasis on critical reflection

Mezirow's theory makes critical self-reflection the main source of knowledge. However, Christian education encourages a relational form of learning that can hold together a creative dialectic of both personal and communal transformation in people's lives. Christianity teaches that our personal faith develops and transforms through our encounter with God and fellow Christians. Further, "Learning in Africa is communal and religious or spiritual in nature….the community's social-cultural norms and values, such as viewing elders as key sources of knowledge, exerts a powerful influence on the "what," "when," and "who" of their learning."[116] Since most Africans view human existence in relation to the existence of others, belonging,

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[113] Arne Redse, *An Introduction to Church Teaching*: *A Manual on Questions Related to the Congregational Teaching of the Christian Message* (Hong Kong: Taosheng, 1993), 34.
[114] Taylor, "The Theory and Practice of Transformative Learning", 33-35.
[115] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An introduction*. 4th ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 407.
[116] Merriam and Ntseane, *Transformational Learning*, 186-187.

connectedness, community participation, and people-centeredness are given high emphasis in education that can bring transformation. As a result, critical reflection will be taken as only one form of learning and will be supplemented by relational and experiential learning based on the context in which my research takes place.

In summary, despite the limitations, Mezirow's theory has significant elements that can guide the discussion and interpretation of this research. As far as knowledge is concerned, there is no learning theory that may fit my research perfectly. However, I think it is possible to use this theory with its limitations by amending it to be useful in my research.

## 2.5   Summary

In this chapter I have discussed three possible theoretical perspectives on my research findings. Two opposite and conflicting forms of pedagogical theory, the acquisition method and the participation method, are prevalent in Ethiopia. The dominant pedagogical approach found at all levels of the official educational system is inherited from the EOCT and relates to the acquisition method. This stands in opposition to the cultural pattern of education, the participatory method, found among ethnic groups of the south and west of the country. A possible pedagogical compromise is found in Mezirow's transformational learning theory. In analysing and discussing my findings I will apply all three theories but with an emphasis on transformational learning. As a theory transformative learning focuses on change and student participation. This relates to how the church envisages the outcome of its confirmation ministry. However, applying a theory developed in the Western world to Ethiopian material, presents analytical challenges. Being aware of these I still think the theory opens perspectives of value to my findings.

# 3 Methods

The model of Practical Theology that I developed in chapter 1 is embedded within a larger hermeneutical/interpretative frame of reference. This model frames the overall approach to my task of assessing confirmation ministry within the EECMY. In this chapter I will present the qualitative research methods and outline the specific techniques that I use for data collection and analysis.[117] I will then reflect on situatedness and ethical aspects involved in the research process.

## 3.1 Qualitative research methods

Qualitative research methods are informed by the strategies of inquiry that guides research. The aim is to understand the actions by which individuals and groups engage in everyday life and the meaning they attribute to their understanding.[118] Qualitative research methods seek to discover actions and experiences of people from their own point of view. Qualitative research aims at understanding what is behind people's intentions and their reactions to a given phenomenon as well as the meaning they ascribe to their actions.

Qualitative findings can be gathered through different ways of data collection such as in-depth or open ended interviews, observations, and written documents.[119] The findings of qualitative research cannot be generalized; rather it provides a rich and more in-depth understanding of the subject under study.[120] To the contrary, the findings of quantitative research do not have the same depth, due to the high number of participants, but can be generalized from the sample under study to an overall population. Although the findings of qualitative research cannot be generalized to the larger population, it paves ways for new insight and inquiry that may help a larger population interrogate their own experiences. In the case of this research, the aim is not to generalize the findings from the two congregation across the entire EECMY, rather it is to pave the way for new insight and inquiry.

N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, as quoted by Swinton and Mowat, assert that "qualitative research is multi–method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter."[121] This means that qualitative research makes use of different

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[117] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical theology*, 74.
[118] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 49.
[119] Michael Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (London: SAGE, 2002), 4.
[120] Scott W. Vanderstoep and Deidre D. Johnston, *Research Methods for Everyday Life: Blending Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2009), 7-8.
[121] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 29.

methods in order to gain a deep understanding of the subject under study and to interpret the subject matter in its natural setting. Some of the methods include interviews, focus group discussion, observation, case study, ethnography, and grounded theory. The choice or application of these methods, however, depends on the purpose of the research.

My preference for qualitative research methods relates to the following aims. First, since the aim of my research is to provide "a richer and more in-depth understanding" of confirmation ministry, the qualitative research approach presents itself as promising.[122] Second, qualitative research enables me to "represent the views and perspectives of the research participants..."[123] Through a qualitative approach, I can attain the participants' understandings, experiences, and interpretations of the confirmation teaching experience. Third, qualitative research sees the phenomena under study including the context in which it occurs. Accordingly, my study attempts to investigate the social, cultural, and religious context that shape confirmation ministry. Fourth, I use interviews and observation as strategies to gather significant data.

The qualitative approach goes hand in hand with the aims of Practical Theology. To re-visit Swinton and Mowat's definition, Practical Theology is a critical reflection "on the practices of the church as they interact with the practice of the world." Since "the church" is its individual members living out their Christian lives in love and faith, the point of interaction between the church and the world is each believer's lived experience. Qualitative methods are best suited to investigate this interaction.

## 3.2   Methods of data gathering

In order to accomplish specific goals in research work, selecting appropriate methods plays a decisive role in gathering significant data. "Methods are specific techniques that are used for data collection and analysis."[124] It is only through clearly defined, disciplined and systematically formulated methods that a researcher can accomplish a particular task. Although there are different tools or techniques, their applicability depends on the purpose or type of the research. The research problem shapes the methods that need to be employed.[125] Here the objective is to identify a clear understanding of the purpose of the research before committing oneself to the choice of methods. Among different qualitative data collecting strategies, I will

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[122] Vanderstoep and Johnston, *Research Methods,* 8.
[123] Robert K. Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* (London: Guilford Press, 2011), 8.
[124] Ibid. 74.
[125] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (London: Sage, 2006), 15.

apply individual interviews, and observation. Hence, in the following sections I will discuss each method briefly.

### 3.2.1  Interview

One of the data gathering methods for this research is the interview. The research interview is a technique in which knowledge is produced through skilful and purposeful interpersonal conversations.[126] The purpose is to "understand the everyday life people live from the very subjects' point of view..." [127] Therefore; this method is useful to attain primary data through direct interaction with the research participants.

In this study, the research participants are confirmation teachers and confirmands. I conducted formal interviews with ten confirmation teachers and twelve confirmands and made informal conversations with more than ten people who have direct and indirect connection with confirmation ministry.

In order to recruit the research participants for interview, I consulted with the confirmation teachers to help me choose among the confirmands. Accordingly, the teachers gave me some names. However, when I saw their choices, I realized that they focused on those they trusted as good learners and who could answer my questions properly. The data would be biased by this strategy. Therefore, I made my own decisions and recruited interviewees in a way that included all age groups and both genders and different levels of education.

To ensure confidentiality, the interviewees are presented by fictive names. I deliberately chose biblical names because Ethiopian names are specific to ethnic groups. Ethiopians would therefore recognize the area of the research and possibly identify the congregation.

I employed a 'semi-structured interview' for my research. In referring to the semi-structured interview, Kvale and Brinkmann affirm that the 'semi-structured life world interview' "seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' lived world with respect to the interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena." According to the author's explanation, a semi-structured life world interview is "neither an open, everyday conversation, nor a closed questionnaire, but it is an interview which focuses on a certain theme guided by suggested questions."[128]

The advantage of the semi-structured interview is that, since it is neither open nor closed, the interview is flexible and enables the researcher to obtain important information that will

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[126] Kvale, and Brinkmann, *Interviews*, 2.
[127] Ibid. 1.
[128] Ibid. 27.

emerge in the process. In addition, a semi-structured interview focuses on the central theme of the research because it is framed by the interview guide prepared by the researcher. I have prepared an interview guide which has two parts. The first part of the interview guide is designed for confirmation teachers, while the second part is designed for the confirmands. Unlike the unstructured interview, the responses gathered in a semi-structured interview is easier to compare and analyse.

Thus, I have utilized a semi-structured interview for my research mainly because of its open-ended nature. This gives the possibility of flexibility both for the researcher and the respondent. It also enables the respondents to answer the questions in as much detail as they want. Furthermore, with a broad and focused approach it helps me to obtain valid data on the respondent's attitudes, values and opinions about confirmation ministry.

However, the weakness of this method is that both the researcher and the respondent might bias the findings. On the one hand, bias could prevail when the interviewees were concerned more about the social acceptability of their responses and refrain from giving real information. Human beings by nature do not want to face failure or shame for what they have said or are conscious of what others would say about what they have been talking about. This aspect of human nature may cause respondents to shy away from truth out of fear and embarrassment.[129] As a result, they prefer not to give any information on anything which they think might cause them to lose their social status or dignity. On the other hand, as a researcher one may be biased by the lack of attention to the strong opinions of the respondents, or by being judgmental to what the respondents have said.[130] Thus both the researcher and the interviewees can be biased and therefore reduce the validity and reliability of the findings."[131]

Though it is impossible to avoid bias completely, it can be mitigated through objectivity. Objectivity in a context of research means striving for objectivity about subjectivity.[132] Kvale & Brinkmann suggest that the knowledge produced through interviews does not need to be subjective because qualitative interviews in principle should be an objective mode of inquiry.[133] These authors give a detailed explanation to qualitative research objectivity that comprises

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[129] William M.K. Trochim, *Research Methods: The Concise Knowledge Base* (Cincinnati OH: Atomic Dog, 2005), 96.
[130] Ibid. *96.*
[131] Charles L. Briggs, *Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 21.
[132] Kvale, & Brinkmann, *Interviews*, 242.
[133] Ibid. 244.

different meanings.[134] I found Kvale and Brinkmann's explanation of objectivity important in order to be aware of the challenges of bias.

### *3.2.2 Observation*

Observation is the other method I utilize to gather data for this research. It is a data collection method of observing behaviours and meanings as they emerge in their natural setting.[135] The aim is "to get the truth of a situation by living within that situation with close contact with the subjects…"[136] The advantage of this method is that "it allows the researcher to see directly what people do without having to rely on what they say they do."[137] Observational data is also useful for the "purpose of description of settings, activities, people, and the meanings of what is observed from the participants' perspective."[138] Accordingly, for this research, observation enables me to have a more contextual understanding of the confirmation setting, especially how the teaching-learning process takes place in congregations with the opportunities and challenges that are faced by both the teachers and the confirmands. I can obtain data that I may not acquire through individual interviews.

The limitation of this method is that the researcher might find it difficult to decide between the more or less important things in terms of making use of the resources she or he utilizes (time, materials, data etc.). On the other hand, the researcher's presence might force the participants to alter what they say and do and how significant events unfold.[139] In order to reduce these kinds of challenges as a researcher, I have considered the cultural values and the social setting and sought to act accordingly. Hopefully, my participation has not influenced the whole setting negatively and diverted the participants from their normal activities.

There are different observational strategies on which the amount and quality of observed data rely. Raymond L. Gold, quoted by Barbara B. Kawulich, states four types of observational

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[134] The meanings they ascribe to objectivity includes: 'objectivity as a freedom from bias that refers to producing a knowledge that is cross-checked and verified; 'reflexive objectivity' that can be developed by striving for sensitivity about one's prejudices and one's subjectivity; 'inter-subjective consensus' refers to communicative validation among the researchers as well as between the researchers and their subjects; 'adequacy to object' meaning reflecting the real nature of the object researched and letting the object speak; and 'the object's ability to object' which means that objectivity is attained when the objects reveal themselves through acts that frustrate researchers' preconceived ideas. Kvale & Brinkmann, *Interviews*, 242-244.

[135] Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for Social Sciences* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2001), 117.

[136] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 166.

[137] Zoltán Dörnyei, *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 169.

[138] Marie C. Hoepfl, "Choosing Qualitative Research: A Primer for Technology Education Researches," *JTE* 9.1 (1997): 7. Retrieved, 12th March, 2014. From http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JTE/v9n1/hoepfl.html.

[139] Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, (Columbus, OH: Merrill Prentice Hall), 2005.

strategies. They are "complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant and complete observant."[140] Choosing the appropriate observation strategy depends on the purpose and the setting of the studied phenomena. For my study, I applied the "observer as participant" strategy, which focuses on data collection more than participation.[141] As pointed out by Kawulich, "observer as participant is the most ethical approach among the four approaches. In this approach observation activities are known to the group being studied and the emphasis is on collecting data rather than participating in the activity being observed."[142] I chose this approach for two reasons. First, it enabled me to participate in the group activities by aiming at data collection without participating in the activities themselves. Second, from an ethical point of view, informing the group about the aim of my participation helped me to establish good relationships and made my interaction with the group smoother.

During data collection I participated in the confirmation class sessions. As far as I noticed, my presence among the confirmands did not create any disturbing influence in the way they learn. I noticed that most of the confirmation teachers perceived me as an expert rather than a learner in the field. In the first sessions I observed nonverbal and verbal actions and expressions of the teachers who perceived me as someone who is there to evaluate their teaching capacity and ability. At some points they wanted me to answer the questions asked by confirmands. But I explained that I am there only to study how the teaching and learning process took place. The strategy I used to overcome this kind of challenge was to spend time with the confirmation teachers and explain the aim of my research.

## 3.3  Data transcription

Data transcription is the construction of a written text from oral conversation.[143] It is a time-consuming task that immediately follows data collection. As suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann, there is no objective transformation from the oral to the written mode. The amount and form of transcription depends on the nature of the material, the purpose of investigation, time, and money available."[144] Hammersley and Atkinson suggest that a decision has to be

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[140] Barbara B. Kawulich. *Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method [81 paragraphs].* Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, (2005). 6 (2), Art. 43. Retrieved 24th March. 2014 from http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0502430..
[141] Ibid. 8.
[142] Ibid. 9.
[143] Kvale, and Brinkmann, *Interviews*, 183.
[144] Ibid. 186.

made by the researcher based on the purpose of the research.[145] According to these authors, a fixed decision on how to transcribe should not be made at the initial stage.

For this research, interviews were conducted by use of tape recorder. This reduced the danger of omitting important points and saved time. Both in conducting an interview and observation I took field notes in order not to distort the attention of the research participants. The interviews were made in the vernacular of the research participants, Amharic and Oromo languages. I transcribed the interviews word by word. Though tiresome and time consuming, the transcription helped me to comprehend my data better.

## 3.4   Data analysis and interpretation.

Swinton and Mowat define data analysis as, "a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the qualitative data that the researcher generates during the research process."[146] The aim is to break down and categorize the collected data into themes in a way that gives meaning. As most scholars argue, in qualitative research, data analysis begins with data collection. Among the different data analysis methods available, I employed a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is one of the major data analytic methods in qualitative research. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke define thematic analysis as:

> A method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail…it also often goes further than this and interprets various aspects of the research topic.[147]

Therefore, thematic analysis is a method that helps to organize and analyse data by the themes that emerge from the data and are not imposed by the researcher. "A theme is part of the data that captures significant points in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response within the data set."[148] The task of identifying, sorting and analysing the themes depends on the researcher. Braun and Clarke have suggested thematic analysis as a process of six steps.[149] The steps include:

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[145] Marty Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice.* (London, Routledge), 149-150.
[146] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 57.
[147] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* Vol. 3, No.2 (2006):77-101, 78.
[148] Mojtaba Vaismoradi1, Jacqueline Jones, Hannele Turunen, Sherrill Snelgrove, *Theme Development in Qualitative Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis. Journal of Nursing Education and Practice 2016, Vol. 6, No. 5.* Retrieved 24th March. 2014 From http://www.sciedu.ca/journal/index.php/jnep/index.
[149] Braun and Clarke. *Using Thematic, 80.*

*Familiarizing oneself with data*. The initial step requires reading and rereading the data until the researcher becomes familiar with themes.[150] Reading the transcribed interviews and the field notes of my observation was my first task and that helped me to understand the meaning and patterns of my data.

*Generating initial codes.* The second step is coding the data. According to Kvale and Brinkmann, coding is "breaking a text down into manageable segments and attaching one or more keywords to a text segment in order to permit later retrieval of the segment."[151] Thus I coded by using highlights and writing notes to identify the segmentation.

*Searching for themes*. As a third step, I looked for themes that captured important elements to answer my research questions.

*Reviewing themes*. The fourth step is refining the themes, that is, reading through the selected themes. Accordingly, I checked if the selected themes had adequate data support. I also merged some themes that had similar patterns, while separating the themes that needed to be categorized under different headings.

*Defining and naming the themes.* Here I outlined and named the themes in a way that addressed my research questions. That included the main themes and the sub-themes, like membership growth, challenges, opportunities, teachers, teaching methods, content, teaching material, duration, doctrinal foundation, outcome, and attachment.

*Producing the report*. The final stage is to present the findings or what Braun and Clarke call "analytic narrative" that goes beyond description of the data and makes an argument in relation to the research question. Data do not "speak for themselves";[152] therefore, interpretation is the process of attaching meaning to the data. The goal is to develop a comprehensive interpretation that includes both the specific and the main themes that will become the basis for understanding the entire study.[153] Kvale and Brinkmann introduce three contexts of interpretation: "self-understanding, critical common sense understanding and theoretical understanding."[154] Each of these interpretation approaches involves a different community and form of validation.

*Self-understanding.* The first level of interpretation is limited to the subjects' self-understanding. Thus, the interpreter condenses meaning from what the subjects themselves

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[150] Ibid. 87-90.
[151] Kvale, and Brinkmann, *Interviews*, 323.
[152] Yin, *Qualitative Research*, 207.
[153] Ibid. 207.
[154] Kvale and Brinkmann, *Interviews,* 214-216.

understand to be the meanings of their statement.[155] This step of interpretation relates to an understanding of phenomenology in which meaning is constructed in and through human experience.[156]

*Critical common-sense understanding*. The second level of interpretation goes beyond the context of the subjects' self-understanding to a wider framework that involves general knowledge and critical views on what is said. This kind of interpretation resonates with a kind of hermeneutics that originally was limited to the art of interpreting ancient texts. But recent developments show that it is applicable to the interpretative activities of humans in everyday life. In hermeneutics, interpretation always relies on a particular perspective since the researcher is never free from prejudices that arise from being a member of a culture and user of a particular language.[157] Accordingly, at this level of interpretation, the content of all the interviews will be compared and contrasted by using a common sense and a critical view to interpret the data in its wider context. Thus, using both critical and common-sense views of interpretation at the same time helps to give a general or public validation to the interpretation for the researcher and the research.

*Theoretical understanding*. The third level relates to the theoretical framework that helps to give meaning to the data. The theoretical interpretation goes beyond the subject's self-understanding and Critical common-sense understanding.[158] For the theoretical interpretation I employed different learning theories (see chapter 2) that facilitated interpretation, analysis and discussion of the data.

For this study, I applied the first and second level of interpretation in presenting my findings. I first tried to comprehend the meanings of the research participants as they themselves ascribed to their words and actions. On the second level, I tried to interpret the data within the context where it took place, considering the language and sociocultural aspects which have direct and indirect influence on the data. I applied the third level of interpretation to analyse and discuss the data.

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[155] Ibid. 208.
[156] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology,* 106.
[157] Kvale, and Brinkmann, *Interviews*, 109.
[158] Ibid.215.

## 3.5 Access to the field and the role of the researcher

Since qualitative research "studies the meaning of people's life under real world conditions,"[159] the researcher ought to be in close contact with the people or the situation under study. The main challenge in this process is to establish access, since "gaining access may be more of a process than that of a one-time event."[160] There are two ways of obtaining field access; these are called covert and overt access. Covert access refers to entering the field without the subject's knowledge; while overt access is based on informing subjects and getting their consent.[161] The selection of the type of access may depend on the purpose and setting of the study.

In the case of my research, I employed overt access, using an admission letter from Mekane Yesus Seminary to facilitate my field work. The admission letter notified my identity and status as a doctoral student and explained the research I was going to conduct. In addition, while conducting interviews and observation, I used informed consent; therefore, gaining access was not a problem. However, in a country like Ethiopia, where research is not common, and more so because I am female, I feared my research participants might not take my role as a researcher seriously, and they even would undermine my task. However, since the gatekeepers (congregation ministers and evangelists) are seminary or Bible school graduates who have some information about research, I did not face challenges of a serious kind.

As Yin points out, access should not be taken for granted, for there is a risk of losing it.[162] Therefore, the researcher is expected to maintain a genuine relationship once she or he has gained access.

Relationships between the researcher and the research participants could affect the research both positively and negatively. Thus, maintaining a healthy and ethical relationship plays a vital role, both for the researcher and the research. Additionally, nurturing field work relations is an important factor that should be taken into consideration by the researcher. According to Yin, nurturing field relations is concerned with the following issues: the researcher should present her/his identity authentically; the researcher should be respectful, friendly, and attentive to what people say and do.[163]

Yin's points regarding nurturing field relations are relevant for my field study. I did not present myself as an expert, but as someone who wanted to learn about the subject under study.

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[159] Yin, *Qualitative Research*, 8.
[160] Ibid. 114.
[161] David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*, (London, SAGE Publ.), 255.
[162] Yin, *Qualitative Research*, 115.
[163] Ibid. 257.

As much as possible I tried to maintain a cordial and respectful relationship and remain friendly and attentive throughout the study process. At the completion of my field work, I formally informed the participants that I had completed the field study by appreciating and acknowledging the importance of their participation.

To overcome the challenges related to gender I tried to create a conducive environment and a clear understanding of my project. Accordingly, I gave a thorough explanation about my role as a researcher, the purpose and objective of my study, and acknowledging their contribution. This helped my respondents to realize the importance of my project and provide necessary information. I believe this played a decisive role in accomplishing the goal of the research.

## 3.6    Research ethics

Research ethics deals with ethical concerns that may arise in the course of the research process. The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and Humanities in Norway states that "research must be regulated by ethical standards and values…."[164] Therefore, it is concerned with the relationship between the researcher and the research participants, and the validity and reliability of research.

### 3.6.1    *The researcher and research participants*

One of the main concerns of research ethics is about the relationship between the researcher and research participants. This involves informed consent, confidentiality, and possible consequences of the research.

*Informed consent* is the process of informing the research participants about the overall purpose of the study and requesting their consent and willingness to participate in the research project. Participation in research should be voluntary, which means she/he should take part in the research "out of free will, without coercion or should not be taken captive audiences."[165] In this regard, participants have to be fully aware of the procedures and risks that the research involves. Accordingly, I made the participants understand the purpose of the research and their role in the study.

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[164] Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Law and the Humanities (NESH) 2006. Retrieved March 3rd 2014 from http://www.etikkom.no/English/NESH/guidelines,2006.

[165] Trochim, *Research Methods,* 20.

As pointed out in the NESH guidelines, the information must be given in a manner that could be understood by the informant.[166] For my research, since our society mostly preserves and transmits oral information rather than written literature, I informed the research participants orally in explaining my identity as a researcher, the research I was undertaking and the purpose. I then answered questions raised by the research participants.

*Confidentiality* assures the research participants that any personal information acquired through the study will not be shared with anyone else.[167] Respecting the participants' right to privacy and anonymity is one of the basic ethical principles that is strictly followed in this research. Confidentiality assures that the source of information remains between the researcher and the participants. Hence, confidentiality was assured at all steps of data collection, data analysis and reporting of the data. No identification of personal data of the participants is available outside the project.

*Consequences:* Participants in a research project may be worried about the consequences or impact that the research might impose on them. Therefore, anticipating the possible consequences and expected benefits from their participation in the study are an aspect of research ethics.[168] In studying confirmation ministry in the EECMY, I have therefore considered the possible risks, and I did my best to avoid them. In Ethiopian society, both at an individual and an institutional level, participating in a research process and giving input to an academic study is not common. Since we belong to an oral culture, people are suspicious and fearful towards any written or documented data provision. They fear documented data will be used as evidence, and they would be subjected to interrogation. They may even fear their life is at risk. By making sure that the participants received adequate information about the purpose and procedures of the study I tried to minimize their fear of consequences.

However, I have some doubts about the degree of openness of my informants. The congregation leaders might have been afraid of sharing all the necessary information I was asking, thinking that the information might distort the image of the congregation. As stated in the NESH guidelines, I as a researcher, could not force them to tell me everything. The guidelines state that "individuals and organizations are under no legal obligation to provide information…, thus, if they refuse access, their wishes are to be respected."[169] From my

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[166] NESH, Guidelines, 13.
[167] Trochim, *Research Methods*, 21.
[168] Kvale, & Brinkmann, *Interviews*, 73.
[169] NESH, Guidelines, 21.

experience in the field, trust between the researcher and research participants was developed when I stayed in the field for a longer period of time.

As there are written rules and regulations in any society, there are also unwritten rules and norms that a society abides to. For instance, the hierarchy between old and young, relationships between peer groups, gender roles etc. are some of the sensitive aspects I had to attend to in the Ethiopian social set up. To achieve the objective of my research, I therefore, had to respect the values, norms and standards of the society. Specially, while conducting interviews with different groups, the hierarchy had to be respected in applying the appropriate and required social approach. Understanding and being familiar with the culture helped me to overcome these kinds of challenges. One of the advantages of being an insider was, therefore, my understanding and behaviour with respect to cultural norms.

Regarding the individuals and institutions that might be affected, my research will neither expose the individual nor the congregations to any risk. Trochim states some institutions formulate an institutional review board (IRB), or a committee, that reviews research proposals with respect to ethical implications to guarantee the safety and rights of the participants.[170] In case of my research the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD) has been consulted prior to engagement in data collection.

### 3.6.2   *Research validity and reliability*

The question of validity and reliability is another issue of concern. These are two key aspects of research on which the quality of a given research rely. Research validity is about the trustworthiness of the research. To enhance validity, research needs to be checked and supported by evidence. Kvale and Brinkmann emphasize that "validation is not treated as a separate or final stage in a research process, but a value built into the research process with continual checking, questioning and theoretical interpretation of findings."[171] This means that validation is integrated at all stages of the research process.

Dornyei points out, in order to reduce or control challenges to the validation process and generate trustworthiness, the best strategy is to build up the image of "researcher integrity." This implies that, beginning from data collection to the process of analysis and interpretation, the researcher must give detailed reflections on the research process without misinterpreting or losing the context of the research. She or he has to keep up a sense of responsibility and

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[170] Trochim, *Research Methods*, 21.
[171] Kvale, & Brinkmann*, Interviews*, 248-249.

accountability. I have therefore given a comprehensive and detailed description on the research process, and the findings are analysed and presented in their respective context.

The term 'reliability' represents 'repeatability' or 'consistency' of the research results. According to Trochim, even in quantitative research, where measurement is involved and possible, it is not easy to calculate reliability in its exact manner. He stresses reliability can only be estimated.[172] Dornyei argues that in qualitative research, replication is not easily achievable because the conclusion is shaped by the respondent's personal accounts and the researcher's subjective interpretation.[173] Additionally, the changing context in which research occurs may affect the conclusion. However, this does not mean it is impossible to measure reliability in qualitative research. Instead, reliability can be checked by asking for the participants' feedback, by comparing the findings, and by giving a thorough description of the context and how it affects the conclusion.

## 3.7   Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the methods employed for this research. The features of qualitative research and the rationale behind my choice of qualitative research is thus explained. The chapter has described how data is gathered, analysed, and interpreted. Accessing the field and the role of the researcher with the ethical issues involved in the research process was also part of the discussion. The next chapter presents the research context.

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[172] Trochim, *Research Methods*, 66.
[173] Dornyei, *Research Methods*, 50.

# 4 The educational context of confirmation

This chapter provides the educational context of confirmation ministry. The educational system in Ethiopia may be divided into two major parts: traditional and modern. Traditional education has three forms that includes: African traditional (indigenous) educational practices, the educational practices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOTC) and educational practices of Islam (the Koran schools). Modern education is the "Western" form of education. It emerged in the early twentieth century with the desire of the Ethiopian emperors to modernize the empire. The EECMY educational practice emerged and developed in the context of both the traditional and modern educational systems to be described as follows.

## 4.1 Traditional education

Among the three forms of traditional education in Ethiopia, I limit my presentation to the two traditions that are related to my research. In writing about traditional education in Ethiopia, most scholars refer to the EOTC's school system. Unquestionably, in Ethiopia, the institutions that could be called schools were connected to the EOTC.[174] However, before the establishment of the EOTC schools, the Ethiopian nations had their own indigenous means of knowledge transmission.

### 4.1.1 Traditional African Education

Before the establishment of EOTC schools in the 4th century A.D and Muslim religious education in the 7th century A.D, the nations and nationalities who lived in Ethiopia had their own mode of knowledge transmission from one generation to the other. This kind of education is referred as African traditional education, Peter Baguma and Irene Aheisibwe define African traditional education as:

> …ways of teaching and learning in Africa which are based on indigenous knowledge accumulated by Africans over centuries in response to *their* different physical, agricultural, ecological, political and sociocultural challenges.[175]

It is a kind of education that is developed through centuries in response to different socio-cultural challenges. According to Gammachuu Magerssaa and Aneesa Kassam, who did

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[174] Richard Pankhurst, *A Social History of Ethiopia: The Northern and Central Highlands from Early Medieval Times to the Rise of Emperor Tewodros II* (Addis Ababa: The Red Sea Press, 1990), 3.
[175] Nsamenang and Tschombe, *Handbook of African Educational*, 23.

extensive research on the sacred knowledge traditions of the Oromo, knowledge is passed on from generation to generation informally, from grandparent to grandchild, or father to son, or mother to daughter, or handed down from other biological or adoptive family members and through peer interaction.[176] This education involves intellectual, physical, and attitudinal training, categorized to different age levels. Boys and girls were taught separately to prepare each sex for their adult roles. Educating or training children and youth involves every member of the community. Thus, every knowledge, skill and attitude are learnt for survival, protection, maintaining unity, preserving cultural heritage of the ethnic community and to prepare the young for adult roles and responsibilities. The practice is similar in most African countries.[177]

Teaching methods included observation, practice-learning, storytelling, poem, riddles, folktales, proverbs, singing, myths etc. Learning is a lifelong process; it is practical and needs-based.[178] Each teaching/learning method has its own structures. For example: storytelling is more than telling a story; a dialogue or conversation follows the story where different themes from the story are picked, questioned and discussed.[179] The teaching takes place in a family and community setting. These teaching methods help the learners to experiment, create, discover, and communicate new knowledge.

Like the modern learning theories, learning in African traditional education is designed in such a way that it matches with the age of the learners. For instance: when the child is 0-6 years, a child learns different activities through accompanying parents and care givers around home, such as storytelling, singing and conversation with parents and care givers. The knowledge that the child gains through sharing and participating in family life is a holistic approach because the activities demonstrate social, cognitive, moral, and affective activities. Childhood, 6-12 years, is the stage in which cultural and skills for sustenance and continuity are acquired. The storytelling at this stage focuses on family tree and linage, family property, age group, traditional dance group and cultural choir group. This kind of learning is characterized by engagement in practical activities that are approved by elders and older siblings which are of importance for cognitive development of the child. The enrichment stage or adolescence (12-19) is a more dynamic and complex from of learning that makes the adolescent more

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[176] Gammachuu Magarssaa and Aneesa Kassam, *Sacred Knowledge of Traditions of the Oromo of Eastern Africa*, (Addis Ababa: Artist printing 2019), 107.

[177] Ibid, 24.

[178] Peter Baguma and Irene Abeisibwe, "Issues in African Education" in *Handbook of African Educational*, eds. Nsamenang and Tschombe, 24.

[179] Therese M.S Tchombe "Cultural Strategies for Cognitive Enrichment of Learning Among the Bamiléké of the West Region of Cameroon" in. *Handbook of African Educational, eds.* Nsamenang, and Tschombe 208.

responsible, mature, and creative. The storytelling and dialogue focus on family, bravery, tribal wars and family settlement stories etc. The narratives are more analytic and critical, highlighting values and models for emulation. The learners are encouraged to ask questions, to reflect on the issues and share knowledge.[180]

As Baguma and Aheisibwe pointed out, the weakness of African traditional education includes the lack of systematic written curricula and an inability in writing and keeping records. Even though there is no academic examination necessary to graduate, the highest point of the African educational experience was the ritual passage ceremony from childhood to adulthood.[181]

### 4.1.2 Education in the EOCT

The EOTC educational system grew with the introduction and expansion of Christianity in the fourth century.[182] It is the oldest unbroken educational system in the world and has its roots both in Jerusalem and Alexandria.[183] The educational content was entirely religious, with the aim of training priests, monks, and teachers for church service. The education focuses on training in reading, writing, and memorizing religious texts.[184] The teaching method is one-way communication. The students are expected to memorize what they hear. According to Richard Pankhurst, the EOTC schools were closed to women. As a result, most women were marginalized and illiterate.[185]

The EOTC schools, aiming at reverend al ministry, have five divisions: Nebab Bet (reading school), Qidase Bet (liturgy school), Zema Bet (music school), Qene Bet (poetry school) and Metsehaf Bet (literature school).[186] The first two schools are the basic level, while the later three are considered higher schools. The duration ranged to over 20 years, grade grouping and promotion was flexible, depending on the learning pace of each student. Every student was treated according to his learning capacity.[187] The medium of instruction was Geez which was a spoken as well as a written language. However, at the present time it is only used in the liturgy. In addition to theological training for church service, the EOTC have schools that

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[180] Ibid, 210-212.
[181] Baguma and Abeisibwe, "Issues in African Education", 25.
[182] Bharu Zewde, *Pioneers of Change*, 20.
[183] Bakke, *Christian Ministry*, 76.
[184] Pankhurst, *A Social History of Ethiopia,* 127.
[185] Ibid. 270.
[186] Bakke, *Christian Ministry*, 77.
[187] Bahru Zewde, *Pioneers of Change,* 19-20.

gave primary education to children.  It is a one-teacher school where a priest or a layman teaches how to read and write. These schools are found in all churches and villages.[188]

The EOTC traditional school system serves as a foundation for both religious and secular education in Ethiopia. Teklehaimanot Haileselassie has created the awareness that the traditional school system contributed to and influenced the modern school system. The system left a rich literary heritage like the alphabet and a lot of useful documentation and lyrics.[189] He also indicates the limitations of the EOTC, which include: firstly, the content and objective was almost entirely religious without giving space to the secular aspect of education; secondly, knowledge was considered firm and unchanging and thus to be learned as it is; thirdly, the emphasis was on theoretical knowledge that neglected practical skills; and fourthly, the authoritarian approach of the teacher, who expects submissive behaviour from the students. Thus, it was mandatory to respect and accept what their teacher taught them without even wondering whether he was right or wrong. Questioning the knowledge of the teachers and the source of knowledge was strictly forbidden.[190] These features and limitations of the EOTC schooling system had direct and indirect influences on both modern education and the EECMY educational practices that will be discussed later.

## 4.2    Modern education

Modern education in Ethiopia has been influenced by different regimes such as the imperial regime up to 1974, the communist regime 1974-1991, and the federal regime from 1991 onwards. The educational policy of the EECMY has, to some degree, shifted with the times.

### 4.2.1    The imperial regime

In Ethiopia, modern education emerged with the need for modernizing the country through Western kinds of education.[191] As pointed out by Aweke Shishigu, the ambition of the emperors was to "to cope-up with Western ideas and modernization."[192]  Shishigu states that the modern

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[188]    The   Ethiopian   Orthodox   Church   school   system,   Retrieved   6th   December   2018   from https://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/ethiopian/school.html.
[189] Teklehaimanot Haileselassie: "The Cultural Foundation of Education in Ethiopia." Retrieved 24th October 2016 from http://chora.virtualave.net/culturalfoundation.htm.
[190]  Ibid. *5*.
[191] Sjöström, *How Do You Spell*, 33.
[192] Aweke Shishigu Argaw, "Foundation of Curriculum in Ethiopia", 5.

school did not develop directly from traditional institutions because of the resistance of EOTC leaders.[193]

In the process of modernizing the country, the need for trained personnel opened the door for Western missions. They were invited to take part in nation-building, introducing Western modes of education. Bahru Zewde states that the Catholic and Protestant missionaries were pioneers in setting up schools.[194] Most missionaries were engaged in publishing and distributing religious literature combined with opening schools. In addition to the emphasis on religious education that mainly focused on reading and understanding the Bible, they had a complete elementary school program with the curriculum brought from their respective countries. As a result, the mission schools presented a diversified curriculum until 1935.[195]

Missionaries were expelled from Ethiopia during the Ethiopian-Italian war (1936-1941). During the occupation, the Italians used education to produce soldiers, to inculcate Italian culture, and to improve Italy's economic position.[196] After the liberation in 1941, the government continued to encourage missionary education by granting land to missionary societies. The Imperial Decree on Missions, from 1944, gave a legal basis for mission organizations. They were invited to serve in areas outside the traditional realm of the EOTC.[197] As a result, mission organizations increased their efforts in Ethiopia, establishing secondary schools and even junior colleges. The introduction of modern education was not without challenges, According to Tekeste Negash:

> The curriculum was ad hoc and left to teachers who came from different countries with different backgrounds...thus the curriculum in place was incapable of producing citizens who had the capability to interpret, enrich and adapt the heritage of the country to new needs and to changing conditions.[198]

The curricula, designed in Europe and USA, was not related to the needs and cultures of Ethiopians; textbooks and teachers were also alien. Despite these challenges, mission schools

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[193] Ibid. *4.*
[194] Bahru Zewde, *Pioneers of Change*, 22.
[195] Fantahun Ayele, "Missionary Education: An Engine for Modernization or a Vehicle towards Conversion?" *African Journal of History and Culture.* Vol. 9(7), 53-63, 2017, 60
[196] Aweke Shishigu Argaw, "Foundation of Curriculum", 6.
[197] Being threatened by missionary education the EOTC insisted the government restrain missionaries. Consequently, a Decree was issued in 1944 to regulate the work of missionaries. According to the Decree, the country was divided into "open" and "closed" areas. Regions predominantly inhabited by Orthodox Christians were termed "closed" to missionary work. Regions with little or no Christian population were regarded as "open areas." Urban centers belonged to this category. Missionaries were free to operate in open areas. As a result, the number of mission schools showed considerable growth in the "open" areas. Fantahun Ayele, "Missionary Education, 61
[198] Tekeste Negash*, Education in Ethiopia from Crisis to the Brink of Collapse* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2006), 13.

played a considerable role in expanding modern education and made modern education accessible to large numbers of Ethiopians, including girls.[199] According to Eide, unlike the EOTC religious education, the introduction of modern education led to a secularizing change in the minds of educated Ethiopians. He also mentions that modern education played a significant role in producing change agents in the country.[200]

To summarise, the Ethiopian emperors' conviction was that modern education was an excellent strategy to educate and train citizens who respected their king, country, and religion.[201] Thus, the subject of moral studies (that included civics and religion) was an important component of the curriculum. Pankhurst, Wagaw, Bahru Zewde and other authors agree the emperors' most important political goal was the creation of a strong central state power.[202] That means the need for modern education was not only to develop and modernize the country, but also to serve the emperors' ability to control the empire.

### 4.2.2   *The communist regime*

In 1974, Ethiopia was declared a republic and ruled by a socialist/communist worker's party. The path of scientific socialism was deemed the most appropriate strategy to bring the country out of its backward stage of development.[203] The ambitions of the new government were to promote mass education among the rural inhabitants, where ninety percent of the population lived, and where illiteracy reached 95%.[204] The aim was to overcome poverty through social education. Thus, the Ethiopian government began to put more emphasis on the role of education for development, and socialist education stressed the inculcation of ideology as a prime objective with Marxism and production as the main pillars.[205] The political economy of Marxism-Leninism was made a subject at all levels of the educational system. Since socialism is critical toward religion, consequently, the separation of church and state and the secularization of public life and atheist education came into practice.[206] Moreover, the church's schools were brought under government control.[207] Like the imperial system, the socialist school system also served the agenda of the government instead of serving the needs of the

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[199] Aweke Shishigu Argaw, *Foundation of Curriculum in Ethiopia, 6.*
[200] Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia,* 28.
[201] Tekeste Negash, *Education in Ethiopia*, 13.
[202] Sjoström*, How Do You Spell*, 34.
[203] Tekeste Negash, *Education in Ethiopia*, 18.
[204] Sjöström*, How Do You Spell*, 40.
[205] Tekeste Negash, *Education in Ethiopia*, 18.
[206] Eide, *Revolution & Religion,* 111, 144.
[207] Ibid. 106.

people. After the socialist government was defeated in 1991, a new government came to power with a new education policy.

### 4.2.3   The federal regime

When the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, (EPRDF) came to power in 1991, they reconfigured Ethiopia as a federal state, according to the constitution that came into effect in 1994. A new era dawned on Ethiopia – with a federal system of governance, equipped with an appropriate educational policy.[208] The major feature of this was the introduction of ethnic languages as mediums of education for primary education. The Ethiopian government has been extremely efficient in mobilizing external funds (bilateral and multilateral) for the expansion of the education sector. Most of the expansion is financed by the growing flow of foreign aid and loans as well by a growing contribution from the communities.

In general, the education policy in Ethiopia in the past has been subordinate to the political system that only permitted change in the direction desired by the rulers.

## 4.3   The educational policy of the missions

As presented above, the emperors' permission to allow the missionary societies into the country rested on the need to modernize Ethiopia. Western missions followed up. Among them we find the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM), the American United Presbyterian Mission (AUPM), the German Hermannsburg Mission (GHM), the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM), the American Lutheran Mission (ALM), the Danish Evangelical Mission (DEM), the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) and a number of smaller societies. Among these, three societies came to play the most prominent role in laying the foundation for Christian education in the EECMY. I will describe the historical and theological background of the missions to understand the basis of their educational framework.

### 4.3.1   The Swedish Evangelical Mission

The SEM grew out of a revival movement in the church of Sweden. This mission pioneered evangelical missions in Ethiopia. The SEM put emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and

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[208] Tekeste Negash, *Education in Ethiopia*, 22.

layman's right to gather for prayer and Bible study. The movement made an impact on the Church of Sweden by turning "listeners" to "readers".[209]

In chapter 1.3, I presented some of the history of the SEM after they arrived on the coast of Massawa in 1866. Most noteworthy in this connection are the translations by Aster Ganno Salban and Onesimus (Abba Gammachis) of the Bible, hymnbook, and *Luther's Small Catechism* into Oromo. This established an Oromo literature and laid the groundwork for education in the vernacular. Literacy was the prerequisite for reading the Bible. Accordingly, the SEM had a policy of requiring new confirmands to be able to read.[210]

Not being able to travel through Ethiopia to the Oromo, the SEM sent an indigenous witness among the Oromo, Daniel Debella. On arriving in Boji, western Ethiopia in 1898, he immediately opened a school. This is the first school among the Oromo in this part of the country. The SEM missionaries reached the western part of Wollega in 1923. Here they continued with evangelism together with education and medical service.[211]

### 4.3.2    *The German Hermannsburg Mission*

The GHM is a missionary society born out of the Pietistic movement of 19th century in Germany which was led by Louis Harms.[212] Louis Harms experienced a personal religious awaking near the end of his theological studies in 1830 and became a popular preacher. In his preaching and teachings he emphasized a pious life, spiritual rebirth in the Holy Spirit and encouraged missionary work as part of a religious duty.[213]  He established the GHM with the vision of taking the Gospel to the Oromo people.[214] To achieve this goal, he opened a school for missionary candidates at Hermannsburg. However, the political situation in Ethiopia did not allow the GHM missionaries to reach their destination at the time.[215] After many attempts, the GHM finally reached Wollegga in 1927, and started missionary work in Aira. The GHM was engaged in education, medical care, and evangelism. Unlike the missionaries of the SEM, the GHM plan was to establish a Lutheran church.  To realize their vision, the missionaries focused

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[209] Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers*, 221, Lundstrom & Ezra Gebremedhin, *Kenisha* (London: Red Sea Press 2011), 158.

[210] Fekadu Gurmessa, *The Evangelical Faith Movement*, 153, 146.

[211] Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers,* 105-114.

[212] Ibid. *106.*

[213] Fekadu Gurmessa, *The Evangelical Faith Movement*, 68.

[214] Johannes Launhardt, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa (1919-1991): with Special Reference to the EECMY and the Addis Ababa Synod* (Münster, Lit. Verlag, 2004), 56.

[215] Magarsaa Guutaa, *From a Humble Beginning to Advanced Standing, A History of Mekane Yesus Seminary* (Addis Ababa, Mekane Yesus Seminary, 2011), 2.

on education "convinced that literacy was a critical milestone in the process of establishing a church."[216]

### 4.3.3 *The Norwegian Lutheran Mission*

The NLM grew out of a spiritual awakening in the second half of the 19th century that left a lasting impact on the life of many young Christians in Norway. According to Bakke, the revival was influenced by the lay movement started by the Norwegian lay preacher, Hans Nielsen Hauge, and also by confessional Lutheranism through the so called "Johnson revival."[217] Thus, the movement emphasized the priesthood of all believers which, in turn, demanded the right of groups of believers to administer the sacraments, and also the Lutheran heritage of giving priority to the Bible in matters of faith and life.[218] The movement, initially called the China Mission, changed its name to the Norwegian Lutheran Mission when the communists expelled the missionaries from China in 1949.

The NLM came to Ethiopia on the recommendation of the SEM in 1948. The initiative was supported by Emperor Haile Selassie I. Based on the decision to begin work in Sidama and Gamo Gofa, the NLM started their work at Yrga Alem and immediately started basic schools and health care.[219] General education and biblical teaching were integrated in the school.[220] Icelandic, Finnish, and Danish missionary organizations joined NLM, and at the height of the missionary endeavour, in 1974, there were 222 foreign missionaries in the then South Ethiopia Synod.[221] They were engaged in a network of primary and secondary schools, with the Teacher Training Institute in Yirga Alem, the Evangelical College in Debre Zeit, the agricultural school in Wondo Genet, and the vocational school in Arba Minch at the top. Through evangelism the mission experienced an immediate and almost overwhelming response. To cope with the hunger for Bible knowledge a network of Bible-schools and a theological seminary at Awasa were built.[222]

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[216] Fekadu Gurmessa, *The Evangelical Faith Movement*, 146.
[217] Bakke, *Christian Ministry* 1987, 101.
[218] Ibid. 102.
[219] Fekadu Gurmessa*, The Evangelical Faith Movement*, 71.
[220] Tolo, *Sidama and Ethiopian*, 134, 149.
[221] Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 58.
[222] Fekadu Gurmessa, *The Evangelical Faith Movement, 216.*

### 4.3.4 Joint efforts within Christian education

As seen above, schools were started long before the EECMY was established as a national church. It is the teaching of different mission organizations with an evangelical conviction that brought the EECMY into existence. Thus, education ministry in EECMY has a pre-history.

In mission schools, general education and biblical teaching were integrated. There was no distinction between teaching the alphabet and preaching the gospel.[223] Thus, preaching and teaching were two sides of the same coin; in many cases, the evangelist and teacher were the same person.

Christian education was provided by missionaries as confirmation teaching combined with literacy. The need for education was high in all areas. When members increased in numbers, missionaries opened theological seminaries and Bible schools to train evangelists and teachers. Accordingly, the missionaries played a decisive role in training church leaders. Though membership growth is perceived as a blessing starting from the early stage, it has become a huge challenge due to shortage of qualified teachers. According to Knud Tage Anderson,

> Such kind of tremendous growth in membership should be followed up with sound and proper Christian instruction, at the right time and level that has to lead to mature Christian understanding and committed church membership.[224]

Responding to such challenges, the missions played a significant role by organizing short- and long-term training. The first minister training was given by the American Presbyterian Mission working in Wollega. Their two first men were ordained as early as 1939.[225] The GHM missionaries also ordained one person after a short period of training in 1941, after which they were forced to leave Ethiopia because of the war.[226] In Wollega, formal training of ministers was started after the war. From 1949-1958, the SEM conducted ministers training for two groups. The GHM also opened a Bible school in Aira 1959 / 1960 to train evangelists and ministers. The NLM established Dilla Bible School in 1956. This was later extended and moved to Tabor, Awasa.[227]

The trained evangelists and ministers played an indispensable role in carrying the burdens of teaching confirmation classes, securing a basic level of Christian knowledge in the

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[223] Tolo, *Sidama and Ethiopian*, 160.
[224] Knud T. Anderson, *A Brief Study of the Mekane Yesus Church*, (Haderslev, 1980), 47
[225] Magarsaa Guta, *From Humble Beginning*, 11.
[226] Bakke, *Christian Ministry*, 138.
[227] Magarsaa Guutaa, *From Humble Beginning*, 11.

congregations.[228] Moreover, they became leaders of congregations, parishes, districts and synods when the EECMY was organized as a church.[229] At the early stage no curriculum was developed to train ministers, mainly due to a lack of teaching material in Amharic. Therefore, the courses were designed by the teachers. The content of the teaching and the theological emphasis was different from one Bible school to the other. As pointed out by Johannes Launhardt,

> The mission realizing the urgent need for … trained evangelists, started the course for pastoral training and opened bible schools…There is no question that the missions gave biblical instruction based on their denominational understanding and teaching.[230]

The diverse theological approaches and practices of the missions were a challenge to the establishment of a united evangelical church and church leadership. Bakke's research on Christian ministry gives a detailed explanation of how different mission traditions were integrated with the culture of the people and resulted in different patterns of leadership in the same church.[231] According to Staffan Grenstedt the heterogeneous views of missions concerned different emphasis on polity, doctrine, and worship.

> As to polity…the priesthood of all believers and the necessity of ordained ministers is the common basis for all missions except for NLM…As to doctrine, the NLM and GHM emphasized the Lutheran confessional documents more than the SEM and the ALM. As to worship, liturgy, the "right" administration of the sacraments was more emphasized in the GHM than by others.[232]

These differences influenced Christian education and the organization of congregational ministries. Despite their difference in theology and practice the missionary societies worked together to solve the shortage of trained minsters and designed a standard curriculum for Christian education by establishing the Lutheran missions committee (LMC) in 1951.[233] This

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[228] Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 84.
[229] Magarsaa Guutaa, *From Humble Beginning*, 29.
[230] Launhardt, *Evangelicals*, 116.
[231] The elder-structure in the southern Ethiopia, (Sidamo, Wolayita, Kambata) with NLM background and the Luba (ordained pastor)-structure in Wollaga, with GHM background, has resulted in different congregational leadership structures. Bakke, *Christian Ministry,* 83-106.
[232] Staffan Grenstedt, *Ambaricho and Shonkolla: From Local Independent Church to the Evangelical Mainstream in Ethiopia: The Origins of the Mekane Yesus Church in Kambata Hadiya*, (Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia LXXXII, Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2000) 130.
[233] It was the LWF that initiated the organization of Lutheran council and encouraged the establishment of the Lutheran Mission Committee (LMC) in Ethiopia. The main objectives of LMC where: serving the common aims of Lutheran missions, making the gospel available to people of Ethiopia and to encourage the assumption of responsibility, leading to autonomy in the church. Launhardt*, Evangelicals*, 126.

committee took up important and urgent issues and worked on its implementations for the growing church. Hence, the questions of Christian literature, an evangelical secondary school, centralized theological training, and Christian broadcasting were main issues of the committee. Their effort had a positive impact on the development of Christian education in EECMY and general education in the country.

## 4.4 The educational policy of the EECMY

As it was mentioned in one of the EECMY Christian education department reports, the church's archive documents show that until the 1960s the church had a diversified Christian teaching program. The need for a unified curriculum had emerged with the idea of establishing a unified evangelical church. In the process of creating a unified national church the establishment of four institutions played a major role: The Joint Literature Program (JLP*)*, the Ethiopian Evangelical College at Debre Zeit (EEC), the Mekane Yesus Seminary (MYS) and the Central Office (CO).[234] Among the four institutions three are related to the educational ministry of the church. Thus, I will briefly describe the contribution of these institutions for the EECMY Christian education.

### 4.4.1 The Joint Literature Program

This institution played a significant role in producing literature for mission / church schools and congregational ministries. It was established in April 1959 by Lutheran mission Committee (LMC) with the aim of providing the people with sound and easily understood religious literature. The EECMY became a full member on the governing board when the church was established on national level. The literature program was active in translating and printing spiritual books to be used at different levels in mission/church schools, including: books for daily devotion, mimeographed pamphlets on Sunday text expositions, with the purpose of helping preachers, ministers and evangelists in their work.[235] The joint literature program accomplished a lot in preparing teaching material for congregations including confirmation teaching. This program underwent thorough structural and administrational changes and during the 1960s it was decided that the literature program should be expanded into a mass media centre and a recording studio for radio programs should be established.[236] The new media centre

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[234] Eide*, Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia,* 57.
[235] Launhardt, *Evangelicals*, 131.
[236] Manfred Lundgren, *Proclaiming Christ to His World: The Experience of Radio Voice of the Gospel 1957-1977*, (Geneva, LWF, 1983), 75.

was given the name Yemesarch Dimts Communications Service (YDCS), meaning Voice of Good Tidings. The centre was built in 1960/61. The YDCS was engaged in literacy campaign from 1962-1975.[237] Currently, The YDCS comprise four departments under two major divisions, the first division is the Electric Media Division (EMD) that includes audio-visual communication, cassette and video and radio (Broadcasting) ministries. The audio-visual unit among other services mainly focus on producing audio and video programs that nurture Christians to grow in their faith. The Print Media Division (PMD) works on producing and disseminating books for different church units.

### 4.4.2  *The Ethiopian Evangelical College*

The EEC was started as a joint program between the missions and Ethiopians. It was to be a four-year high school plus two years of teacher training.[238] The EEC followed the curriculum of the ministry of education with the addition of religious instruction given between three and five periods a week. The spiritual education was as important as the academic training.[239] Morning and evening devotions were held as well as Sunday services with full attendance from the community around. The students were active in witnessing the Gospel to the surrounding community.[240] Moreover, the idea of designing a unified confirmation curriculum for congregational ministry was proposed by the EEC teachers at the 5th General Assembly of the EECMY in 1967.[241] The proposal was taken into consideration and a Christian education committee was established. Generally, the EEC got a reputation for rendering excellent service to the nation and the church. During the communist regime, the EEC was confiscated by the Air Force. Recently the EEC was handed back to the EECMY and started to function as a college for management and leadership training.

### 4.4.3  *The Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary*

Establishing a major theological training institution was one of the primary issues taken up by the missions, and later on by the EECMY, believing that theological education was the

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[237] The YDCS literacy campaign was financially supported by LWF. The schools were situated in the countryside in all regions and more than half million students had been involved up to 1975. The aim of the campaign was to teach participants to read and write Amharic, to impart basic skills in arithmetic, to provide a basic social and civic education, to make literacy work-oriented and to promote socio-economic changes. Sjöström, *How Do You Spell*, 45.
[238] Leonard Flachman and Merlyn Seitz eds. *Mission to Ethiopia: An American Lutheran Memoir 1957-2003*. (Minneapolis MN: Kirk House, 2004), 294.
[239] Launhardt, *Evangelicals,128*
[240] Flachman, and Seitz, *Mission to Ethiopia*, 294.
[241] EECMY Christian Education Ministry Consultation, Aug 5-9, 1997. (EECMY Head office Archives)

foundation on which the church's ministry must stand. The need for a higher training institution for ministers had been on the agenda of LMC in Ethiopia since 1957. The aim was to assist the new church with trained ministers who could teach and lead the people of God, based on a solid Biblical and doctrinal foundation. MYS started in October 1960.[242] Since its establishment the MYS has seen continued growth in order to fulfil its objective of training leaders, ministers and missionaries for the various ministries of the EECMY as well as other churches in Ethiopia and beyond.

The contribution of these three organizations was immense in facilitating the Christian education within the EECMY in past and present.

### 4.4.4  A Christian education curriculum

As was discussed earlier, the idea of designing a unified curriculum was proposed by the EEC teachers in 1966 and approved by the 5th General Assembly in 1967.

The original name of this program was The Christian Education Curriculum Development Program. In 1973 the program was integrated with the newly established Evangelism department. The program was led by a working committee until it was fully institutionalized as one of the EECMY gospel ministry departments. At its early stage, the program had the following aims:

1. That men and women receive Jesus Christ as their personal savior for salvation from the condemnation of sin and acknowledge God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as a Triune God.

2. That they grow in the faith as children of God through the empowering and leading of the Holy Spirit.

3. That through their fellowship with other saints they worship and serve Him alone.

4. That they, in their families, communities and nation be obedient to the Holy word of God and their calling.[243]

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[242] Magarsaa Guutaa, *From a Humble Beginning,* 20.
[243] EECMY 6th General Assembly, Bakoo, 1967.

Based on these general objectives, the section has produced, and evaluated teaching materials for institutional and congregational ministries. The focus is on faith formation, spiritual, physical, and social growth and maturity. This relates to the church's motto of wholistic ministry. Among other works the section proposed a curriculum for congregational ministry that is classified into three categories, these include:

1. *Christian Faith: Course One*: The curriculum that was developed to instruct new converts in basic Bible knowledge and which could be used by evangelists and ministers as a teaching guide for congregational and Gospel Expansion ministry. The name of the material is 'God and His promise'.

2. *Christian Faith: Course Two* is a curriculum that was developed to guide those who completed Course one and should be taught spiritual maturity or faith growth. The name of the course is 'Growing in Faith' (this material was used to teach confirmation).

3. *Christian Faith: Course Three*: A course which helps to nurture believers in their faith and prepare them for further ministry in church and society. The curriculum aims at further development in growth and expansion of the church. The material was named 'Christian Life Course.'[244]

Accordingly, these curricula were designed for pre-confirmation, confirmation, and post-confirmation. However, the dissemination and the application of the material did not reach its goal due to internal and external challenges that the church faced during the communist regime. The external challenge was the pressure and persecution from the communist regime. The internal challenges include the lack of qualified teachers and lack of funds. Thus, the churches' Christian education ministry ceased to exist for more than a decade.

The Christian Education Section of EECMY was re-established as the first section within the Evangelism Department in 1977. Later, in 1983, the Theology Ministry was founded. These two sections merged in 2003. Finally, the EECMY Christian Education Theology Division was established in the year 2014 and began its activity as one of the three divisions within the Department of Mission and Theology. The EECMY Christian Education Section has the following six objectives:

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[244] EECM, *Christian Education Ministry Consultation*, Aug 5-9, 1997. (EECMY Head office Archives).

1. Build the capacity of leaders providing leadership services at congregation, parish, and synod levels through short and long training.

2. Increasing the number of ministers and evangelists through theological training.

3. Empower ministers and evangelists through inspirational and educational events such as seminars and larger conferences

4. Enhance and maintain Christian maturity (growth in faith and service; disciple training, etc.) in the church.

5. Economically empower ministers and evangelists' families in order to increase their efficiency and commitment in ministry.

6. Improve the institutional capacity of EECMY Bible schools, to ensure the Bible schools function efficiently and effectively. [245]

At present, Christian Education carries out different activities. It provides for the general and basic teaching of the Church in direct contact to the congregations, keeping its identity, its vision and mission and for responding to current challenges. It facilitates confirmation class teaching materials and facilitates the patterns of worship in the EECMY (liturgical worship, special initiated by international ecumenical bodies). It also conducts consultations on theological and doctrinal issues and formulates statements to guide the life and ministries of the Church. The division develops curriculum for the Bible schools, visits synods and presbyteries to advise and encourage on matters related to theological issues and church ministries.[246] As stated, the division responds to the challenge of growth and the Church's capacity to render adequate Christian Education.[247] In relation to confirmation ministry, the division has tried to design a unified confirmation teaching manual; however, the manual had shortcomings. The need for a unified and contextualized confirmation curriculum has not been met.

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[245] Department for Mission and Theology- Christian Education and Theology Division Profile. (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: EECMY –DMT, 2018), 5.
[246] Ibid. 6.
[247] Ibid. 39.

## 4.5    Summary

This chapter has dealt with the educational context of confirmation ministry. The traditional and modern educational systems in Ethiopia were discussed.  This chapter also describes how the EECMY educational practice emerged and developed in the context of both the traditional and modern educational systems. The chapter also presented the background of Christian education in pre-EECMY and after the EECMY was established as national church. In connection to this the theological context of confirmation is the focus of the next chapter.

# 5    The theological context of confirmation

The aim of this chapter is to show the religious and theological context in which the EECMY confirmation ministry developed. The EECMY understands itself as a confessional Lutheran church.[248] Based on this self-identification, EECMY's theology of confirmation is therefore anchored in Lutheran theology. The chapter begins with a brief description of the development of confirmation ministry at different times of church history, then the theology of confirmation in the Lutheran church is discussed. Finally, the current EECMY theology of confirmation is seen within the larger religious context of Ethiopia.

## 5.1    A brief history of Confirmation

The term confirmation refers to the action that takes place after water baptism.[249] Baptism was a sacrament of initiation among the early Christians, and confirmation was an integral part of the service. As Richard R. Osmer says in his study on confirmation:

> During the first centuries of the church's life, confirmation was part of a much border catechumenal process. Firmly embodied in the practice of adult initiation, its primary purpose was to shape the habits of thought, action and feeling of those who were joining the church.[250]

This shows that confirmation was not practiced separately but integrated with baptism. What was considered as confirmation was the laying on of hands by the bishop. This marked the coming of the Holy Spirit to confirm baptism.[251] The catechumenate, the institution for basic Christian education, emerged out of the teaching and formation offered to new converts in order that they could demonstrate moral and spiritual readiness before they joined the Christian community.[252]

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[248] Magarsaa Guutaa, "The EECMY and Her Theological Self," Paper presented to the Theological Consultation, the EECMY Department of Mission and Theology, Christian–Education and Theology Division, (Addis Ababa, May 2015), 14.

[249] The term 'confirmation' was officially used for the first time in France, probably in a Pentecost sermon, by Bishop Faustus, at the council of the Council of Orange (A.D. 441), Krych, *Confirmation*, 49.

[250] Richard R. Osmer, *Confirmation: Presbyterian Practices in Ecumenical Perspective*. (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1996), 30.

[251] John M. Brenner, "A Brief Study of Confirmation: Historical Development, Theological Consideration, and Practical Implications." (*A paper originally delivered to the Joint Metro Conference meeting in PT. Washington DC on Nov.18.1996*), Retrieved 15th November 2015, *from https://www.lutheransonline.com/lo/673/FSLO-1310052673-111673.PDF. 2.*

[252] Osmer, *Confirmation,* 30.

During the Middle Ages, confirmation became a separate event and second sacrament. According to Brenner it was Thomas Aquinas who gave the classical theological expression to what would become official Roman Catholic teaching:

> …baptism is a spiritual generation into Christian life, so confirmation is spiritual growth bringing man to spiritual maturity. But it is clear that, from a comparison with bodily life, the activity of a man newly born is different from that which is proper to him when he reaches maturity. So through the sacrament of confirmation a man is given spiritual power for activity that is different from that for which the power is given in baptism.[253]

The doctrine of confirmation as a sacrament was affirmed at the Council of Trent in 1547.[254] The reformers, Luther, Melanchthon as well as Calvin, rejected the sacramental idea of confirmation.[255] This does not mean the reformers banned confirmation, as Luther E. Lindberg writes, "Reformation however, gave new freedom and permission for the church to interpret and practice confirmation in the light of reformed doctrine."[256] Accordingly, the reformers put the emphasis on catechetical instruction and preparation for confession preceding the first communion.[257]

Among the reformers, it was Luther who laid a theological foundation for confirmation through his Small and Large Catechisms. "Luther's work in this area represents a brilliant synthesis of theory and practice…universally adopted in the reform movement, even by the Roman Catholic Church."[258] The instruction based on the catechisms explains basic Christian doctrine that helped the confirmands both to understand and strengthen their faith.

A catechism is a short summary of the Christian faith.[259] Luther designed the catechism after observing that those who taught the confirmands lacked knowledge of basic Christian teaching. He used a simple question and answer format arranging and explaining traditional catechetical elements in new ways. A variety of forms furthered catechetical instruction including catechetical hymns, sermons and prayers focused on parts of the catechism. The catechism was

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[253] Brenner, "A Brief Study of Confirmation", 6.

[254] Osmer, *Confirmation*, 51. The Report of the Joint Commission on "The Theology and Practice of Confirmation" (Minneapolis, Augsburg Publ. House), 1970, 8.

[255] The Report of the Joint Commission, 14.

[256] Luther E. Lindberg, Lutheran Confirmation Ministry in Historical Perspective, in Krych *Confirmation*, 43.

[257] Osmer, *Confirmation*, 59.

[258] Ibid. 67.

[259] Catechism traditionally has several meanings: a course of instruction in the Christian faith, the content of that instruction and a written text that contains the text. In the early church instructions in the basics of faith (catechesis) and knowledge of those basics were prerequisite for baptism. Later catechisms were used to instruct those baptized. See Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *Dictionary of Luther and Lutheran Traditions*, (Baker Academics, Grand Rapids MI, 2017), 128.

taught in several settings, including worship services, schools, homes, and the pastor's study. In Luther's time a significant number of those who were learning the catechism were illiterate. Therefore, instruction was oral and used repetition to impress the text on the learner. Memorization was required with the expectation that it would produce a deep active engagement with the Christian faith. Pictures of Bible stories were used to illustrate the various parts of each section of the catechism and to aid instruction.

*Luther's Small Catechism* conveyed the basics of faith in an easily understandable manner. By offering a simple yet profound introduction to the Christian faith it encourages thoughtful engagement in that faith. [260]

In the 17th century and beyond the *Small Catechism* became a key text in Lutheran missionary outreach. It remains a defining document for transmission of Lutheran doctrine and piety down to the present day.[261] It was and is the main tool in confirmation teaching.  Geoffrey R. Boyle summarizes the goal of *Luther's Small Catechism* as:

> Catechesis is the process of transmitting the word of God so that the mind and the life of the one who receives it grows up in every way into Jesus Christ, living in faith toward him and in love toward the neighbor, while Catechesis does lead from the font to altar, culminating in the extolling of the Lord's gifts and the confession of his name in that churchly rite called confirmation, catechesis itself is from the womb to the tomb.[262]

In the ECCMY *Luther's Small Catechism* was a basis for doctrinal teaching from the earliest stages until today. According to Øyvind M Eide, "among the Church's confessional documents, *Luther's Small Catechism* has been the basis for the doctrinal teaching…"[263]


## 5.2   A Lutheran theology of Confirmation

One cannot understand Lutheran theology of confirmation without knowing the basic elements of Lutheran theology. Lutheran theology has a scriptural foundation. Krych begins her discussion by showing how the documents on Lutheran theology of confirmation between 1970's  and 1990's  made  the central teaching of  the Lutheran church, "Justification by grace

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[260]  Luther's Preface, Retrieved on February, 18/ 2022 from   https://catechism.cph.org/.129-131

[261] Mark A. Lampart, ed., *Encyclopedia of Martin Luther and the Reformation*, Vol. 1: A-L, (Rowan & Littlefield, Lanham. New York, 2017), 110.

[262]  Geoffrey R. Boyle, "Confirmation, Catechesis, and Communion: A Historical Survey," CTQ 79, (2015): 121-142,

[263]  Eide, Revolution & Religion, 81.

through faith alone," a point of departure.[264] This is formulated in the Augsburg Confession, article IV:

> It is also thought among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works of satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.[265]

Justification received in faith is a gift and work of God.[266] The Holy Spirit creates, preserves and strengthens faith through his word and sacraments.[267] The Word of God is "God's self-expression, self-revelation and impartation of God's very self."[268] The Bible is referred as the Word of God, and thus, in explaining the significance of the Bible, Luther emphasizes that it is the only authoritative guiding principle of Christian faith and the Church, or as the formula of Concord says:

> We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone (…) Other writings of ancient or contemporary teachers, whatever their names may be, shall not be regarded as equal to Holy Scripture, but all of them together shall be subjected to it…[269]

Based on the Lutheran understanding, Baptism is a rite through which water is used according to God's command and connected with God's Word that contains and conveys all the fullness of God.[270] Baptism is commanded by Jesus (Mt 28:19, Mk 16:16) and a sign of the believer's death and resurrection with Christ (Rom 6:2-5; Col 2:12). Luther thus places Baptism at the centre of Christian life. His understanding of Baptism expresses his view on the doctrine of justification. In Baptism we receive forgiveness of sin and the gift of Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39).[271] Through Baptism the Holy Spirit performs the work of rebirth and renewal, "a washing

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[264] Krych, *Confirmation,* 89.

[265] Augsburg Confession, article, IV.

[266] Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther, Translated* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, Press, 1966), 231.

[267] Brenner, "A Brief Study of Confirmation," 6.

[268] Krych, *Confirmation*, 90.

[269] Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000) 486. Retrieved 20th August 2018. https://lutherantheology.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/a-brief-introduction-to-sola-scriptura

[270] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther, 357.*

[271] Ibid. 353.

of regeneration."[272]  In Baptism God brings us into his family and establishes his covenant of grace. Lutherans confess the teaching of Scripture that Baptism is unilateral and complete.[273]

Holy Communion is instituted by our Lord Jesus (Mt 26:26-28, Lk 22:19-20). The bread and wine set with God's Word makes it truly Christ's body and blood.  However, "this does not mean that bread and wine are changed into flesh and blood, but the body and blood of Christ are present "in, with, and under" the bread and wine."[274] By receiving Holy Communion we are united with Christ's spiritual body and the community of love.[275] As Luther writes in the Small Catechism:

> Christ's words given for you and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin shows us that, forgiveness of sin, life and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin there is also life and salvation.[276]

Hence, according to Lutheran teaching, Baptism is a sacrament of initiation that makes the person a child of God, and Holy Communion is a sacrament of sustenance, which maintains and strengthens what was given in baptism.[277] Here the word of God plays a key role, because the sacrament is nothing without word. As Luther said:

> It is not the water that produces these effects, but the word of God connected with the water… the eating and the drinking do not in themselves produce them, but the words for you and for the forgiveness of sin.

Thus, without the Word of God the sacraments become just "sacred magic." Based on this theological understanding, confirmation has relationship with the word and the sacraments. Confirmation is a ministry through which those who are baptized and become members of God' family are instructed by the word of God to deepen their faith. Confirmation thereby prepares the confirmands to participate in Holy Communion.

Armand J. Boehme discusses the relationship between baptism, confirmation, and communion. He stresses Luther's high regard for the instructional aspect of confirmation in preparing a person for her/his first communion. Quoting Luther, "If any refuse your instructions ... they should not be admitted to the sacrament of the altar."[278] According to Boehme the aim

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[272] Ibid 353.
[273] Ibid 374.
[274] Millard Eriksson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House), 353.
[275] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther, 378.*
[276] *Amharic / English, Catechisms, Creeds and Confessions*, (USA: Augsburg Fortes, 2000), 307.
[277] The Report of the Joint Commission, 14.
[278] Confirmation: When? Early? Later or Not At all? Retrieved 15th July, 2019 from https://logia.org/logia-online/confirmation-when-early-later-or-not-at-all2017.

of instruction is that the confirmands understand the severity of sin and significance of Christ's redemptive work. Accepting it by faith and recognizing the forgiveness through the Word precedes taking part in Holy Communion.[279]

## 5.3  EECMY theology and practice of Confirmation

The EECMY understands itself as a confessional Lutheran church.[280] The people that flow into the EECMY come from diverse religious backgrounds. They bring their spirituality and thought patterns into the church, and this makes an impact on the way Christian faith is shaped and practiced. As some studies show, Lutheran churches have different interpretations and practices regarding confirmation.[281] The 1970 report of *The joint commission on the theology and practice of confirmation*, lists, for example, six types of confirmation theology and practice in Lutheran churches. They include the catechetical, hierarchical, sacramental, traditional, pietistic and rationalistic type.[282] The differences show that confirmation is influenced by the context in which it developed.  Therefore, a short presentation of the socio-religious context of the EECMY may be helpful.

### 5.3.1  Initiation in African traditional society

As discussed in the previous chapter, before the introduction of Christianity and Islam, Ethiopian nations followed different religious practices that involved the rite of initiation.  In According to Gammachuu Magersaa and Aneesa Kassam, an individual is expected to pass through different age-based initiation stages to qualify as a complete person and considered responsible in traditional Oromo society.[283] That means a child is not considered as a full member of society unless she/he passes through initiation stages that focus on learning different roles. In explaining initiation in the African context, Onwumere A. Ikwuagwu says:

> Initiation introduces the candidate into the human community and the worlds of the sprites and ancestors, the individual learner's behavior patterns,

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[279] The understanding of and desire for communion meant "(1) understanding Christ's redemptive work, (2) accepting the presence and promise of Christ, (3) understanding sin and recognizing/anticipating God's forgiveness in Sacrament and Word, (4) awareness and appreciation of life in Christ, and (5) expectation of seeing and banqueting with Christ. This understanding was to include the "comprehension of certain basic facts of salvation history and certain formulations of faith. The final statement of this section says: "To receive Holy Communion without understanding would be to perform a meaningless act." Ibid.

[280] Magarsaa Guutaa, EECMY and Her Theological Self, Paper presented to the Theological Consultation, the EECMY Department of Mission and Theology, Christian–Education and Theology Division, (Addis Ababa, May 2015), 14.

[281] Lindberg, "Lutheran Confirmation Ministry" in Krych *Confirmation*, 44-45.

[282] The Report of the Joint Commission, 8.

[283] Gammachuu Magarssaa and Aneesa Kassam, *Sacred Knowledge*, 104,

techniques and institutions of adult life. He/she also learns sacred myths and traditions of the community, the names of the deities and history of their works. In addition, he/she learns mystical relations between the community and supernatural beings, as established at the beginning of time. Finally, initiation reveals the almost awesome seriousness with which the individual assumes responsibility of receiving and transmitting spiritual values. [284]

To gain the right to be admitted among the adults requires serious tests. Transition from one stage to the next is not a simple adoption or switch in lifestyle but is a demanding process. Hence, it is not birth but passing through the rite of initiation that makes a person a full member of the community.

### 5.3.2  Confirmation in the EOTC

In the EOTC, confirmation is the sacrament through which the believer is granted the gift of the Holy Spirit.[285] In the apostolic times the baptized person was granted the Holy Spirit by laying on of hands. (Acts 8:14-17; 19:5-6). However, when the church expanded, the bishops who continued the works of the apostles, seem to have opted for a practice of anointing with Holy Oil. Therefore, in EOTC confirmation is seen as the administration of the holy oil (Myron[286]) on the child or adult immediately after Baptism. The practice is based on Matthew 3,16 where it says that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus immediately after baptism.  Through this sacrament the believer receives the Holy Spirit which enables her/him to grow in the new life and keep her/him in the way of truth. Confirmation like Baptism is performed once and cannot be repeated.  The rite is concluded by the child receiving Holy Communion,[287] At the end of the service, the priest ties a cord of silk, the "mateb", the badge of Christianity around the infant's neck.[288] Thus, since confirmation is an integral part of baptism and the first communion, confirmation instruction has not been developed in the EOTC.

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[284] Onwumere A.Ikwuagwu,  Initiation in African Traditional  Religion, A systematic Symbolic analysis with special Reference to aspects of Igbo religion in Nigeria (PhD Thesis, University of Wuürzburg, 2006), 62.

[285] The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Faith, Order of Worship and Ecumenical Relations, (Addis Ababa: Tensae Publ,, 2017), 38.

[286] The Holy Oil (Myron), is related oil, first made by the disciples, of the spices and ointments that were prepared for the body of the Lord both before and after burial (Lk, 23:56; 24:1). St Mark brought part of it to Egypt. Since that time fresh oil is added to what remains. It is now made of the olive oil and spices. It is consecrated by the Patriarch and bishops through prayer. The EOTC faith and order. Retrieved 17th February, 2022, from https://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/dogma/sacraconfirmation.html.

[287]EOTC       Sacramental       Theology,       retrieved       15th       July       2019       from http://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/dogma/sacaracommunion.html

[288] *Confirmation in EOTC, retrieved 15th July 2019, from http://www.eotc.faithweb.com/basic.html#con*

In relation to Holy Communion the EOTC teaches that after the bread and wine is consecrated it is the real blood and flesh of Christ (transubstantiation). Those who partake in eating of the bread and drinking the wine share sacramentally in eternal life. In his thesis on Cyril of Alexandria Professor Ezra Gebremedhin gives a telling comment:

> The EOTC theology is influenced by the understanding of Cyril of Alexandria (377-444): "Through the Eucharist Christ abides in the faithful and makes them superior to corruptibility, infusing Himself (into them) through his own flesh which is true food. So much so that Cyril can teach that the life-giving blessing (i.e. the Eucharist) transforms into immortality those who partake of it.[289]

This interpretation of the sacrament places heavy demands on the partakers. A first requirement is that they should be free of sin. Certain conditions, such as having a true faith, being repentant and reconciled with others, are necessary for receiving Holy Communion.[290]

### 5.3.3    *The Pentecostal-charismatic movement*

In the 1960s the Pentecostal-charismatic movement developed among the students at Addis Ababa University (*The Mule Wongel Church*). During the communist regime (1974-1991), these students suffered severe persecution. Since their churches were closed, they were welcomed in the EECMY congregations. They brought with them a theology on the gifts of grace and practices with prophecy, speaking in tongues, healing, and exorcism. The charismatic youth were Christians and eager in mission. This convinced many of their seriousness and made an impact on young people in the EECMY. But the movement led to severe conflicts with the older generations. The conflicts threatened the unity of the church. In 1993 the EECMY conducted two important consultations on the charismatic movement and its theology.[291] On the basis of these consultations the 89th EECMY-Executive Committee decided to accept charismatic theology in the church. Among others it was resolved to

- that charismatic experiences be recognized as a blessing to the church,
- that signs and wonders are Scriptural and are attested in the Lutheran view
- that healing ministries (…) can be true manifestations of the Spirit…
- that as Lutherans we recognize that we receive Holy Spirit at Baptism
- that believers experience the continual filling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 4:3; 9:17).

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[289] Ezra Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing: An Inquiry into the Eucharist Doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria*, (Uppsala, 1977), 100. See Eide, *Revolution and Religion*, 80.
[290] *Confirmation in EOTC, retrieved 15th July 2019, from http://www.eotc.faithweb.com/basic.html#con.*
[291] EECMY Gospel Ministry Department (Addis Ababa, 1993), 1-3.

The resolution gave the charismatic youth great space within the church. As a result, their theology and practices came to influence the EECMY as a whole. The church's theological institutions and theological studies were to some extent disregarded. Instead, the gifts of the Spirit, including both knowledge and teaching skills were kept in high regard. This led to confusion and the issue was brought to the attention of the 7th Council of the EECMY in 2011. The resolution passed at this council seems to be an effort to control the increasing influence of the charismatic movement. Three points is worth noticing:

> The first addresses the question of authority in the church, underlining that the apostolic and prophetic witness in Holy Scripture "is sufficient."

> The second states that the sole function of prophecy is the edification of the church.

> The third addresses the order of worship in the EECMY. Based on the criteria given by Paul, "test everything", a space is given to prophetic utterances on certain conditions.

In relation to confirmation, the EECMY's acceptance of charismatic gifts has not brought change to the theology and practice of confirmation. However, the Pentecostal's emphasis on sprit baptism influence how the confirmands perceive confirmation.

### 5.3.4 *The missions' theology and practice of confirmation*

In the introductory chapter I gave a short presentation of the most influential mission organizations behind the EECMY and the reasons why confirmation got such a prominent place in the life of the EECMY (1.2). The basic point is that from the very beginning of evangelical ministry in Eritrea/Ethiopia orthodox Christians joined the congregation. As they were already baptized emphasis was given to instruction in basic Christianity. The minimum requirement for confirmation was knowledge of *Luther's Small Catechism* by heart. However, much emphasis was given to reading Scripture and understanding the central message of the gospel.
Confirmation teaching lasted from one to three years. The long timespan was due to the SEM policy of proficiency in reading before confirmation.[292] The Bible and the Catechism were translated into several of the vernacular languages spoken. Accordingly, confirmation was not limited to the question of membership, but also to the ability to read the Bible. The confirmed could take part in Holy Communion. Confirmation was also mandatory for those who wanted to get married in the church.

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[292] Fekadu Gurmessa, *The Evangelical Faith Movement*, *146.*

In the GHM tradition, the content of confirmation teaching comprised knowledge of the Bible and *Luther's Small Catechism*. The GHM had strict criteria for admitting believers to Holy Communion.[293] This might be due to the influence of Martin Bucer, regarded as the "father of Lutheran confirmation." Bucer was known for his emphasis on the importance of Christian maturity, church discipline and preparation for the First communion.[294] As a result, Bucer made a distinction between catechetical instruction and confirmation.[295] This practice had the effect of raising the age of confirmation to a time when the catechumen was more mature.[296] So in addition to completing the confirmation course, the confirmand was expected to show personal commitment to live a Christian life.

In the southern synods of the EECMY, where NLM and related missionary societies worked, there was a high regard for confirmation. This was because most of the populace that became Christians were marginalized in society. According to Arne Tolo, literacy and participating in church education was taken as an elevation of their position in community. As a result, the demand for all kinds of teaching was very high.[297] This shows that confirmation also had a social value. As Eide also marked, in the western part of the country, high emphasis is laid on confirmation as establishing a new identity.

> In many ways taking Holy Communion on the day of confirmation represents the final breach with any former adherence, be it traditional religion or Orthodox Christianity. Holy Communion replaces baptism as the place of confession …. Communion was followed by a remarkably high church attendance (91 per cent).[298]

Thus, confirmation served as a bridge to a new life with Christ in the church and the wider community. Even though the emphasis was slightly different, confirmation ministry was anchored on the doctrine of justification by faith through grace alone.

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[293] Ibid. 149.
[294] Ibid. 146-147.
[295] Osmer, *Confirmation*, 78-79.
[296] Krych, *Confirmation,* 53.
[297] Tolo, *Sidama and Ethiopian*, 160.
[298] *Eide, Revolution and Religion,* 79.

## 5.4 Reflections on the theology of confirmation in the EECMY

The EECMY understands herself as a Lutheran church. This implies that the ministry of the church should be guided by the theology of the Lutheran confessions.[299] As the EECMY constitution reads:

> *Section 1*: The EECMY believes and professes that the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments are the Holy Word of God and the only Sources and Infallible norm of all Church Doctrine and Practice.
>
> *Section 2*: The EECMY adheres to the Apostles' Creed, The Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed which were formulated by the church fathers and accepted by the early church.
>
> *Section 3*: The EECMY sees in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, which was worded by the reformers, as well as Luther's Catechisms, as a pure exposition of the Word of God.[300]

Based on the confessional documents, the EECMY focuses on preaching and teaching the Word of God, which creates and sustains faith in the life of the confirmands.

Since the EECMY practices infant baptism, children who are baptized in the EECMY automatically become members of the EECMY. Adults not baptized before joining the church are admitted through baptism. Confirmation is intended to strengthen personal faith, bring members into a deeper relationship with Christ and prepare them for Holy Communion. At that time a believer affirms that she/he personally profess the faith which the godparents professed on her/his behalf at baptism. Confirmation incorporates the believer into the fellowship of responsible and active members in life and witness.

Reflecting on the theology of confirmation as it is understood in the EECMY, we may initially draw attention to the two interpretations of confirmation most common in the heritage of the founding mission organizations. The first is the catechetical view of confirmation, with its emphasis on instruction and preparation for the first Communion. The second is the pietistic view of confirmation, with its emphasis on conversion, profession of faith in word and deed, and renewal of the baptismal covenant. A close study of the EECMY's stated aims for the educational programs reveal an emphasis on both spiritual growth and Christian maturity (4.4.4). This reveals a goal for confirmation beyond the mere increase in knowledge and shows that both views of confirmation have a part to play in the contemporary EECMY understanding.

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[299] Maagaarsaa Guutaa, "The EECMY and Her Theological Self", 14.
[300] EECMY, Constitution and Bylaws, Revised, 2005, Article II, 2.

The missionary experience in Ethiopia presented a set of challenges not encountered in the missions' place of origin. Some of the new converts came from traditional cultural backgrounds. Before baptism these new converts were offered introductory teaching so that they could get a basic understanding of Christian faith. Those who come from a traditional religious background regarded confirmation as a rite of initiation to become a member of the faith community. This gave a high social value to confirmation that perhaps de-emphasized its spiritual necessity. Of course, this presented challenges to confirmation instruction.

But the most difficult theological challenge was the fact that many of the new converts made by the missions were already baptized in the Orthodox Church. In the tradition of the Lutheran churches world-wide, Orthodox baptism was regarded as valid. The problem was that the Orthodox converts had little knowledge of the Bible and only scant understanding of Jesus and his work for our salvation. Catechesis therefore became a central concern for the missions. The hope was that this teaching would contribute towards deeper understanding and growth in Christian maturity. However, as the missions had grown within a pietistic tradition, confirmation tended to become more than a question of head knowledge.

Another difficulty arises when dealing with members who have a background in the EOTC. In contrast to the Lutheran understanding of Holy Communion, where the penitent sinner is encouraged to come for the forgiveness of his/her sins, those who come from EOTC emphasize the necessity of personal sinlessness before reception of Holy Communion. This relates to EOTC teaching about Christ "infusing Himself (into them) through his own flesh which is true food,"[301] which requires sinlessness on the part of the communicant before such a direct encounter with the Divine.

In Lutheran theology, faith (and therefore church membership) is created by God the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of Baptism and is nurtured throughout the life of the believer through the Word of God. On the other hand, Pentecostals emphasize a direct baptism in the Holy Spirit that enables the believer to live a sprit-filled and empowered life, often with accompanying charismatic signs. What makes the person a mature member of the church is direct empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and not water baptism and instruction in basic Christian teaching found in the Lutheran tradition. Often, Pentecostals perceive EECMY members as if they lack Spirit baptism and are therefore a lower or less-mature category of believers.

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[301] Confirmation in EOTC, retrieved 15th July 2019, from http://www.eotc.faithweb.com/basic.html#con

These various streams of diverse theological views on confirmation have no direct impact on the EECMY theology and practice of confirmation, but they do influence the way confirmands perceive confirmation.

The EECMY sees baptism as complete by itself, and those who are baptized become full members of the church. Baptized infants receive salvation through baptism and should continue to grow throughout their lives by the power of the Holy Spirit, as they continue to attend the church and hear the Word of God. However, even though a baptized child is a member of the church, it is still important to instruct Christians on the nature of the sacraments, particularly the doctrine of the real presence, before allowing them to receive consecrated bread and wine.

An element of church discipline comes into play in the EECMY communion practice. Ethical issues may restrict the confirmand. These include unrepented and uncorrected polygamy, different kinds of addiction, like alcohol, smoking etc., and an unreconciled conflict with family or neighbour. Those who have been confronted by the church elders in accordance with Mt 18 but refused to repent and change their behaviour are excluded from the sacrament.

## 5.5   Summary

In principle the EECMY adheres to the Lutheran confessions, with a clear emphasis on "justification by faith." Trying to maintain this understanding through the confirmation course and the ritual of confirmation within the Ethiopian cultural and religious context has turned out to be a most demanding task. The strong traditions of initiation in African religion play a role, orthodox sacramental theology has influenced the theological conceptions of people as well as ministers, and the Pentecostal-charismatic movement has been influencial. In general, one may say the EECMY understanding of confirmation takes on a profile of its own.

## Part  II      Findings - Interpretations - Assessments

It will be recalled that the core task of my thesis is '*An investigation and critical assessment of contemporary confirmation ministry in two EECMY congregations.*' (1.4.3). The chapters 2 to 5 established frames of reference. As for my theoretical approach (2) I opted for a theory, transformational learning, that places my pedagogical frame between the participatory approach, found in Ethiopian cultures, and the acquisition approach, dominant in the formal educational system of the country. I then developed my tools of investigation through a presentation of qualitative research methods (3). The EECMY pedagogical tradition (4) and theology of confirmation was then laid out in relation to Orthodox and Pentecostal theologies and practices (5).

In Part II I present research findings, interpretations and assessments, chapters 6-14. Each chapter has an established structure according to the two first tasks of the hermeneutical circle as applied in Practical theology (1.4.3).

The first task is descriptive empirical, presenting quotes and observations, showing what is going on in confirmation classes. I present findings in thematic order. Each theme is presented with the teachers' perspective and the confirmands' perspective. These two perspectives help to build awareness of how confirmation ministry is thought, practiced, and experienced by the participants in the ministry of the two congregations in focus.

Based on findings I move to the second task, the interpretive, trying to answer the question why confirmation ministry functions this way in the EECMY. I will basically interpret findings with the help of my frames of reference (2-5). However, the many themes and issues raised by research, makes it necessary to bring in additional theory and reflection. The interpretation goes with an assessment and discussion of findings.

# 6   Membership growth and confirmation ministry

The EECMY is one of the fastest growing churches in the world. The current membership is more than ten million members.[302] This chapter describes the research participants' views regarding the impact of membership growth on confirmation ministry and the discussion and analysis of the main themes of the data. My interview question for the teachers was, "What are the opportunities and challenges of membership growth in relation to confirmation ministry?" The question for the confirmands was "What do you see as an opportunity and challenge in attending confirmation class with a huge number of confirmands?" The responses of the teachers and the confirmands embrace the following.

## 6.1   Growth as an opportunity: teachers' perspective

Confirmation teachers perceive membership growth as an opportunity from the following aspects:

### 6.1.1   The active work of God's Sprit

> The growing number of members show that God has blessed us with new souls every day. It is not our work, but it is the Spirit of the Lord who is moving and working among us. As a result, we have continuous confirmation classes and every year more than four groups of confirmands are confirmed.[303]

Rev. John is a senior pastor who served in the Rehoboth congregation for more than a decade.[304] He explained membership growth by pointing to God's blessing and the active work of God's Spirit. He refers to the convincing power of the Holy Spirit in bringing individuals to faith through the Word of God. He perceives this as a blessing form God and as a positive sign of God's active presence in the service of the congregation. I followed up by asking him to explain what he meant by "it is not our work but the Spirit of the Lord":

> Even though our congregation has an outreach program that has made some contributions, the huge membership growth is mostly the outcome of active congregation members who are led by the Holy Spirit to witness the good news to the neighbours, friends in schools and workplaces.[305]

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[302] EECMY Department of Mission and Theology, 2021 Annual Report, 55 Addis Ababa.
[303] John, Rehoboth, June 1/2015.
[304] As explained in chapter 1, I have given fictive biblical names for the research participants to secure anonymity.
[305] John, Rehoboth, June 1/2015.

The congregation has a formal outreach program, sending out evangelists for mission. The aim is to reach people in remote areas. According to John, however, the growth in membership is more a result of the casual witness of active members being incited by the Holy Spirit. In Ethiopia, religion is an integral part of the life of people. Thus, people openly discuss religion in their daily life that takes place in informal conversations in schools, working places, markets or even in taxis or buses. Rev. John interprets this activity as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The constant flow of new converts made the congregation arrange for a continuous confirmation ministry. According to the pastor, annually the congregation teaches more than three or four groups of confirmand. Each group attend an hour class every Saturday at different times. Except for special cases,[306] a group of confirmands comprises sixty to eighty persons.[307]

### 6.1.2 Participating in God's mission

One of the teachers responded that teaching large number of confirmands means taking part in God's mission. As a voluntary confirmation teacher in Bethany expressed,

> By teaching a huge number of confirmands we are participating and fulfilling God's mission, to expand the kingdom of God on earth. As our Lord commanded: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptize and teach…" confirmation is one means of making disciples.[308]

Isaac, a secondary school teacher, who has served in Bethany on a voluntary basis for more than twenty years was in his late adulthood when I conducted the interview. He expressed the idea that the great opportunity in relation to confirmation ministry is that the congregation is making disciples through confirmation. Participating in the Great Commission is something exciting and a privilege. In explaining how this contributes to the expansion of God's kingdom, Isaac stretched his hands to both sides, a common gesture to show something big or wide. Through confirmation more people are added to the congregation, and this is perceived as expanding the kingdom of God in the world.

### 6.1.3 Expanding the service of the congregation

Evangelist Mathew from Rehoboth mentioned that the growing number of believers creates opportunities to expand the service of the congregation.

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[306] Congregations organize small group of confirmands for those who cannot attend the regular confirmation classes because of their professional duty.
[307] Observation in Rehoboth and Bethany Congregations.
[308] Isaac, Bethany, August 18/2015.

It is astonishing and interesting to have such a huge number of members. I have served in this congregation for ten years and the number of believers is increasing all the time. That means we also increase the ministry we are giving, especially confirmation ministry.[309]

Membership growth is exciting for most congregation leaders and confirmation teachers.[310] As Mathew, an evangelist who has served in Rehoboth for about a decade indicated, the congregation increased the number of confirmation classes due to membership growth. During my field work there were four groups with approximately sixty to eighty confirmands in each class.[311] Each year the congregation confirms huge number of confirmands, and this is taken as an achievement and an opportunity. In relation to this, a pastor at Bethany congregation explained:

> There was a time when our congregation confirmed 700 confirmands. The number was the highest in the history of the congregation. Membership increased spontaneously. That took place during the fall of the Marxist regime. As the membership increased, we were obliged to establish additional congregations.[312]

Rev. Abraham is the main pastor at Bethany congregation. He is middle-aged and has served in the congregation for many years. He mentioned that sometimes the number of confirmands is high, and this increases the number of communicant members. He referred to the time after the fall of the Marxist regime. As a result of religious freedom, great numbers of people came to church. During these years, growth was beyond the congregation's capacity to handle. Thus, the congregation was forced to establish new congregations. Abraham added:

> The advantage of a huge membership is that we can ask the government to get land for a church building, and our members make the congregation economically self-reliant to build a church and run its ministry.[313]

In the EECMY, congregations are fully financed by contributions from members, in the form of offerings, tithes and gifts. Thus, the congregation relies on members to run different activities, like paying staff salary and covering different expenses, including building expenses. From the response of the pastor, one of the benefits of having more members is more money to fund the congregation's ministry.

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[309] Mathew, Rehoboth, June 30/2015.
[310] John, Rehoboth, June 1/2015. Evangelist Mary, Bethany cong. August 20/2015, Aster, Rehoboth. August 5/2015.
[311] Observation in Rehoboth.
[312] Abraham, Bethany, August 17/2015.
[313] Abraham, Bethany, August 17/2015.

### 6.1.4 Sharing experience

A teacher mentioned that a big attendance is an opportunity in terms of experience sharing among the confirmands:

> The house of the Lord is the place where people of different backgrounds coexist and are treated equally. Therefore, it gives an opportunity to share their experiences and learn from each other…[314]

According to Rev. Aster, the only female pastor at Rehoboth, there are opportunities of learning from each other's life experiences. Unlike the surrounding community that divided people based on their ethnic, religious and gender differences, the church is the place where all people are treated equally. The differences in age, educational status, and religious background among the confirmands gives opportunities to learn from each other through experience sharing. Aster assumed that the mixed groups of confirmands provided such opportunity. Abraham shared a similar view: "The confirmands attend class together for one year and this gives them an opportunity to know each other and establish fellowship."[315]

The fellowship created within a group of confirmands is understood as an opportunity, because through learning together the confirmands will get to know each other and develop a Christian fellowship. Accordingly, the relationships that the confirmands establish among themselves helps them to actively participate in the congregation's life.

## 6.2 Growth as an opportunity: confirmands' perspective

Confirmands also shared their perception of being part of a large group as follows:

### 6.2.1 A privilege

> It is a great privilege to be part of the large group of confirmands.[316] It is good that many people come and learn God's word and I am happy to be one of them.[317]

Young confirmands from Bethany and Rehoboth congregations, perceive taking part in the huge class as an opportunity and privilege. To be part of a large class with different age levels is not seen as a problem. As Martha and Daniel, teenage confirmands, added: "I am grateful to

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[314] Aster, Rehoboth, August 5/2015.
[315] Abraham, Bethany, August 17/2015.
[316] Timothy, Bethany, August 22/2015.
[317] Solomon, Rehoboth. July 30 /2015.

God to learn the word of God together with many people."[318] "I am glad and give thanks to the Lord that I can take part in learning the word of God"[319] Learning the Word of God with many people seems to give them a sense of belongingness,

The responses of the confirmands show that learning together is a normal practice and they are happy to be part of the large class. They are used to learning in classes filled with many students. Schools owned by the government have seventy to eighty students in each class. The teenage confirmands may have had this kind of experience when they express happiness about large numbers. Even though confirmation classes are different from the government school classes, due to the age and educational levels, the confirmands still see it as a privilege.

### 6.2.2 *God's family*

Paul, an adult confirmand expressed his satisfaction by saying:

> I am joyful to attend the confirmation class with a lot of people. I see the teenagers and youth as my children and the adults as my brothers and sisters. It is the house of the Lord where we all are treated as His children.[320]

Paul, who converted a year ago, tells that he as an adult does not feel humiliated by attending confirmation class with teenagers. Culturally, children and youth do not take part in adult conversation except in family settings. Instead, they are expected to leave space for adults as a sign of respect. By referring to "the house of the Lord" Paul may want to show the difference between how people are treated in ordinary houses and in God's house. The house of the Lord is different in the sense that youth, adults, and elderly are all seen as God's children. Accordingly, Paul is happy to attend the confirmation course with people of different ages whom he sees as his own family. Titus also expressed; "I feel good and thank God, because I am part of the big church and the family of God."[321] The responses of the confirmands reveals that attending class together with many others gave them a sense of belongingness and  a privilege of being member of God's large  family.

In sum, church leaders and confirmation teachers see membership growth as an opportunity from the aspects of: active work of God's Sprit, participating in God's mission

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[318] The confirmands refer to all the lessons they learn in confirmation class as *Ye Egzabher kal* in Amharic or *Sagalle Waaqaayo* in Oromo, literally: "word / speech of God". Daniel, Rehoboth, August 2/ 2015,
[319] Martha, Bethany, August 24/2015.
[320] Paul, Bethany, August 21/2015.
[321] Titus, Bethany, August 23/ 2015.

expanding congregation ministry, experience sharing, a privilege and being part of Gods large family. The challenges related to membership growth are described in the next section.

## 6.3   Growth as a challenge: teachers' perspective

Teachers and confirmands do not see membership growth only as a blessing and opportunity. They also explained some of the challenges they face. Some of the challenges are due to different aspects of the numerical growth of the congregations.

### 6.3.1   The problem of handling huge numbers

> We are thankful to the Lord for the ongoing membership growth. However, the congregation is incapable of handling and nurturing the huge numbers of new believers. This is mainly because the growth is unintended.[322]

Jacob, an evangelist who had served in Bethany for more than a decade, appreciated the growth and was grateful to the Lord. At the same time, he expressed that managing in the sense of providing adequate spiritual nourishment was a challenging task. The congregation did not have capacity to meet the spiritual needs of such large numbers. Further, he saw it as a problem that growth was unplanned or unexpected. Most confirmation teachers have similar idea in indicating the growth as unintended. The congregation leaders may anticipate growth in their service, but what I understood from their reflections is the growth is more than expected and more than what the congregation can handle. Jacob and other teachers describe the problem of proper handling happen due to the following reasons:

### 6.3.2   The lack of trained teachers

In explaining the reasons for the problem of proper handling, Jacob commented: "We have a shortage of trained ministers. That is our main challenge. We assign voluntary teachers to teach some subjects, but they are not capable."[323]

Bethany congregation has only two ministers and three evangelists to serve more than two thousand members. The number of teachers who have a formal Bible school or seminary training is small compared to the number of members and new converts. The number of those who need confirmation teaching is always beyond the congregation's capacity to teach. As a result, many are forced to wait until the current course is completed and a new one begins. Since

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[322] Jacob, Bethany, August 18/2015.
[323] Jacob, Bethany, August 18/2015.

the duration of a confirmation course takes a year at Bethany, the waiting time might take months or even a year. The congregation assigns voluntary workers to different services, including confirmation teaching. However, these volunteers may not have adequate training for teaching topics that may require theological insight.

Confirmation teachers from Rehoboth also stated the shortage of trained volunteers. Rev. Lukas pointed to the challenge:

> Membership growth is always perceived positively. However, serving the spiritual need of each individual, giving deep-rooted teaching or making disciples is almost impossible with only a few trained minsters.[324]

Lukas is a senior pastor at Rehoboth. He is also part time teacher at a regional seminary. As he explained, dealing with the individual person's needs, and providing solid spiritual food is difficult to attain due to the large number of confirmands. The individual needs a follow up to bring her/him to Christian maturity, but the congregation has a shortage of trained workers to give this kind of service. Though the congregation has trained voluntary workers, still the number is insufficient compared to the number of members and the ongoing membership growth. In explaining the reason for the shortage of workers, Deborah, a long-time evangelist in Bethany, indicated that "Sending a person to a Bible school or seminary for training is expensive and time consuming; this is the main reason for the lack of trained workers."[325]

In the EECMY, congregations are responsible for calling and training individuals for ministry by covering study expenses at Bible schools and regional or national seminaries. The training takes at least two to three years in Bible school, four years in regional seminaries to get a first degree and four to six years at Mekane Yesus Seminary to get bachelor and master's degree. The congregations are responsible for covering school fees as well as supporting the family of those who are on study leave. That requires high sums of money. Debora's comment reveals that it is difficult for a congregation to train many ministers at a time and that contributes to the shortage of the trained workers. So as both teachers explained shortage of trained workers contributed to the problem of proper handling.

### 6.3.3  Teaching mixed groups

The teachers also mention teaching mixed age group as a contributing factor for the problem of proper handling. As Mary, a long-time evangelist in Bethany, said:

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[324] Lukas, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.
[325] Deborah, Bethany, August 19/2015.

> The confirmands differ in age and educational background. Providing appropriate teaching for all age groups with their educational level is a challenging task.[326]

The variation in age of the confirmands is between 13 and 70. In former times, a person was expected to be mature (physically, mentally, and spiritually) to attend Holy Communion. Attending confirmation class therefore started at the age of eighteen. However, when the Ethiopian government changed the school system in 1993, the EECMY reduced the age of confirmation to thirteen. [327] This was to have the teenagers confirmed before they attend high schools and preparatory classes that may require traveling to other areas.[328] These teenagers were therefore accepted into classes with older confirmands. Teachers were challenged to meet the needs of both young and old.

Evangelist Mary pointed out that there is a gap in the educational level of the confirmands. A confirmation class might comprise confirmands who are functional illiterates as well as university graduates and everyone in between. An evangelist in Bethany shared the challenge related to the different level of education:

> When I explain the topic in the way that educated confirmands understand, those who are not educated will not understand. On the other hand, when I make the topic simple by repeating the theme and by using examples it will be boring for those who are educated.[329]

Evangelist Jacob from Bethany shard his frustration about different educational backgrounds. The class comprises both those who have a formal education and those who, in fact, are illiterate. Those with a formal education do not need the same illustrations and repetitions. They can read their Bible and take notes. Those who cannot read and write need more explanation. The teachers are challenged to bridge the gap between the educated and uneducated. Rev. Joshua from Rehoboth shared the same experience:

> The challenge is that those who are baptized and grew up in the congregation, understand the lesson and do not like the long illustrations that I use to help those who do not have some pre-knowledge. It is hard to balance the teaching.[330]

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[326] Mary, Bethany, August 20/2015.
[327] Jacob, Bethany, August 18/2015.
[328] EECMY 21st General Assembly Decision.
[329] Jacob, Bethany, August 18/2015.
[330] John, Rehoboth, June 1/2015.

There is a gap between those who are raised in a Christian family and have some knowledge about Christian faith and those who have no such background. Those with a Christian background are interested in learning more topics without spending time on explanations and examples. Those who are without pre-knowledge might be new converts who come from other religious backgrounds. This unfolds that the confirmands have different preferences and needs in the way they learn based on their educational level and religious background.

In an informal discussion with a voluntary teacher in Bethany, he described the difference in religious background and the challenge of teaching such groups:

> Some might come from traditional religious backgrounds and need to learn every detail about the Christian faith. Some come from the EOTC background and have different questions. Those who have a Muslim background want to know the difference between the two religions. Still others have been members of other evangelical churches and want to know the difference between the EECMY teaching and others. Those who are baptized and grew up in the church need an in-depth knowledge of Christian faith. Hence, it is very challenging to provide a teaching that meets the needs of so different groups.[331]

A group of confirmands may comprise different religious backgrounds and therefore different educational needs. Some need basic teaching about God, Bible and about the Christian faith and what it means to be a Christian in general, while others want to know the difference between their own religious background and the teaching of the EECMY. Still others need an in-depth teaching on the sacraments and a deepening of their personal faith to enable them to confess Christ as their Lord. However, the congregation could not provide the teaching based on their religious background and the need of the groups.

> Another problem is related to language:

> There are confirmands who do not understand the language we use for teaching. They attend the teaching without understanding what is taught. The congregation could not teach those people in their vernacular because it is demanding.[332]

Rehoboth offers all congregational services in the official Amharic language of the country, but the congregation is made up of people from different ethnic groups with their own vernacular languages. Those who have formal education may understand the official language, while those without will not fully understand the teaching. The congregation is not able to provide teaching

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[331] Bethany, December 12/2014.
[332] Mathew, Rehoboth, July 30/2015.

in the vernacular of the confirmands. Teachers who know the language, Bible translation and teaching material in that specific language is therefore needed. This requires human and martial resource availability which might be beyond the congregation's capacity.

### 6.3.4 Unknown motivation

Rev. David who is a coordinator of the Christian education section of Rehoboth said,

> I am not certain why huge numbers of people are coming to our church. The majority might come looking for miracles and signs, not being willing to sit and learn the Word of God."[333]

The comment tells the numbers make the ministers doubtful of the intentions. He is afraid they might be coming for miracles and signs that undermine the preaching and the teaching of the word of God. In such cases confirmation is not taken as necessity for Christian life.

### 6.3.5 Dropouts

> Since the class consists of eighty to hundred confirmands, it is hardly possible for us (the teachers) to know each confirmand personally and make a good follow up, and as a result there is a high number of dropouts….. Sometimes the number of dropouts may go up to 50%.[334]

I observed that most teachers take attendance notes at the end of each session. The aim of the control is to check whether a confirmand is coming to class regularly. Aster added, "There is always a gap in numbers between those who start and those who complete the course…twenty to thirty confirmands withdrew from the course for unknown reasons."[335] Due to large numbers of confirmands, there does not seem to be a regular system to follow up of those who withdrew from the confirmation course.

## 6.4 Growth as a challenge: confirmands' perspective

The confirmands shared the difficulties they face in learning with mixed group of people:

### 6.4.1 Challenges related to asking questions

> One of the disadvantages of our large numbers is that, for instance, if we want to ask questions, it is impossible for all the sixty students to ask. That is why

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[333] David, Rehoboth, May 30/2015.
[334] Jacob, Bethany, August 18/2015.
[335] Aster, Rehoboth, August 5/2015.

we always ask questions after class. This is not good because when I ask the teacher after the class is over, the other students do not know what I asked.[336]

Hannah, a teenage confirmand in Rehoboth, said that when the teachers explain the subject, the confirmands may not understand, or they may have questions related to the subject. Perhaps, the short time available in the class and the large amount in the material expected to be covered does not allow for question. They use the time to lecture, either, thinking that questions will be answered as the subject is fully explained or, they just want to complete the topic of the day according to schedule. At the end only a few students get the chance to ask questions.

I observed that, often, as many as seven to ten confirmands stayed behind to talk with the teacher, individually or in groups. The teachers tried to explain and respond to their questions. Though this practice gives an opportunity for students who feel too shy to ask questions in front of large audience, as mentioned by Hannah, others will not get the chance to participate in the discussion. Thus, the educational benefit to the whole group of these answers was limited.

### 6.4.2   Communicating with teachers

A young confirmand, Martha, from Bethany, expressed her frustration: "The teachers only favour those who sit on the front bench."[337] The confirmands expect the teachers to communicate with all; if teachers limit their communication to those who sit at the front, some may feel abandoned. Those who sit at the back seem to feel free to not pay full attention. Saron form Rehoboth said: "When we sit at the back some confirmands talk and disturb us."[338] The confirmands' response reveals that large numbers of confirmands are a hindrance to effective communication between the teacher and the confirmands.

### 6.4.3   The problem with illiterate confirmands

Another challenge mentioned by Paul is related to the problem of learning with uneducated men and women:

> In our group there are women and a few men who have not attended formal education. They don't understand what is taught, even if the teacher gives examples. They come and go without understanding the lesson. They had better learn separately. Even it is better if they learn how to read and write besides learning the Word of God.[339]

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[336] Hannah, Rehoboth, August 13/2015.
[337] Martha, Bethany, August 24/2015.
[338] Saron, Rehoboth, July 26/2015.
[339] Paul, Bethany cong. August 23/ 2015.

Many of the adult women who attend confirmation have no formal education. Paul's fear was they may not fully understand what is taught. He did not mention male adults who are also illiterate. It may be that these women are shy and more afraid to speak than male adults who are also illiterates. This is mainly due to cultural influence. Therefore, Paul suggested that these women should be taught in a separate group, combining this with literacy.

### 6.4.4  Problem related to young mothers

> I have no problem by learning with the large number of people, but mothers who come with their little children disturb the class. This needs to be corrected so that we attend the class with proper attention."[340]

I have also observed what Timothy described, the crowded classes with foul air are not comfortable for babies and children. The glass windows are painted dark colour so that confirmands do not loose attention by looking outside the window. Moreover, the windows remain closed all the time. So children will not get fresh air, and they express their discomfort by crying. When a child cries the attention of the whole class is distracted and the nonverbal reaction is embarrassment for the mothers. Some teachers politely tell the mother(s) to take their children out so that they can get fresh air, while others do it in an impolite way. These mothers come back to class only if the child calms down or sleeps. Otherwise they go home without attending the whole session.

### 6.4.5  Lack of fellowship

The confirmands also raised the difficulty of having a fellowship among themselves. As a teenage confirmand, Dinah, described:

> When many confirmands come together, we do not get to know each other closely. I do not even know the names of those who attend the class with me. For instance, if our number is small, say ten to fifteen, communicating with each other is not difficult. We can come close and establish a good fellowship, but it is impossible now because we are many.[341]

It is obvious that when the group is small, it is easier to get to know each other personally and establish friendships, worship, pray, and study the Bible together. Large groups make this difficult. The confirmands' expectation was the class would give them opportunities to establish fellowship, but this did not always happen. Joining a Christian church fellowship plays a crucial

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[340]Timothy, Bethany cong. August 22/2015
[341] Dina, Rehoboth Cong. August 12/2015.

role both to grow and endure in faith. Fellowship plays a key role for new converts to be fully integrated in congregational life. I observed the confirmands came to class alone or in pairs and except a few, most of them left the class without taking much time to greet or talk to each other. In sum, though membership growth is perceived as exciting and a blessing, both teachers and confirmands express challenges that affect the learning process. The confirmation teachers stated many challenges. These include problems of proper handling due to shortage of trained workers, challenges related to teaching groups of people with different age groups, educational and religious backgrounds and problems related to language, unknown motivation of newcomers and dropouts. The confirmands also explained the challenges they faced as a result of attending classes with large numbers of confirmands with diverse age and educational backgrounds.

## 6.5 Interpretation and assessment

My findings regarding the opportunities and challenges of membership growth are broad but interconnected. Therefore, quantity verses quality, learning through experience sharing, communal learning and fellowship, and challenges related to teaching mixed groups of people will be the main themes in this section. My interpretations and assessements will be based on the research context, relevant literature, and the theory employed.

The growth in membership in the EECMY has attracted scholars interested in the history and the factors that contribute to the growth. Some refer to the translation of the Bible into the vernacular, wholistic ministry and the charismatic movements as key factors.[342] My intention is not to discuss how or why the EECMY grows, but to discuss how this numerical growth has affected confirmation ministry, both positively and negatively.

### *6.5.1 Quantity versus quality*

In the EECMY, for many decades, except for admiring the growth and being excited about the fact that our church was one of the largest Lutheran churches in the world, little progress was made toward an organized strategy on how to deal with the challenges caused by the growth. However, since 2011 the shortcomings of the church's ministry and the challenges the church was facing pushed for a strategic plan. Therefore, the church designed a five-year plan for 2013-

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[342] Berhanu Ofgaa, "The Major Factors that Propelled the Explosive Growth of the EECMY during the last Fifty Years." Paper presented at the EECMY International Theological and Mission Conference, Addis Ababa, February 15-17/ 2011.

2017.[343] The strategic plan document pointed out that EECMY membership growth is appreciated from two aspects only.

The first advantage is that the growth in membership resulted in the establishment and expansion of EECMY congregations in different parts of the country. Based on the EECMY 2019 statistical report the EECMY has more than nine thousand established congregations and more than five thousand preaching places.[344] These congregations are found in all regions of the country. Covering a huge geographical area is seen as the positive result of membership growth.

The second advantage is the growth in "Wholistic Ministry" that involves both evangelism and diaconal services. The EECMY mission statement is known as "On the Interrelation Between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development." This constituted the base for the church's program of "Wholistic Ministry." A crucial paragraph reads:

> We believe that an integral human development, where the spiritual and material needs are seen together, is the only right approach to the development question in our society … from the Christian point of view development should be understood as a process of liberation by which individuals and societies realized their human possibilities in accordance with God's purpose.[345]

This theological statement argues that proclamation of the gospel and diaconal/social services should be integrated. It shows that the concern of the church should not be limited to the spiritual needs of a person but should include the physical needs. This theological view was inspired by the Church's understanding of God's saving act, as directed towards the total human being. Based on this theological understanding, the EECMY has been engaged in diversified development and social service projects across the country.

However, the strategic document indicated that the fast membership growth has also brought significant challenges. Some of the stated challenges that concern my thesis include a lack of proactive planning in the process of church planting and congregational growth, lack of proper nurturing and handling of members, lack of consistent teaching that leads to discipleship,

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[343]EECMY, "Still Serving the Whole Person: Wholistic Ministry: The EECMY Five Years Strategic Planning, 2013–2017," (SAZ Professional Management Consultancy, Training and Research PLC, Addis Ababa: Ethiopia, April 2012), 3.

[344] EECMY Department of Mission and Theology Annual Report, 2019. (Addis Ababa: Ethiopia), 55.

[345] EECMY officers, "On the Interrelation between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development (May, 1972)." Eide, Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia, 263-268.

shortage of gifted and trained teachers that may equip the huge number of believers and the focus on growth rather than developing people.[346]

During my research, I heard confirmation teachers express that numerical growth has helped the congregations to expand the service they are rendering. In the EECMY, congregational ministry includes services such as Sunday service, adult and children Sunday school, youth ministry, women ministry, choir, prayer groups, diaconal service, outreach ministry, Bible study, and teaching ministry. Expanding the ministries involves organizing more confirmation groups, multiplying congregational and establishing more congregations.

However, as indicated in the strategic plan one of the weaknesses of the EECMY is, "explosive growth in membership but lack of discipleship training and follow-up of new members."[347] When describing the opportunities involved in quantitative expansion, the confirmation teachers never mentioned what they were doing or planned to do to improve the quality of the confirmation ministry. As Donald McGavran pointed out in his book *Understanding Church Growth*, "faithfulness in proclamation and finding [the lost sheep] is not enough. There must be faithful aftercare…quantity goes hand in hand with quality."[348] According to this view, looking for the lost sheep and bringing them to church is not enough. They need to be equipped with basic Christian teaching. McGavran comments on critics of church growth that emphasize the importance of nurturing over numerical growth:

> Some earnest Christians reject multiplication of churches as today's chief task because they pin the hopes on quality rather than quantity. What is the use, they ask, to make more Christians unless they are better Christians? Throughout much of the world they affirm that education of believers is more important than evangelism.[349]

Of course, the church needs both evangelism and teaching. The importance of nurturing is not in question. The problem comes when the church only focuses on evangelism without considering the importance of teaching or when the church only focuses on maturing believers and neglects evangelism. Accordingly, in the process of enhancing the quantity of congregational ministry the congregations ought to consider the quality of the service they give, especially to present teaching that can transform the life of the confirmands. My research seems

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[346] EECMY, Still Serving the Whole Person, 17.
[347] EECMY, Still Serving the Whole Person, 9.
[348] Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner, eds. *Understanding Church Growth, 3rd Ed,* (Eerdmans Pub: Grand Rapids, MI, 1990), 6.
[349] McGavran and Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth, 33.*

to indicate that the EECMY's current practice of confirmation teaching is falling short of the ideal quality/quantity balance.

## 6.6    Learning through experience sharing

Transformative learning theory focuses on two aspects of learning: learning from experience, referred as *communicative* (reflection on experience) and *instrumental* (learning through participation). In the case of confirmands in the EECMY, according to the assumption of confirmation teachers, the difference in age, educational level, and religious background gives opportunities to learn from each other through experience sharing and reflection. They also learn through participating in different congregational activities. Swinton and Mowat stress the importance of human experience because "it is the 'place' where the gospel is grounded, embodied, interpreted and lived out."[350] It is therefore, vital to stress the importance of experience sharing and learning through practice in Christian life. Without experience sharing any kind of the Christian practice will be ritual only.

It is by taking part in congregational activities that the confirmands are integrated into church life. According to Norma Cook Everist, it is "through participating in worship people repent, receive forgiveness, and receive the sacraments, offer their lives in service, sing and share."[351] In other words, participation is an important aspect of transformative learning as it brings about an identification with church life.

Experience sharing is suitable for small groups as this makes it is easier to speak and be open. Arne Redse describes the advantages of the small group in his book *An Introduction to Church Teaching*. In small groups, the learners are engaged in discussions and here they can learn tolerance and respect for different opinions. Groups promote training in becoming independent from the teacher.[352] Therefore, through experience sharing the learners do not only gain knowledge, they also learn how to listen, respect and share their own views with others. To have such kind of discussion, the teachers are expected to organize small groups and facilitate the discussion.

Further, Mezirow acknowledges cultures and societies differ in the degree to which critical reflection and discourse are encouraged. Thus, experience sharing needs a culture that supports and accepts it as a means of learning. In Ethiopian cultures, it is not common for a

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[350] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 5.
[351] Norma C. Everist, *The Church as Learning Community*: *A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002) 107.
[352] Redse, *An Introduction to Church Teaching,* 176-177.

young girl / boy to speak openly in the presence of adults. The cultures do not allow children to speak or listen when adults discuss an issue. If the child interferes in adult discussions, she / he is perceived as a bad girl / boy. Moreover, there are proverbs that discourage young children from participating in experience sharing like: "A silly daughter teaches her mother how to bear children."[353] This means by trying to teach her mother she is perceived as a fool who underestimates her mother's knowledge and experience. In addition, since teenagers have little experience of life, they are not encouraged to share their experience with adults and elderly people. Even if they try, no one listens to them. Since wisdom is related to age, children and youth are not seen as wise enough to share their experience or participate in discussions with adults.

The way women are treated is not very different from children. They may sit and learn or worship together in church. However, it is not common for an Ethiopian woman to raise her voice to speak in the presence of men. Women are perceived as if they know nothing. The household responsibilities hinder many women from taking part in formal education and the lack of education and cultural influence has made women less confident in sharing ideas or experiences in the presence of men. There are many proverbs which portray women negatively and reinforce patriarchal ideology, for example: "A woman gives birth to the one who knows [the male] but she knows not."[354] This means that the woman produces those who have knowledge and wisdom, but she does not possess any knowledge or wisdom. The research of Bakure Daba shows how Ethiopian culture and Christian teaching silence Christian women:

> They are taught not to speak in the company of men. Significantly, it seems that psychologically, they often live in a world of fear both in the home and in Church and society because they themselves have internalized the sexist and androcentric principles of their culture and of Christian teaching.[355]

This is the sign of patriarchal society that keeps women in a subordinate position. Moreover, my findings uncover that mothers who come to class with small children were not welcomed by their fellow confirmands, especially by young or adult men. This is because children disturb by crying or making noise. Since there is (at least in the congregations I researched) no accommodation or separate class designed exclusively for these women so that

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[353] Eshetu Fekadu, "Socio-Cultural Factors that Affect the Role and Status of Women among the Bayso Community of Gidicho Island. *International Journal of Recent Research in Social Sciences and Humanities (IJRRSSH) Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2014, 21-28, 5.*

[354] Zewde Jagre Dantamo et al. "A Feminist Appraisal of Oromo Proverbs with Reference to Selected Districts in Bale Zone." *American Journal of Art and Design; Vol 2 Issue 3, 2017, 69-78, 72.*

[355] Bakure Daba, *An Examination and Assessment,* 11.

they can attend without embarrassment and disturbance, it is hardly possible for these mothers to take part in any experience sharing. In this kind of culture learning through experience sharing and reflection needs time and effort.

In spite of the benefits of critical reflection and experience sharing, in my observation of EECMY confirmation ministry, not even adult males were given chance for these activities. My observations during field work were, in most cases, that the teachers used the time to lecture. I did not observe the confirmands sharing experiences or reflecting on the subjects in focus. My research seems to indicate that the EECMY's current practice of confirmation teaching is falling short of the ideal balance of lecturing and learner participation. Since transformative learning theory asserts that change takes place in the life of the learners through discussing and sharing their life experiences, one possible solution is that confirmands ought to be organized in small groups according to age and gender, so that they can freely share their experiences and learn from each other.

### 6.6.1 *Communal learning and fellowship*

In transformational learning theory, Mezirow puts emphasis on individual change. This I saw as a weakness in relation to settings where collectivism was appreciated. Learning together and having fellowship is regarded as an important aspect of learning. The confirmands perceive they become part of the family of God by learning with others. As regards to fellowship, the teachers presume the confirmands establish fellowship among themselves while the confirmands said that the large group and the variation of age hindered them form having fellowship.

Taking communal learning as an opportunity is related to the socio-cultural life of the confirmands. In an African context, belongingness, connectedness, and community participation are central in the process of teaching and learning. A famous quote from *African Religions and Philosophy* by John S. Mbiti says*:*

> The individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore create or produce the individual for the individual depends on the corporate group. [Hence], the individual can only say I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.[356]

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[356] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* 106.

This holds true in Ethiopian cultures as well. An individual will not survive and grow as an isolated being; an individual defines her/his existence and identity in relation to others. Based on this worldview, learning has relational aspects. To be part of the larger unit is perceived as a great opportunity and privilege that gives a sense of belongingness. This is one of the great potential advantages to group confirmation classes, especially those which bridge age and education gaps between members. A confirmation class may help the confirmands to develop a relationship to God and with each other. This plays a key role in building their spiritual and social identity. Spiritually, it helps the confirmands to learn and grow as the body of Christ. Attending confirmation class also gives them an opportunity to socialize with other confirmands and with the whole congregation. In the Ethiopian context loneliness is perceived as dangerous to life. The new converts might feel lonely because of the discrimination and persecution they face from family members and the community. According to Lambert Bartels,

> Loneliness is considered as a beginning of death by itself, a lonely person is pitied, hence, being together and working together, constitutes a value of its own, irrespective of its output in terms of achievement.[357]

The church in Africa exists in a culture where collectivism is more appreciated than individualism. Relationships with other members of the group and interconnectedness between people play an important role for the life and identity of a person. Therefore, learning together gives a kind of social security to the confirmands. Mezirow also asserts that in the process of transformative learning, establishing relationships and continuous dialogue is important to bring about transformation.

The confirmation teachers assumed the confirmands establish fellowship by learning together, while the confirmands commented their large number was a challenge to fellowship and knowing each other. Christians need fellowship to learn and grow in the life of faith. The New Testament also teaches Christians to maintain fellowship with God and with each other. The Greek term *koinonia* (fellowship) refers to joint participation in a common thing. As it is written in 1 Jn 1:3, "our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have fellowship with one another."

Fellowship is not only sharing or doing something together, but also a way of learning. As Merton P. Stormmen and Richard A. Hardel say, congregations should create a family

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[357] Lambert Bartels, "Dado: A Form of Cooperation on Equal Terms among the Macha Oromo of Ethiopia*,"* *Anthropos Volume 72, Issue 3-4,* 1977, 497-513. 499. Retrieved 12th August 2018 from. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40459135.

atmosphere for effective Christian education because the fellowship will enable the learners to enjoy the teaching and assimilate to church life.[358] Fellowship gives space to exercise what is learned and to integrate into congregational life. Teachers think the group of confirmands is a fellowship by itself, but fellowship is more than a group. The EECMY congregations should make use of this important aspect of learning as it is biblically and culturally supported.

### 6.6.2 The age gap

My findings show the confirmands are from different age groups, starting from age 13 and upward of 60. Educational psychologists and learning theorists assert people have different psychological needs in the way they learn, depending on their age level. As a result, learning theories are based on different age levels.[359] That means people have different mental and psychological needs at different ages. The book edited by Michael J. Antony, *Introducing Christian Education,* states that in order to provide effective educational ministry, Christian educators should pay due attention to life span developmental stages. The book also describes the importance of dealing with psychosocial, cognitive, intellectual-ethical, social, moral, and faith development.[360] However, in case of the EECMY confirmation ministry, due to the huge number of students in each class, there is no way to make provision for these age differences.

In her book, *Basic Christian Education,* Karen B. Tye emphasizes in order to educate the people of God faithfully, educators need to understand three things. These are an understanding of the complex nature of human beings, an understanding of human development, and an understanding of how people learn.[361] Understanding these aspects would make the teaching ministry of the church more effective

Tye explains that to understand learners, educators should have at least four lenses: biological, psychological, cultural, and theological.[362] These lenses play a key role in understanding who the learners are, how they grow, learn, and change.[363] Providing Christian education without considering these lenses can hardly produce the desired results. Due to the constraints on confirmation classes imposed by large numbers of confirmands the teachers have by necessity been limited to considering only the theological lens. The theological lens sees

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[358] Merton P. Strommen, *Passing on the Faith: A Radical New Model for Youth and Family Ministry* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2000), 159.

[359] Dale H. Schunk, *Learning Theories: An Educational Perspective,* (Boston, MA: PEARSON, 2012) 5.

[360] Michael J. Antony, ed. *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century, (*Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 63-115.

[361] Karen B. Tye, *Basics of Christian Education*, (St. Louise, MD: Chalice Press), 2000), 69-70.

[362] Ibid. 70

[363] Ibid. 71.

human beings are created in the image of God, as such, they ought to be treated equally. Putting teens, adults, and elderly in the same class appears at first glance to be treating people equally; however, as Tye discusses, ignoring biological and psychological differences between learners by homogenizing the classes is harmful to the growth of individual students. In the large class setting, it is difficult for teachers to consider the cultural aspects that divide people by age and gender. As it is, teenagers have no freedom in the presence of adults and the elderly. They therefore tend to be passive. According to Mezirow, to be free and participate in full plays a key role in transformative learning.[364] By learning together with adults and the elderly, teenagers may not have confidence and freedom to express their ideas or ask questions; this affects the way they learn.

African traditional education serves as a good model in this regard because learning is designed in such a way that it matches with the age of the learners. For instance, when the child is 0-6 years old, a child learns different activities through accompanying parents and care givers around home, such as storytelling, singing and conversation with parents and care givers. The knowledge that the child gains through sharing and participating in family life is a holistic approach because the activities demonstrate social, cognitive, moral and affective activities.[365] Childhood, 6-12 years, is the stage in which cultural and skills for sustenance and continuity is acquired. The storytelling at this stage focuses on the family tree and linage, family property, age group, traditional dance group and cultural choir group. This kind of learning is characterized by engagement in practical activities that are approved by elders and older siblings which are of importance for cognitive development of the child.[366] The enrichment stage or adolescence (12-19) is a more dynamic and complex form of learning that makes the adolescent more responsible, mature and creative. The storytelling and dialogues focus on family, bravery, tribal wars, and family settlement. The narratives are more analytical and critical, highlighting values and models for emulation. The learners are encouraged to ask questions, to reflect on the issues and share knowledge.[367] The EECMY confirmation ministry could learn from traditional African models of learning. This would make the learning process more relevant.

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[364] Mezirow et al. *Learning as Transformation,* 11.
[365] Ibid, 210.
[366] Ibid, 211.
[367] Ibid, 212.

### 6.6.3   Language

Another challenge in teaching mixed groups is the use of one language for instruction. In any educational context, language plays a key role. The teachers are expected to communicate in the language learners understand. If not, the learners may misunderstand the subject. Before going to the discussion of the language used in confirmation classes I find it worthwhile to give a brief description of languages in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia has 83 different languages with up to 200 different dialects spoken.[368] Among these languages, four languages play a key role in the religious settings where my research was conducted. These languages are: Ge'ez, Arabic, Amharic and Oromo. Ge'ez is a liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox church. Arabic is used in the Mosques and the Qur'an schools but not taught in government schools. Amharic is the official language of instruction throughout Ethiopia, and Oromo is spoken by the largest ethnic group.[369]

The EECMY, serving within this diversity of languages and ethnicities, tries to preach the good news in the vernacular of the people. The church is also engaged in Bible translation. The EECMY in cooperation with the Bible Society has translated the whole Bible into 11 languages and the New Testament in 27 languages and is at present running more than 20 plus translation projects.[370] In the case of Bethany congregation, they use Amharic and Oromo for worship and teaching. In the case of Rehoboth congregation there are different ethnic groups, each with their own language.[371] The congregation uses none of these languages either for worship or teaching, and this creates the communication problem mentioned by the teachers. Instead, Amharic is used as a worship and teaching language. The problem is that Amharic is only understood by those who have attended formal education and live in towns.

There are both internal and external factors that influence the use of language in the church. Internal factors include teachers not knowing other peoples' languages, as well as the lack of teaching material and time.  Due to the demands and shortages the congregation may choose to use only one language. An external factor is the fear that the use of different languages may put church unity in danger. The socio-political history of the country shows that language is used to retain unity both in the church and the country.[372] Ethiopian governments formerly

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[368]Ethiopian Treasure, Language, Retrieved August 12th 2018 from http://www.ethiopiantreasures.co.uk/pages/language.htm
[369] Forslund, *The Word of God in Ethiopian Tongues*, 37.
[370] EECMY, Vernacular Bible Translation Strategic Plan 2022-2031 (DHAE Management and Consultancy Service), 15.
[371] Observation in Bethany and Rehoboth.
[372] Articles 13 and 14 of the 1944, Imperial Decree, No. 3.

emphasized one language (Amharic), one church (EOTC), and one country (Ethiopia) in building and sustaining the nation.[373] This ideology was changed in 1991, when the government issued a policy which considers all languages to be equal. It has encouraged ethno-linguistic groups to develop and use their languages in all spheres of life, including the church's service.[374] Even though this is seen as an opportunity, the EECMY ran into conflict on the use of worship language, especially in the congregations in Addis Ababa. The problem divided the church and affected its services. The conflict dragged on for 15 years before it was resolved. Thus, using different languages in the same congregation can be seen as a threat to the unity of the congregation. The EECMY language policy states:

> In case of congregations comprising different nations and nationalities, it is resolved that the regular Sunday morning Worship Services and the administration of the Holy Sacraments be conducted as usual for all members in common language.[375]

The policy may be effective when it comes to Sunday worship or other congregational services. However, in the processes of teaching basic Christianity, the learners will not adequately grasp what they are taught.

## 6.7    Summary

In this chapter I described the opportunities and challenges of membership growth in relation to confirmation ministry, as revealed by the interview subjects. The research participants see the growth as an opportunity in terms of having a continuous confirmation ministry, participating in God's mission, experience sharing and fellowship, becoming members of God's family, and making the congregations financially self-reliant. The growth is perceived as a challenge when it comes to teaching mixed groups without meeting the spiritual needs of the individual, shortage of trained teachers, bridging the gap between age groups, educational levels and different religious backgrounds, dropouts and language problems. The Interpretation and assessment indicated that membership growth has brought opportunities as well as challenges.

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[373] Eide, *Revolution and Religion*, 63.

[374] Sibilu, Temesgen Nagassa, "The Influence of Evangelical Christianity on the Development of the Oromo Language in Ethiopia," (PhD thesis, University of South Africa, 2015), 153.

[375] The resolution of the 93rd Ex. Com. of EECMY, January 1995 regarding the use of language in EECMY was accepted by both the 4th EECMY Council in 1995 and the 15th EECMY Gen. Ass., January 1997, respectively to be the language policy of the Church.

The discussion and analysis present a theoretical reflection on weaknesses and indicate potential improvements to strengthen confirmation ministry in the congregations under scrutiny.

# 7 Confirmation teachers

This chapter explores the teachers' qualifications. The chapter deals with who is authorized to teach and why these individuals are chosen. Exploring who qualifies to prepare students for confirmation is vital for an understanding of the learning process and how it helps confirmands to grasp basic Christianity.

## 7.1 Teachers' perspective

One of my interview questions was: "According to the rules and principles of your congregation, who is eligible to teach confirmation?" The confirmation teachers responded from the experience of their respective congregations. Rev. Lukas from Rehoboth expressed a basic principle:

> In the principle of our congregation only theologically trained persons teach confirmation. We do not assign volunteers to teach because confirmation is the foundational teaching in our congregation.[376]

Rehoboth only assigns people who are trained in Bible schools or seminaries to teach confirmation classes. According to Lukas, teaching the basics of the Christian faith ought to be prioritized among the many ministries. Therefore, trained teachers are assigned to this task. Rehoboth engages volunteers in a range of services except teaching confirmation. In the EECMY, voluntary workers are lay people who are engaged in different congregational activities. A volunteer must be confirmed and afterwards attend a discipleship course. The course helps the attendants to identify their gifts of service and teaches them how to serve God and His people. As confirmation is foundational, the responsibility is given to the ministers.

In Bethany, unlike Rehoboth, volunteers can teach confirmation. Isaac, a voluntary teacher in Bethany, said:

> According to the rules, teaching confirmation is the responsibility of ministers and evangelists. It is their regular work. And they have to dedicate their full time to this. But in the case of our congregation, first, to overcome the shortage of workers, secondly, to bring lay people to the ministry, volunteers selected among the congregation members are called to teach.[377]
>
> He did not refer to the rules of the congregation, saying that confirmation should be taught by ordained ministries and that this service should be prioritized. However, these rules were not observed fully. One reason may be

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[376] Lukas, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.
[377] Isaac, Bethany. August 18 /2015.

that ministers and evangelists have many assignments and may not manage all. This creates a work-gap that is filled by volunteers. Second, there is a strong tradition in the EECMY to engage members in voluntary service based on the theological principle of the priesthood of believers. Rev. Abraham, the senior minister in the same congregation, explained the criteria for selecting lay volunteers:

> In our congregation, confirmation teachers are mainly evangelists and ministers. Sometimes, when we get busy with other congregational ministries, we assign mature and experienced lay workers to teach. What I mean by this is that, first we select those who are mature in their faith, those who have good reputation, those who stayed in the congregation for a long time and those who have the gift and experience of teaching. Then we train them. After training, we give them specific topics to teach, not the whole course.[378]

### 7.1.1 Criteria for selection of volunteers

Abraham listed four criteria. They are:

*Someone who is mature in faith:* They look for a person's experience and responses to different life situations. They want to see if faith is integrated into the person's life. If so, they may be able to share experiences and advice with the confirmands on living as Christians, as well as answering many of the questions raised by the confirmands.

*Someone who has a good reputation*: The teacher's greatest witness is the way a person lives his/her life. This is more important than the words spoken. A person's reputation is a basic quality. Since teaching involves character building, congregation leaders are concerned about the morals of the teacher. She/he may serve as an example for the confirmands.

*Someone who stayed in the congregation for a long time*: A faithful member of the congregation has accumulated broad knowledge about the spiritual life and developed good relationships both with staff and members. Faithfulness is seen as a quality compared to those who change denominations frequently.

*Someone who has the gift and experience of teaching*: The teaching ability may be interpreted as a natural gift in line with the idea of "talents" (Mt 25:14-30). It can also be interpreted as a spiritual gift, as seen in Paul's letters (Rom 12:3-8; I Cor 12:7-31). It is not clear what Abraham had in mind. But the point here, when referring to criteria, seems to refer to pedagogical ability. Experience adds to this. My observation confirmed this point as three of the voluntary teachers at Bethany were teachers by profession. The congregation seems to have seen this as an asset.

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[378] Abraham, Bethany, August 17/2015.

An important point here is that even though a person as seen as gifted, the congregation offers training on how to teach the confirmands. Asking what kind of training was offered, Abraham referred to a teaching manual and a course developed three years ago by a seminary teacher.[379] In addition there is a limit to what they can teach. The volunteers are only assigned to teach selected topics. Doctrinal questions are taught by ministers or evangelists. The gift of teaching was commented on by Rev. John at Rehoboth:

> Even though full-time workers (ministers and evangelists) are assigned to teach confirmation, we realized that all are not gifted teachers. Therefore, nowadays we do not only consider the theological training, but we look for gifted teachers.[380]

In this answer another distinction is found. Not all ministers or evangelists are gifted or capable of teaching. Some of them fail to communicate in appropriate ways. Still, Rohoboth congregation stick to rules. In Bethany, however, the criteria of theological training and ordination are not decisive- They are willing to assign volunteers they think have the gift of teaching. Evangelist Jacob from Bethany added:

> In my understanding, theological training does not qualify the person for teaching. A good preacher, counsellor, or person of prayer may not be a good teacher since teaching needs a special gift and potential in addition to training."[381]

Jacob's comment is interesting as it shows that formal training is of limited use if a person lacks pedagogical ability. The person may be able to render good service in other ministries, but a teacher must at least have some pedagogical ability.

### 7.1.2 The number of teachers for each class

The number of teachers assigned to each class differs. Two kinds of practice prevail. In some cases, only one teacher is assigned for the whole course, while in other cases the congregation assigns several teachers to teach different topics:

> In former times, due to a shortage of confirmation teachers, only one teacher taught from the beginning to the end of the course. But now we engage different teachers to teach different lessons.[382]

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[379] Abraham, Bethany, August 18/2015.
[380] John, Rehoboth, June 1/2015.
[381] Jacob, Bethany, August 18/2015.
[382] Marry, Bethany, August 20/2015.

According to evangelist Mary, the assignment of one teacher for the full course at Bethany was because of a lack of trained workers. When more workers were available, they employed more than one teacher for a course. Mary did not develop her argument further. Rev. John explained why Rehoboth prefers to assign more than one teacher:

> When one teacher is assigned, she/he gets the chance to know the confirmands better, including their name, behaviour, and family. However, it becomes dangerous when the teacher imposes her/his character on the minds of the confirmands. Most of the confirmands sketch the picture of their teacher in their minds - including his character and do not think others are also church workers.[383]

The advantages of employing one or several teachers were based on the congregation's experiences. Assigning one teacher makes it possible to know the confirmands and thus be of some personal support. This increases the possibility of communication according to the individual's interest. On the other hand, this may turn into a disadvantage if the teacher tends to enforce the confirmand to follow his point of view. To avoid this kind of problem Rehoboth assigns more than one teacher. Rev. David added:

> It is good to employ more than one teacher because some teachers are better in teaching specific subjects than others. For example, some are clever in teaching doctrinal issues, and some are good in teaching ethics.[384]

The comment allows for a teacher's strengths and weaknesses. Each teacher has his/her field of ability and interest. Evangelist Deborah from Bethany added:

> Doctrinal matters are always taught by a minister or an evangelist because the topic needs adequate knowledge. Some subjects need life experience; in that case the right person to teach is assigned. For example, I am not married so I let the married people teach the lesson about marriage.[385]

In assigning teachers, Bethany looks for the capacity of the person. The dogma of the church is always taught by a theologically trained person. The reason is the knowledge needed. I observed doctrinal issues provoke questions that need adequate responses.[386] In such cases, the teacher is expected to know the subject. Deborah also mentioned subjects related to life experiences. She was able to teach on marriage by referring to the teaching material and the Bible. Her fear

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[383]Yohans, Rehoboth, June 1/2015.
[384] David, Rehoboth, May 30/2015.
[385] Deborah, Bethany, August 19/2015.
[386] Observation in Rehoboth and Bethany.

was, however, that being single she may not be able to give proper answers to the questions raised, and so, they let married teachers take care of teaching about marriage.

## 7.2 Confirmation teachers: confirmands' perspective

My interview question for the confirmands was **"**Who teaches you the confirmation course and how do you perceive the teachers?" One said:

> The teachers treat all of us equally. They teach us from their heart. I have not observed any problem with our teachers. They accept their students with a smiling face, so I am happy with all of them.[387]

Solomon, a young confirmand from Rehoboth is happy because his teachers are not biased. Even though the confirmands differ in age and educational background, Solomon has experienced fair treatment. In explaining their ways of teaching, he used the Amharic term, *ke libachew,* which literally means "from the heart." This term is used to express full commitment. In addition, Solomon appreciated the teacher's body language; the smiling face was perceived as a signal of welcome and acceptance.

### 7.2.1 The dedicated teacher

Paul, an adult confirmand from Bethany, saw voluntary teachers as an asset:

> Our teachers are so nice. They teach us as volunteers, and they are so punctual. They are committed teachers. I appreciate them much. They willingly teach us all what they know. We have different behaviours, but they try to unite us by treating us equally.[388]

Voluntary workers are dedicated. Paul admires them because they are unpaid, even when they work full-time. They take the service seriously. Paul observed the teachers share their knowledge without any reservations. They try to create unity among the confirmands. Hanna commented:

> We had a problem with our former teacher who did not come on time and who did not explain well. But now the minister comes to class on time and is teaching us in a good way. He encourages us to speak, so we all like his teaching.[389]

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[387] Solomon, Rehoboth, July 30 /2015.
[388] Paul, Bethany, August 21/2015.
[389] Hannah, Rehoboth, August 13/2015.

The comments show the confirmands evaluate the teachers' punctuality. Unlike the former, her present teacher came on time. In addition, he explained the lessons in a way the confirmands could understand and encouraged the confirmands to participate in the teaching-learning process. The moral quality and the teaching approach of the teacher motivates the confirmands. Timothy both appreciates and criticises the approach of the teachers:

> More than the teaching approach and the subject they address, I appreciate the way they treat the confirmands. I used to talk and make fun when the teachers talk, but one of the teachers whom I admire most told me in a good Christian manner that what I am doing is wrong. In that way I learned from my mistake. However, some among the teachers have bad manners. They laugh or shout at me when I ask questions. So, I am not interested to attend the class when this person comes to teach us. When teachers are angry, the students may find it hard to continue up to the end.[390]

Timothy, a young confirmand from Bethany, clearly put emphasis on the teacher's communication. As I observed, the teachers changed her/his tone and shouted in order to make confirmands pay attention. The teachers' attitudes clearly play a role in the overall impression they give.

### 7.2.2 *The importance of relationship*

Confirmands raised challenges related to some of the teachers. As a young girl from Rehoboth said:

> Different teachers taught us, and I think this is good because people have different capacities. One teacher might not know what the other knows. For instance, when we learned about premarital relationships, a teacher knowing the subject well, taught us. But the disadvantage is that the teachers sometimes don't cover the portion. The new teacher begins his own teaching before the previous is finished. [391]

Saron, a teenage confirmand from Rehoboth, explains the advantage of learning from different teachers as an opportunity to acquire knowledge. By saying, "one teacher may not know what the other teacher knows", she refers to the capacities of the teachers. There remains, however, a problem of continuity. A confirmand from Bethany also mentioned this problem.

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[390] Timothy, Bethany, August 22/2015.
[391] Saron, Rehoboth, July 26/2015.

> The topic they started…. When another teacher comes, he or she starts at a different place. Our teachers are good but most of the time teachers leave without completing the topic. Therefore, there is the problem of continuity.[392]

This is a challenge mentioned by most confirmands. The time allocated for each subject might not be well planned and not considering the time needed to cover the subject.

Dinah, a young confirmand from Rehoboth, saw the change of teachers as a barrier in terms of establishing relationship with the teacher, "one teacher teaches one topic and is replaced by another teacher. There is no opportunity to get to know the teacher well."[393] From the leader's side, the aim of employing different teachers is that the confirmands get better education, and they get to know the congregation workers. However, according to the comments, the teachers come to class only to teach the topics they are given; there is no time to grow relationships with the teachers, and this is a hindrance to the learning process.

To sum up, in most cases theologically trained workers are assigned to teach confirmation in both congregations. In Bethany, when there is a shortage of workers, volunteers are assigned. Even though trained workers are assigned, teachers emphasize that the ability to teach is a matter to be considered. The congregations employ different teachers to share different experiences. This gives the confirmands a chance to establish relationships with different congregation workers. From the confirmands' perspective, they appreciate the teachers who teach from their heart, who treat them well and respect their audience by coming on time. They are unhappy with those who do not live up to the expectations of how a Christian ought to behave.

## 7.3    Interpretation and assessment

My findings indicate some important issues. They show that Bethany assigns volunteers to teach by selecting and equipping them for service, while Rehoboth does not assign volunteers to teach. This raises the question of teaching responsibility and the question of formal trained versus volunteers. Whether teaching is a spiritual gift or a natural ability is also an issue. The importance of good relationships between teacher and student is a concern. I will interpret and assess these issues against the frames of reference built in chapter 2-5, adding some theory on certain points.

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[392] Lydia, Bethany, August 21/2015.
[393] Dina, Rehoboth, August 12/2015.

### 7.3.1 Teaching responsibility

The EECMY adheres to the theological concept of the priesthood of believers (1 Pet 2:9). This is the only ecclesiological designation mentioned in the EECMY Constitution of 1959:

> In accordance with the teaching of the Holy Word of God this Church recognizes the Priesthood of Believers and that it is the responsibility of the individual Christian to witness to the love of Christ ...[394]

From the time of its formation, the EECMY has been known as a church of the laity. Johannes Launhardt puts emphasis on this in his book, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa*:

> There is no question that the lay people were and are the treasure of the EECMY, the rapid growth of the church is among others, the result of their active involvement and their readiness to serve voluntarily.[395]

Lay people are a major asset for the church. Rohoboth and Bethany, however, have decided on different practices as to the use of lay people in confirmation teaching. The teachers I interviewed were all aware of the importance of this teaching. The choice made at Rehoboth was to assign teachers with some level of formal theological training, while Bethany accepted volunteers on certain conditions. These conditions are interesting. They relate to maturity of faith, good reputation, long time service, ability to teach and experience in teaching. In many ways the list of qualities could serve as a comment on the meaning of the "Priesthood of Believers."

It comes as a surprise that Rohoboth, situated in the former NLM area, laid more emphasis on formal training than Bethany, in former Swedish and German missions' areas (see 4.3). A characteristic of NLM theology was its strong position on laymen's witness. I interpret this as an acknowledgement of the importance of confirmation ministry. In a context of powerful Pentecostal-charismatic influence on the youth of the congregation, it seems as if the congregation elders and ministers of Rehoboth wanted to secure the church's Lutheran heritage (see 5).

The Bethany interpretation of the "Priesthood of Believers" is slightly different. They allow for volunteers, but the criteria for being accepted as a confirmation teacher are very strict. In addition, they give them some basic training. This indicates that the elders and ministers of the congregation has a supervisory role and the responsibility for what is taught.

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[394] EECMY Constitution Art. X, Ministry. See Sæverås, *On Church-Mission Relations*, 175.
[395] Launhardt, *Evangelicals*, 56.

### 7.3.2    *The gift of teaching*

My finding reveals an uncertainty or even confusion on the use of concepts. Rev. Abraham from Bethany for example, lays down strict criteria for a confirmation teacher. They include personal character, ability, and training. Abraham does not mention any idea of a divine gift of teaching. However, his point of view is noteworthy. His first condition for allowing a lay person to participate in confirmation ministry is maturity of faith. Keeping the history of persecution of the EECMY in mind and considering the hardships of life in Ethiopia, Paul's words to the Romans may serve as a comment on this point:

> Therefore, since we are justified by Christ, we have peace with God …
> knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces
> character, and character produces hope …. (Rom 5:1-5).

In the Oromo culture maturity and character are held in high regard. These qualities come by age and experience. Abraham's point of view is therefore a strong cultural and theological comment on the tendency to spiritualise the teaching ministry in the church.

Rev. John from Rehoboth applies the concept of "gifted person". Evangelist Jacob from Bethany says that "teaching needs a special gift in addition to training." It is not clear from these examples whether the concept of gift relates to a natural ability or a spiritual gift as something in addition.  Due to the theological influence of Pentecostal-charismatic theology in the two congregations in focus, conflicting points of view on the concept of gift are heard.

Applying my methodological model, a thorough exegetical and systematic treatment of 1 Pet 2:9 (priesthood of believers) or 1 Cor 12 (spiritual gifts) relates to task 3, the normative task. That goes beyond the aim of my thesis. I therefore limit myself to an interpretation and assessment based on pedagogical theory (2), EECMY tradition (4) and Lutheran theology of confirmation (5).

My presentation of theory indicates that the pedagogical task can be solved in vastly different ways. Anyone claiming that the gift of teaching is given together with a pedagogic approach, may not have considered all the challenges to teaching presented in my thesis. The fact that most teachers in the church apply the acquisition approach, generally seen as insufficient, indicates that pedagogics is something to be learned.

The second point relates to EECMY tradition. All missionaries who served in Ethiopia were well trained, with degrees in a variety of fields. The NLM, for example, was a lay movement with great emphasis on the ecclesiology of 1 Cor 12 (the body of Christ). Still, they established Bible-schools from the very beginning. This is a clear indication of the need for

training. The American (Presbyterian), Swedish and German missions, realized from the beginning that teachers ought to be equipped with knowledge. They therefore initiated formal theological training. I, as a teacher at Mekane Yesus Seminary, serve within this tradition.

My third point relates to my presentation of confirmation theology in chapter 5. This shows that Lutheran theology is built around "justification by faith." This core is related to salvation and is maintained against Orthodox sacramental theology as well as Pentecostal spiritualizing theology.

However, what is meant by the biblical concepts of "talents" and "spiritual gifts"? My research findings indicate that congregations and confirmands appreciate a clever teacher, or as they say, "a gifted teacher." In the context of my thesis, I interpret this to mean a person with a natural ability to teach, or perhaps a person who in a special way is endowed with the ability to teach. This ability does not exempt her/him from the hard work of learning theory, be it Bible-knowledge, pedagogical theory or the Lutheran tradition.  It is as Gary Newton says:

> A spiritually gifted teacher must possess not only a thorough knowledge of God's Word but also an ability to communicate it to people in such a way as to equip them to apply the word within their life and relationships.[396]

My thesis supports the idea that proficiency in teaching is something to be learned – also by the talented and gifted.

### 7.3.3   Relationship between teachers and confirmands

The teachers commented on the practice of assigning several teachers for a confirmation course. The advantage of this is that confirmands get a share in a broader range of experiences. In addition, the confirmands get to know more congregation workers. In part the confirmands express satisfaction about teachers who have different skills and gifts. However, they complain that many of the teachers only teach for shorter periods and leave before they get to know her/him properly and can establish relationships. The lack of communication between the teachers creates problems of continuity.

According to Ted Ward, "teaching is more dependent on human relationships within the learning context than upon the intellectual…"[397] That means learning is hampered if there is no relationship between the teacher and the learners. The relationship the teacher establishes with

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[396] Gary Newton, "The Holy Spirit in the Educational Process, Learning Style", in *Introducing Christian Education,* ed. Anthony, 126.
[397] Ted Ward, "The Teaching Learning Process", in *Introducing Christian Education*, ed. Anthony, 118.

the learner may hinder or facilitate effective learning. More than transferring knowledge, the teachers "support, encourage, shape, correct and guide" the learners.[398] To establish relationships requires time and effort.

Jesus, the Master teacher, spent a lot of time with his disciples because He was "a deeply personal and intimate teacher."[399] Through this relationship he transformed the lives of the disciples. The congregation assigns several teachers, hoping to establish relationships between the confirmands and the teachers. However, as the confirmands point out, the time they spend together is too short to establish good teacher - student relationships. The teachers and the confirmands have scant opportunity to get to know each other. As I observed, this is enforced because of the high number of the confirmands in each class. The congregation leaders do not seem to have considered the time and effort that goes into knowing sixty or more confirmands. In addition, the relationship is limited to class time and that is mostly used for lecturing. Teachers and confirmands meet on different occasions, such as Sunday services and other programs. However, a confirmation course does not include outdoor experiences like excursions or camping, where the teachers and the confirmands can spend more time together and engage in other activities than formal classroom settings.

In one case, the congregation did not employ a teacher because the close relationship between the teacher and the confirmands was perceived as problematic. The fear was the confirmands would be tempted to follow only his model. Ward stresses that, in establishing relationships, the teacher must avoid the desire to control or to remake the students in his own image.[400] When the teachers make the learners their own followers instead of the followers of Christ, the relationship has a negative impact. However, assigning different teachers has not brought a solution, but created new problems.

In transformative learning theory teachers do not present themselves as experts or as the only sources of knowledge. They identify themselves with the learners. The mutual relationship with the teachers, in which they participate equally in the teaching and learning process, brings transformation in the learner's life. If the teacher come to class only to pass on knowledge, the impact of their teaching is less. Transformative learning asserts that transformation occurs when the learners are made to reflect on their learning and experience. Reflections on the learning process is an unfamiliar exercise in Ethiopian schools and totally absent in confirmation classes.

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[398] Robert W. Pazmino, "Jesus the Master Teacher", in *Introducing Christian Education,* ed. Anthony,114.
[399] Ibid. 115.
[400] Ward, "The Teaching," 118.

Since confirmation is the main teaching ministry in the congregations, assigning trained and qualified ministers for teaching is important. Employing volunteers can solve some of the problems of shortage of teachers.

## 7.4 Summary

On a general level my findings indicate that ministers and evangelists are so busy with many tasks that they struggle to find time enough on confirmation ministry. In one of the congregations, they solve this problem by allowing lay volunteers to teach on certain conditions. They include both personal character and formal studies. My assessment of the issue of spiritual gifts indicate that this relates to an ability to teach, natural or endowed. In the two congregations this does not exempt the gifted person from being valued on maturity and knowledge. The confirmands support the practice of lay contributions in confirmation ministry. My findings confirm the importance of good relationships between teacher and student.

# 8  Teaching methods

This chapter explores the teaching methods applied by confirmation teachers. I asked the teachers the following interview question: what kind of teaching method do you use for confirmation teaching? And what are the reasons for choosing those specific approaches? I also asked the confirmands: how do you see the teaching approach of the confirmation teachers? The main themes of the findings will be discussed and analysed following the presentation.

## 8.1  Teaching methods: teachers' perspective

### 8.1.1  Lack of training

Confirmation teachers described the teaching methods they utilize with the reasons for choosing those methods. Evangelist Joshua said:

> I and most of the full-time workers did not take a course in pedagogy. We do not know how to teach …. We are just given the responsibility of teaching without knowing how to do it. In my case, I was very confused and did not know what to do when I was assigned to teach confirmation class for the first time. Of course, I believe that it is the Lord who gives capacity and grace because I may fail to communicate effectively even having pedagogical knowledge but by God's grace, I am able to communicate in a good way. In my case, I have encountered a bit confusion in the beginning. I might have taught falsely at that time. When I evaluate myself based on today, I dare to say this. But I was right yesterday. Nobody could judge me because I taught to the level of my understanding. I did it due to the great love I had both for God and the church. I made mistakes that time. I have been learning so many things from time to time.[401]

Joshua raises important issues. First, he indicates he and the other confirmation teachers had not received a special training on how to teach a confirmation course. The full-time workers have theological training either in Bible school or seminary. The congregation delegates responsibility for teaching to the ministers and evangelists, assuming they know how to teach. Bible schools and seminaries give a course in Christian education. The course describes the aims and means of Christian education, the curriculum, the teaching and learning process, and teaching materials. However, when Joshua and the other theologically trained teachers say they lack training, they might refer to a specific training on teaching large number of confirmands with diverse age group, educational level and religious background. Thus the training they have received does not adequately prepare them for the difficult task of teaching confirmation classes with all the challenges.

The other point is about God's grace. Though he lacks adequate pedagogical training, Joshua relies on God's grace (Amharic: *Ye Eegzeabher Tsega*), in order to be able to teach his students. For Joshua, God's grace makes a person a capable teacher. This does not mean he opposes pedagogical training. Joshua compares his teaching experience when he started with how he is

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[401] Joshua, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.

teaching now and realizes some of his teaching and methods were wrong. At that time, he felt what he was doing was right because he taught at the level of his understanding. As he was not adequately trained on how to teach catechism classes most effectively, he did it in the way he thought right. In addition, the motivation behind his ministry was his love for God and His people. So even if what he practiced might have been wrong, he claims he did the best job of which he was capable, and with a positive intention.

Evangelist Jacob, from Bethany congregation, added:

> Since I have not received specific training, I teach confirmation as I was taught twenty-four years ago. First, I write notes on the black board. Then I explain. I think this is the right approach.[402]

For Jacob and others, the method followed, almost as a norm, was writing notes on the blackboard and explaining the subject. By teaching the way he was taught, Jacob thought he was following the right pattern. This shows that untrained teachers tend to teach how they were taught, for better or worse.

### 8.1.2 Teaching as one-way communication

Rev. Abraham shared his teaching approach briefly:

> The confirmands are given notes on the blackboard. They can write them down. Then the teacher explains the topic. The teachers also motivate the confirmands to participate by asking questions or answering. This is the teaching method I and the others practice.[403]

Abraham says he involves the learners, either by asking question or the confirmands raise questions and get explanations. He does not mention how he or other teachers motivate the confirmands to participate. In all classes I observed, however, the teacher spoke for three quarters of an hour continuously while the confirmands listened. Only on a few occasions the teachers asked the confirmands to read a text from Scripture. The time allocated for questions and discussion was less than ten minutes. Therefore, what Abraham seemed to share was an ideal expression of how the teaching was intended without going into details of his practice.

Rev David from Rehoboth explained:

> The teaching is more a kind of information giving. The teaching material does not include the teaching method. The teachers are not trained in how to teach,

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[402] Jacob, Bethany, August 18 /2015.
[403] Abraham, Bethany, August 17/2015.

the teaching material we are using does not have a teacher's guide. So, the teachers only teach from their own experience.[404]

This quote is informative as it points at the heart of the matter: Confirmation teachers are information givers while the confirmands are there to receive information. It seems, however, that David is uneasy about this method, pointing out that the congregation did not offer training for the teachers. He is also aware that there are no guidelines available. The teaching material has only a list of lessons to be taught. The situation forces the teacher to teach based on their own experience, or in whatever way seems right to them.

### 8.1.3   Participation

When I asked the question about teaching methods, some of teachers were confused. I explained there are different teaching methods, like the lecture method, a question-and-answer method in which both teacher and learner take part, storytelling where the students reflect on the story, and so on.

Based on my explanation, evangelist Mathew shared his experience:

> In my teaching I ask the confirmands to participate in the process, because that is the way I make sure that they understood what they learn. What discourages me is that the confirmands do not engage in dialogue. If it were secular education, they would have participated actively. I am actually teaching them something that makes them members of the church. I gave them two tests and discussed the results with them. Some don't attend the class regularly. If I take a measurement on the students that don't attend the class regularly, that can create conflict in the congregation because their families are our members.[405]

Mathew tried a participatory approach but experienced difficulties. I observed his teaching. He asked questions but only three to four confirmands raised their hands to answer. A majority of the confirmands were teenagers who had been brought up in the congregation. Some of the questions were simple, but the confirmands did not show any interest in answering. Mathew thought the confirmands were more active in their secular education because class activity was graded. But in confirmation class they did not participate because participation was not graded. For him the objective of confirmation teaching was to make the confirmands full members of the church, however, they could achieve this without the need to be active.

Another problem was even though he gave them two tests, most of the students got a low score. Mathew was not happy with the performance. There was, however, little he could

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[404] David, Rehoboth, May 30/2015.
[405] Mathew, Rehoboth, July 30/2015.

do about it as he was afraid of their parents. He did not mention what kind of measurement he wanted to take, but he thought what was going on was inappropriate. This shows that the parents of teenage confirmands do not participate in their children's catechetical instruction. Lack of participation form the confirmands side might be due to the influence of the Ethiopian school system.

Rev. Aster from Rehoboth congregation shared a different experience:

> I use different mechanisms of teaching. For example, I give them group work by dividing them in small groups, I also use a question-and-answer method and ask them for prayer items so that we pray together. I want the confirmands to become active learners.[406]

This is an example of a teacher who tried different approaches to teaching. Aster stated that she arranged group work, used questions and answers and asked the confirmands to present prayer requests. Her teaching experience was somewhat different from other teachers. It might be that Aster had a fewer number of students in her class, or she utilized more hours to practice what she had mentioned. When I conducted the interview, the group Aster had been teaching had completed the confirmation course and she was engaged in other ministries.

Isaac shared his teaching approach as follows:

> My teaching method is very participatory. First, I give confirmands notes to write down and then I explain the topic. I ask the confirmands to pray at the beginning and end of the session. I also ask them to read Bible texts and they participate by asking questions.[407]

Isaac, a voluntary confirmation teacher, who is a teacher by profession, commented that he made the confirmands participate by asking the confirmands to do some activities, like praying or reading Bible texts. However, those activities took only a few minutes while lecturing takes most of the time. From his professional experience, Isaac knew other teaching methods. However, he noted that there were challenges to applying those methods to his catechism class. He indicated that the class size made it difficult to apply other methods. Another problem was shortage of time. The time allocated was one and a half hour per week. For him, the time was too short to practice other teaching methods.

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[406] Aster, Rehoboth, August 5/2015.
[407] Isaac, Bethany, August 18 /2015.

### *8.1.4  Disorder and punishment*

Rev. Aster uncovered that she used punishment so that the confirmands would pay proper attention.

> Sometimes I use a little punishment when they do not pay due attention, like telling them to kneel down in front of the class or twisting their ear. I practice this especially when I teach teenagers; as a result, they listen properly.

Punishment is a common practice in all schools in Ethiopia, though the degree and the kind of punishment differs depending on the policy of each school. In her own opinion, Aster used the mildest form of punishment. That is making the confirmand kneel in front of the class and stretch out their arms, while other confirmands are sitting. The ear-twisting is to make the confirmand listen. Both kinds of punishments are considered light forms because they are less painful compared to the harsh punishments practiced in most schools. Aster did not apply punishment to harm the confirmands but to enforce attention. In her opinion it was helpful, but we do not know how it affected the confirmand and her/his relationship with the teacher. Again, it should be noted that I was not able to observe Aster's teaching.

In general, the confirmation teachers explain that they lack specific training on how to teach confirmation class as a result, they apply a teaching method they think appropriate, and some of them said they teach as they were taught. The teachers think their teaching method is participatory only because they ask confirmands to do some activities. The response of the confirmands is described as follows.

## 8.2   Teaching methods: confirmands' perspective

The confirmands shared different opinions about the teaching methods followed by the teachers.

### *8.2.1   Dissatisfaction*

I observed some degree of dissatisfaction from the confirmands both regarding how time was spent and the lack of opportunity to ask questions and discuss the issues.

Lydia gave her opinion on the teacher's pedagogical ability:

> My observation of the teachers' teaching methods is that, when they teach, they are always in a hurry to complete the lessons. They do not take time to

check whether we understood the subject or not. We do not get satisfactory answers for our questions.[408]

Lydia, a young confirmand from Bethany, reflected on the teachers' use of time. In her view the teachers rush to cover the lesson. This resulted in dissatisfaction on the subjects they learn. During my visits, I observed that teachers use most of the time lecturing without making any assessment to see whether the confirmands were following or not. In the middle of the lecture the teacher may ask the confirmands: "is it clear", or "have you understood?" Only a few would say yes while the majority kept silent. In most cases the teachers did not give any attention to the response, whether it was yes or no. They simply continued lecturing. The confirmands on their side were not bold enough to express their ideas. I observed that even though some of the teachers encouraged or even forced the confirmands to speak, the confirmands preferred to look down instead of expressing their viewpoints.

This may be due to the high respect for the teachers, In Ethiopia, starting from elementary school, teachers are highly respected. Submission to the teachers' authority and accepting all their teachings without criticism make the best students. Disrespecting a teacher brings punishment. When the confirmands prefer to keep quiet it may be a sign of respect and obedience to the teacher. However, Lydia asserts that even when they are bold enough to ask questions, they do not get adequate answers.

Another young confirmand, Timothy from Bethany, had the same complaint about how the teachers used class time and answered questions.

> The teachers use most of the time writing notes and explaining the topic. At the end, they give us the chance to ask questions but only two or three will get the opportunity. There is not enough time to answer all our questions. So, they postpone our questions and I doubt if some of the teachers are even capable of answering our questions.[409]

Timothy commented that since the teachers use most of the time to write notes and lecture, the confirmands become passive learners. This kind of teaching leaves the confirmands with many questions and ambiguities. As there is not enough time, the teachers leave questions for the next class but fail to keep their promise. For Timothy, the reason for suspending questions was not only shortage of time, but also the suspicion that the teachers did not have the knowledge necessary. Thus, the practice of suspending questions and answers was interpreted by Timothy as a lack of knowledge.

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[408] Lydia, Bethany, August 21/2015.
[409] Timothy, Bethany, August 22/2015.

As I interpret the situation, the confirmands do not see pending questions as a big problem, but they are unhappy when the teachers fail to keep their promise. Some of the questions are relevant to the lesson of the day, while others are not. The complaint is the teacher will come to the next class without answering. This can be a frustration for the confirmands.

### 8.2.2  On participation

The confirmands also commented about class participation:

> We actively participate in the teaching. We are asked to pray in the beginning and end of the class and to read biblical texts and we are also given the opportunity to ask questions and to give our opinion on some issues.[410]

Thomas, an adult confirmand from Rehoboth, who was a secondary school teacher by profession, replied that the teaching allows the confirmands to take part in the discussions. For him teaching was engaging because the confirmands were given the opportunity to pray and read the Bible texts. Like Thomas, most confirmands thought the method was participatory because the confirmands took part in prayer and text reading. As an adult male and a teacher by profession, Thomas could raise his hand and speak at any time when he had question or wanted to share his view. For Thomas, the teaching made him an active learner who could contribute to his own learning. In Thomas' case, his age, gender and profession made it easier to contribute towards his own learning.

Paul, an adult confirmand from Bethany, who was also a teacher by profession, shared a slightly different opinion.

> We participate a lot in the class. We can ask questions, read texts and discuss topics. But not all confirmands take part, women and teenagers feel shy to speak. I can say the method is semi-participatory.[411]

The teaching method does not engage the confirmands equally. I observed some teachers ask the confirmands to pray or read a Bible text randomly by looking at the name list of the confirmands. This is because they do not know all confirmands by name. Other teachers gave the chance to confirmands they knew or to those on the front bench. Prayer or reading does not involve all confirmands. As adult male confirmands, Thomas and Paul are culturally favoured to speak, while women and teenagers are not expected to express their thought. Even if teachers give equal chances to ask questions, cultural norms often govern participation.

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[410] Thomas, Rehoboth, August 8/2015.
[411] Paul, Bethany, August 21/2015.

Dinah shared her comment on this:

> I and my friends always sit at the back because we are afraid to sit in the front and speak out. The teachers explain the lessons to all of us but during discussion, they only communicate with those who sit in the front. The teachers do not give attention to those who sit at the back. They do not favour us.

Dinah and her friends preferred to sit at the back because if they sit at the front they might have asked to participate. As teenage girls they were afraid to speak in the presence of many people, even if they knew the answer. Another issue is that looking directly in the eyes of the teacher is seen as a sign of disrespect:

> In many Asian, African and Latin American cultures, extended eye contact can be taken as an affront or a challenge of authority. It is often considered more polite to have only sporadic or brief eye contact, especially between people of different social registers (like a student and a teacher, or a child and his elder relatives). For example, if an Ethiopian woman avoids looking someone in the eyes, she is not showing a lack of interest nor is she demonstrating a lack of self-confidence; instead, she is being polite, respectful and appropriate according to her culture[412]

Accordingly, teenagers, youth and especially women, avoid looking at teachers' eyes as a sign of being polite and appropriate. One of the ways to avoid direct eye contact is by sitting at the back. The result was less attention. The teachers lecture to the whole class but when it comes to participation, the teacher communicates more with those who sit in front, mostly male confirmands who can freely raise their voice get the opportunity.

I observed how the teachers limited the discussion to those who were active and confident. I see this as a lack of knowledge on how to encourage participation of passive learners and also the class seating that does not allow the teachers to equally communicate with the confirmands...

In sum, the confirmands shared their dissatisfaction of the teaching methods followed by the teachers that hindered getting answers and explanations on the subjects they learn. The issue of class participation is explained both positively and negatively. Positively some confirmands think they take part in the teaching - learning process because they pray, read Bible texts, and ask or answer questions.

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[412] Making Eye Contact in Different Cultures, Retrieved August 24th 2018 from https://www.brighthubeducation.com/social-studies-help/9626-learning-about-eye-contact-in-other-cultures/

## 8.3 Interpretation and assessment

In my overarching methodological approach, the second sub-task refers to the cultural-contextual interpretation of the results of my descriptive-empirical investigation of teaching methods. The main question is: *why is this going on in this way*? (see 1.4.3). The Interpretation and assessment therefore focus on the teaching methods the teachers follow. The discussion will also include factors that need to be considered in applying teaching methods.

### 8.3.1 *The pedagogical approaches*

Scholars of education label lecturing as a traditional form of education. "It is a teacher-directed process wherein the student is passively engaged and becomes dependent upon the instructor for learning external truth."[413] The primary advantage of the lecture method is that it helps the teacher to cover large amounts of material in short time. Confirmation teachers may therefore apply the lecture method to cover the courses within the scheduled time. The question, however, is what is meant by "cover" the course material. As Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins point out, the concept of "coverage" is one of the mistakes in the traditional practice of teaching. They describe "coverage" as "an approach in which students march through a textbook, page by page (or teachers through lecture notes) in an attempt to go over all the factual material within a prescribed time."[414] The teachers I interviewed never expressed this idea explicitly, but the confirmands recognized from the approach that the primary aim was to "cover" the subjects in the curriculum, rather than pursuing understanding.

In this regard, Anna Sfard, in her article "On two metaphors for learning and the danger of just choosing one," describes 'acquisition' and 'participatory approach of learning" (see 2.1). The acquisition metaphor sees the human mind as an empty box or a container to be filled with certain knowledge in such a way the learner acquires it or becomes the owner of it. Knowledge is considered as a property, possession or commodity, while the learners are mere recipients/consumers and teachers are perceived as providers of knowledge.[415] The weakness of this method is that it is difficult to know if the lesson is understood, accepted and remembered by the learners. Moreover, it makes the learners depend on the teachers as the only sources of knowledge. The teaching method applied by confirmation teachers resembles the acquisition approach as it helps the teachers to cover many subjects in a shorter time. Their approach

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[413] Nick Taylor, "Spiritual Formation: Nurturing Spiritual Vitality", in *Introducing Christian. Ed. Anthony,* 91.
[414] Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins, *Understanding by Design*: *Professional Development Work*, (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005), 7.
[415] Sfard, "On Two Metaphors of Learning", 5.

mirrors the prevalent pedagogical approach, inherited from the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church's teaching tradition.

While participation of the confirmands is limited to reading Bible verses, praying at the beginning and end of sessions, and asking questions, the confirmation teachers claim their teaching approach is participatory. However, according to Sfard's explanation of the participation metaphor, to learn is to become a participant in certain kinds of mutual activities, rather than accumulating private possessions. In this metaphor, knowledge is an aspect of the practice/discourse or activity, and teachers are expert participants or preservers of the practice/discourse.[416] Sfard's explanation of the participatory approach is related to traditional African ways of teaching (see 2.1) but is also found in what transformation learning theory asserts. According to Mezirow, transformation happens when the learners engage in constructive and reflexive discourse such as "specialized use of dialogue devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of justification of an interpretation or belief."[417] Therefore, in transformative learning, dialogue with fellow learners and educators plays as key role in bringing change. In this method of learning, a learner is not an empty container but active contributor to her/his learning. The discourse helps the learners to reason, reflect, argue, and interpret from different perspectives, and construct new meanings. This takes place through effective participation in a discourse. This is the approach followed in African traditional education. It is characterized as learning by participation. "Participation" is almost synonymous with "taking part" and "being a part," and both of these expressions signal that learning should be viewed as a process of becoming part of a greater whole."[418]

The participatory approach is not utilized in confirmation classes, either due to the lack of knowledge about the participatory methods or due to other challenges that hinder participation, such as the huge number of confirmands, shortage of trained workers, shortage of classrooms and confirmation teachers, etc. Confirmation teachers need to consider this approach as it is supported by learning theories. Educational experts assert that we remember 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see and 70% of what we discuss with others.[419] Participatory learning approach fosters understanding and reduces the problem of dissatisfaction from the confirmands side.

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[416] Ibid. 5.
[417] Mezirow et al. *Learning as Transformation*, 10.
[418] Sfard, "On Two Metaphors of Learning", 6.
[419] Anthony, ed. Introducing Christian education, 45.

### 8.3.2 Other factors of importance

Educational scholars propose various factors that help determine the choice of teaching method. These include instructional objective, availability of teaching and learning aids, teachers' ability and preference, cultural aspects of the society, age of the learners, size of the class, time available, the content of the teaching, the learners' learning capacity (intelligence) and the educational philosophy of the church/government.[420] I want to reflect briefly on these factors:

*Instructional objective:* In the case of a confirmation course the instructional objective is to explain the basics of the Christian faith in order that the confirmands will get an understanding of what they believe and be transformed by what they learnt. While lecturing is important to know the facts and the doctrines, more teaching methods need to apply to establish understanding that transforms the confirmands. This can only happen when teaching engages the learners. My findings on methods have identified a mismatch where the objective of teaching confirmation may not be reached.

*Availability of teaching and learning aids.*[421] In order to apply different teaching methods the availability of teaching aids plays a key role. As far as I have observed, the only teaching aids utilized in confirmation classes are the Bible, blackboard, and chalk. The teachers use what they have. Lack of teaching aids is partly because of scant knowledge of the teachers about the benefits of teaching aids and partly because of the poor resource availability.

*Teacher's ability and preference:* The teachers were aware they had little training in how to teach when they were given the responsibility. Since they have little knowledge about method, they used the method they knew from their own experience. Christian education is offered as a course in Bible schools and seminaries. The course material includes important subjects for Christian education. However, the course is given on introductory level, and it is more theory focused than practical. Their lack of training did not adequately prepare them for teaching confirmation classes.

*Cultural aspects of society:* The culture of a given society plays a key role in shaping the teaching methods. Before the introduction of modern education, traditional modes of education were practiced in Ethiopia. Like in many African countries, the aim of Ethiopian traditional education revolves around problem solving.[422] Consequently, life experience leads

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[420] John D. Bransford et al., *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (Washington DC: National Academic Press, 2004), 131.

[421] Teaching aids may be an object (such as a book, picture, or map) or a device (such as a DVD or computer) used by a teacher to enhance or enliven classroom instruction. MYS TEE, *Christian Education, 146.*

[422] Nsamenang and Tchombe, *Handbook of African Educational Theories,* 24.

to learning new skills. Teaching methods applied in traditional education include devoted observation, storytelling, proverbs, myths and practice learning like wrestling, running, cooking, dressing, hunting, farming, carpentry, drumming, dancing etc.[423] These teaching methods are participatory as they involve observation, imitation and participation (see 2.1). The confirmation teachers could have applied some of these methods as they are culturally valued. However, since much of the teaching they have received in their own formal school experience matches the acquisition/lecture method they subsequently apply it in their own teaching.

*The age of the learners:* As was discussed before, the age of the learners is a factor that determines the teaching method. Learners have different mental, physical and psychological needs depending on their age and learning preferences. I observed the age and the needs of the confirmands was not considered by the leaders of the congregation or the confirmation teachers, as students of all ages were taught in the same classrooms.

*The learners' learning capacity:* The learners' "intelligence" ought to be taken into consideration when method is discussed. However, what is meant by "intelligence"? Howard Gardner has developed a "multiple intelligence theory," according to which, all human beings possess intelligences to a varying degree. Intelligence is located to different areas of the brain, and these intelligences can either work independently or together. Gardner identifies nine kinds of intelligence. The theory explains why students learn, remember, understand, and perform in widely different ways.[424]

In the field of education, Gardner's theory implies learning can take different forms. To apply the multiple intelligence theory, one needs to know the kind of intelligence the individual learner possesses. In the Ethiopian context the issue of intelligence is discussed more in schools and workplaces than in the church. In the church what is considered and discussed is the spiritual gifts a person possesses to serve the congregation. The course on discipleship is

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[423] Ibid. 25.

[424] Verbal-linguistic intelligence (well-developed verbal skills and sensitivity to the sounds, meanings and rhythms of words). Logical-mathematical intelligence (ability to think conceptually and abstractly, and capacity to discern logical and numerical patterns). Spatial-visual intelligence (capacity to think in images and pictures, to visualize accurately and abstractly). Bodily, kinaesthetic intelligence (ability to control one's body movements and to handle objects skillfully). Musical intelligence (ability to produce and appreciate rhythm, pitch and timber). Interpersonal intelligence (capacity to detect and respond appropriately to the moods, motivations and desires of others). Intrapersonal intelligence (capacity to be self-aware and in tune with inner feelings, values, beliefs and thinking processes). Naturalist intelligence (ability to recognize and categorize plants, animals and other objects in nature). Existential intelligence (sensitivity and capacity to tackle deep questions about human existence such as, what is the meaning of life? Why do we die? How did we get here?) Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligence for the 21st Century,* New York, NY, Basic Books, 1999), 34-36.

designed to help confirmed church members to recognize the spiritual gifts and how to exercise them.

*The size of the class*: The application of different teaching methods is highly dependent on the size of the class. In teaching small groups, the teacher can apply teaching methods that engage the learners. In large classes this is hardly possible. The primary barrier to a more participatory approach of learning is the size of the classes. As a result of membership growth, the number of confirmands in the classes where I conducted field work is from sixty to eighty. Since the size of the class hinders the teachers from applying alternative approaches they resort to lecturing as their only option.

*The time factor*: The time allocated for each confirmation class is from one to one and a half hours per week. This time is used for checking attendance, prayer, writing notes, lecturing, questions, and answers. Compared to the objective of the teaching and the number of confirmands, the allocated time is not adequate to practice alternative approaches.

*The course curriculum*:   The EECMY confirmation course lacks a standardized curriculum. The course takes six months in the case of Rehoboth, and one year in the case of Bethany. The teaching materials contain only the lessons without suggested teaching methods to be applied. The number of lessons is not proportional to the time allocated. Therefore, the teachers use the lecture method as a means to cover the lessons.

*Educational policy of the government:* The educational policy of the government plays a decisive role in relation to method. What is practiced in society has impact on church practice. In 1994 Ethiopia issued an education policy with a curriculum that promotes active learning and student-centred approaches, "The aim was to replace the traditional teacher-centred approach with active learning, in which students can interact with teachers and other students."[425] However, research done by Workneh Abebe and Tassew Wolde Hannah uncovered major challenges to the implementation of student-centred teaching in Ethiopian schools that includes:

> First, the curriculum was imposed from the top down. It did not consider comments from teachers, who are responsible for implementing the curriculum. Second, the curriculum was developed based on western cultures and research and was donor-driven. It did not consider traditional Ethiopian Church and Koran education, community- and home-based informal

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[425] Workneh Abebe and Tassew Wolde Hannah, *Teacher Training and Development in Ethiopia: Improving Education Quality by Developing Teacher Skills, Attitudes and Work Conditions* (Oxford: Young Lives, 2013) 31.

education (including domestic and agricultural skills) and the values of the Ethiopian people.

Third, the deep-rooted Ethiopian tradition of using the lecture method, as well as a lack of institutional support and a lack of content knowledge on the part of many teachers have constrained teachers from applying this type of teaching.[426]

Among the other challenges, the deep-rooted tradition of the lecture method in Ethiopian schools hindered the implementation of the new policy. Hence, in spite of the new policy, the teacher-centred approach is still the dominant teaching method at all levels in all schools. The church is not exempt from this practice. Confirmation teachers were brought up in this tradition and apply the same methods.

## 8.4 Summary

This chapter described the teaching methods followed by confirmation teachers and why they utilize these methods. Teachers claim that the little training they had did not make them capable to teach confirmands with various backgrounds. Hence, they apply the teaching method they know. That focuses on lecturing. However, both the teachers and the confirmands thought the approach is participatory because confirmands do some activities. Pedagogical theory asserts that participation in learning is more than what the teachers and confirmands currently practice. There are external and internal factors that hinder a participatory approach. The internal factors are shortages of trained human and material resources, shortage of time and the class size. The external factors are the cultural and social understandings that give more opportunity to teachers and adults to freely express their views while teenagers and women are overlooked. The educational policy followed by the Ethiopian government seems to hamper pedagogical development.

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[426] Ibid. 17.

# 9 The content of confirmation teaching

This chapter deals with the content of confirmation teaching. My interview question for confirmation teachers reads: "What are the main themes you teach in the confirmation class?" and "Why do you focus on these themes?" Confirmands were asked: "What subjects do the confirmation teachings focus on?", "What do you find most helpful from the lessons?" and, "What do you find most difficult/challenging from the lessons?" Accordingly, the teachers' response about their teaching and the confirmands' response about their learning is the focus.

## 9.1 Content: teachers' perspective

In describing the content of confirmation teaching the teachers from both congregations listed relatively similar subjects and gave reasons for focusing on those subjects.

### 9.1.1 List of subjects

Rev. Lukas from Rehoboth and Rev. Abraham from Bethany described the content of the teaching as follows:

> First, we teach the importance of confirming one's faith. Then we continue with the topics: The Ten Commandments, The Lord's Prayer, church history, the creeds, Trinity, the holy sacraments, baptism and Holy Communion (are taught in detail). Lessons about Christian service, stewardship and marriage are also included. The last lesson is about discipleship. We focus on these items because the lessons are inclusive, and we believe that the confirmands need to understand these topics to confirm their faith.[427]

> In our confirmation class we teach about creation and fall as a starting point to teach about salvation. The other lessons are the Bible and the Canon, the Ten Commandments, prayer, Trinity, the holy sacraments, creeds, liturgy, stewardship marriage life and how to handle premarital relationships. We focus on these items because we believe they are the basics of Christian faith that the confirmands need to understand to confirm their faith.[428]

Lukas, a senior pastor at Rehoboth, explained that the first topic is on faith. Per his explanation, this topic begins by defining and discussing faith from a biblical perspective. It seems as this course comes first so that the confirmands know the purpose of confirmation from the very beginning. This way the confirmands understand why they need to attend a confirmation course. The Ten Commandments focus on ethical perspectives in Christian life. The lesson on the

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[427] Lukas, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.
[428] Abraham, Bethany, August 17/2015.

Lord's Prayer is not limited to the explanation of the Lord's Prayer but includes how to pray, when to pray, and to whom prayer should be addressed.

On church history Lukas reflected: "In brief we teach early church history, medieval and reformation history, and the history of the EECMY and other evangelical churches in our surroundings." From his explanation, early church history is taught to show how the church came into being. Medieval church history is taught as a background for the Reformation. This explains Luther's theological concern in relation to the Catholic Church. This serves as a foundation to teach Lutheran doctrine. After church history comes the creeds and sacraments. The creeds mentioned by the teachers were the *Apostles' Creed*, the *Nicene Creed*, the *Athanasian Creed*, the *Unaltered Augsburg Confession*, *Luther's Small and Large Catechisms*.

In Bethany, as Abraham explained:  the teaching on creation served as an entry point into studying the need for salvation.  God's purpose of creating human beings and human disobedience is explained first, then the consequence of sin is discussed. This helps the confirmands to understand the deprivation of human beings, and why they need salvation. The lecture about the Bible deals with canon history, the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments and how to study the Bible.[429] The issue of cannon is important in our context because the EOTC has an extended cannon. A lesson on liturgy explains the EECMY way of worship. This includes the contents of liturgy, symbols, and instruments used. The lesson on Christian service focuses on responsibility for helping people in need:  the poor, orphans, widows and widowed and to visit the sick. Stewardship deals with the responsibility of a Christian for her/his own body, for other people, and for creation.

### 9.1.2   Teaching the creeds

As Lukas and Abraham mentioned, the Apostles' Creed is taught in-depth while other creeds were taught in brief. In one of the classes, the teacher took two class periods to teach the Apostles' Creed. Because this creed is recited in the Sunday service, he admonished the confirmands to learn the creed by heart before the day of confirmation. He also underlined that on that day, the confirmands are expected to profess this creed in front of the congregation to show that they have learnt and accepted the church's doctrine. The teaching on the other creeds focused on the name of the creeds, the time of development, and purpose of the creeds. It

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[429] Abraham, Bethany, August 17/2015.

seemed the aim was to give the confirmands some familiarity with the documents that establish the doctrinal base of the EECMY.

### *9.1.3 Teaching the sacraments*

Lukas and Abraham explained that the sacraments are taught in-depth. As I observed, topics such as: what is baptism, who should baptize, infant baptism, how and where baptism should take place, how many times a person should get baptized and the importance of baptism for Christian life were discussed. In addition, confirmands raise many questions from what they encountered in their daily conversation with friends and neighbours from different religious backgrounds. Many confirmands have questions about the EECMY baptismal practice compared to other evangelical churches. There are three basic differences between the baptism practice of the EECMY and other evangelical churches: First, the EEECMY accepts the baptism of the EOTC and therefore does not re-baptize, while others, such as the Baptist and Pentecostal churches practice rebaptism. Second, the EECMY practices infant baptism, while the Baptist and Pentecostal churches practice adult baptism. Thirdly, the Pentecostal churches emphasize baptism by the Holy Spirit in addition to water baptism. These issues dominate the teaching and the discussion. The lectures focus on helping the confirmands to understand what baptism.

The teaching about Holy Communion explains what the Holy Communion is, describes the biblical texts that speaks about Holy Communion, and mentions some factors involved in taking Holy Communion in a "worthy manner" (1 Cor 11:27).

Beside the focus on what God has done for as through Christ, the teaching on "worthy manner" unfolders that some sort of holiness is expected from the person to qualify her/him to take part in the communion service. As evangelist Mary explained:

> In order to receive Holy Communion, one has to be reconciled with one's neighbour, if she/he was in conflict. She/he has to abstain from any kind of addiction, like alcohol, cigarettes, sexual immorality. Because the Word of God says that we should not take the Holy Communion in an unworthy manner. We ask each person individually and take time until they avoid all the wrong habits.[430]

Mary pointed out that the ethics of the congregation narrow access to Holy Communion. The basis for this is 1 Cor. 11:27ff. that speaks about taking Holy Communion in an "unworthy manner." This verse is used in confirmation teaching to emphasize the ethical qualifications of the confirmands and congregation members. The Amharic translation of 'unworthy' has two

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[430] Mary, Bethany, August 20/2015.

alternative words to translate: *Saygebaw* (unworthy manner) and *Sayigebaw* (without understanding). EECMY has adopted the EOTC tradition that emphasizes the need to be holy to receive Holy Communion.[431] What makes the person unworthy are the things she has listed as any unreconciled conflict with the neighbour, and different kinds of addictions. Thus, the person needs to have to ask for forgiveness or to forgive and be reconciled. Those who are addicted, discuss the matter personally with the church leaders. If they are unable to give up the habit, they are given time to repent and pray until they can abstain before they are admitted to the Lords Table.

### 9.1.4 Teaching ethics

Christian marriage is also listed in the content of the confirmation course. The teaching emphasizes how to handle premarital relationships, develop marriage relationships, and how to live family lives as Christians. Evangelist Mathew said:

> The lesson about marriage is good for married people, especially for those who became Christians after they got married. This is because the teaching includes: biblical background of marriage, the importance of marriage, the role of husband and wife, how to raise children and how to overcome the challenges they face in life. Instead, I teach the youngster about how to handle premarital relationships with the opposite sex and the consequence of wrongdoing in the relationship but not about marriage and related challenges.[432]

Teaching the details of marriage seems equally puzzling to the youngest confirmands. As Mathew described his teaching on marriage, it included issues that mainly concern married people. Mathew thought the lesson might be difficult for the teenagers, young and unmarried confirmands. As he said, hearing the challenges in marriage might also create fear and confusion. He therefore put more emphasis on teaching premarital relationships. The focus was then on how the confirmands should handle relationships with the opposite sex and the consequences of not doing so. By the term "wrongdoing" he is implicitly pointing to pre-marital sex that can expose the life of teenagers to great challenges. Talking about sexual intercourse is a taboo in the Ethiopian culture; he therefore used the term "wrongdoing."

I observed that the teaching on premarital relationship focuses on two things. First, the view that an evangelical Christian should only establish marital relationships with a person who is a member of an evangelical church. The teacher based this teaching on 2 Cor. 6:15, "What

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[431] Sæverås, *On Church- Mission Relations*, 65.
[432] Mathew, Rehoboth, July 30/2015.

does a believer have in common with an unbeliever." The teacher stressed that starting a relationship with someone who does not belong to the evangelical faith is equal to going against biblical and congregational principles. Second, the importance of holiness, the teacher taught teenagers are expected to keep their virginity until they get married.[433] In addition to the biblical concept of holiness, this kind of teaching has some cultural flavour. In traditional marriage practice, the bride is expected to be a virgin until the day of her marriage. Both in the culture and in the church, virginity is expected from the bride but not from the bridegroom. The teacher also told the confirmands to take great care when dating because it exposes youth to unhealthy relationships and can damage the life of youngsters spiritually, physically, and psychologically. The teachers quoted biblical texts that talk about the importance of sexual purity.

Rev. Aster informed me that she teaches unmarried and married confirmands separately:

> When we teach about marriage, we separate the married and unmarried confirmands. We teach married couples, both the husband and wife together. Teaching couples together is more fruitful. For the young and unmarried we strictly teach how to handle pre-marital relations with great care.[434]

In the EECMY, confirmed congregation members take a premarital course before they get married. Anyone wanting to have their marriage in the congregation must pass through this course. But in confirmation class, the aim is to teach Christian marriage ethics.

## 9.2 Content: confirmands' perspective

The interview guide on the content of the teaching comprises the following three questions:

a) What subjects do the confirmation teachings focus on?

b) What do you find most helpful from the lessons?

c) What do you find most difficult/challenging from the lessons?

### 9.2.1 The Ten Commandments

The presentation is a combination of responses to the three questions. One of the confirmands responded in this way:

> We have learned many topics, but the lessons I remember more are: the Ten Commandments, stewardship, and the spiritual gifts that talks about the existence of different gifts. The teaching about the Ten Commandments is

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[433] Observation in Bethany.
[434] Aster, Rehoboth, August 5/2015.

very interesting for me. If you do what you are told not to do, you will be punished by God and will also be accountable on a legal basis. As I understood the teaching, I have changed my evil way I was in. No topic was difficult because they taught us from the Bible. We look into our Bible when the teacher gives us Bible verses.[435]

Timothy said that the topics are too many to be remembered by heart. From what he learnt he could recall three: The Ten Commandments, spiritual gifts and stewardship. None of the teachers had mentioned the lesson on spiritual gifts. It might have been a subtopic. Timothy did not find the lessons difficult to understand because, as he said, the teachers referred to the Bible. In his view the Bible verses made the teaching clear.

For Timothy, the Ten Commandments was the most interesting of the subjects taught. Breaking the commandments was a sin and could bring legal punishment. Timothy commented that learning the connection between the commandments and the civil law helped him to understand his responsibilities as a citizen and as a Christian. He did not mention in what kind of sin he had been engaged. He only said the teaching helped him to stop his wrong practice, and he thought that he was on the safe side by keeping the commandments. He said nothing on the mercy of God.

I attended the teaching Timothy was referring to. The teacher explained governments and countries derived their laws form the Ten Commandments. Killing, stealing, and other kind of crimes bring punishment by the law at the same time as it is disobedience towards God. The teacher taught The Ten Commandments in order that the confirmands could integrate these principles in their lives.[436]

In contrast to Timothy, the emphasis on keeping the commandants created fear and uncertainty in some confirmands. As Lydia, a young confirmand from Bethany, described:

> I found the lesson about the Ten Commandments challenging and difficult to comprehend: How can I live a sin-free life, because intentionally or unintentionally I might tell lies or commit other kinds of sin. Then I will be punished by God and I can't escape his judgment. I did not attend confirmation when I was a teenager because my parents warned me that I have to live according to the Word of God after confirmation.[437]

Lydia shared her worries and concern about the commandments. The Bible teaches that the law exposes our sin and that we need a Saviour and that the Lord offers us forgiveness through His

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[435] Timothy, Bethany cong. August 22/2015.
[436] Observation in Bethany.
[437] Lydia, Bethany, August 21/2015.

son Jesus Christ. If the importance of keeping the law is stressed, Christ's redemptive work may become secondary. However, as Timothy reflected and I observed, the teaching emphasizes the importance of keeping the commandments; that created fear and doubt in the minds of confirmands like Lydia. The role of the Ten Commandments in shaping the moral lives of Christians, is undeniable. Jesus said the essence of the Ten Commandments is loving God and loving our neighbours (Mt. 22:37-40) and through this love Christians demonstrate they are the children of God. However, when much emphasis is given on keeping the law, the confirmands tend to think the law is more important than believing in Christ. As Lydia asserted, in her parents' understanding and expectation, she had to keep the commandments to escape God's judgment and live a life free from sin. They thought Lydia should be mature enough mentally and spiritually to shoulder a burden of this kind. This shows how unbalanced ed teaching of the law apart from the gospel created misunderstandings and fear in the lives of the confirmands. An alternative understanding was voiced by Thomas, an adult confirmand from Rehoboth:

> We have learnt the similarities and differences of Christian denominations. We learnt not only the doctrine of the Mekane Yesus Church but also of the other denominations. We also learnt about salvation. I found the lesson about sin and God's mercy interesting. We may fall to sin some time in our life, God hates and punishes sin, but He wants the sinner to turn back to Him. We learned that God is merciful and will not reject us. The other topics are about the Trinity which is not an easy topic. It took much time to learn their similarities and differences.[438]

Thomas mentioned the lecture in which the doctrine of the EECMY was taught in relation to the doctrine of other Christian churches. Teaching the doctrine of the other denominations helped the confirmands to have an in-depth understanding of the EECMY doctrines. At the same time, this teaching aimed at protecting the confirmands from being attracted by other denominations. What Thomas found more important was the understanding of the mercy of God. Knowing the Lord hates sin, but not the sinner, helped him to see that even if he fell into sin, he would not be rejected by God.

### 9.2.2 Difficult subjects

Learning about the Trinity took a longer time than the other subjects, especially the discussion on the unity and the difference between the three persons of the Trinity. Most of the confirmands

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[438] Thomas, Rehoboth cong., August 8/2015.

I interviewed stated the Trinity was a difficult subject.[439] One confirmand said: "The Trinity is a very difficult subject. I think about 50% is unclear to me even after the teaching. I had questions that did not get answers."[440] Martha, a young confirmand from Bethany, stressed that among the subjects, she found the Trinity to be a complicated subject. Martha has attended the whole teaching about the Trinity, but she still did not get the idea. Her questions were not answered. I asked her what was difficult and what her question was. She replied:

> The subject itself is not easy to understand compared to other lessons. Besides, the teachers' approach was so serious and not friendly. My question was if God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are really one, why did Jesus say no one knows the time He returns?[441]

It might be that the other subjects, like the Ten Commandments or prayer are related to daily life, and are therefore, more easily understood. In addition to the difficulty of the subject, Martha mentioned the approach of the teacher made the subject more complicated. The teacher was not friendly or easy to communicate with, and as a result she was left with her questions. Had the teacher been friendlier, she might have obtained some understanding of the subject.

Dina from Rehoboth said: "I found the lesson about the Trinity hard to understand. We had a long discussion though, and finally our teacher told us to take some of the things by faith."[442] Even though they had a long discussion, she found it difficult. Teaching and discussion questions and answers could not solve the problem. The solution proposed by the teacher was to accept what was taught by faith.

Another confirmand from Bethany said: "We had a hot debate about the Trinity. There is a point we couldn't agree on. We left it as a secret of the Holy Spirit."[443] Things beyond human capacity to solve or understand is culturally perceived as God's mystery. "Only God knows the secret" is a common expression in people's daily conversation. Paul, an adult confirmand, used a similar expression, "a secret of the Holy Spirit," to tell how he and his fellow confirmands finally concluded and accepted the teaching about the Trinity. The debate he was referring to seems to be informal, with fellow confirmands outside the classroom. I never observed learning through debates or discussions. When the subject was beyond their capacity to fully comprehend, they preferred to stop any effort to dig out the secret and just accepted the

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[439] Lydia, Bethany, August 21/2015, Daniel, Rehoboth. August 2/ 2015.
[440] Martha, Bethany, August 24/2015.
[441] Martha, Bethany, August 24/2015.
[442] Dina, Rehoboth, August 12/2015.
[443] Paul, Bethany, August 21/2015.

teaching. It seemed that the idea of accepting without questioning was the solution suggested by both the teachers and the confirmands.

Regarding the creeds Solomon commented, "Currently we are learning about the creeds which are somewhat difficult to understand."[444] For Solomon the teaching about the creeds is somewhat difficult to understand but he did not explain why. Saron, another young confirmand, tells the reason why she found the lesson on creeds different by saying "For me what makes the subject difficult is when the teacher fails to explain well like the topic on creeds which the teacher did not explain well." In explaining the creeds the teachers concentrated on the Apostle's creed, while the other creeds are mentioned briefly. This is due to the fact that Luther's catechism focuses on the Apostle's Creed, and much of what is said of that is applicable to other creeds. It might be that the teacher has not clarified the reasons for not going into the details.

### 9.2.3 Interesting subjects

> We have learned different lessons…the lesson about faith is my favourite because faith is the basic thing for a Christian in his relationship with God. I learned that I can do nothing apart from faith. Living with Christ is also the subject I liked most because I learnt how to live with Christ.[445]

> Among the lessons I was very impressed by two topics. The first is about faith, and we learned that we shouldn't misunderstand faith. Faith is not tempting God. For instance, if we stand in the middle of a road and expect God to help us not to be harmed, this is wrong. The other lesson is living with Christ; we learnt how to live with Christ. What does living with Christ mean, and why it is important? [446]

Solomon and Saron from Rehoboth listed the subjects they found interesting. Both included the lectures on faith. Solomon understood that faith was the key to a Christian life and Christians can do nothing without faith. In his understanding, faith is an integral part of Christian life and Christians had to practice faithfulness in their daily lives. This means faith is not limited to believing or trusting God. It also includes living the life worthy of that faith.

The other interesting topic for Saron and Solomon is the teaching about "living with Christ" (*Ke Kisrstors gar menor*). This was the most favoured lesson by other confirmands also. This lesson teaches how Christians should live lives that please God. The lesson deliberates on how Christ lived his life on earth and served the will of his Father, and how he overcame

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[444] Solomon Rehoboth, July 30/2015.
[445] Solomon Rehoboth, July 30/2015.
[446] Saron, Rehoboth, July 26/2015.

temptations. The confirmands found this essential teaching. The lessons about faith and living with Christ were taught in a way that motivated the confirmands to learn and relate the subject to their daily lives. This created an interest in learning.

## 9.3 Interpretation and assessment

The teachers described the topics covered in confirmation class. The rationale for focusing on these topics was because they are foundational for understanding Christian faith. The confirmands listed both interesting and difficult topics. Based on these findings, my interpretations and assessments raise questions to what ought to be included in a curriculum of basic Christian education. This is then related to age and maturity and finally I reflect on challenges related to difficult topics in ethics and dogma.

### 9.3.1 What is basic teaching in a Lutheran church?

As presented in chapter 5, Luther's *Small Catechism* played a prominent role in the missions' teaching of basic Christianity. The EECMY constitution of 1959, however, allowed for differences between the synods: "the synods that would be established in the various mission spheres would be autonomous to organize church life, liturgy and ordination."[447] As for confirmation ministry, the synods could design their own teaching syllabus. As a result, the content of the teaching was different from one synod to the other. This is a crucial point as it reveals a lack of agreement on what is basic Christian education in the EECMY.

The problem was acknowledged in the 1970s. The church then tried to create a uniform curriculum for confirmation (see 4.4.4 and 5.3). The confirmation course, *Growing in Faith* was based on Luther's *Small Catechism* and expanded with some additional topics, such as the meaning of confirmation and stewardship. The textbook gave an outline of the Bible and treated the catechisms as part of a historical process. The order and content of the course was clear and served as a frame of reference for the church's ministry.[448] However, the dissemination and use of this textbook was hampered due to lack of finances and harassment by the communist regime. As a result, the congregations worked out the confirmation course themselves. This resulted in a lack of unity on both aim and content of confirmation ministry. The material used was uneven and the church had no mandate or strategy to evaluate the theology and the quality.

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[447] Fekadu Gurmessa, *The Evangelical Faith Movement in Ethiopia,* 248.
[448] EECMY, *Growing in faith: Teacher's Guide for Confirmation*, 1987.

Against this background Takele Kebede made a surprising discovery when working on his Master thesis on "The status of Luther's *Small Catechism* in Christian education," in one of the EECMY synods. He found that Luther's *Small Catechism* was unknown by most ministers and evangelists and was not used by the congregations in their teaching ministry. It was either forgotten or ignored.[449] My findings in the two congregations in focus show that most of the topics in Luther's *Small Catechism* were covered in both congregations. But this does not say anything about the level and usefulness of the teaching.

My findings show that the content of the teaching was difficult to remember or explain by the confirmands. In former times the confirmands were expected to be able to read the Bible and know the most important truths of Luther's *Small Catechism* by heart (see 1.2.2).[450] To learn something "by heart" is different from memorizing without understanding. It rather means understanding in addition to committing to memory.[451] This shows a commitment in education, aiming at both knowing and understanding. It involved an ability to transfer what was learned to new settings. The ability to transfer knowledge and skills involves the capacity to take what we know and use it creatively, flexibly, and fluently in different settings.[452] Based on my findings the degree of confirmands' understanding is questionable.

Applying theory to the question of understanding, one may say that transformation occurs when the learners learn new frames of reference or elaborate the existing frames. A frame of reference is a "meaning perspective, the structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions that involves cognitive, affective an conative dimensions."[453] Frames of reference are composed of two dimensions, a habit of mind and resulting points of view.[454] The habits of mind are expressed as points of view in which beliefs, feelings, attitudes and judgments shape our interpretation and judgment.[455] In Christian education, frames of reference are made of church doctrine and Christian tradition. A crucial point will then be that the church teaches and practices Christianity in order that her members understand and live accordingly.

According to Redse, building frames of reference is crucial in communicating the Christian message. The frames can be seen as a knowledge system that serve as a foundation

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[449] Takele Kebede, *The Status of Luther's Small Catechism in the EECMY: Christian Education with Especial Reference to Central Synod Bako Parish*. (Unpubl. MA Thesis, MYS, Addis Ababa: 2016), 2.
[450] Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers,* 1978, 165.
[451] McTighe & Wiggins, *Understanding by Design*, 35.
[452] Ibid. 7.
[453] Mezirow et al., *Learning as Transformation*, 17.
[454] A habit of mind is a set of assumptions, broad, generalized, orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience. Ibid. 17.
[455] Ibid. 18.

for the learner's faith and life. He makes aware of two mistakes that should be avoided in designing a curriculum. First, concentrating so deeply on a few topics that the teaching does not enable the learners to build a comprehensive frame of reference. Second, including too many topics and sweeping each topic superficially for the sake of covering many topics. My findings indicate that the teachers are in danger of making just these mistakes. In order to avoid the danger of the learners being unable to achieve a frame of reference, Redse suggests the topics should be presented clearly, follow a good outline and focus on key thoughts and concepts in depth.[456] A well organized, coherent and clear frame of reference is needed to help the confirmands change or elaborate their understanding in order to produce the desired fruit. Relating to my presentation of the theology of confirmation in chapter 5, the content of confirmation teaching in the EECMY should be designed around the central concern of the church. I would think that the crucial frame of reference for confirmation ministry ought to have been designed on 'justification by faith' (see 5.2). Neither the teachers nor the confirmands gave the impression that his was a core issue.

### 9.3.2 Content, life experience and maturity

In chapter 4 I gave a short presentation of cultural approaches to learning. This was commented upon in chapter 8 where the aim of participatory learning was seen as problem solving.[457] The teaching methods applied in traditional education were attuned to this task. A characteristic of these teaching methods is that they include both theoretical and practical aspects.[458] Another aspect of the cultural approach to learning is the age-factor, or the maturity of the participant. The initiation rites for example come at a time when the girl or boy becomes sexually mature and ready for adult life. As was discussed in chapter 8, the age of the learners is a factor that ought to play a role in the development of a teaching curriculum. Learners have different abilities and needs depending on their age and learning preferences.

Referring to James W. Fowler's studies on faith development, the point is that faith develops in stages throughout life. As example I may mention two aspects of growth in faith, conversion, and transformation.[459] The first refers to the change in the way a person views her/his relationship with God and others. The second represents the development toward

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[456] Redse, *An Introduction to Church Teaching*, 129-130.
[457] Nsamenang and Tchombe, *Handbook of African Educational Theories,* 24.
[458] Ibid. 25.
[459] James W. Fowler, Karl E. Nipkow, Friedrich Schweitzer, eds. *Stages of Faith and Religious Development Theory: Implications for Church, Education, and Society* (New York, Crossroad, 1991), 2.

Christian maturity. An aspect of confirmation teaching is to help the confirmands to mature as Christians. This aspect showed up in my research to some extent as the confirmands expressed satisfaction in the way faith was taught in relation to their daily lives and not as an isolated experience. As such we may say that the teaching helped the confirmands develop new frames of reference and that this transformed their meaning perspectives. An example of this is in the topic entitled "Living in Christ" or as the confirmands articulate it, "Living with Christ." Here, I found a description of what the expression means, why it was important, and how it was lived. The lecture was designed with many biblical texts and examples that focused on how to maintain a spiritual life through prayer, Bible study and Christian fellowship. The confirmands were interested as it expanded their understanding. The lecture was a kind of practical guide.

In the Christian education textbook, prepared by MYS, education aims at teaching values and behaviours that are biblically based, theologically sound, and faithfully lived out.[460] As such, Christian education is not limited to giving information about the Bible or the church's doctrine, it includes how it should be applied in the daily lives of the learners. This process is transforming – if the teaching is understood. My observations, however, indicate that many of the topics were incomprehensible for many of the confirmands. This may be due to age, as some of them were only about thirteen years, or background, coming from traditional religion or Islam. Teaching the mystery of the Trinity to thirteen years olds or former Muslims seems a quite challenging task. My point is that neither the content nor level of the educational was related to age or needs of the confirmands. The whole issue seems to be overlooked.

### 9.3.3 *How to teach ethics and dogma*

The confirmands expressed a certain satisfaction with the teaching of the Ten Commandments. The reason they gave was that it guided their relationship with God and fellow human beings. In Luther's *Small Catechism* the Ten Commandments comes as the first section. A concern of Luther was to increase awareness of ethics, both as a guide for life and as a background for increasing awareness of failure, sin, and the need for divine forgiveness. In the EECMY confirmation course the Ten Commandments is meant to encourage the confirmands to evaluate, change and shape their morals in relation to God and fellow human beings. As the confirmands expressed, and I observed, the aim of the teaching was not to expose sin and show the importance of grace. Instead, emphasis was laid on life principles. The teachers stressed that confirmands should keep the commandments. However, by not seeing the commandments

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[460] MYS TEE, *Introduction to Christian Education*, 7.

together with salvation in Christ, the Ten Commandments tend to be seen as the Christian law. When confirmands question the realism in keeping the commandments or are worried about their fate if they break them, the comforting word of forgiveness through in Christ seemed to be missing.

Before the EECMY 21st General Assembly decided the age of confirmation to be 13, the idea was that the confirmand should be mature enough to take responsibility; that meant above the age of eighteen. After completing the confirmation course and become a communicant member of the church, the person was deemed responsible for all her/his behaviour. With many teenagers in class, the teachers tend to put emphasis on pre-marital sex and adiaphora. Therefore, in teaching the Ten Commandments there was and is a tendency to stress moral standards rather than balancing law and gospel. Transformative learning theory asserts that learning takes place when the learners' meaning perspectives are developed. A balanced teaching on the relationship between morals and grace as interpretive frames of reference would, as I see it, have equipped the confirmands of all ages for a life in faith.

My findings indicate that the teaching on the Lord's Prayer was comprehensible while the teaching on the Trinity was difficult to understand. This affirms Redse's point that "the more the teaching is related to the actual life experience the more meaningful it becomes."[461] Most confirmands were happy to learn the meaning of the Lord's Prayer. Those who had a Christian background might have known the prayer by heart and able to recite it without understanding the meaning. A point in transformative learning theory is that transformation occurs through elaborating existing frames of reference.[462] Explaining the Lord's Prayer and expanding the teaching to include how, when, and to whom one should pray was appreciated. Learning the theological meaning of words and concepts of the Lord's prayer, made them able to elaborate on their pre-existing assumptions or what they took for granted and start to pay due attention to the prayer.

The confirmands found the teaching on the creeds demanding, in particular the idea of a triune God. One of the teachers asserted the issue was an obscure secret. In dealing with issues of this kind the teachers' approach in communicating the subject plays a key role. When the discussions in class was unable to clarify the issue, the teachers suggested the confirmands ought to accept the teaching by faith. Regarding this challenge, Redse writes that the use of obscurities, paradoxes, and mysteries is an accepted pedagogical approach even used by Jesus.

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[461] Redse, *An Introduction to Church Teaching*, 150.
[462] Mezirow et al., *Learning as Transformation*, 19.

This kind of pedagogical technique encourages the learners to think more and search for deeper meaning. This may stimulate spiritual growth. Since some of the doctrinal mysteries in many ways are beyond comprehension, the learners are expected to accept that God's wisdom is greater than human wisdom.[463]

This said, it may not be an excuse for the lack of explanation of abstract and difficult concepts through illustrative stories or connection to the learner's life experiences. The teachers could have considered the advantages of storytelling so important in African traditional education. I did not observe any storytelling or story-based teaching. Not making use of culturally established models of education, or biblical examples about Jesus praying to his father, the teacher missed opportunities. Here different themes from the story could have been questioned and discussed. This would have helped the confirmands to experiment, create, discover, and communicate new knowledge.[464]

In transformative learning theory as in participatory learning, confronting the unknown or problem solving is the starting point of change or growth. Following a translation model in communicating new or problematic subjects the point is to convey the meaning of a text in a meaningful idiom of the mother tongue.[465] Translating the meaning of difficult topis into meaningful concepts is a demanding task. The question is if the teachers have sufficient training in pedagogics to master such a task.

## 9.4   Summary

This chapter has dealt with the content of the confirmation course and the pedagogy applied in teaching. The list of lessons both by the teachers and the confirmands reveal doctrinal issues, ethics, and Christian service. Some of the issues involved are theologically demanding. Confirmands' answers gave a mixed impression. For some the teaching was interesting while for others difficult. In my interpretation and assessment, I tried to reflect around the reasons for this. An impression is that the course tries too much. My research on these issues in many ways presents educational challenges beyond what the individual teacher is equipped for. Ultimately, designing a standardized content and educational forms is the responsibility of the EECMY.

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[463] Redse, *An Introduction to Church Teaching*, 161-165.
[464] Therese M.S Tchombe "Cultural Strategies for Cognitive Enrichment of Learning Among the Bamiléké of the West Region of Cameroon" in Nsamenang,and Tschombe, *Handbook of African Educational,* 208.
[465] Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, (San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass, 1991), 65.

# 10 Confessional foundation and confirmation ministry

This chapter deals with the doctrinal foundation of the confirmation course. My interview question for the teachers was: "What is the doctrinal foundation for the congregation's confirmation course?" "How do you contextualize the doctrine in the teaching?" I also asked the confirmands what they understand to be the doctrinal basis for confirmation ministry. My aim was to investigate how doctrine is understood and taught.

## 10.1  Confessional foundation: teachers' perspective

Confirmation teachers described the doctrinal foundation of confirmation with the challenges related to application.

### 10.1.1  The gap between teaching and practice

Rev. David from Rehoboth says:

> Our doctrinal foundation is Lutheran, and the content of the teaching is based on Lutheran doctrine. Catechism, creeds and confessions are the main part of the teaching. However, in practice, the charismatic aspect is strong. It goes beyond Lutheranism. So, we are not only Lutherans, but charismatic Lutherans. [466]

The confirmation course includes Luther's *Small Catechism* and the ecumenical creeds. However, as David indicated, there is a gap between the congregation's teaching and practice. As the doctrinal base is Lutheran, the expectation is that church practice should reflect the doctrine. Especially the Sunday service should be conducted by a liturgy based on Lutheran doctrine. I observed worship services and other congregation programs that bore scant resemblance to traditional Lutheran liturgy. Instead, the shape of the liturgy, its music, emotions and tongues looked more like a Pentecostal service. Services on weekdays emphasized prophecy, healing, and exorcism. Because of the combination of the Lutheran emphases and charismatic practices David labelled the church 'Charismatic-Lutheran'. I therefore asked why this gap existed. David responded:

> The congregation members like the teaching but not the liturgy. In the context of our congregation there is a huge phobia of Lutheranism, because

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[466] David, Rehoboth, May 30/2015.

> Lutheranism is perceived as a dry/formal worship that does not have space for the fresh work of the Holy Spirit.[467]

The understanding is that the more charismatic aspects of the service are in accord with the Bible, while Lutheran worship, through liturgy and hymnbooks, is not appreciated by the congregation members. As David stated, Lutherans are perceived to be dry in the spirit. The liturgy and hymns are recited from books written a long time ago. Thus, the members think they do not get fresh experience or renewal in their spirit. On the contrary, the Pentecostal churches teach that they can experience revelations and spiritual renewals through the Holy Spirit. Rev. Yohans added:

> The church fathers prepared the creeds, catechisms and confessions to defend the church from false doctrine. We use these documents to stick to the biblical truth and to protect our church from false teaching. However, there is no rule or regulations that forces us to do everything according to Lutheran teaching. For example: We conduct liturgy only once a month, because the current generation prefers non-liturgical worship. If we do not pay attention to the need of the present generation, we will lose many of our members.[468]

Yohans stated the meaning of the creeds and confessions, to defend biblical truths. Apart from teaching Lutheran doctrine there were no rules either at congregation or church level that forced the congregations to apply Lutheran liturgy in worship programs. By saying this he might be referring to the part of the constitution that give the synods autonomy as to life, order or work.[469] As I observed, liturgical worship was practiced once a month, while other Sundays are for free worship. The congregation celebrates Holy Communion once a month and then they use the church's liturgy. In explaining the reason for not using the liturgy every Sunday, the understanding was they might lose members. The present generation perceives liturgical worship as something old fashioned. None of the teachers clarified whether they focus on free worship and charismatic practices in order not to lose members or for other reasons.

Rev. Abraham says:

> Confirmation teaching is founded on the Lutheran doctrine that is the doctrine of the EECMY. The main base for the doctrine is the Bible. To make it understandable for the confirmands, we explain about Lutheranism under church history, and inform them that Lutheranism is our base. We deeply teach

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[467] David, Rehoboth, May 30/2015.
[468] Yohans, Rehoboth, June 1/2015.
[469] EECMY Constitution Art, V, Sæverås, *On Church- Mission Relations,* 178.

that we are saved by grace alone. The creeds are also the part of the teaching, but many people do not know whether they are Lutherans or not.[470]

The teachers might find church history as a good starting point to describe the process and the result of the reformation in the sixteenth century. By learning some history, the teachers hoped the confirmands would understand how Lutheran doctrine came into being. Doctrinal difference between the EECMY and other Christian denominations were also discussed in order that the confirmands know where they stand. Even though the content of the teaching is Lutheran, most of the members do not see themselves as Lutherans. This might be because the workers do not communicate the church's doctrinal identity or that they avoid the name Lutheran.

### 10.1.2 Lack of adequate knowledge about Lutheran doctrine

The teachers openly admit that they lack adequate knowledge of Lutheran doctrine. Evangelist Jacob from Bethany congregation:

> We are Mekane Yesus, but neither the workers nor the members clearly know what kind of teaching the church follows. There is no clear teaching about the doctrinal foundation of the church, even at Bible school and seminary level. Most of the theologically trained teachers, including myself, have no adequate capacity to explain the churches doctrine in detail. As a result, the teaching on the doctrinal foundation is not well integrated in the life of the members. Moreover, the reason for losing many members is because they are easily attracted by the teaching of other denominations. This happened because they lack adequate knowledge about the doctrinal foundation of the church.[471]

This quote reveals a problem. He remarked the teaching offered in the Bible-schools and seminaries does not give adequate knowledge about the doctrinal base of the church. All Bible-schools and seminaries teach Lutheran doctrine. Doctrine is an integral part of all subjects taught. However, the depth of the teaching and the emphasis might differ, based on the availability of competent personnel. Theologically trained ministers, especially those who teach doctrine at regional seminaries, are few.[472] Members therefore lack stability and move from one denomination to another. Jacob thinks that if the members had adequate understanding of their theological identity, they would stand firm in faith.

Evangelist Joshua from Rehoboth congregation:

> Lutheran doctrine is the foundational teaching, but most of the workers, including myself, lack confidence when we teach because we do not have

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[470] Abraham, Bethany, August 17/2015.
[471] Jacob, Bethany, August 18 /2015.
[472] Lalissa Daniel, *An Investigation.*

sufficient knowledge. Things are not clear, even for us. I teach from the surface without going to the details.[473]

Joshua admits his lack of knowledge. He is a graduate of one of the regional seminaries. Still, he thinks his teaching on doctrine is superficial. The lack of adequate knowledge on doctrine is a problem even for trained ministers. This has an impact on the confirmands. They might raise questions teachers are not able to answer. They teach without going into the details to avoid confusion.

### 10.1.3  Neglecting the importance of doctrine

Some teachers do not see the teaching on Lutheran doctrine as important:

> Our main doctrinal base is the Holy Bible. That is above everything. Luther's life and teachings are included in different topics, but we do not deeply teach about the Lutheran doctrine. I do not personally think that it is important.[474]

Evangelist Mary's point is that the Old and New Testament is the foundation of the church's doctrine, while other things are secondary. Luther's life and teaching are represented in different lessons but not a main topic. She saw the doctrine of Luther and that of the EECMY as different. In talking about the EECMY's doctrine she said: "Our doctrinal base is the Bible," and in referring to Luther she said: "the life and the works of Luther are integrated in the teaching about the Reformation." She failed to explain the relationship between the Bible and the Lutheran interpretation of the core of the Bible. In her view there was no need to teaching the Lutheran doctrine in-depth, except referring to the life and the works of Luther. By this she fails to grasp that teaching Lutheran doctrine is not the same as teaching about the life and works of Luther Himself.

Evangelist Mathew had a slightly different view:

> The doctrinal foundation of our teaching is based on the Lutheran doctrine, especially the Bible alone, grace alone, and faith alone. Except teaching, I do not challenge or force any one to be Lutheran. Even God doesn't enforce. Because I do not personally believe that Lutheran or Mekane Yesus Church is the gate to heaven, but Christ is.[475]

For Mathew, the Bible, grace, and faith is the heart of the doctrine. He believed and taught the Lutheran doctrine. But he did not stress that Lutheran doctrine is the teaching that the

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[473] Joshua, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.
[474] Mary, Bethany, August 20/2015.
[475] Joshua, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.

confirmands had to follow. God does not force people to be Lutheran. It seems the congregation ministers see Lutheran doctrine and the EECMY doctrine as different due to misunderstanding or lack of knowledge.

In sum, the confirmation teachers responded that Lutheran doctrine is the basis for their teaching. But they recognize the significant gap between the ormal, historical doctrinal foundation and the actual contemporary practice. Still others think the church's confession is part of the teaching, but they do not see the need to emphasize this.

## 10.2 Confessional foundation: confirmands' perspective

I have found two different responses form the confirmands about their understanding of the confessional foundation. The first group are those who have a fair knowledge about crucial points of doctrine. The other group are those who have no idea about doctrine.

### 10.2.1 Fair knowledge of the foundations of faith

Thomas, an adult confirmand who had a good understanding:

> When we learned church history, we also learned about the Lutheran doctrine. Luther avoided the things the Catholic Church accepted which were outside of the Bible. Luther protested against those unnecessary things. The Word of God is the Word of God. We don't have to add anything to the Bible. I think there were also about nine points, even though I am not sure.[476]

Thomas explained that he learned about the doctrine of the church under the sub-topic, church history. The teachers started from church history to explain how the Lutheran theology is developed. Teaching about Luther and the Reformation is not the same as teaching Lutheran doctrine.

Paul, another confirmand said:

> Trinity is a doctrine of our church and the same is true for Holy Baptism. Holy Communion is another doctrine. That is the truth, and I have received it. Those doctrines are the difference the Mekane Yesus Church have from other churches. Some denominations argue that baptism must be carried out after one is matured enough. What about the time before baptism? Would people stay with Satan? They also taught us that all the churches had emerged from the Catholic Church. After that, the reformation by Luther happened. I think what we learned is just an introduction. They show us the way and it is up to me to go deeper.[477]

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[476] Thomas, Rehoboth, August 8/2015.
[477] Paul, Bethany, August 21/2015.

Paul mentioned some central concern that distinguish the EECMY from other denominations. The congregations refer Lutheran doctrine to the Reformation and church history rather than showing how Lutheran doctrine arose from of Scripture. They fail to recognize that teaching Lutheran doctrine is not the same as teaching the history of Luther and his struggle against the Roman Catholic Church.

### 10.2.2 *Poor knowledge of the fundamentals of faith*

The second group of confirmands seemed to have difficulties with my question. Unlike my other interview questions, I found that questions about doctrine was difficult for them to answer. After hearing the question, each confirmand asked for clarification. I tried to simplify and explain the question, but even so most of the teenagers failed to understand and respond in a way that showed they understood what I meant. They were not able to articulate an answer relating to the confessional foundation of what they were learning in confirmation class. The response of Martha is a good example: "I have not heard anything about what you are talking about, I am sure I do not know."[478]

Daniel, from Rehoboth, replied: "I do not know about doctrine. I heard about Lutheranism, but I do not remember the details of the teaching."[479] Daniel was familiar with the name Lutheran, but he did not know about Lutheran doctrine.

Titus, from Bethany had some clue: "I only know that our Bible is different from the EOTC, but I do not know about the doctrine of Mekane Yesus Church. They may have taught this topic on a day I was absent from the class."[480] Titus remembered the EECMY uses sixty-six books as the authoritative Word of God while EOTC uses eighty-one books.

Dina, from Rehoboth, was almost of the same opinion: "I remember all the lessons but do not know the doctrine that the EECMY follows. We might learn the topic in the future."[481] The confirmands were in the middle of their course when I conducted this interview, and they had touched the topic in one of the lessons. However, these confirmands could not recall anything about the Lutheran doctrine or what the doctrinal foundation of the EECMY.

To be fair to the students and their teachers, it is likely that the problem lay in my question, rather than in the teachers' presentation or the students' grasp of the topic. It is probable that doctrine was taught in relation to church history. That may be the reason why the confirmands

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[478] Martha, Bethany, August 24/2015.
[479] Daniel, Rehoboth, August 2/ 2015.
[480] Titus, Bethany, August 23/ 2015.
[481] Dina, Rehoboth, August 12/2015.

couldn't explain the foundational teaching of the church. If I had been able to ask them specific questions about what they believed regarding certain doctrines, or where those teaching came from, they may have given responses which indicated they knew the "correct" answer.

## 10.3 Interpretation and assessment

Most teachers knew that the EECMY has a Lutheran confessional base. However, they indicated that the congregation services emphasize charismatic practices rather than what they understand as Lutheran. This creates a gap between the church's confession and its liturgical practice. The teachers were aware that they lacked knowledge about Lutheran theology but were perhaps not aware of how much charismatic theology deviates from confessional Lutheranism. Regarding the confirmands, some have fair knowledge while some lack knowledge about the doctrinal foundation of confirmation teaching.

### 10.3.1 Integrating traditions

As was discussed in the chapter on the theological context of confirmation (chapter 5), the EECMY understands herself as a confessional Lutheran church. However, her practices and the understanding of church members may have been influenced to some extent by religious and denominational ideas in the Ethiopian context.

As the confirmation teachers responded the doctrinal foundation of the congregation's confirmation teaching is Lutheran. The EECMY constitution also states:

> Section 1: The EECMY believes and professes that the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments are the Holy Word of God and the only Sources and infallible norm of all Church Doctrine and Practice.
>
> Section 2: The EECMY adheres to the Apostles' Creed, The Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed which were formulated by the church fathers and accepted by the early church.
>
> Section 3: The EECMY sees in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, which was worded by the reformers, as well as Luther's Catechisms, as a pure exposition of the word of God.[482]

Since her establishment in 1959, this was the basis of EECMY teaching. However, due to the charismatic movement's influence in the whole country in the 60s and 70s the EECMY officially agreed to incorporate the exercise of charismatic gifts. The church's theological

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[482] EECMY, Constitution and Bylaws, Revised and Endorsed by the 17. General Assembly, 2005, Article II, 2.

institutions and theological studies were to some extent disregarded. Ayalew Tesema, in his paper, "*Charismatic Movement and the Teaching of the EECMY*," described how the charismatic movement emerged in the 1970s and the reaction of the EECMY. At that time the movement was rejected by the missionaries who were working with the EECMY and by the majority of the EECMY church leaders.[483] As pointed out by Yacob Godebo, the integration of the two traditions created conflicts and divisions between those who wanted to retain the former practices (the old generation) and those who wanted the charismatic practices (the young generation).[484] The practice at stake here is not seemingly a neutral practice but theologically influenced practices shaped by different underlying doctrinal understandings. This is seen in other churches as well.

As discussed in the Wittenberg report:

> Since the 1960s the charismatic renewal spread beyond the Pentecostal churches and is found within denominations like Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, and more recently, also the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Church… In spite of warnings by denominational leaders and even the removal of pastors from their charges, the movement seems to increase in influence.[485]

Members of the EECMY were attracted to this new movement that emphasized speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, and exorcism and, singing with emotion, accompanied by modern music and traditional instruments. Even though charismatic practices in many ways were different from Lutheran practices, the members found them more relevant than the traditional forms of worship.

As pointed out by Yacob Gedebo, the reasons for preferring charismatic practices over Lutheran worship practice is that the traditional worship structure is understood as fixed, static, and repetitive and will not give access to fresh experiences of the Holy Spirit.[486] The EECMY accepted the charismatic practices and integrated them into her ministry. However, the EECMY has not added anything to her constitution. This professes that she is a confessional Lutheran church. Confirmation teaching is therefore in principle anchored in the Lutheran heritage, even though contemporary practice is shifting towards Pentecostal-charismatic theology.

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[483] Ayalew Tesema, "Charismatic Movement and the Teaching of the EECMY,"
[484] Yacob Godebo, "The Impact of the Charismatic Movement", 91.
[485] *Project Wittenberg: The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology* Preface and Part I. A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. January 1972
[486] Yacob Godebo, "The impact of the Charismatic Movement," .91.

### 10.3.2 Theological challenges

The recent EECMY strategic plan states the church is open to charismatic gifts and it is seen as a strength without any reference to its doctrinal base. The plan, however, identifies challenges that affect the denominational identity of the church:

o   In many congregations, ordained ministers are not conducting the liturgy, which is an important aspect of worship.
o   Emotionalism dominates church services.
o   Teaching the Word of God is given less time, as the tendency is towards singing as worship.
o   Leaders at grass root level lack the knowledge of Lutheran doctrine.
o   Deviation from the Lutheran teaching.[487]

The plan reveals contradicting views. On the one hand, the church's openness to charismatic gifts is taken as a strength. On the other hand, the document describes the challenges that the practice has brought to the identity of the church. Lalissa Daniel stated, "The EECMY self-understanding as a "confessional church" and "charismatic Lutheran" is contradictory."[488] Ayalew Tessema also stressed that though the church accepts and practices charismatic gifts, there is no official theological document or constitution that clearly shows the position of the EECMY toward charismatic practice.[489]

My findings identified the challenges mentioned in the strategic plan. Sunday worship is usually led by lay persons and a service with traditional liturgy is only conducted during sacraments, confirmations, installations, and inaugurations. Singing and charismatic worship that involves much emotion dominates the other worship occasions, while less time is used for teaching and preaching. This shows the theological underpinnings and presuppositions of most charismatic-style worship are understood in opposition to the Biblical/Lutheran understanding of the means of grace, the sacraments, the divine call, and other important doctrines. In this regard Lalissa Daniel underlines that the focus on charismatic manifestations has resulted in a critique of "the liturgical order, the role of ordained ministers, the authority of Scripture and the necessity of sacraments."[490]   The attraction to charismatic practices, therefore, has created dissatisfaction within the EECMY, as well as a fear of "fresh" experience of the Holy Spirit. The confirmation teachers' 'perceptions about the superiority of charismatic-style worship are not well founded. It is taken for granted due to a lack of adequate knowledge on the Biblical

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[487] EECMY, *Still Serving the Whole Person*. 22.
[488] Lalissa Daniel, "An Investigation," 6.
[489] Yacob Godebo, "The Impact of the Charismatic Movement," 96-97.
[490] Lalissa Daniel, "An Investigation," 333.

basis for Lutheran liturgical practices, as well as confusion about the working of the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace. There seems to be a misunderstanding about the relationship between Lutheran doctrine and charismatic worship, and the underlying conflict between them. This created a negative impact on teaching Lutheran doctrine. The teachers teach Lutheran doctrine knowing that charismatic practice dominates the church services. This shows a gap between teaching and practice.

According to transformative learning theory, a learning that is detached from experience will not bring the desired transformation.[491] Moreover, practical theology, the field in which my research is situated, sees the Christian faith as a performative and embodied act. This means the gospel is not simply something to be believed, but also something to be lived.[492] Hermeneutics makes clear that understanding involves interpretation, and interpretation involves application.[493] Since the teachers and the congregation services focus on charismatic gifts, the Lutheran doctrine which is taught ends up being a disembodied theory without practice. As a result, the confirmands fail to connect their confirmation lessons with their daily lives in church, and struggle to articulate the doctrinal foundation of the church they attend.

### 10.3.3 *Lack of theological depth*

My findings show that the teachers lack adequate knowledge of Lutheran theology and that impacts the way they teach. A full discussion on the theological training of the teachers is beyond the scope of my research. However, I want to point to two factors that affect the teaching and learning of Lutheran doctrine in confirmation class.

> At the local congregation level Luther's Catechisms, especially the *Small Catechism* is taught in confirmation classes to prepare adherents for membership in the EECMY Congregations. … However, the catechism process loosely treats the Lutheran confession at best, and at worst it is plagued by ill-equipped teachers in the dogmatics. The extent of this problem is further exacerbated when even congregational leaders lack deep knowledge of the Lutheran Confessions.[494]

The findings of Lalissa Daniel about the lack of adequate knowledge on Lutheran teaching is similar to what the EECMY strategic plan pointed out that "Leaders at grass root level lack the knowledge of Lutheran doctrine." As stated in chapter five of this thesis the EECMY

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[491] Mezirow et al., *Learning as Transformation*, 19.
[492] Swinton and Mowat. *Practical Theology,* 5.
[493] Friedrich & van der Ven, *Practical Theology*, 55.
[494] Lalissa Daniel, "An Investigation," 334.

understands herself as a confessional Lutheran church and that her teaching is based on Lutheran doctrine. (EECMY Const. Art. 2). Why the does the training in Lutheran theology lack depth?

Sheferaw Sadi, on his evaluation of the EECMY TEE program pointed to the problem of contextualization, he stated that, the TEE course materials, the curriculum and the language are culturally remote. The teaching lacks relevance in relation to the context of the learners and the church's mission.[495] Sheferaw Sadi also indicated that this does not only affect the training but also its application because students find it difficult to see the immediate relevance of the subjects being thought. This is true when it comes to the residential theological training programs as well. Paul J. Isaak, in discussing theological education in the life of the Lutheran churches in Africa presents a more radical point of view. Claiming that Lutheran theology is foreign to African thought he advocates a theology that is more attuned to an ethos and dynamic that "transcends" the particularity of its founding context."[496]

The problem of understanding and applying Lutheran theology may therefore be a lack of contextualization. The EECMY Bible schools and seminaries are anchored on Lutheran doctrine though the depth of the teaching might vary. However, lack of contextualization hampers an in-depth understanding of the doctrine. Engaging the trainers in doing theology is indispensable. This, however, requires a teaching method that supports critical engagement. Critical reflection is foreign to the acquisition pedagogics used in teaching in Ethiopia. This focuses on conveying knowledge and is in many ways a hindrance to in-depth knowledge of the theological system. In this regard, involving dialogue or a more participatory approach would be helpful as it refers to the "ethos and dynamic" familiar to Ethiopians. Participation would encourage the learners to solve problems, examine and test what they learn, and come to an authentic understanding.

Furthermore, if theological students are exposed to charismatic practices early on, they will suffer the same disconnect between "dry" Lutheran theology and "living" charismatic practices. This will cause them to under-estimate the power of the Word and under-value good Lutheran teaching, which trickles down from the seminary over generations to the congregations. In this regard, the blame, cannot only be "uncontextualized" European Lutheranism, but also the preference for charismatic practice over the core concern of the EECMY, "justification by grace."

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[495] Sheferaw Sadi, "Theological Education by Extension," 134.
[496] Paul John Isaak, "Studying and Doing Lutheran Theologies and Theological Education in Africa" in *Handbook of African Educational*, eds. Nsamenang and Tchombe, 325.

## 10.4  Summary

My findings and assessment indicate that there is a gap between the official doctrine of the church and congregational practices. The reasons for the gap points towards a lack of adequate knowledge about Lutheran doctrine, the understanding that Lutheran doctrine and charismatic gifts are contradictory, or simply a rejection of Lutheran doctrine. This creates a challenge to the very identity of the church.

# 11 Teaching materials

This chapter explores the teaching materials utilized in the confirmation course. For the teachers, my interview question reads, "What are the teaching materials you use for confirmation teaching?" I also asked the confirmands, "What materials do you use as reference for the confirmation course?"

## 11.1 Teaching materials: teachers' perspective

### 11.1.1 The shortage of teaching materials

In an informal conversation with Rev. Markos, the head of the Department of Mission and Theology (DMT) at the synod level, he brought up the shortage of teaching materials by saying:

> All of the Mekane Yesus Church congregations in our synod lack textbooks for confirmation class. A long time ago, there was a book prepared by the EECMY Head office, but we had no budget to buy it. There were some small books used by congregations but no common teaching materials that can be used by both rural and urban congregations. We have a good administration, we have good teachers, but there is a high shortage of teaching materials. This is a serious problem for all congregations in our synod.[497]

In the EECMY structure, congregations are organized under parishes and the parishes are organized under synods. A synod is the largest church unit organized under the EECMY Head office.[498] The synod where Markos works comprises more than one thousand congregations. He stresses the problem of the shortage of teaching materials that all congregations have faced for a long time. The book he referred to is titled, *Growing in Faith*, the first manual for confirmation instruction that was designed by EECMY in the 1970s (see 4.4.4). The price of the book and finances of the synod prohibited a purchase of the book. Some of the congregations were using two small books but he did not mention the author or the title of those books. It might be Luther's *Small Catechism* translated to Amharic, or teaching materials designed by missionaries. He saw the shortage of teaching materials as a major challenge. Good management and qualified teachers were not able to cover this deficiency.

A Confirmation teacher from Bethany, Evangelist Deborah, shared similar view:

> At present, the EECMY does not have standardized teaching curriculum. The congregations in the EECMY use materials prepared by congregation

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[497] Markos, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.
[498] EECMY, Constitution and Bylaws, Revised, 17the General Assembly, 2005, Article II, 2.

ministers. Even though our congregation is one of the oldest in the EECMY, we have great problems of teaching materials.[499]

Deborah had served in Bethany congregation for more than two decades, noted that the shortage of teaching materials is a basic challenge of all EECMY congregations. The church has not been able to work out a standardized teaching curriculum to be used by the congregations. Even though Bethany is one of the oldest congregations of the EECMY, it has not managed to produce a teaching manual. In the congregation where I conducted my pilot study, three confirmation teachers (one minister and two evangelists) taught from notes they had prepared themselves. I asked if I could have a look at their notes, but none of them wanted to show them to me. They seemed to lack confidence in their own abilities.

Isaac, a voluntary confirmation teacher from Bethany said, "We have a shortage of teaching material for all the teaching programs in our congregation. It is the responsibility of the teacher to create his own teaching manuals or borrow from others."[500] Due to the lack of resources, each teacher needs to produce her /his own material to have something to present to the class. In this regard, the quality and the content of the material depends on the capability of the teacher. Bethany has different teaching ministries, such as Sunday school for children, (age four to twelve), education for new converts (an introductory course lasting three to six months), confirmation (a one-year course) and a discipleship course (one year). According to Isaac, the congregation does not have a standardized curriculum for these ministries.

Another worker said: "I am responsible to teach the new converts and I use a document that I copied from one of the ministers who has been teaching before me."[501] He showed me an old, handwritten and hardly readable piece of paper. This document was written by a retired minister almost twenty years ago and used ever since. On the one hand the congregation believes in the necessity of teaching, on the other hand the need for standardized teaching materials is not considered. Instead, each teacher is left to their own initiative to procure teaching material.

When I asked Isaac from where he got his material, he responded: "From other EECMY congregations or from the surrounding Christian denominations." Since the other EECMY congregations are in a similar situation, he might not get anything unless an evangelist or minister willingly shares her/his notes. The other Christian denominations might be Pentecostal.

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[499] Abraham, Bethany, August 17/2015.
[500] Isaac, Bethany, August 18 /2015.
[501] Yard, Bethany, December 20/2014.

There are major doctrinal differences between the EECMY and the Pentecostal churches. Thus, unless the teachers critically examine the materials they borrow, they might end up teaching a doctrine different from that of the EECMY. The responses show how the problem of manuals challenged and affected the teaching ministry of the congregations.

### 11.1.2 Attempts to solve the shortage

Teachers explained the actions they took to overcome the challenges. Rev. Abraham explained

> When I came to this position, I realized the problem of teaching materials and (we) asked a seminary teacher, who is also a member of our congregation, to prepare a teaching material in a way that it is used by the teachers. Since our congregation is bilingual, the material was prepared in Amharic and given to the teachers, and the teachers may translate it into Oromo if needed.[502]

Based on the organizational structure of the EECMY, congregations are led by elders elected by congregation members every two years. These elders make decisions on issues that relate to the congregation. Abraham therefore had to consult the elders to persuade them that there ought to be a written agreement between this seminary teacher and the congregation to undertake the task. The seminary teacher prepared some material in Amharic. Even though Abraham characterized the congregation as bilingual, I observed the main language of communication and instruction was Oromo. Sunday services are conducted in Oromo with translation into Amharic. Compared to the Oromo, the Amhara are a minority. In confirmation classes 90% of the teachers communicate in Oromo. During my field work, I got a chance to speak to Aron, the seminary teacher who prepared the material. He explained his motivation and purpose:

> In my service to different congregations, I recognized the shortage of teaching materials, so when I got time and opportunity, I prepared material for confirmation teaching. I shared it to Bethany congregation where I am also a member. My plan is to publish the material so that it can be used in all EECMY congregations at national level.[503]

Aron did not mention he was given the responsibility by the congregation but gave his own reasons for preparing the material. As his aim was to publish the material, he prepared it in Amharic so that it can be used by all EECMY congregations.

The experience of Rehoboth is different from Bethany, as Rev. Lukas expressed:

> We had great shortage of teaching materials, and we discussed the problem with the leaders and assigned individuals who can do the job. The material we

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[502] Abraham, Bethany, August 17/2015.
[503] Aron, Bethany, August 16/2015.

are currently using is prepared by a committee. When I say a committee, it is not a collection of ordinary people, they are mature and educated persons.[504]

When the need of teaching materials was recognized by the congregation leaders, they were able to find a practical solution, including a budget. The challenge is greater if the need is not recognized or prioritized. Accordingly, the congregation selected persons who were theologically trained and had the capacity to undertake the task. Rehoboth overcame the problem by designing its own material as a congregation, rather than relying on individual teachers.

### 11.1.3 Problems related to the teaching materials

According to the findings, Bethany had used the material by Aron for three years, while Rehoboth had utilized the material prepared by the committee for more than a decade. In discussing the application of the material, Jacob, an evangelist, explained their problem:

> In recent years, a seminary teacher prepared confirmation teaching material that solved our problem. He also gave training for evangelists and lay workers on how to use the material. But applying the material in our confirmation classes is problematic. This is because the material is philosophized and theologized. Teaching the subjects became a challenge because it was not designed in a way that common people could understand. The topics were not simplified and contextualized. In my opinion the material can be used only as a reference for confirmation teachers.[505]

Jacob's critical reflection shows that making new material may solve the problem of shortage. The comment, however, disclosed that this material brought new challenges. Aron had produced a manual based on his own theological training, experience, and available sources, but without consulting the confirmation teachers or the confirmands.

The challenge is one of contextualization to the confirmands' level. The material was not prepared in a way that was intelligible to either teachers or confirmands. Jacob characterized the problem with his expression, "philosophized and theologized," indicating that the content was too advanced. Even those who have some theological training had problems.

I managed to get hold of the material.[506] When looking into it, I saw that the first page was entitled 'religion.' There was no introduction on the purpose or guideline on how the

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[504] Lukas, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.
[505] Jacob, Bethany, August 18 /2015.
[506] Aron was not willing to give me a copy of the material since he was looking for someone to help him publish. The teachers said they paid for the copies they had and did not want to lend me the material. Fortunately, after a long explanation about my project, one of the evangelists helped me to photocopy the material.

material should be used. The chapters were divided according to weeks, from 1 to 56. Most of the explanations under each chapter were short, while some were extensive (The Ten Commandments, Stewardship). Some of the chapters ended with a question for discussion, while most of the chapters had no specific ending. Some of the terms needed theological training to be fully understood. For example, the writer used Hebrew and Greek terms, such as *torah*, *Eucharist,* and *kairos*, without explanations. This shows the writer had not considered the context of the teachers and confirmands. Besides, the material had not been evaluated by others before it was used.

The comments of the teachers indicate the problems of manuals is not recognized by the congregation leaders. The teachers, therefore, had to solve the problem on their own. According to Isaac, a voluntary teacher:

> The material is prepared in Amharic and needed to be translated into Oromo. Widening or narrowing the information in the material and what to include and exclude is very problematic. So, the capacity and the experience of the teachers play an important role in prioritizing and limiting the lessons.[507]

The material was prepared without considering the language and the context of the confirmands. If the material had been written in the language of instruction, the teachers would not need time to translate. According to Isaac, it was up to the teachers to decide how the subjects were to be presented. This depends on the teacher's capacity. Those engaged in the task of teaching carried the burden and tried to solve the problems. These efforts brought temporary but no lasting solutions. The congregation leadership gave priority to other things. According to Jacob:

> In this congregation priority is given to things like church building, music instruments and conducting huge spiritual conferences, rather than investing in production of teaching material.[508]

I observed the congregations did not have financial problems. The congregations were engaged in building big, new church buildings. The problem was either lack of concern or lack of knowledge and awareness of the full extent of problem. The congregation had trained personnel and budget but did not see the need for teaching aids.

Like in Bethany, the Rehoboth teachers appreciated the material, but they were aware of the problems and the need for revision. Joshua said,

> Compared to the other congregations the material we use in our congregation is good. In my own case, I attended confirmation class three times because our

[507] Isaac, Bethany, August 18 /2015.
[508] Jacob, Bethany, August 18 /2015.

teachers have not taught us well, because they had no appropriate teaching material. I was even not sure that I was saved, but this material is good because it explains everything. However, it ought to be edited and updated because it has to be compatible with the present generation, I believe anything can be updated except the Bible.[509]

The assessment of Joshua shows that the material the congregation is currently using seemed better than what was in use many other places. The experience, however, was mixed. He had to repeat the course to fully understand confirmation topics, including possibly his own salvation. In his opinion this was due to a shortage of appropriate teaching material. The current material used by the congregation helped clarify the subjects. Even though there is an appreciation for the material, there is a need for revision related to the present generation. The reasons for this are the many religious and cultural changes taking place in the community and the society at large. The material was, therefore, out of date and context. Among them may be mentioned the cultural revival taking place among ethnic groups, the rise of health and wealth preachers, and the use of information technology.

Speaking about revisions, the evangelist used the expression, *Metsihaf Qedus Bicha*, which means, "only the Bible" is exempt from revision.

I have obtained a copy of the material produced by the committee at Rehoboth. It is entitled "A teaching for confirming faith," (*Ye Emnet Matsenya Timhert*). It has a brief preface that states about the creation and fall of man, God's plan for salvation and the need for faith. Those who have faith in Christ need to strengthen their faith by learning the Word of God. The aim is to help the confirmands grow in faith. The material aims at the teachers, but nothing is said about how the material should be used. Each lesson is divided into topics, and each topic begins with an explanation without introduction or objective. It gives no guidance on how to teach. The material does not indicate the time required to complete the course.

Other teachers confirm Joshua's points of view. Rev. Yohans commented:

The material we are using at present is prepared in magazine form. Now we are planning to revise the material by adding questions so that the students read the material and do homework. We will also add more topics that are not included because the confirmands ask doctrinal and other questions that are not included. On the other hand, the material is bulky to be completed in six months, so we will reduce some of the topics.[510]

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[509] Joshua, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.
[510] Yohans, Rehoboth, June 1/2015.

The material is not suited for its purpose; they therefore, plan to include questions and work sheets in order that the confirmands can use it for homework. However, it is not clear if the plan is to prepare a proper textbook or only improve the material.

Another problem is that the material is too extensive to be completed in six months, but there are still important doctrinal issues not included. I therefore asked if they have considered prolonging the duration of the course. Yohans responded that "prolonging the confirmation course is a challenging task because we might face a high number of dropouts." The revision plan included an evaluation and shortening. Evangelist Mathew commented on the same issue:

> There is no way to know whether the confirmands have understood the lesson or not. The confirmands graduate only because the day has come. The material has no means of evaluation. It is prepared to add knowledge to the students, not to make them grow in their faith. Moreover, the way the lessons are presented is difficult for new converts. We recognized the problem and even reported the issue to the leaders. Though we have the capacity to improve, we are reluctant to revise because those who originally prepared the material are the current leaders. There is uncertainty and competition among the workers to revise it.[511]

As Mathew expressed the material is designed in a way that gives knowledge on the basic Christian education and intended for understanding. However, there is no way to prove that. The evangelist is acutely aware it is impossible to help the confirmands grow spiritually just by transferring knowledge from the textbook or the teacher. When, in addition, the material is difficult to comprehend, especially for teenagers and new converts, there is a serious problem. Evangelist Mary mentioned another book prepared by the EECMY:

> Recently the EECMY department for Christian education published a book for the confirmation ministry. I participated on a course on how to apply the material. However, using the material is problematic because the reference books mentioned in the textbook are unavailable. So, we cannot use the book as our main teaching material but as a reference.[512]

The book is entitled *Christian Education (Tehimirte Kiristina): Level I and II: Teacher's Manual.*[513] It is designed to be applied for pre-confirmation course (level 1) and confirmation course (level 2) classes. The subjects to be taught on each level are listed. The explanation given for each subject is short and related to biblical texts. Guidelines for teachers are given.

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[511] Mathew, Rehoboth, July 30/2015
[512] Mary, Bethany, August 20/2015.
[513] EECMY, *Christian Education (Tehimirte Kiristina): Level I and II: Teacher's Manual* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: EECMY-Department for Mission and Theology, 2014).

According to Mary, thirty-five books were listed as references. Some of these books are not available in bookstores. Searching and buying these books is time-consuming and costly, even for those who live in Addis Ababa. This makes the use difficult. Bringing the problem up with the head of the department for Christian education at the church level,[514] I found these weaknesses have been recognized and that they are working on a new book.

### 11.1.4 The process of decision-making

After identifying the problems in the existing confirmation material, Mathew stressed the material had to be revised. This he tried to communicate to the congregation leadership, but they did not take necessary action. Those who were engaged in teaching could have edited the material and made it operational, but they were afraid to edit what was prepared by those more educated. To revise or edit the material might create conflicts or be perceived as disrespect. In Rehoboth, there was clearly a lack of a spirit of cooperation, but rather competition. The teachers in Bethany pointed out similar concern, Isaac remarked:

> When I see our workers, there is no spirit of cooperation and encouragement among them. Rather they compete with one another. There is no tradition to learn from one another. One wants to gain popularity over the other. For example, if someone prepared the lesson and shared with the others and they evaluated and co-operated together, that would have been good. But the practice of accepting one another and appreciating others' gift is not common.[515]

Lack of cooperation was one of the barriers to a unified teaching curriculum. The workers who were engaged in the teaching ministry had identified the problems and tried their best. However, the concern and commitment to improve the material did not bring a lasting solution because they tried to solve the problems on their own. The congregation had not created a space for the teachers to plan, evaluate or revise material together. The lack of space created divisions rather than cooperation as a team.

The response by the teachers reveals the demand for standardized and contextualized teaching material is high. However, the congregation leaders failed to recognize the need and the challenges related to the teaching materials. From the formal and informal discussions, I had with the teachers, they gave reasons for leaders' passivity:

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[514] May 24/2019.
[515] Isaac, Bethany, August 18 /2015.

"Our congregation gives much emphasis to evangelism and we are well known by our evangelistic activity rather than by making disciples."[516] According to James, an evangelist from Rehoboth, the congregation leaders were more concerned about preaching to unbelievers than helping believers to grow in faith. Attention is given to huge conferences which focus on prophecy, healing, and worship rather than providing foundational teaching for nourishment. Making disciples is secondary. The Rev. proudly referred to the congregation as missional.[517] Priorities like this create a gap between conversion and growth. According to James, the high concern for evangelism made the congregation's leaders pay less attention to teaching and teaching materials.

Jacob from Bethany aired his concern in the following words:

> The congregation leaders are elected every two years by communicant members of the congregation. They are the main decision makers in all matters. Most of the time priority is given for professionals, businesspeople, or those who have a position in government offices. Most of those who are elected have little knowledge about congregational ministry. Besides, the main challenge is that the decision-making process does not involve Rev. and evangelists. So, we do not have the chance to explain and convince the congregation elders about the problem with materials or other challenges related to the teaching task.[518]

In the EECMY congregational structure, decision makers are the elders of the congregation who are elected for two or four years. Before the election, the congregation reminds the members to pray for the election. In addition, a Bible study is offered to the members on 1Tim. 3:1-13, to show biblical criteria for election of leaders. However, I observed that individuals were elected on the basis of their position in society, economic status, and authority in the governmental offices rather than the criteria set in the Bible. The congregation seems to think these people will serve, not only as leaders, but with financial support and authority. According to Jacob, the problem with this system is that some of these elders do not have adequate knowledge about congregational service. As a result, they fail to give attention to the challenges related to congregational ministries. As the ministers and evangelists are not permitted to participate in the decision-making process, the elders make all decisions without consulting them. Those who are engaged in the service have no chance to explain, convince or influence a decision. This practice creates gaps between the actual needs and the decision-making body.

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[516] Informal discussion, evangelist in Rehoboth.
[517] Yohans, Rehoboth, June 1/2015.
[518] Jacob, Bethany, August 18 /2015.

The issues related to the teaching ministry might be raised on the meetings, but neither the teachers, who face the problem, nor the confirmands have a chance to convince the elders of the actions necessary.

> Compared to the past, nowadays people are more educated. Most of our workers are not trained to serve and lead this generation. The leaders have problems in understanding them and serving their needs. More than preparing teaching material, we need to employ more technology to serve the current generation; otherwise I don't think they will listen to us in the same way.*"[519]

The concern by Yohans is the knowledge gap between teachers and confirmands. The present generation is better educated than the past generations and some of the confirmands have a higher educational level than their teachers. The present generation have access to information technology and like to utilize these tools for learning. The congregation is therefore expected to incorporate this technology in the teaching ministry. In Yohans' view, the current teaching materials are not sufficient. Modern communication technology seems to be in demand. At the seminars, however, the students did not get training in using this technology. Computers are expensive and unaffordable for most of them. The fear is the coming generation might be unwilling to attend a church teaching that is limited to textbooks and blackboard. Although leaders ought to be proactive in planning, no plan or action took place to reshape the teaching ministry.

## 11.2 Teaching materials: confirmands' perspective

### 11.2.1 The importance of textbooks

Lydia explained the advantage of having textbooks as follows:

> It is good if we have books, to read and understand more about the topics. We can ask adults or our parents for explanations. In addition, in case we miss a class we can refer to the books.[520]

A lecture period is forty-five minutes. As Lydia saw it that might not be enough time for confirmands to comprehend the content of a lesson fully. Having a textbook would, therefore, be helpful. With a textbook in hand, she would be able to ask family members to clarify things. Since the chance of getting clarifications to questions during class is limited, the involvement

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[519] Yohans, Rehoboth, June 1/2015.
[520] Lydia, Bethany, August 21/2015.

of family members has advantages. If a confirmand misses a class, she/he can study the subject in the book. A book would facilitate the teaching in many ways.

Samuel, one of the confirmands in his late adulthood and without formal education, stressed the importance of reference material:

> I cannot read and write, because I did not attend school in my life, but if there is a book to refer to, I would ask my family members or neighbours to read it for me. Otherwise, I can't remember all the lessons I learnt by heart.[521]

This comment shows that books are of significance, even for illiterate confirmands. The lessons might require reading for better understanding. Though the confirmands like Samuel are unable to take notes, the advantage of books is high as family members can help them by reading.

### 11.2.2  Audio visual lectures

Saron, also commented on the advantage of materials that could be taken home:

> I would like it if we had a textbook for our confirmation course. Through reading, the Spirit of the Lord might reveal the teaching to us because God does not only reveal things to the teachers. It is also good if the teaching is recorded and given to us on CD or DVD so that we can listen or watch the video for more understanding of the lessons.[522]

Saron, a teenage girl form Rehoboth, suggested having a textbook would enable confirmands to gain more understanding. She thinks the Holy Spirit will enlighten the students about their lessons more through reading, since teachers would not be the only sources of knowledge. She also commented it should not be limited to a textbook; she would like it if the teaching were recorded on audio visual equipment and distributed. Nowadays, it is common to find recorded audio and video teachings and spiritual songs everywhere, including in rural areas. There are also religious/ spiritual TV channels owned by individuals and churches that broadcast different kinds of spiritual programs. Moreover, recorded audio–visual lectures and discussions benefit also older and illiterate people like Samuel. However, the congregation does not seem able to meet the preference of the confirmands, either out of ignorance, lack of human resource, or financial capacity.

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[521] Samuel, Pilot study. July 20/2014.
[522] Saron, Rehoboth, July 26/2015.

### 11.2.3  The importance of reading

Solomon has, however, a second thought on the use of books.

> It would have been good if we had a textbook that we refer to when we have questions, and to read in advance and prepare. However, in my view, having reference material does not guarantee a good understanding unless the confirmands are active, reading and ready to learn. It shouldn't be the same as what we practice at school. In the secular school, we have books for all the subjects but not all students read, or they read only for exams, not to gain knowledge. But this is the house of the Lord and spiritual knowledge is more important for our life than what we get from school.[523]

A book might be the help the confirmands need to find answers for questions. Since the teachers do not have time to answer questions, a book would be useful. There are also problems with this view though. Solomon doubted the confirmands would bother to read the books. The fear is unless the confirmands are active and willing to read, a book will not make any change. By referring to *Ye Egezeabeher Bet*, the Amharic word for the house of God, the confirmand wanted to make a distinction between the secular school and the church. The confirmands should not copy the laziness they may practice in school; spiritual knowledge too important.

## 11.3  Interpretation and assessment

My findings reveal a serious challenge for both teachers and students. Because of the shortage of materials, the teachers are in general left with the responsibility for working out the content of their teaching themselves. Some congregations have tried to solve this with varying degrees of success. The confirmands expressed that having a textbook and recorded lectures would be advantageous in many ways.

### 11.3.1  Material resources

After the EECMY was recognized as a national church, the congregations were using materials, based on Luther's *Small Catechism*. Designing a unified Christian education curriculum was addressed when the EECMY General Assembly in 1967 appointed the "Christian Education Curriculum Development Committee" to work on a curriculum for congregations and church schools. The committee developed curricula that included pre-confirmation, confirmation, and post-confirmation courses. The book designed for confirmation teaching was entitled "Growing

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[523] Solomon, Rehoboth, July 30/2015. 40

in Faith." As mentioned in chapter 4 the dissemination of this book, was hampered by internal and external reasons. Lalissa Daniel comments on this:

> The vigorous work started in the 1970s, referred as "the golden age of Christian education for the EECMY", collapsed, partly due to the fact that Christian education was totally dependent on the support of foreign mission organizations and partly because one of the joint programs (EECMY-Yemisrach Dimts Communication Service (YDCS) started to follow a market driven approach.[524]

Publishing and disseminating the textbooks was the responsibility of YDCS. However, the organization engaged in income generating activities rather than serving congregations and church schools. The continuous workshops for material production were discontinued due to lack of financial support. For years, the church was unable to either revise the old manuals or design new ones. A report f'rom the churches' Christian education ministry stated that revising/developing, contextualizing, rewriting and reprinting work was an immediate challenge:

> As the historical background of the EECMY Christian education shows, the work of Christian education has been done by a set up committee and some literature section personnel at the central office. The section has been vacated for five years. However, at present the section is led by only one person... Besides the section lacks sufficient budget for material production.[525]

This report is from 1997. Neither the church archives nor the person in charge of the section at present were able to give me reports after this date. According to this report and the informal discussion I had with the current head of the section, it still suffers from the lack of budget and human resources. The demands from the synods were high, but the church was not able to revise the old, nor produce new material.

A global study conducted by LWF on confirmation ministry places my findings into a larger context relating to a major weakness of confirmation ministry in Africa:

> Lack of material resources for teaching was the number one stated weakness of the confirmation programs in Africa. The teachers are challenged with large classes, literacy issues, and lack of training to function independently of printed materials. Memorization was the only teaching method used in confirmation instruction and many considered this limited method as a severe

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[524] Lalissa Daniel, "An Investigation," 332-333.
[525] EECMY Christian Education Ministry Consultation, 15.

weakness of their programs because it resulted in students completing instruction being unable to articulate what they believe.[526]

The church's lack of financial resources is a major reason for the problems of teaching materials revealed in my study. It is scarcely possible to assign competent personnel to develop, print and distribute suitable material. Not all congregations have the financial means to buy this kind of material. The absence of relevant EECMY material has forced the teachers to borrow from other churches. Other evangelical churches, such as the Baptist, Pentecostal or Mennonites have another theological base. As they do not have a confirmation ministry, they do not have a teaching related to the needs of a confirmation course. They might therefore borrow a pre-baptismal course material designed for new converts. EECMY teachers might teach from these materials without a critical assessment of its theological content.

### 11.3.2 Human resources

In the participatory pedagogics applied in the cultures of south-western Ethiopia knowledge is transmitted orally (see 2.1). Both preaching and teaching is practiced without the help of written material. The best preachers and teachers are those who master the art of oratory. This tradition is reflected in Peter Baguma's and Irene Abeisibwe's statement that one of the weaknesses of African traditional education is the lack of systematic written curricula and an inability in writing and keeping records.[527] Compared to written curricula that require training and material resources, oral communication is the easiest mode of communication. Although the present generation is generally more educated than past generations, a literate culture has not developed. This influences the thinking around teaching material.

An effort to develop a standardized confirmation curriculum was made in the 1970s (see chapter 4: Growing in Faith).[528] The working committee was based on theological and pedagogical competence. In Bible schools and seminaries, topics like pedagogics, curriculum design and lecture planning belong to a course in Christian Education. However, the course is given on introductory level. The students get no practical training within this field during their studies. Their training can hardly be said to prepare them for the complex task of preparing, designing, and evaluating a course in confirmation teaching.

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[526] *Confirmation Ministry Study, Global Report*, (LWF, Dep. for Mission and Development, Geneva, 1995), 21.
[527] Baguma and Abeisibwe, "Issues in African Education", 25.
[528] EECMY Christian Education Ministry Consultation Report, Aug 5-9, 1997, 15.

Planning a curriculum is an integral part of the teaching-learning process. A properly planned course will guide those who teach to give attention to what should be taught. It could also help the teacher to teach in other ways than the customary acquisition method (see 2.1).[529] However, due to the lack of confirmation teachers' guides, most teachers apply the pedagogics they are accustomed to and their own material. The teaching focuses on filling the confirmands with information. As discussed in my chapter on theory (2) the acquisition method is not suited to engage or transform the lives of the listeners.

At the basic level, however, the question is if teaching material is prioritized in the church. Even if the church had adequate finances and human resources, it does not seem that the congregation elders give priority to this kind of expenses. Instead, we can observe a competition among the congregations to have new and bigger church buildings, music instruments and sound systems. The necessity of having a standardized, quality teaching material is neglected. Mark W. Cannister's comment may speak to this:

> People are the church's highest priority. They are the reason why the church exists in the first place...People are eternal, whereas material resources are not. In the long run, only people count! Without people there would be no ministry. They bring life to the building and add meaning to the tasks. Some church leaders forget about this priority in a rush to build a building that ends up as a monument to the reverend or some significant leader in the church.[530]

The congregation leaders play a significant role in prioritizing what ought to be done. Priority ought to be given to teaching because it is the main task given by our Lord (Mt 28, The great commission). The ministry and service of any church reflects the quality of the education given to its members.[531] The quality of the church relies on her teaching, not on buildings. In recent time the focus on Pentecostal practices of huge and expensive spiritual conferences tempts leaders to pay less attention to the importance of the important and hard daily work of teaching.

### 11.3.3 *Assessing the cost of failure*

Assessing the revealed lack of teaching materials, I may take a point form Richard R. Osmer. Based on Paul's teaching in the epistles, he identifies three core tasks of congregational teaching

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[529]Ted Ward, "The Teaching Learning Process," in *Introducing Christian Education*, ed. Anthony, 120.

[530] Mark W. Cannister, "Organizational Models of Christian Education", in *Introducing Christian Education*, ed. Anthony, 149.

[531] Andre Karamaga, Foreword, in Isabel Apawo and Dietrich Werner, eds. *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, (Regnum series in global Christianity, Regnum, Oxford, 2013).

ministry, namely catechesis, exhortation, and discernment.[532] Catechesis refers to the task of passing on Christian teaching drawn from Scripture and Christian tradition in ways to allow the members of the Christian community to understand God and put their trust in Him. Exhortation refers to moral formation demonstrated in Paul's way of challenging his congregations to live a life that pleases God. Discernment refers to teaching Christians how to read the signs of the time and how to interpret the present in the light of God's promised future for creation.[533]

The teaching ministry of congregations ought to consist of these three core tasks. Teaching scriptural truth and doctrine ought to be supplemented with instructing on how to apply the teaching in the daily life of the learners and helping them to understand and interpret their lives in relation to God's promise for the future. The confirmation ministry is strong in teaching scriptural truth and its application. Nonetheless, the discernment task is weak as the congregations overlook the importance of understanding what is going on in society and fail to address the needs of the confirmands. For Osmer, the task of discernment is "oriented toward Christian hope, and discernment of hidden transformation in the present."[534] Understanding the times and interpreting the signs of the times in the light of Scripture helps the congregation not only to solve the present challenges but also to be ready in advance. The confirmands should be equipped to face the world today and in the future.

Due to globalization and the explosion of information technology, the present generation in Ethiopia has access to far more information, at much greater speed, than any time in the past. Confirmation teachers are "no longer the only educated voice in the village or town."[535] At the same time confirmands are not empty vessels to be filled with knowledge from the teachers. The church, bound by tradition, is expected to make significant changes by developing strategies that are applicable to the characteristics of the generation she serves.[536] Overlooking or ignoring the need of the generation makes the teaching ministry fruitless. This is one area that the congregations need to take into consideration.

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[532] Catechesis refers to the instruction offered to new converts in preparation for baptism. Richard R. Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2005), 27.

[533] Ibid. 29, 33. 44.

[534] Richard R. Osmer Friedrich Schweitzer, *Religious Education between Modernization and Globalization: New Perspectives in the United States and Germany,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 249.

[535] David Day, Jeff Astley and Leslie Francis, *A Reader on Preaching: Making Connections* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publ. 2005), 158.

[536] Wesley Black, "Generational Perspectives," in *Introducing Christian Education*, ed. Anthony, 242.

## 11.4 Summary

My findings uncovered that there is a lack of teaching materials utilized by congregations and the challenges that arise from this. The importance of having textbooks and recorded audio-visual lectures was raised by the confirmands. Due to a lack of material resources and perhaps also a lack of prioritizing the development of teaching materials for congregations, the EECMY-DMT has not been able to solve the problem. This leaves the individual teacher at a loss as how to provide adequate teaching for their many confirmands. In the long run this might weaken the congregations and its members spiritually.

## 12 The duration of the confirmation course

This chapter deals with the time allocated to complete the course on confirmation. The aim is to see how much time is used in relation to the aim of the course. Thus, the interview questions for the teachers reads: "For how long do you teach confirmation?" "What factors determine the duration?" The interview question for the confirmands was: "How do you see the time allocated for the confirmation course?"

### 12.1 Duration: teachers' perspective

In Bethany the course lasts one year while in Rehoboth it takes six months.

#### 12.1.1 Time is adequate

Rev. Abraham put forward this perspective:

> In our congregation, confirmation teaching takes one year, which is the tradition in our congregation for a long time. The teaching is given once a week. After completing the confirmation course, the confirmands continue with a discipleship course. That helps to prepare the confirmands to take part in the congregation ministry. Therefore, we think one year is adequate for a confirmation course.[537]

The schedule from September to August follows the Ethiopian calendar. A newly converted person who comes to the congregation in October or in the middle of the year will first take a pre-confirmation course and is expected to wait for the New Year in September to begin. As I observed the class takes an hour and a half, even though it should be two hours. Either the teachers or the confirmands come 15/20 minutes late and the first 15 minutes are used for opening prayer/song and attendance checking. So, the total hours they learn per month is six hours and per year sixty to seventy hours.

In Rehoboth the course lasts for six months, as Rev. Lukas commented:

> In our congregation the confirmation course lasts six months, but most of the time we don't finish within six months because the class is only one hour per week and teaching all the lessons takes more time. Since the learners come from different backgrounds, it is difficult to teach them more than an hour. But if the group agrees and the class is given twice a week, six months is enough.[538]

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[537] Abraham, Bethany, August 17/2015.
[538] Lukas, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.

The standard one hour per week in six month means the whole course takes 24 contact hours. Actually, the course takes more time because the allocated time is not equivalent to the content of the course. According to Lukas, the confirmands will not be attentive if the teaching goes beyond one hour. I observed that teaching takes less than an hour because the class does not begin on time. Prayer and attendance checking take around fifteen minutes. The time left for teaching is around 40-45 minutes. If a teacher intends to complete the course in six months, she/he must teach more hours and that depends on the willingness of the confirmands. I tried to clarify the question of willingness. I found that the problem is not the enthusiasm, but the life situation of the confirmands. This decides whether theycan attend more classes or not. Lukas remarked that, "These days' people who live in towns are very occupied with work and education. They can only attend confirmation teaching on Saturdays."[539] Some government organizations and schools work on Saturdays, but since the confirmands ought to attend Sunday service. the teaching is given in two shifts on Saturdays.

### 12.1.2 Time is short

Evangelist Jacob from Bethany commented:

> The confirmation course is given for one year. In my understanding, one year is a very short time to accomplish the purpose. In order to attain the desired goal, the congregation should plan a lifelong teaching ministry, because we do not only teach but we work on the mind and attitude of the confirmands. So, teaching the basics of Christian faith and making them responsible Christians need more time than a year.[540]

To Jacob a confirmation course should teach the basics of faith and make the confirmands responsible Christians. To achieve both goals one year is not enough. The focus of the ministry is not only to transfer knowledge but includes an element of transformation in order that they become responsible for life and ministry. Jacobs's comments indicate that confirmation should not only be limited to introduction but it requires continued learning.

Rev. David from Rehoboth congregation shared the same concern:

> Regarding duration, six months is short because the material is too much. The lessons are very wide. Covering the lessons depends on the preparation of the teacher: It takes about eight months or more. For instance, when there is no

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[539] Lukas, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.
[540] Jacob, Bethany, August 18 /2015.

teacher; and when a special program takes place that encompasses all members, like conferences and trainings, the class is interrupted.[541]

Covering all the topics within six months is impossible. In addition, the availability and preparation of the teacher plays a role in determining the time. As he indicated, there are times when teaching confirmation is suspended. Six months is a principle while in practice the teaching takes more time. It is therefore impossible to complete the course within six months. The gap shows those six months are allocated without considering the content of the course listed on the teaching materials they are utilizing.

### 12.1.3 Time is long

Isaac noted the duration is long compared to other evangelical churches:

> It is a one-year program, given once a week for two hours. There are other evangelical churches who bring new converts to full membership within 3 or 6 months. The confirmands are not happy when the course takes more time. The course takes so much time because the teaching is interrupted for different reasons. There is also a tendency of delaying confirmation day until all groups complete the course. The other big challenge is that the numbers of believers who want to attend the course are many and they are forced to wait for a year.[542]

Isaac is referring to the practice in Pentecostal churches. These churches give three to six months instruction before baptizing adults. As a result, new converts become full church members within a short time-period. No Pentecostal church practices confirmation. The long process to become a full member of the EECMY might frustrate some confirmands who attend the teaching for the sake of membership.

Courses are sometimes interrupted by other programs. Interruptions prolong the time of completion. Congregations bring all the confirmation groups together for the confirmation ceremony once a year. Since there are more than one group, those who completed the course are expected to wait for all to complete the course. Because of this, confirmands might get frustrated and drop out or move to other denominations.

Evangelist Mathew stated six months is too long:

> I think six months is too much. I suggest that if we modify the material, we can successfully finish it within three months. I suggest this because, though we teach for six months, none of the confirmands learn six months continuously. They either come and the teacher is absent, or another cause may

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[541] David, Rehoboth, May 30/2015.
[542] Isaac, Bethany, August 18 /2015.

appear. They only learn a little time and then get confirmed. So, to be more effective, not only the time, but also the content needs to be condensed.[543]

Mathew noticed the problem of attendance. Based on his observation and evaluation, the teachers do not come to class regularly because they might be engaged in other ministries. The attendance of confirmands is also on and off. Therefore, Mathew suggested that attendance would be better if the time and the content of the course was shorter. However, his suggestions have a lot to do with the curriculum and the aim of the teaching.

In sum, the confirmation teachers have strong views on the duration of the course. In Bethany the course lasts one year and still some teachers think it is too short. In Rehoboth the teaching takes six months, and still some teachers think it should be three months. Clearly the teachers hold different opinions about the duration.

## 12.2  Duration: confirmands' perspective

To the question of course length, the confirmands gave different responses. Most of them were more concerned about the teaching than the length.

### 12.2.1  Time is enough

Martha from Bethany says:

> The duration is one year, and I think our teachers considered the lessons when they allocated a year. It is okay for me. But the problem is that the time is not used properly. Our class takes place Saturday afternoon. But most of the time we leave the class before finishing the lesson and the discussions, because the class is crowded, and it is too hot in the afternoon.[544]

Martha's point is that time is not utilized because of the teaching conditions. The class is full of people and the temperature high. I observed the classroom was in an old building with glass windows, but these windows were painted with a dark color and remained closed. One of the workers explained that they closed and painted the windows in order that the learners should not lose attention by looking outside.[545] Thus, the crowded room has not enough light and fresh air and that affects the teaching. Martha suggested that the allocated time is enough if the time is used properly with a conducive class setting.

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[543] Mathew, Rehoboth, July 30/2015.
[544] Martha, Bethany, August 24/2015.
[545] Barnabas, Bethany, August, 22/2015.

### 12.2.2 Longer time

Hanna from Rehoboth commented:

> The course takes six months and I prefer to lean for more time to understand all the lessons before I am confirmed. I had great expectations about confirmation from childhood, so I want to learn everything in detail.[546]

Hanna was raised in a Christian family and had attended Sunday school. She knew about the confirmation course. She would therefore have been familiar with topics such as the Lord's Prayer or the Ten Commandments. She, therefore, expected in-depth teaching and was ready to spend time.

Paul an adult confirmand from Bethany also shared a similar concern "I don't think one year is enough. The topics are many and I am eager to learn the lessons deeply, even if it takes more than a year" [547]   Eager to have an in-depth understanding of the lessons and willing to learn more than the allocated time, Paul thinks that subjects that need to be covered require more time.

Daniel, a young confirmand said: "I am not sure for how long the teaching will continue, but I have no problem with the time. I want to get answers to my questions and understand everything. I am not in a hurry to complete the course."[548]   For Daniel time was not of major concern, He needed answers and wanted to understand the lessons. His idea was that learning for longer time would solve this.

### 12.2.3 Time and theological issues

Rachel, a young mother from Bethany, wanted to complete the course within a short time for the sake of her child:

> I came to this congregation when I was six months pregnant with my first child. After giving birth, I asked the minister to baptize my infant, but he said I had to finish the confirmation course first. I was very sad when I heard that the course took one year. I am happy to learn the Word of God, but I am not happy that that baptism of my child is delayed. I am worried if something may happen to my child, so I like if the time is shortened.[549]

The young mother with her child of two months was a new believer. She was surprised by the requirements for baptism. Rachel and others in her situation are expected to attend a pre-

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[546] Hanna, Rehoboth, August 13/2015.
[547] Paul, Bethany, August 21/2015. Titus, Bethany, August 23/ 2015. Dina, Rehoboth, August.12/2015.
[548] Daniel, Rehoboth, August 13/2015,
[549] Rachel, Bethany, December 27/2015

confirmation course before starting the confirmation course. In Bethany, the pre- confirmation course takes from three to six months. Rachel might have attended a pre- confirmation course. She understood the importance of baptism.  Besides she, as many in her situation, might have been influenced by the EOTC teaching that baptism releases the person's soul from control by the devil and puts her/him under divine grace.[550] The theological idea is that baptism will protect the child from being attacked by Satan. The EECMY practices infant baptism. Through baptism the infant receives salvation. There is a principle, however, that those who bring their children to be baptized should be communicant church members. The reason is that the baptized child needs someone who can help and guide her/him to grow in faith through teaching the Word of God and pray for the child.[551]

Rachel wanted to secure the life of her infant. She therefore wanted confirmation as soon as possible, to get her child baptized. Her fear was not acknowledged by the teachers and congregation leaders. This left her with no choice but to attend class to the end, while filled with fear. The congregations need to critically reflect on this practice for the sake of infants and their worried mothers.

Timothy a young confirmand from Bethany said:

> The teaching is for a year. This is a long time because I have a fear in case I am called by the Lord or if the Lord comes back before I took Holy Communion. In that case I will not inherit the kingdom of God. I also heard that there are some additional requirements to take part in Holy Communion. I like if the time is shortened to six months. I don't have problems in sitting and learning. Even for more than a year. But I will be glad if they first give us necessary instructions on Holy Communion so that I can take part in it.[552]

In Timothy's view, Holy Communion is crucial; eternal life depends on it. His fears were to be "called by the Lord;" this is a cultural expression for dying, or to be called by God. By the expression "if the Lord comes" he is referring to the second coming of Christ. If this happens before he takes Holy Communion, he fears the consequence. The understanding is that the only way of salvation is Holy Communion, waiting without taking Holy Communion is not safe. He also fears other things required by the congregation might delay him from taking part in Holy Communion. The completion of the course is not the only requirement by the EECMY; peaceful relationships with family members, friends and neighbours and abstaining from addictions are

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[550] The EOTC baptizes male infants at the age of 40 days and female infants at the age of 80 days, (Lev. 12:2-7). If an infant is sick the EOTC baptizes prior to the above fixed baptismal dates. *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Faith,* 37.
[551] Misgana Iticha, *The Holy Sacraments*, (Addis Ababa: Misrach Demth Publ., 2002), 147.
[552] Timothy, Bethany, August 22/2015.

also important. The EECMY needs to consider its interpretation and teaching about taking Holy Communion in an unworthy manner (see 5.4).

Thomas, an adult confirmand in Rehoboth, preferred a short course in order to be part of a Christian fellowship:

> For me the time is more than enough, I even asked the teachers why the course took more than three months. I was thinking about my social life. I did not want to spend a long time without getting recognition. I worried so much because I already left my former denomination and friends. I will be lonely if something happens either to me or my family.[553]

Thomas had left another Christian denomination some months ago. He wanted to be accepted as a full member of a new congregation as soon as possible. In Ethiopia, changing denominations is not easy. When a person leaves his previous denomination, fellowship and social connections are broken. Accordingly, like Thomas, some confirmands do not want to wait long until they become full members of the congregation because that gives them spiritual and social security. Thomas needed the recognition both for good and bad times in life. Without fulfilling the criteria for membership in the congregation, he will not get much support here either. Facing this dilemma, he found the confirmation course far too long

## 12.3 Interpretation and assessment

The confirmation teachers and confirmands shared views about the duration of the confirmation course. Some teachers suggested the allocated time was too short compared to the content and aim of the course. Some thought the time was appropriate if used properly. Others found the course too long compared to the high demand and the practice in other Christian denominations. Most confirmands wanted to learn in-depth rather than rushing to complete the course. A few wanted to be confirmed for their own spiritual and social reasons.

The variation in duration of confirmation is rooted in EECMY history, both the practice of the missions and the failed effort to create a unified teaching curriculum in the 1970s (see chapter 4). As a result, there is no standardized curriculum, and therefore no guide for the congregations. The EECMY congregations decide by themselves. The time frame is decided without proper planning and assessment. In Bethany, the confirmation course takes one year, while in Rehoboth, six months. Both teachers and confirmands have complaints about the duration.

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[553] Thomas, Rehoboth, August 8/2015.

The *Christian Education Textbook* of Mekane Yesus Seminary describes some elements that need to be considered:[554] The content of the course is a determining factor. What are the subjects? And how many sessions are needed? Teaching material available show that there are many subjects, and the allocated time may not be enough to cover them properly. This indicates an imbalance between content and time. Teaching methods play a role because some methods take more time than others. A lecture needs less time than a discussion or a group session. In case of a confirmation course, there are no guidelines as to how to teach. Knowing the learner helps to determine the time needed.

Transformative learning theory gives priority for the need of the learners. The confirmands in my study have different ages and a diverse religious and educational background. My findings show different motives for attending the confirmation course. They were, however, never given the opportunity to share their concerns. Some confirmands need more time than others. Not knowing their capacity, the teacher is unable to make any distinctions. Thereby the teacher misses an important factor when evaluating the time needed.

The EECMY has her own calendar. This takes the official calendar for holy days and events into consideration. In planning a program, the congregations are expected to refer to this calendar and their own congregation's program, in order not to overlap or interrupt the course. In case there are collisions, the congregations are expected to compensate for lost days.

My findings show that the congregations allocate the time without considering these points. In describing the duration of the course, teachers only talked about teaching hours, but failed to address the importance of participating in Sunday services and other congregational programs. Both in Bethany and Rehoboth the point of offering the course on Saturdays was to make it possible to attend a Sunday service and develop relationships with congregation members and leaders. Participating in congregational gatherings and fellowship is learning by doing. Through participation the confirmands can learn what Christian fellowship is and integrate teaching and life. However, the congregation does not know the confirmands taking part in Sunday service. The confirmands are not required to take part in church programs as part of the course.

In 1970, *The Report of the Joint Commission* developed a standardized guideline for time allocation in confirmation ministry in the Lutheran Church of America. This guideline recommends at least 60 hours for the *Small Catechism*, 80 hours to the Bible, and at least 20

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[554] MYS, *Introduction to Christian Education*, 88-89.

hours to the study of projects and the mission of the congregation.[555] The guideline recognizes the importance of participation in worship and fellowship. The plan was made for youngsters from grades seven to ten. This document is an example of the emphasis given to confirmation ministry in a Lutheran church.

Some of the confirmation teachers and confirmands suggested that the course time could be shortened. However, none of them explained how the purpose of the course could be achieved in shorter time. In the early years of the EECMY, there was no urgency to confirm a person without making sure that the person understood the basics of Christian faith and showed that the Gospel had changed her his/ life.[556] Two to three years of instruction together with participation in worship and fellowship was deemed necessary for faith and growth. The huge and rapid growth in membership presented a serious challenge to the old time-model. Since confirmation is mandatory for membership, the church found no other solution than to shorten the timeframe.

The EECMY experience may be compared to the church's experience in the 2nd century. In the Early Church three years was allocated for teaching new Christians. In many cases their faith was tested through persecution. When Christianity became state religion under Constantine in 313, and masses of people turned to Christianity, the church was unable to teach and guide the new converts through a period of probation. This resulted in syncretism and unethical living within the church.[557] This may be seen as a warning to the EECMY of today. Without adequate time for instruction and spiritual growth, the quality of Christian life may suffer. The maturity issue relates to Mezirov's transformative learning theory. This puts emphasis on change as a process.[558] Different phases are described as different steps in a process of change, or perhaps I should say growth. Though Mezirow's theory does not say how much time is needed to experience this kind of change, his point is that it needs time. Hence, in allocating time for a confirmation course, the planning should not only consider the time needed for covering the topics, but also think through the time needed to grow as Christians.

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[555] Krych, *Confirmation*, 131.
[556] Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers*, 224.
[557] Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001). 116, 124.
[558] Mezirow et al., *Learning as Transformation*, 22.

## 12.4  Summary

This chapter pondered on the duration of a confirmation course. A basic problem is what was revealed in chapter 11, that the EECMY has been unable to agree on a unified and standardized curriculum.  This is reflected in the differing views of teachers and confirmands on the time question. Those who think the duration is long have their own personal spiritual and social interests. Those who think the time is short like to learn in-depth. Others think the allocated time is sufficient if the time is used properly. The question of the duration of the course can only be solved in relation to the aim of the course. If the aim is to secure a minimum of Christian knowledge, Rehoboth's solution with a course of 6 months may be enough. If maturity or some degree of change in the life of the confirmands is to be sought, Bethany's solution with one year seems preferable. The conflicting views on the duration of the course is therefore an issue to be considered.

# 13  Aims and expectations

In this chapter I will investigate how the confirmation teachers understand the aim of their teaching. My research question was: "What are the aims of confirmation ministry in your congregation?" I then investigate the confirmands' expectations. My research question was: "Why do you attend the confirmation course?" The teachers' aims and students' expectations are important in order to understand whether aims and expectations are corresponding.

## 13.1  Aims of confirmation: teachers' perspective

The responses of the teachers comprise:

### 13.1.1  Bringing confirmands to full membership

Some teachers responded that the aim is to bring the confirmands to full membership. Evangelist Mary from Bethany explained:

> Our aim is to bring people to full membership status, because, a person has to be a communicant member to get services such as: having children baptized, participating in Holy Communion, Holy Matrimony, funeral service and serving in the congregation. We also help the confirmands to understand about Christian faith and how to live accordingly.[559]

Becoming a communicant member plays an indispensable role to access the services of the congregation. Members enjoy privileges. These involve:

*Baptism:* In order to get their children baptized, the parents must be full members of the congregation. At least one of the parents needs to be a full member. The understanding is there must be someone who helps and guides the child to live in the faith she/he was baptized as an infant. If the parents are not communicant members, Baptism will be postponed until they are confirmed.

*Holy Communion*: confirmation prepares for first participation in Holy Communion. One of the major things believers look forward to is taking part in the Lord's Supper. I observed that the congregation leaders only invite the communicant members to come forward and receive Communion, while non-communicant members remain seated or leave. Participating in Communion gives the members both spiritual and social security. Spiritually, their relationship

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[559] Mary, Bethany, August 20/2015.

with the Lord is strengthened, and socially, the fellowship with congregation members gives a sense of belonging. .

*Holy Matrimony*: If couples want to marry in church, both must be full members. Even though there are additional obligations such as attending a pre-marital course and a medical certificate showing they are free from HIV/AIDS, the congregation will not conduct the ceremony unless they are communicant members.

*Funeral Ceremony:* I observed there is a slight difference between the funeral ceremony for those who are communicant members and those who are not. When a communicant member dies, the body of the deceased is taken to the local church for the funeral ceremony that includes prayers, hymns, confession, preaching, and the Lord's Prayer. Afterwards the body is taken to the graveyard to be buried. If the deceased person is not a communicant member, the body is taken directly to the graveyard. A brief sermon is conducted at the graveyard. The difference between the funeral ceremony for communicant and non-communicant members creates feelings that might help people to see the importance of confirmation.

*Serving in the Congregation:* Only full members give service to the congregation. These include: voting to elect congregation leaders or be elected, preaching, teaching, singing in a choir, participation in a prayer group, Christian service, witness to the Gospel, or cleaning the assembly hall or being an usher.[560] According to the principles of the congregation, one has to confirm her/his faith before taking part in any kind of ministry.

### 13.1.2  Making Disciples

Others responded the aim of confirmation ministry is to fulfil the great commission.
Rev. Yohans said:

> Our purpose is to make our believers disciples. Christ commissioned us to baptize all people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Not only this, but He said, teach them to obey what I have told you and make them disciples. Every saved Christian should be a mature disciple to make other disciples.[561]

The aim refers to Mat. 28:19-20 where Jesus did not only tell them to baptize, but to teach with the aim of making disciples. Since the EECMY does not practice rebaptism, those who join the EECMY as baptized members of other church bodies need confirmation instruction. Through the teaching ministry, the congregation tries to implement the Great Commission.

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[560] Isaac, Bethany, August 18 /2015.
[561] Yohans, Rehoboth, June 1/2015.

The congregation also assumes those who are confirmed will share their faith. I observed that sharing the Gospel or discussing about one's faith does not always need teaching. People try to convince and attract each other in their conversation of daily life. Those who do not have much knowledge about their faith also engage in informal discussions. However, making disciples transcends sharing one's faith with others, or being engaged in a discussion about faith. When the confirmation teachers say they are making disciples, they mean equipping the confirmands to become disciples who have knowledge about their faith.

Evangelist Jacob shares a similar idea: "Our aim is to produce members who are mature in their faith and true Disciples of Christ, but the way we are doing it might have some shortcomings."[562] For Jacob the aim of confirmation ministry is to bring the confirmands to a level of spiritual maturity. However, he believes the way they are doing might not bring the desired result. He did not explain the shortcomings, but he understood bringing people to Christian maturity and discipleship needs more effort than what they are doing.

### 13.1.3 Preparing for inheritance of the Kingdom of God

Rev. Aster, from Rehoboth, assumes the congregation prepares confirmands to enter the Kingdom of God:

> What we aim at in confirmation ministry is preparing people for the Kingdom of God. As Paul states in his epistle to Timothy, "…who wants all people to salvation and knowledge of the truth." So, the main purpose is to bring all people to come to salvation so that they inherit the Kingdom of God. In this process we make the church ready for Christ's return.[563]

Aster refers to Paul, 1 Tim. 2:4. She sees the confirmands as people who have faith in Christ and need to have knowledge of the truth which is the basic Christian teaching the congregation offers. She ponders that a person who become a believer need to be instructed to understand about her/his own salvation. According to Aster, the instructions or the knowledge of the Word of God lead people to salvation and attain eternal life. Aster refers to this process as the congregation's effort to prepare for second coming of Christ.

Unlike Aster, evangelist Deborah focused on the significance of Holy Communion to inherit the kingdom of God:

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[562] Jacob, Bethany, August 18 /2015.
[563] Aster, Rehoboth, August 5/2015.

> The aim of confirmation is making the confirmands ready for eternal life. Through confirmation, the confirmands get access to Holy Communion and by taking part in Holy Communion they will inherit the kingdom of God.[564]

As it was discussed in chapter five, there is high tendency of connecting Holy Communion with eternal life, mainly due to EOTC influence (see 5.3.2). In addition, most teachers use Jn. 6:54-56 to emphasize the importance of taking Holy Communion to access eternal life. The EOTC utilize this text to support their doctrine of transubstantiation.

### 13.1.4 Strengthening Faith

Some teachers said, "The main aim is to make people know about their faith and confirm it."[565] The aim was seen to be strengthening and explaining the faith the confirmands had already accepted. The teaching enabled them to identify the foundations of their faith. Learning supported them in in this process. Three confirmation teachers shared a similar response:

> The main purpose is to make confirmands understand what they believe.[566] As it can be understood from its name, it is a means by which believers confirm their faith. Teaching the truth about Him in which we believe, and the basis of our faith is our responsibility.[567]

> In this process our main objective is to make confirmands grasp the truth, confirm their faith, and live accordingly. The lessons are based on this fact."[568]

According to these teachers, the confirmands' understanding and knowledge about Christian faith and their experience of faith is diverse. Hence, the first thing they need to know is the basic doctrines of faith, so they have an understanding about what they believe. In addition, the teaching is intended to help them differentiate their own doctrine from other Christian denominations and settle ambiguities related to their prior religious practices. The knowledge they get through the confirmation course enables them to comprehend the faith they have accepted. The process does not end in confirmation; the confirmands are expected to live a Christian life that is worthy of the teaching. Moreover, their knowledge of salvation will hopefully continue to grow.

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[564] Deborah, Bethany, August 19/2015.
[565] Lukas, Rehoboth, July 29/2015. Abraham, Bethany, August 17/2015. Isaac, Bethany, August 18 /2015.
[566] Abraham, Bethany, August 17/2015.
[567] Isaac, Bethany, August 18 /2015.
[568] Lukas, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.

## 13.2  Confirmands expectations

The confirmands shared their expectations.

### 13.2.1  Faith and life

Some confirmands assert they attend confirmation course to gain knowledge and be equipped for a life that pleases God. Daniel explained:

> I attend confirmation class because I want to deeply know my faith and confirm it. The teaching protects and separates me from the secular world. So that I live my life as the Word of God commanded me to live. It also helps me to defend my faith against false teachings. Jesus is the only way, the truth, and the life. By learning the details, I can stand firm in my faith.[569]

Daniel wanted to protect his life from the sinful ways of this world. Being guided by the Word, he would be able to distinguish between an ungodly life and a Christian life. Choosing the right path is not easy without adequate knowledge. Daniel is convinced the teaching enables him to walk in the light. Understanding Jesus as the only way of salvation, truth and life /Jn 14:6). This enables him to deepen his faith and defend it against untruthful teaching.

Timothy, who shared Daniel's view, explained his aim saying:

> Attending confirmation is very important for my Christian life because through these teachings I learn how to live a holy life. I came from a worldly life. I was doing everything without knowing what is right or wrong. A person who does not know the love of Christ might practice all kinds of sin, but when he understands the love of God, he leaves behind all these practices and turns to God. By attending this course, I learn how to walk with Christ. I believe that this teaching helps me to take part in Holy Communion, which helps me to strengthen my relationship with Christ and inherit the kingdom of God.[570]

According to Timothy, the teaching helped him to live a God-pleasing life. "I came from a worldly life", is a common expression to of a life without faith in God, He was living a life against the Word of God. Instruction helped him to understand what a Christian life should look like. The love of God helped him to leave the ways of the world. He looked forward to the blessings of Holy Communion.

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[569] Daniel, Rehoboth. August 2/ 2015.
[570] Timothy, Bethany, August 22/2015.

### 13.2.2 *Knowledge and service*

Most of the confirmands I interviewed aimed at learning the Word of God in-depth and serving in the congregation:

> Unlike some people who may come to church to get a graveyard, I do not care if I am buried anywhere. Naturally, if a person dies, the flesh dies and the soul joins Paradise. For me membership does not matter. By the way, I did not lack membership in the Orthodox Church. But I was not sure if I am saved and I did not know much about the Word of God. I have to learn God's truths in order to come closer to God and confirm my salvation. Then I want to preach the Gospel and be a worker in this congregation.[571]

Paul compares practices with other denominations. In towns different religious groups have their own graveyards, there is no common cemetery. When a person dies, the place of burial is based on her/his religious membership. I observed the question of burial place for a person who does not belong to any religious group is a challenge. Therefore, it is very important to be part of religious group as this has high social value in the community. As Paul mentioned, some people join churches to become members and to secure a burial place.

In the early history of the EECMY, Christians with an evangelical conviction decided to establish their own church when the EOTC denied them a burial place.[572] The EOTC prohibits members of the evangelical churches to be buried in their cemeteries. Paul is special in the sense that a burial place was not decisive in his relationship with God. He was not looking for a church affiliation since he was already a member of the EOTC. His aim was to learn the Word of God. Until recently, Scripture reading, liturgy, and preaching in the EOTC was conducted in the Geez language. Reading and interpreting the Bible was the task of the clergy. Instead, Paul wanted to have a clear understanding of his own salvation by learning the basics of Christian faith and come closer to God. Paul then wanted to serve God by witnessing to the Gospel for non-believers and become a preacher. Confirmation was a foundation to strengthen his faith and make his vision true.

A young confirmand, Lydia, shared her aim of attending the course:

> I attend the confirmation course for two aims. First, I grew up in the congregation, attending Sunday school and singing in Sunday school classes, but to continue my service as a choir member, confirmation is mandatory. Second, I just wanted to know in-depth about my faith. Though I am known as a member of the Mekane Yesus Church by my friends in school, I do not

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[571] Paul, Bethany, August 21/2015.
[572] Arén, *Evangelical pioneers,* 222.

know my faith in detail. I want to know about the teaching Mekane Yesus Church follows for my own understanding and also to share it with others.[573]

As a baptized member, Lydia was permitted to sing in a choir as a child and teenager. But she cannot continue unless she is confirmed. She might know some of the teaching from Sunday school, but it is through the confirmation course she can improve her knowledge. The existence of different Christian denominations confuses many believers. Without adequate knowledge it is hard to differentiate between right and wrong doctrines. I observed confirmands raising questions about the teaching of different Christian denominations. They want to know what unites and what divides the denominations. Lydia has also a missionary zeal as she want to share her faith with others.

### 13.2.3 Witness

It appears that most confirmands have a desire to witness. This is motivation for joining a confirmation course. Hannah and Solomon said:

> First, we need to know our own stand before knowing that of others. After confirming our faith, we will go and witness the good news to others.574 We can also argue logically based on the knowledge we got.575

Hannah, from Rehoboth, wanted to know in whom she believed, this was the first aim; then, she wanted to learn about other denominations. Knowledge helped her to confirm her faith. As one who has the light does not put it under the table, sharing the Gospel with others was her second motive for attending confirmation. Almost all the confirmands I interviewed had the interest of sharing the Gospel with non-believers. This motive may be a result of teaching and encouragement.

Solomon shared the same idea. He wanted to know differences in doctrine to be able to conduct a meaningful discussion. Arguing for and against one's religion is part of the daily conversation. When Solomon says he can argue logically, he says having adequate knowledge helps him to conduct a good argument.

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[573] Lydia, Bethany, August 21/2015.
[574] Hannah Rehoboth, August 13/2015.
[575] Solomon, Rehoboth, July 30/2015.

## 13.3  Interpretation and assessment

According to the teachers, the aim of confirmation ministry is to make the confirmands full church members, make disciples, prepare people for the Kingdom of God, expand the Kingdom through witness to Christ, help confirmands understand their Christian faith, and confirm the confirmands' faith.

The confirmands on their side attended the course to learn about their faith in depth and get access to eternity by taking part in Holy Communion. In addition, they wanted to take part in different congregational services including witnessing the Gospel to others.

The teachers' aims and the confirmands' expectations are interrelated but not overlapping. My interpretation and assessment focus on stated EECMY aims and the teachers' expressions of aims, and the interrelation between teachers' aims and confirmands expectations.

### 13.3.1  Church aims and teachers' aims

In chapter five I presented the EECMY's theological thinking on confirmation. I made aware of two perspectives. The first was the catechetical view of confirmation, with its emphasis on instruction and preparation for the first Communion. The second was the pietistic view of confirmation, with its emphasis on conversion, profession of faith in word and deed, and renewal of the baptismal covenant. In the EECMY the aim of confirmation ministry is stated in recently published teaching material:

> Confirmation ministry aims at helping the confirmands to understand basic
> Christian teaching and confirm their faith and bring them to membership, so
> that they live and serve in fellowship with the members of the congregation.[576]

This definition   reveals a goal for confirmation beyond the mere increase in knowledge and shows that both views of confirmation have a part to play in contemporary EECMY understanding. Most of the confirmands are baptized and have grown up in the church. Others come from different religious backgrounds. For all of them it is important to understand and affirm their faith.  The Amharic word for confirmation, "*Matsnat*", has more meaning than affirming, it has the idea of helping the confirmands to endure or sustain in faith. The  point  of bringing confirmands to full membership was presented above.

Aims are "statements that broadly and generally describe the direction and final overall achievements we aim at in our teaching and learning."[577] In line with this definition, the aims

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[576] EECMY, *Christian Education, Teacher's Manual*, 48.
[577] Redse, *An introduction to church teaching*, 119.

we opt to achieve from a specific teaching program determines the content and the method of teaching. Aims play an indispensable role in guiding the teaching learning process.

Most of the aims described by confirmation teachers are in line with the church's aim of confirmation. Becoming a full member includes preparing for Communion. The idea of preparing confirmands for eternal life seems to be an import from the Orthodox Church.

It is of interest to note that the teachers also aimed at making disciples. The question is if they thereby state an aim beyond what the church expects from a confirmation course. Their idea seems to be that by teaching the Word of God, they contributed towards a discipleship process. This aim would, however, include more than teaching the basics of faith. Ermias G. Mamo's point of view is that "the existing discipleship training in many churches comprise knowledge - based on information - focused teaching that does not take the whole life into consideration."[578] Making disciples involves shaping the whole life of the learners so they dedicate their life to Christ in words and deeds. In the EECMY there is a discipleship course after the confirmation course. This is optional.

The confirmation teachers do not seem to know the more recent EECMY material on confirmation. They may therefore aim at more than is expected and possible in a confirmation course.

### 13.3.2  Teacher's aims and confirmands' expectations

The confirmands express great expectations: "teaching protects me", teaching is "important for my Christian faith," "I learn to walk with Christ," "I want to learn my salvation," "I want to know in depth about my faith," "I want to be a witness."

Some confirmands attend confirmation courses expecting to learn how to live a life that pleases God. These confirmands are most probably new converts who want to learn how to live a life different from the life of unbelievers. The teaching of The Ten Commandments may meet these expectations. The motive of living a holy life and having a good behaviour as a Christian is not problematic by itself. However, overemphasizing the behavioural aspect instead of relying on the grace of God is not necessarily consistent with the core of Lutheran teaching, salvation by grace. "Without the grace, help and operation of the Holy Spirit through the Word, human beings are incapable either of believing or of resisting their natural impulse."[579] Emphasizing

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[578] Ermias G. Mamo, *The Maturing Church: An Integrated Approach to Contextualization, Discipleship and Mission*. (Carlisle; Langham Global Library, 2017), 146-147.
[579]  Nafzger, Samuel, H. et al, eds., *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran approach to Systematic Theology*, (Saint Louis, Concordia publ., 2017), 1044.

good behaviour instead of grace and forgiveness can easily lead young confirmands to despair or spiritual pride. Despair when they realize they can't obey the Law; pride if they mistakenly think they can.

Some confirmands expect that the confirmation course will strengthen their faith in God. This is a crucial point as we believe the Word has a power to draw us near to Him. The question is, however, if this strengthening of faith and a deepening of the relationship with the living Christ is achieved by having the catechism lectured. I would rather think that readings, prayer, and experience sharing would be helpful in this regard.

According to Mezirow the individual's expectations is of great importance as a starting point in all learning.[580] Focusing on the expectation or personal preference of each learner gives an opportunity for afterthought and a deeper understanding of the subject. The teacher and the process of learning would therefore have benefited from allocating time to talk about expectations. If some more space had been given for experience sharing and questions, or if some more time had been given to involve the confirmands in the teaching process (participation), I imagine that expectations could have been met in a better way. Involvement would have activated cultural forms of learning, familiar to all students.

## 13.4  Summary

This chapter has dealt with the teachers' aims and confirmands' expectations. Considering the great challenges of theoretical and practical kind, I come away with a surprisingly positive result. The teachers had great ideas for their work and the confirmands did not express any criticism. An improved pedagogical theory and practice, together with space to discuss expectations and experiences as Christians, seem to carry potential for improvement. Assessing the answers, it seems that the teachers' efforts are appreciated by the confirmands.

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[580]  Mezirow et al, Learning as transformation, 31

# 14  The outcome of confirmation ministry

EECMY' stated aim of the confirmation course is "to help confirmands understand the basic Christian teaching" (see 13.3.1). In addition, the hope is that the confirmands' faith is confirmed, that they become full members of the congregation and that they "live and serve in fellowship". This is very much to ask and not easy to measure.

As my research so far has shown, the teachers face enormous challenges in their effort to achieve these aims. Weak pedagogical practice, language problems, large classes, diverse age and educational backgrounds, lack of teaching materials are among the challenges. Against this background it would be of value to know if the church's confirmation ministry is of any help. I asked the teachers their opinion of the outcome of confirmation ministry and the attachment the confirmands would establish with the congregation after being confirmed. My question to the confirmands was diversified as two questions: "How has the teaching impacted your life?" "After completing the course, how do you intend to attend and participate in serving the congregation?" The questions were designed to find possible effects of the teaching in the life of the confirmands at the completion of the course.

## 14.1  Outcome: teachers' perspective

The teachers observe changes in some of the confirmands' lives. Outward signs of change are visible. As such they may be an indirect way of seeing some effect of their teaching.

### 14.1.1  No change

The teachers who claimed there was no effect in the life of the confirmands described:

> Most of the confirmands complete the course, but I don't see any change in their lives. They attended the class just because they are commanded by their families or by the congregation when they are at the right age. They think that it is a kind of path they have to go in order to claim membership. Only a few of them are dedicated in their life and service after completing the course.[581]

Mathew's comment is referring to confirmands who are baptized and raised in the congregation. Mathew was not happy about the progress of these teenagers as they did not show any change in their lives. They seemed to know church life, and therefore they did not take the teaching seriously.

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[581] Mathew, Rehoboth, July 30/2015.

Christian families encourage and may even force their children to attend confirmation instruction in order that their children remain firm in their faith and might not be attracted by other teachings or unbelief. The congregation also commands the teenagers to attend confirmation, because there is an age limit set by the congregation. Those who come with this kind of pressure might not see the importance as the desire to attend did not come from within themselves. These confirmands join the course to obey their parents or to submit to the congregation rules; they may, therefore, think of confirmation as a rite of passage or as a criterion for membership, and as a result, there might be no observable change in their personal life.

 Mathew mentioned that only few confirmands, show love for the Word of God, prayer, and interest in taking part in the congregation services.[582]  According Matthew these expressions of Christian life are perceived as a positive outcome of the confirmation course. However, for different reasons, not all confirmands demonstrated changes of this kind in their lives.

Evangelist Jacob, from Bethany, was of the opinion the course did not make any impact on the life of confirmands:

> Christ said that a tree could be known by its fruit not by its leaves. If the confirmands have been taught and understood the Christian teachings properly, why do we see broken marriages or divorce among our members? Besides, there is no true unity and love as the church of Christ. People are divided by ethnic groups and languages, there is no difference between Christians and non-Christians.[583]

Jacob refers to Luke 6:43-46, to explain that the confirmation course has not brought the desired outcome. A tree should not be judged by its appearance, as some trees have the same kind of leaves. For example, the orange and the lemon trees are difficult to distinguish unless one sees the fruit. In the same way Jacob is saying that people's lives are not to be judged by the quantity of Christian teaching they have received but by the quality of Christian life that they live.

### 14.1.2  Temporary change

Evangelist Joshua from Rehoboth said:

> Even though it is God who evaluates and sees the fruit of our work, I look at this from two angles. On the one hand, the church is impacting the spiritual life of the confirmands in a good way through her teaching. On the other hand, I feel that our congregation has not done enough. By this I am not blaming

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[582] Mathew, Rehoboth, July 30/2015.
[583] Jacob, Bethany, August 18 /2015.

anyone. If I talk from my own teaching experience, some years back, I was teaching about sixty confirmands who were being supported by the 'Compassion project.' A majority were teenagers, and it was difficult to handle them. Besides, they were from different religious backgrounds. They came to 'Compassion' just to get food and educational support. It was difficult to teach them, and I never expected that the teaching had any impact on their lives. But when I see the outcome, some of them became active Christians and are serving in congregations. The depressing part is that others left their faith. I even see some of them on the streets, because we have a weakness in good follow up. We do not know the whereabouts many of the confirmed members.[584]

Joshua teaches and serves according to the responsibility given to him. Since he does not see the fruit immediately, he leaves it to the Lord to judge. Joshua appreciates what the congregation is doing through her ministry. Teaching the basics of the Christian faith has brought growth and change in the spiritual life of the confirmands. However, as he saw it, the change seems to fade in some of the students after a while because the congregation fails to nurture and follow up.

The group mentioned was unique. They came in search of support provided by Compassion International,[585] an organization which provides support to economically vulnerable children. Rehoboth congregation is among its partners. Accordingly, the children were expected to attend a confirmation course. The children were between 13 and 15 years of age and more than sixty in number with a variety of denominational backgrounds. Joshua did not expect that his teaching would bring any positive impact. He recognized, however, an impact after observing some were successful, both spiritually, educationally, and in congregational services.

The annual statistical report of the congregation gives the impression that the number of confirmands who complete the course is high. But Joshua said that the congregation does not know whether they attend worship services after confirmation or note. Rev. Abraham of Bethany congregation commented:

> I observe the spiritual development of those who are confirmed by looking at the service they render in the congregation. But not all of them become active members and voluntary workers. We are active in bringing people to

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[584] Joshua, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.

[585] Compassion International is a child-advocacy ministry that brings compassionate people in touch with poor people. The ministry helps children from spiritual, economic, social, and physical poverty. The goal is to make children responsible and fulfilled adults. Compassion associates with churches and denominations, Compassion's work in Ethiopia began in 1993. Currently, more than 89,800 children participate in more than 390 child development centers. Compassion International, Retrieved 16th January 2018 from https://www.compassion.com/about/where/ethiopia-facts.htm

membership, but we have a weakness in bringing members to Christian maturity.[586]

Spiritual development is measured by activity in the congregation. The participation in worship and service proves the confirmands have matured spiritually. If the confirmands do not show any activity, it is perceived as spiritual immaturity. Abraham indicated the number of active members and voluntary workers was small compared to the number of those who completed the confirmation course. He pointed out that the congregation has weakness in making good follow-up and providing lifelong learning.

Like Joshua, Abraham and other teachers had noticed confirmation ought to be part of something that continues, not only an education to be completed at a certain time.

### 14.1.3  Spiritual and moral change

There were teachers who did recognize changes in the confirmands' spiritual, social, and moral lives. Rev. Aster described the changes she observed:

> I have seen great change in the whole life of the confirmands. Many have become active in prayer and are living good Christian lives. For instance, couples who were about to divorce have been reconciled and their marriage is restored. The status of women in this community has also improved. Women are used to being degraded in this community. Men do not want to sit or eat with women. Some women confess that the way their husbands used to treat them changed after attending the course. The women don't want to be idle. They want to serve in the congregation. Our members are also faithful in paying their tithes because they learnt about it in class.[587]

As Aster indicated the teaching has brought both spiritual and socio-cultural changes in the lives of confirmands. They might have been motivated by teaching. Aster also noted changes of behaviour. She might have observed how the confirmands practiced Christian life. She was sure the teaching had influenced their lives.

Family life is an area of importance. Aster brought awareness of how teaching about marriage had changed the confirmands' understanding of marriage and the status of women in the community. In the lecture about marriage, the congregation stresses that divorce is a prohibited practice among Christian couples. If couples have a marriage problem, the congregational leaders try to reconcile the couple through counselling and prayer. Divorce only takes place if the couple goes to court instead of seeking help from the congregation.

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[586] Abraham, Bethany, August 17/2015.
[587] Aster, Rehoboth, August 5/2015.

The congregation is found in a city which has members from different ethnic groups. Even though Aster avoided mentioning any specific group, it is common among some of them to deny women equal status with men. Despite their enormous contribution to the well-being of families and society, women have a low status and their roles are unrecognized. As a long standing social tradition among some ethnic groups a woman do not sit together with men, even in their own house. If men (including a husband) are sitting in the house of a woman, she has to stay in the kitchen, or on the floor to show her respect. During meals, women and men eat separately. Women eat with the children after serving the men. Moreover, domestic violence, polygamous marriages, deprivation of economic and social rights are perceived as normal practices.

Tithes is another area of change. Communicant members are not forced to give tithes, but they offer willingly. The biblical background of giving tithes and other gifts is explained in class. Teaching has resulted in responsible and faithful Christians.

Evangelist Mary observed:

> I am sure that teaching changes the spiritual life of the confirmands because the Word of God has power, but it is hard to measure. What I observe is that their way of clothing and their hair style at the beginning and at the end of the course has changed. I am happy to see such changes. Usually, in relation to clothing, Muslim and Orthodox Christians are better in dressing nicely when they go to a religious place than those from the evangelical backgrounds. The evangelicals are not strict and have no special dressing rules. I observed their eagerness looking forward to the day of confirmation. They get dressed nicely and some put on traditional clothes.[588]

The Word of God has power to transform the lives of the learners. As there are no means to measure this exactly, Mary indicated changes in attitudes and values. Among the visible changes, she observed the change in clothing. One of the challenges of Christian youth is their interest in fashion. Due to peer pressure, youth feel rejected if they do not dress in certain ways. Likewise, hairstyle also matters a lot, both for boys and girls. According to Mary, the confirmands change their dressing code and their hair style while attending class.

The Orthodox have special dressing codes for church, and Muslim men and women also have their own dressing code when they go to mosque; however, there is no special dressing codes among the evangelicals, and Mary does not appreciate the freedom thus displayed. There are advantages in the sense that people feel free to wear any kind of clothes they have. Those

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[588] Mary, Bethany, August 20/2015.

who are poor are not challenged to buy special clothes to come to church. The disadvantage is some people misuse their freedom and come to church with improper clothes and hairstyles, which can distract the attention of worshipers. Mary sees the decent dressing code of the confirmands as a positive outcome and also the traditional clothes the confirmands put on the day of confirmation.

### 14.1.4 *Attachment to the congregation*

My last interview question related to the confirmands' attachment to the congregation after the confirmation course. The teachers commented on the short-time and the long-time effect. Rev. Lukas said:

> Our congregation was facing a problem of losing contact with the confirmands after confirmation until we began the discipleship class. We advised and encouraged all of them to take part in the course. The discipleship class helped them to link up with the congregation. After completing the class, each of them will get involved in the congregation's different ministries according to their spiritual gifts. However, this doesn't mean that there is no gap. Some leave the congregation and join other denominations due to peer pressure.[589]

It is not clear when the congregation started the post-confirmation course.[590] Confirmation culminated in bringing confirmands to full membership. This is seen as a great source of joy for the congregation. The confirmands feel they have reached the apex of congregational teaching and may not see the need to continue their learning. Realizing the need for follow up, the congregation designed a discipleship course to equip the members for ministry and make them feel at home. However, not all who were confirmed came to the discipleship course. According to the minister, peer pressure influenced the youngest. Becoming part of peer group is important to develop a sense of belonging and participation in social and spiritual activities. On the other hand, peer pressure may cause the youth to change their convictions and go in a different direction. In the case of the confirmands, some were attracted by other congregations. Those who remain continue with the discipleship course and a wish to serve the congregation. The course helped them to identify their spiritual gifts. The congregation has space for those who want to participate in the different ministries, like choir, prayer group, cleaning, diaconia and evangelism.

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[589] Lukas, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.
[590] The post confirmation course is named "Discipleship Course" in Bethany while it is named "Ministry Course" in Rehoboth.

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Evangelist Joshua, from Bethany, commented on the loss of attachment:

> Most confirmands continue their engagement with the congregation after confirmation, but when they go to university, they may change their membership. Newly established churches influence the students on campus more than the EECMY. Encountering students from different denominations influences them. Even when they come for vacation, they attend other churches. If you ask me the reason for this, our church is not doing enough for students on campus. Pentecostals dominate student activity at the universities.[591]

The EECMY has university and college student ministry at all levels of the church. But for different reasons, the ministry is not active. The services rendered by charismatic oriented churches attract them. Being away from home, without the supervision of parents or the congregation, the students feel free to change their denomination. EECMY congregations might not be found close to the university or college, and it might be costly and time consuming for the students to go there. As a result, they attend the churches they find nearby. Here they find fellowship which lead some of them to change their affiliation.

Evangelist Jacob pointed at the weakness of the workers as a cause for poor attachment:

> The attachment with the congregation after confirmation is poor. If sixty are confirmed, only thirty or forty will continue the ministry class and only twenty complete the course. Besides, though I teach them, I do not know each of them personally. I do not know where they spend their time, because our attachment is limited to one-hour classes. It is as if we are responsible only to teach. We lost many souls due to a lack of proper follow up.[592]

Unlike the other teachers Jacob's statement was more serious. He was aware of the problem of building good relationships because the classes were too big. This influenced the confirmands' sense of belonging. The congregation follows the same approach every year without any concern. The three-stage teaching plan of the congregation (salvation, confirmation, and ministry) seems to them adequate in bringing believers to maturity. Some of the workers realized the weakness of this program but were reluctant to change as it might require time, commitment, material and human resources. The responsibility they were given by the congregation was to teach. They do that and feel they have done what is expected from them. On the one hand, it seems impossible to follow up because the confirmands are so many. On the other hand, they might not notice how many of them they miss. By saying, "We have lost many souls," the evangelist might not be talking about those who changed their denomination.

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[591] Joshua, Rehoboth, July 29/2015.
[592] Jacob, Bethany, August 18 /2015.

He is referring to those who have ceased coming to church at all. Bringing believers to spiritual maturity is not achieved only through transferring knowledge from the teachers to the learners, it is a process concerned about the whole life. When the members lack the care and concern of the congregation, they easily leave the church. Isaac, a voluntary teacher, confirms this:

> After completing confirmation course only half of them stay in the congregation. Others change denominations because our congregation lacks the capacity to give responsibilities to all who complete the course. The ministries are limited when compared to the number of confirmed. They also were not given adequate attention and follow-up, and as a result they move to other churches to find good fellowship and to participate in ministry. Most members in the surrounding evangelical and Pentecostal churches have an EECMY background.[593]

According to Isaac, only half of the confirmands continue with the discipleship course. Even after attending this course, many of them leave because the congregation does not assign them to any ministry. The confirmands learn with the aim of becoming full members, while those who continue with the discipleship course aim at serving the congregations. The congregation has a limited number of tasks, and it is beyond its capacity to assign all of them for service. As a result, they move to a fellowship where they can be actively engaged in ministry.

The other thing missing is follow-up. When people become members, they feel secure both spiritually and socially. Being a member, they are part of God's family. Here they can share happiness and sorrow. Some might have been expelled by their family because of their faith. These individuals feel lonely, and therefore wish to have a good relationship with congregation members and workers. When the congregation fails to meet their expectations, they leave the congregation, looking for better care and attention. Isaac's answer suggests that other evangelical denominations might give a better service in caring and creating fellowship opportunities for their members.

Evangelist Mathew said that "the other big problem is that our congregation does not work with the parents of the confirmands. That creates a gap."[594] Except this saying, none of the teachers mentioned the importance of engaging parents in confirmation ministry. In the case of teenagers, the congregations would have benefited from working with the parents. That would help to establish an affiliation to the congregation. Helping the confirmands to keep faith and a lasting relationship with the congregation should not only be the responsibility of the congregation.

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[593] Isaac, Bethany, August 18 /2015.
[594] Mathew, Rehoboth, July 30/2015.

As seen above, the teachers saw that some confirmands establish a good relationship with the congregation while more than half confirmands leave the EECMY for different reasons including peer pressure, lack of follow up from congregation side and lack of community engagement.

## 14.2 Outcome and attachment: confirmands' perspective

Some of the confirmands said that the spiritual and behavioural changes that took place in their lives was because of confirmation teaching while others did not experience change. They also shared their interest in engaging in congregating ministry after completing the course.

### 14.2.1 No change

Some confirmands expressed the teaching had not brought any change to their lives. Lydia from Bethany said:

> I grew up in the church and knew most of the topics already. I have not experienced any change in my life as a result of teaching. I attended the course because it is the church's regulation. After completing the teaching I will continue my service in the choir.[595]

Lydia had background knowledge from Sunday school. Like the confirmation course there is no standardized curriculum for Sunday school, but a teaching based on Bible-stories is conveyed. The teaching touches topics of ethics, prayer, faith, and salvation. In the confirmation course these lessons are given in more detail. The course helps to recall former knowledge and deepen their understanding. Lydia is a choir member and in order to continue her service she has to attend the confirmation course.

Dina from Rehoboth shares this opinion: "My family are Christian, and I believe in God. I did not find any special thing in the teaching. I attended the course just to obey my parents."[596] Dina was baptized and raised in the congregation. For her the course made no difference. The motivation to attend confirmation course came from her parents. She had little motivation to take part in the course. She seems to have thought she knew everything from before.

It may be that their perception or the way the topics were communicated was the cause for the lack of change. Having grown up in Christian families, they might not have made their mind ready to learn something new. Besides, both attended confirmation course because they

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[595] Lydia, Bethany, August 21/2015.
[596] Dina, Rehoboth, August 12/ 2015

were urged to do so by their parents and church leaders. The way the course was organized also matters. They were taught the same way as in Sunday school, sitting in the same classroom, might be taught by the same teachers with similar teaching methods. Another approach might have made a difference. As it is, there was little room for new experiences, and the confirmands have little opportunity to develop social and spiritual skills. All these factors contribute towards the scant outcome for some of the confirmands.

### 14.2.2  Change in practice

For Timothy, the teaching changed his life and corrected misunderstandings about one of the practices in the congregation during worship:

> I saw many changes in my life since I started the confirmation course. I did not know the importance of attending Sunday worship on a regular basis, but I learned that it helps to strengthen our fellowship with God and with each other. The teaching changed my view about many things. For instance, I did not know why Christians should give money to the congregation. I was wondering if the gift is for God or for the ministries. But I have now learnt the biblical basis for giving tithes and why the church practices giving. I also began to offer. I want to serve as an usher after completing the course.[597]

Timothy gradually came to understand the necessity of building his relationship with God and the blessings that come from regular attendance. It seems the teaching changed his way of thinking. Timothy was uncertain about the gifts offered. People without adequate Bible knowledge might be confused about the importance of offering. On one hand, the church teaches God has everything and is the source of all good gifts. On the other hand, the church asks for gifts. Is God poor? Why does the church collect money? Since all teaching in the confirmation course is based on the Bible, Timothy learnt the biblical foundation of giving in order to carry out the congregational ministries. When he completes the course Timothy wants to be responsible for seating the congregants and maintaining the order and security of worship service by being an usher.

Martha told about the confidence she developed in sharing their faith:

> Before coming to confirmation class, I had no confidence in sharing the Word of God or to talk about my faith with other people. I did not know much about my faith. The teaching equipped me with more knowledge about the Bible and the Christian faith. The knowledge made me confident to talk about my faith without any hesitation because the teachers clarified all the lessons and I got

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[597] Timothy, Bethany, August 22/2015.

answremos for many of my questions. So after completing the course I will witness the Gospel.[598]

Discussing religion or faith is part of daily conversations. A fair knowledge of the basics of Christian faith is essential to participating in this kind of conversation. The course includes teaching about other Christian denominations and religions. The aim is double. First, there is what is called "sheep stealing," that is attracting members of another church with special offers. For example, the Pentecostal church members attract EECMY members by telling them they will be baptized by the Holy Spirit and will speak in tongues if they join them. Those who do not have adequate knowledge easily change church affiliation. If the EECMY teaches her doctrine, the confirmands might be able to resist when they hear different teaching. Secondly, knowing the teachings of other Christian denominations will help the confirmands to witness to the Gospel. Martha grew up in the congregation, but she had not enough knowledge to enable her to share her faith in daily conversations. Teaching opened her eyes and heart to a better understanding which enabled her to participate in faith- related discussions with confidence. She has an ambition to tell about Christ to others when she has completed the course.

### 14.2.3  Spiritual and behavioural change

> My behaviour was a little bit difficult before I joined confirmation class I pretended to be a good son before my family, but in relation to other people my behaviour was different. Now those things are changed. As a result of the salvation course and then confirmation, I have seen a change in my behaviour. After am confirmed, I want to serve God by preaching the Gospel and teaching youth.[599]

Solomon, a young confirmand from Rehoboth, does not explicitly explain what kind of bad behaviour he refers to, but he realized it was wrong. Normally, parents do not tolerate children who are engaged in gambling, addictions, theft etc. So he acted as a good son at home. A child with a bad behaviour is not only an offence to the parents, but to the community and the society at large. The parents will be offended because they will earn a bad reputation in the community. If the parents discover the bad habits of their children, they take serious measures, including harsh physical discipline. Fear of such measures made Timothy behave properly at home, but otherwise outside. The confirmation course helped him realize what he was doing wrong, and his life changed in the process of attending the course. Based on the changes he has discovered

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[598] Martha, Bethany, August 24/2015.
[599] Solomon Rehoboth, July 30/2015.

in his life Titus wants to preach the word of God that has power to transform people's life. He has also an interest in teaching and guiding youth.

Titus, another young confirmand, gave voice to a similar experience:

> I was not praying. I even did not know the importance of prayer. I learnt that prayer means communicating with God and that Christians must pray continuously. I now pray in the morning and in the evening. I used to think only about worldly things and I used to drink locally made beer. I have stopped doing all these things and now I am a changed person because of the lessons I learnt. I want to serve in prayer group when I finish the course.[600]

The Lord's Prayer is the theme under which the confirmands learn about prayer. It is not easy to practice prayer without understanding. His response indicates he did not grow up in a Christian home where prayer is practiced. When he said, "I was thinking about worldly things," it shows he has made a distinction between his previous life and the present. By "worldly thinking" he is referring to an attitude only concerned about food, clothing, shelter, and something extra for leisure and security. It is a self-centred kind of thinking. An example of this kind of life is the addiction to alcohol. The course enabled Titus to stop drinking and live according to the Word of God. Titus want to join the prayer group may be motivated by the lesson about Lord's Prayer.

What can be understood from the response of Titus and Solomon is that neither the congregation workers nor their parents knew they were addicted. They kept it secret because these practices were not accepted by their parents, the congregation, or the community. Therefore, the change they experienced was invisible to the teachers and parents. The change was not brought about by counselling, but by teaching.

In sum, most confirmands realized changes in their lives as an outcome of the confirmation course. The teaching impacted their spiritual life, ethics, behaviour, and social life. At the completion of the course most of them want to be engaged in congregational ministry.

## 14.3  Interpretation and assessment

My research questions intended to find out a possible outcome of the two congregations' confirmation ministry. The questions were open and served as an introduction to semi-structured interviews. As there are no exams it is difficult to assess whether the confirmands

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[600] Titus, Bethany, August 23/ 2015.

had grasped "basic Christian education" or not. Likewise, it is difficult to assess whether the confirmands' faith has been confirmed, but a life in service and fellowship may be more visible. Related to the second task of practical theological methodology the task in this sub-chapter is to answer the question: "Why is this going on in this way?" (1.4.3), or, focused on this chapter, "Why do the teachers and confirmands describe the outcome of the confirmation course in this way?" Let me structure my interpretation and assessment of my findings along four points relating to my frames of reference, chapter 2-5. The first relates to transformation, the second to the age factor, the third to the relationship between confirmands' life experience and theology and the fourth to congregational responsibility and engagement in confirmation ministry.

### 14.3.1 Transformation

Reading the confirmands' answers comes as a surprise. As my findings show, confirmation ministry in the two EECMY congregations in focus meet almost impossible challenges. From a theoretical perspective the greatest challenge is the pedagogical approach. Lecturing, without giving proper space for questions and experience sharing, may not be the best way of doing things. My first point may therefore be that acquisition pedagogics work to some extent. This may be because this is the teaching method the confirmands know from school. From first class to twelfth grade, they are accustomed to listen and memorize. They bring this experience to confirmation class and seem to memorize the basics of faith.

The answers, both from teachers and confirmands, show an impact on the lives of many, both the spiritual, behavioural, and social life. As an example, one of the confirmands said: "The teaching equipped me with more knowledge about the Bible and the Christian faith." In transformative learning theory changes in cognition is important as it contributes towards "perspective transformation".[601] Cognitive change that mainly focuses on the mental process or the way the learners think, governs changes in emotion and action. This happens when the learners leave behind or adjust their taken-for-granted (old) meaning perspectives and hold new ones.[602] According to the confirmands, confirmation ministry may have helped some confirmands to mature as Christians and therefore change on certain points.

Some confirmands understood the importance of taking part in Sunday services: "I learned that it helps to strengthen our fellowship with God and with each other."[603] Worship practices and

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[601] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions,* 177.
[602] Ibid. 177.
[603] Timothy, Bethany, August 22/2015.

ritual repeated each Sunday does not present itself as very attractive to young people. They seem to appreciate the lively Pentecostal-charismatic meetings more. However, learning the meaning and the importance of worship in a Lutheran setting, made them appreciate their own background.

Teaching has had an impact on the prayer life of the confirmands. A deeper understanding of the meaning of each petition or prayer in the Lord's Prayer was helpful. The how, when and what to pray for enabled them to set off time for prayer and appreciate praying with others. Change in behaviour was also mentioned. "The teaching helped me to live a Christian life. "My behaviour was a little bit difficult before joining confirmation class … those things are changed now."[604] The teaching on The Ten Commandments is rich as a guideline of life.

> The Ten Commandments, rather than expressing human requirements, are the true fountain from which all good works spring, the true channel through which all good works must flow. Apart from these Ten Commandments no action or life can be good or pleasing to God no matter how great or precious it may be in the eyes of the world.[605]

The church teaches that marriage is for life. Those who have marriage problems are encouraged to come to church for counselling. Couples who were about to divorce have been reconciled and their marriage was restored as a result of teaching.

Rev. Aster, teaching in the congregation in southern Ethiopia had observed a change in the status of women.[606] This confirms an observation made by Arne Tolo in his study of the impact of the Gospel on Sidama culture:

> The work among women brought changes in the customs and thinking of the people. The relationship between men and women changed. Women began to take part in public meetings, which had never happened before.[607]

This kind of change took place in a culture that forbade women to sit or eat with their own husbands.[608] This cultural custom seems to change when they become Christians and learn that God created man and woman in His image. This has led to change in men's attitude towards women. In the congregation, men and women worship together. In a cultural perspective this is a real transformation of perspectives. These women use their freedom to serve God.

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[604]Solomon Rehoboth, July 30/2015.
[605] Nafzger et al., *Confessing the Gospel*, 1049-1050.
[606] Aster, Rehoboth, August 5/2015.
[607] Tolo, Sidama and Ethiopian, 161.
[608] Ibid, 161.

The outcome of confirmation ministry in the life of the confirmands is encouraging. The effort of confirmation teachers, contrary to all limitations, is remarkable and needs to be recognized.

### 14.3.2 Age and outcome

It will be recalled that until the church was established in 1959 and sometime afterwards, confirmation age was set to 17 or 18 years (see chapter 4). The idea was that the confirmands should reach a level of maturity before they attended Holy Communion. The modern school system forced teenagers to leave home and travel to cities for education. As the church wanted to reach them before leaving their home congregation, they lowered the confirmation age to 13 years. However, when the age of confirmation was reduced from 18 to 13 the church made no change in the curriculum. This change represents a challenge worth considering.

Some confirmation teachers claimed there was no visible outcome in the lives of the confirmands. They referred specifically to the case of teenage confirmands who are baptized and raised in the congregation.

To the extent that Ethiopian youth can be compared to European youth, an observation by Kati Niemelä, who conducted a study on the quality and effectiveness of confirmation training in Finland, found that most of the teenagers who attended confirmation training commented they have not experienced change in their life:

> Not much effect, my upbringing at home already gave me a religious base, and confirmation complemented that.[609] Not in any way at all. My attitude to God and the church has always been very stable and I need no confirmation or guidance in this, I do not feel that I learnt anything new in confirmation training and the lessons are stultifying.[610]

Some of her findings are identical with my own findings. Among the reasons for the lack of observable change may be mentioned: first, her respondents interpreted the question of effect of confirmation training to be merely an effect on the spiritual life.[611] As such little change could be observed.[612] In the case of my research, I did not ask only for spiritual change but also for change in general, including change in understanding, spiritual life and behaviour. However, the response I obtained looks like the response Niemelä got. Those who got the opportunity to learn and practice faith at home and in the congregation, responded that confirmation ministry

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[609] Niemelä: *Does Confirmation Training Really Matter?* 107.
[610] Ibid. 115.
[611] Ibid. 107.
[612] Ibid. 116-117.

hardly had any effect. Since they knew much of the content and had family habits of church attendance, there life for most part, already looked like the intended outcome of confirmation ministry.

Niemelä's findings indicate that age is a factor to be considered. One confirmand responded, "Age makes a difference, the older you get the more you understand."[613] The age of teenage confirmands in the EECMY is between thirteen and fifteen. This is a time of transition from adolescence to adulthood. Jean Piaget, the developer of cognitive theory and the stages of cognitive development, refers to this age as "formal operational thinking." The adolescent shows "the ability to think outside the box - to think of possibilities, not just present reality."[614] Lawrence Kohlberg, who developed the 'stages of moral development theory,' named this stage 'post-conventional morality,' where the adolescent starts to make autonomous moral decisions.[615] James Fowler, founder of "the faith development theory," states that the age between twelve and twenty is when the adolescent is able to use abstract ideas to determine meaning in life.[616] Therefore, the teen-age confirmands are in a transition process where they start to make autonomous decisions about life and are not willing to be told what they have to believe or do.

Commitment made at a later age would be based on a better understanding and be more lasting. Unless adolescents are provided with continuous Christian education that helps them to grow in faith, it is folly to take for granted that they will remain faithful to the church and their Lord. My point is to indicate how the age of confirmands contributes to the outcome and the attachment to the congregation. The EECMY could have met this challenge to some degree if they established confirmation classes for teenagers.

### 14.3.3  Life experience and outcome

Most of the confirmation teachers said the change in the life of the confirmands is both visible and invisible. Arthur C. Repp elaborates on this thought when she says:

> Not only does the Holy Spirit give the increase; he alone can evaluate whether the church actually attains the outcomes for which it strains. No instrument has been devised whereby church and home can accurately measure how well they are achieving objectives for spiritual growth.[617]

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[613] Niemelä: *Does Confirmation Training Really Matter?* 123.
[614] Dennis Dirks, "Faith Development", in *Introducing Christian Education,* ed. Anthony, 69.
[615] Ibid. 69.
[616] Ibid.76.
[617] Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran,* 197.

The Word of God has a power to transform all aspects of human life. But a maturing faith is not easy to observe. Still, I missed from the responses any indication of growth in faith or a deepened understanding their salvation.

James Fowler defines religious faith as "personal appropriation of relationship to God through and by means of religious tradition." Fowler also states three dimensions of living faith: First, faith is a dynamic pattern of personal trust in and loyalty to a centre of value. That means for Christians, God is the centre of value, whom they love, attach to, and to whom they devout their life. Second, faith is trust in and loyalty to images and realities of power. Living in an imperfect world full of uncertainty, people align themselves to greater power to feel sustained in life and death. Third, faith is trust and loyalty to a shared master story or core story.

As the confirmation teachers expressed, many leave the congregation after confirmation. One of the reasons for losing their affiliation to the congregation may be the focus on knowledge transmission, ignoring the spiritual and personal development of the confirmands. According to Osmer, there is a high emphasis on internalization of the doctrinal teachings of the church, while paying insufficient attention to personal construction and understanding.[618] In a theoretical perspective the teachers, applying an acquisitional approach puts emphasis on "knowledge, but seems to overlook what participatory learning theory would characterize as "knowing".

The economic, social, and political situation in which the confirmands live is not considered. Issues of interest to the confirmands, such as body and sexuality, violence and crime, friendship, justice and responsibility for others, would most likely be of great value.[619] Integrating issues of concern to the confirmands is of significance in stimulating motivation for actively engaging in learning. The motto of EECMY is "Serving the whole person." Gudina Tumsa, the most influential person in the development of wholistic theology, asserted that:

> …Theology must grow out of concrete daily experiences from our dealing with ordinary affairs of life as we experience them in our situation, in our cultural setting, in our economic life, in our political experience and in our social practice … lack of involvement is a denial of the goodness of creation and of the reality of incarnation.[620]

Here proclamation of the Gospel and Christian services are seen together. This theological perspective was not reflected in confirmation teaching.

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[618] Osmer, *Confirmation*, 89.
[619] Schweitzer et al. *Confirmation Work in Europe*, 252- 253.
[620] Eide, *Revolution and religion*, 119.

In transformative learning theory, the learner's experience is the starting point. Without considering and reflecting on the experiences of the learners, opportunities are lost. A crucial point in the theory of Swinton and Mowat is that practical theology takes human experience seriously because it is the place where the gospel is grounded, embodied, interpreted, and lived out.[621] Therefore, human experience ought to be a resource in the educational process.

### 14.3.4 Congregational engagement

Some confirmation teachers state that the changes they observed did not last. Niemelä's findings indicate similar results. Possible changes in the spiritual, behavioural, and moral life of the confirmands seems to fade through time, due to lack of religious support at home and due to peer pressure.[622] Peer pressure plays a decisive role in determining the sustainability of the changes during and after confirmation. This is acknowledged to some extent in the EECMY. After completing the confirmation course, the congregation has designed a discipleship course which is not mandatory. This is an effort to follow up the confirmation course. Confirmands who do not attend to the course are at risk.

My findings show that a reason for loss of attachment seems to be the lack of engagement by the parents and the congregations. The age of the confirmands in the EECMY is mixed; therefore, my study did not involve the role of parents in the confirmation process. However, in responding to my other questions, the teachers indicated that the congregations do not involve parents and congregation members in the ministry. Parents limit their involvement to sending the confirmands to class and taking part in the ceremony on confirmation day. Confirmation is, however, the responsibility of the whole congregation and should involve lay teachers, peers, mentors, parents and extended families as a confirming community: "The communion of saints, the body of Christ, is called to confirm one another in their faith, to proclaim instruct, educate, nourish and support one another."[623]

Lutheran teaching emphasizes that faith is strengthened through Word and Sacrament, but the process of confirmation requires the commitment of the whole faith community. The community possesses gifts, and they can contribute to strengthen the faith of the confirmands through teaching, prayer, witnessing and counselling. However, in the EECMY teaching is generally perceived as the task of congregation ministers.

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[621] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology,* 5.
[622] Niemelä, *Does Confirmation Training Really Matter?* 124.
[623] Everist, *The Church as Learning Community*, 201.

Transformative learning theory asserts that perspective transformation is a social process which involves sharing the views expressed by others and testing our new perspectives on friends, peers, and mentors.[624] In such a way, the reinforcement from family, friends, and community plays a key role in making transformation possible. In transformative learning, the teaching is not limited to the classroom. What transforms the meaning perspectives of the learners is their engagement in sharing experience and reflecting on it. The confirmation ministry of the EECMY should involve the whole community of faith in helping the confirmands to strengthen their faith.

Like in other cultures, African educational ideas and practices are rooted in family traditions. This involves parents, especially mothers, to be teachers and educators.[625] Thus, parents and families have a great potential in teaching and nurturing the spiritual life of children and youth. In Christian homes, family devotions might be practiced; however, when it comes to teaching, parents think that this is the responsibility of evangelists or ministers. As families send their children to school for secular education, they send their children to church, thinking the teachers know best how to teach. Unless the class teaching is backed by the love, care, support, prayer, fellowship and follow-up of family and the whole congregation confirmation ministry will suffer. My findings therefore indicate that more involvement of families and congregations would be beneficial for all. A family nurturing program could be useful.

## 14.4 Summary

This chapter has dealt with the personal outcome of confirmation ministry and the confirmands' attachment with the congregation. The confirmation teachers and confirmands explained the outcome of confirmation ministry by exemplifying the changes they observed in the lives of the confirmands. Some teachers and confirmands thought there was hardly any change. Most of the teachers and confirmands I interviewed, however, described changes in the spiritual and behavioural realm, but that some of these changes were invisible. The findings that point towards "no change" may in most cases refer to teenagers who are raised in Christian families and attended children Sunday school. The teaching method applied by the teachers, the age factor, and the lack of engagement by families and congregations are seen as contributing factors.

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[624] Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 185.
[625] Bame and Tchombe, *Handbook of African Educational*, 43.

# 15 Summary and conclusions

I introduced my thesis with an observation of a session of confirmation teaching in a congregation within the EECMY in Ethiopia. The starting point was deliberate as it indicated a basic feature of my approach, to start in human experience. This is a characteristic of Practical Theology (see 1.4). The theme of my thesis relates to a crucial aspect of the life of my church: *Confirmation ministry*. This concept is comprehensive in the sense that it includes the whole situation under investigation. That includes applied pedagogical theory, theological foundations, language, teaching manuals, numbers of confirmands in a class, the age-factor and other aspects influencing the situation.

The EECMY has shown rapid membership growth and that makes the church the largest Lutheran Church in the world. Several hundred thousand Ethiopians flow into the congregations of the EECMY every year and they become full members of the church when they are confirmed. Even though the EECMY has different teaching programs at congregational level, only the confirmation course is mandatory. That makes confirmation ministry a crucial aspect of the life of the church. In this final chapter, I will reflect on the process of research and assess some major findings.

## 15.1 Core task and research questions

The teaching ministry of congregations has traditionally been one of the sub-disciplines under the overarching umbrella of Practical Theology. In line with recent developments in Practical Theology methodology, I made a situation in the life of the church my starting point, in this case, the actual experience of confirmands and confirmation teachers. The core task of my thesis was formulated as: *An investigation and critical assessment of contemporary confirmation ministry in two EECMY congregations.* The concepts of 'critical' and 'assessment' implied evaluation of the quality of ongoing confirmation ministry.

The core task was approached by employing the proposed overarching methodological approach in Practical Theology, relating to Gadamer's hermeneutical circle. This envisions an interpretive process unfolding as four sub-tasks. I focused on the two first sub-tasks. The first is the *descriptive-empirical*. Starting with observation of contemporary practices, the first sub-task aimed at answering the question, *what is going on in confirmation ministry in the congregations in focus?* To assist me in my enquiry I made use of tools employed in qualitative research. I followed Swinton and Mowat's (2006) proposal to apply qualitative research methods to fulfil the tasks mentioned to answer the question. Here Kvale and Brinkmann's

(2009) theoretical and practical guide to the craft of qualitative research interviewing served me well. This approach, applied through semi-structured interviews and observations, enabled me to discover how confirmation ministry is practiced in the EECMY congregations. Based on initial observations and a small pilot study I developed a questionnaire addressed to both confirmation teachers and confirmands.

Since the aim of qualitative research is to make an in-depth study of a phenomena rather than studying a large sample, I chose two EECMY congregations. The rationale behind my choice of congregations was to represent the two major areas of growth in the EECMY, the western and southern parts of the country (see 1.5). The research participants were confirmation teachers and confirmands who were attending confirmation courses. The gaps and contradictions between the responses of the teachers and the confirmands to the same questions helped me to observe the situation critically.

The second sub-task referred to the *cultural-contextual interpretation* of the results of the descriptive-empirical investigation. The main question was: *why is this going on in this way*? To answer this question, the educational context of confirmation ministry in Ethiopia was explored. Context included traditional approaches to education (African traditional and Orthodox Church), the educational policy of the state, the legacy of the missions and the educational policy of the EECMY (see chapters 2 & 4).

The cultural-contextual interpretation included a presentation of the theological frameworks of confirmation teaching in Ethiopia (chapter 5). These frameworks include Lutheran thinking on confirmation as well as Orthodox and Pentecostal theologies relating to Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. This presentation was used to understand and interpret answers by teachers and confirmands. Referring theologies, I referred to the Bible and the EECMY's confessional basis. As such I touched the third sub-task, the normative. At the same time this means that I did not move to the third sub-task, *the normative*. I did not engage in a normative assessment of my findings as this would imply a broader exegetical and systematic treatment of the issues involved. This lies beyond the scope of my investigation.

On some points I have suggested what lies in the fourth sub-task, *the pragmatic*, where I point at challenges that arise from my findings.


## 15.2 Theoretical frameworks

In Part I, I developed theoretical frameworks. These related to pedagogical theory (chapter 2), qualitative research methods as a tool within the larger methodological framework Practical

theology (chapter 3), EECMY history and practice related to confirmation (chapter 4) and Lutheran theology on confirmation (chapter 5). Investigating EECMY published manuals on confirmation teaching, I tried to find out what the church defines as the aim of its confirmation ministry. The most recent publication indicates that the aim goes beyond the mere transfer of knowledge.

> Confirmation ministry aims at helping the confirmands to understand basic Christian teaching and confirm their faith and bring them to membership, so that they live and serve in fellowship with the members of the congregation.[626]

Reflecting on this aim(s) the question is how you teach in order to achieve more than the transfer of knowledge. Was there a pedagogical theory that could guide me? Finding an appropriate theory was difficult because the confirmation classes under investigation were so diverse. Most learning theories are designed for specific age groups, based on the mental, physical and psychological development of the learners. The theories also focus on one aspect like behaviour or cognition. Mezirow's Transformative learning theory looked promising as it focuses on the relationship between learning and change, encouraging students' experiences and dialogue. The theory, developed in a Western culture, may seem strange in Ethiopian cultures of learning. But I found it useful as it opened new perspectives on what is going on in the teaching ministry of the EECMY.

I gradually came to realize that pedagogical traditions in Ethiopia are, roughly speaking, related to two other theories. The first is what the educational theorist Anna Sfard characterizes as "participatory". That is the educational approaches familiar to the cultures of southern and western Ethiopia. This approach plays a great role in transforming the life of the learners. Unlike the lecturing method, the participatory approach involves intellectual, physical and behavioral training categorized by age. This type of learning helps the learners to experiment, create, discover and communicate new knowledge. The pedagogics of "participation" is familiar to the teachers and would make a difference in confirmation ministry.

The second is what she calls the "acquisition" approach, with roots in the Orthodox Church's educational traditions and currently the approach used in government schools. In relation to these two more familiar types of educational approach, transformative learning presented itself as a possible bridge, or at least as helpful in seeing the two other types from a critical angle.

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[626] EECMY, *Christian Education, Teacher's Manual*, 48.

### 15.3  Major findings

Given the great numbers of new confirmands and the meagre economic and educational resources allocated to the task of rendering basic Christian education in the two congregations in focus, I come away with the impression that the teachers make a heroic effort to manage. My findings must not be read as criticism of their work, but as an uncovering of some of the challenges they face in the practice of confirmation ministry.  The data may then serve as a tool in the service of the two congregations and may be for the church as a whole. The major answers to my core task of research can be summarized in five points.

*Preconditions:* The preconditions for good learning in the two congregations was in many ways overwhelmed by the huge numbers of confirmands. Numbers were perceived as a strength by most research participants, thinking this was a sign of God's active presence and blessing. But we may ask if this understanding spiritualizes and overlooks the pedagogical challenges involved in growth. Language is fundamental to any teaching learning process. In Rehoboth congregation the language issue was of major concern. Most of the time the teaching was conducted in the official language of the country (Amharic), but this was understood mostly by those who have attended formal education, and therefore, left out people whose mother tongue was different. In both congregations there were huge differences of age (teenagers and elderly), educational background (illiterate and university graduates) and religious background (African religion and Orthodox Christian). Different psychological and spiritual needs (teenagers, baptized and raised in Christian families and new converts) added a dimension to the teaching situation.

*Responsibility*: My research reveals an unresolved tension on the congregational level as to who is responsible for the educational ministry. Does the responsibility rest with the church's theological committee, with the synod, parish, ordained ministers, or the lay workers?  Lay persons are assigned to teach when there is shortage of ordained ministers, but they lack capacity to answer the doctrinal questions posed by the confirmands. However, my analysis shows that lay volunteers can play an important role where there is a shortage of ordained ministers. Theologically trained and ordained ministers have multiple duties begging for attention and that leaves the confirmation ministry unattended in many cases.

The Pentecostal-charismatic emphasis on teaching as a gift of grace and not primarily something to be learned is a theological concern. This has led to an artificial tension between

the idea of teaching as a spiritual gift and the importance of theoretical and practical training. My research has shown that in education, as in any other human activity, skills must be learned. This is exemplified on the theory level. Transformational learning theory shows a pedagogy where the teacher-student relationship requires a different culture of learning compared to the acquisition method commonly used in Ethiopia. My point is that teaching needs pedagogical competence. Even though a person claims a gift for teaching, my Practical Theological approach, starting in the actual practice of teachers, has revealed that even gifted teachers cannot avoid the hard work of obtaining knowledge and pedagogical competence.

*Theology:* Even though Luther's *Small Catechism* belongs to the constitutional base of the EECMY, there was no agreement as to how this could be used. The impression I come away with is that the EECMY has not clarified the aim and content of its ministry of confirmation sufficiently. Therefore, teachers on the local level are confused. Most confirmands thought the central concern of the confirmation course was access to Holy Communion. This was interpreted as a pathway to salvation and eternal life. In addition, the confirmands observed an inconsistency between confirmation teaching and congregation life. What confirmands learned in class regarding the liturgy of the church was not seen in the congregation's worship service. Teaching and life did not seem to confirm each other in neither of the congregations. The EECMY presents herself as charismatic-Lutheran, but the teachers were unclear on what this meant. The result seemed to be doubt about the significance of the church's Lutheran identity. Pentecostal-charismatic theology and practice tends to overtake tradition.

*Curriculum:* As an independent church, the EECMY tried to develop a uniform curriculum, but this failed due to political circumstances. The tremendous growth in membership and the lack of teaching competence and economic resources has made it even more difficult to develop a curriculum. The absence of official church teaching manuals had forced the teachers on the local level to compile their own. The lack of a unified curriculum reveals a more serious problem, a confusion among the teachers on the content of what they were to teach. The first manual by the EECMY, *Growing in Faith*, was based on *The Small Catechism,* expanded with a few additional topics. This may still serve as a starting point. Revision and contextualizing would help the teachers to answer burning questions raised by confirmands in relation to their experiences of the socio-cultural dynamics and ethical challenges that confront them.

*Attachment:* Some confirmands establish a lasting relationship with the congregation, while many leave. In a way the statistics confirm my findings, that the ministry of confirmation in the EECMY is not sufficiently attuned to meet, understand, and guide the many who turn to Christ. As a basic requirement, the EECMY ought to redesign the confirmation course curriculum and develop a manual to preserve the very heartbeat of the church, the message of forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus Christ. A transformational learning approach would include confirmands in dialogue with their teachers so that lasting relationships could be built, and the confirmands' experiences, questions and needs to be met.

## 15.4  Two congregations and the many others

My research was limited to two EECMY congregations. A last reflection relates to the question: Are my findings valid for other congregations of the EECMY?

The first point to consider is if the two research congregations are typical EECMY congregations. As presented in chapter 1.5 they are both situated in towns. That makes them more diverse than congregations situated in villages. Especially the age composition and educational backgrounds of confirmands will be different. A town congregation would also have more resources in trained personnel and material support. This said, town congregations share the same features as village congregations on several points. Growth in members is a common feature. With this comes big classes and a challenging teaching situation. The pedagogics applied in education, the acquisition method, is common in all forms of education in Ethiopia. The lack of a teaching manual is a challenge everywhere and with this a confusion as to the aim, content, and duration of the confirmation course. The challenges related to the lack of church guidelines are intensified due to powerful influences from Pentecostal-charismatic theology and practice. The burning question is if the EECMY confirmation ministry in its present form manages to keep up its heritage, centring on salvation by faith.

As the history of the EECMY shows with abundant clarity, our Ethiopian evangelical mothers and fathers held salvation by faith more precious than life itself. It rests on us to carry the message forth to new generations. It is my hope and prayer that the findings and reflections from this study will edify the body of Christ, as it is written, "He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ" (Col 1:28).

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# Appendices

## Interview Questions

The interview questions [627] for this research has two categories. The first category is for confirmation teachers who are also congregation pastors, evangelists, and lay workers. The second category is designed for confirmands.

### *Interview questions for confirmation teachers*

I       What are the opportunities and challenges of membership growth in relation to confirmation ministry?

      1   What are the opportunities of membership growth in relation to confirmation ministry?

      2   What are the challenges of membership growth in relation to confirmation ministry?

II      Who are confirmation teachers and what teaching methods do they apply?

      1   According to the rules and principles of your congregation, who is eligible to teach confirmation?

      2   What kind of teaching method do you use for confirmation teaching?

      3   What are the reasons for choosing those specific approaches?

III     What is the content and doctrinal foundation of the EECMY confirmation ministry?
1       What are the themes confirmation deals with in your congregation?
2       Why do you focus on those themes?
3       What is the doctrinal foundation for the congregation's confirmation course?
4       How do you contextualize doctrine in your teaching?

IV      What teaching material is applied and what is the duration of confirmation course?

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[627] Kvale and Brinkmann point out, that research questions are usually formulated in theoretical language, whereas the interview questions should be expressed in the everyday language of the interviewees: Kvale and Brinkmann, *Interviews,* 132.

1       What are the teaching materials/aids you use for confirmation teaching?

2       For how long do you teach confirmation?

3       What factors determine the duration?


IV      What is the outcome of confirmation ministry and what kind of attachment will the confirmands establish with the congregation after being confirmed?

1       What is the basic purpose /aim of confirmation ministry in your congregation?

2       What is the outcome of confirmation ministry?

3       How do the confirmands associate themselves with their congregations after Completing their confirmation teaching?


V      Is there anything we have not discussed about confirmation ministry in your congregation that you think is important?


*Interview questions for confirmands*

I      What are the opportunities and challenges of membership growth in relation to Confirmation ministry?

    1   What do you see as an opportunity in attending confirmation class with a huge number of confirmands?

    2   What do you see a challenge in attending confirmation class with a huge number of confirmands?


II      Who are confirmation teachers and what teaching methods do they apply?

    1   Who taught you the confirmation course and how do you perceive the teachers?

    2   How do you see the teaching approach of the teachers?


III     What is the content and doctrinal foundation of confirmation in the EECMY?

    1   What subjects do the confirmation teaching focus on?

    2   What do you find most helpful?

3   What do you find most difficult/challenging?

4   What do you understand to be the doctrinal basis for the confirmation ministry?

IV   What teaching material is applied and what is the duration of Confirmation ministry?

1   What materials do you use as reference for the confirmation course?

2   How do you see the time allocated for the confirmation course?

V   What is the outcome of confirmation ministry and what kind of attachment would the confirmands establish with the congregation after being confirmed?

1   Why do you attend the confirmation course?

2   How has the teaching impacted your life?

3   After completing the course, how do you intend to attend and participate in serving the congregation?

VI   Is there anything we have not discussed about confirmation ministry in your congregation that you think is important?

## List of Research Participants

| Confirmation Teachers | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| No. | Fictive Name | Congregation | Interview date |
| 1 | Abraham (Rev.) | Bethany | August 17/2015 |
| 2 | Aron ( teacher at seminary) | Bethany | August 16/2015 |
| 3 | Aster ( Rev.) | Rehoboth | June 1/2015 |
| 4 | David (Rev.) | Rehoboth | May 30/2015 |
| 5 | Deborah (Eva.) | Bethany | August 19/2015 |
| 6 | Isaac (lay person ) | Bethany | August 18/2015 |
| 7 | Jacob (Eva.) | Bethany | August 18/2015 |
| 8 | Joshua (Eva.) | Rehoboth | July 29/2015 |
| 9 | James (Eva. ID) | Rehoboth | July 30/2015 |
| 10 | Lukas (Rev.) | Rehoboth | July 29/2015 |
| 11 | Markos (Rev., ID) | Bethany | July 29/2015 |
| 12 | Mary (Eva.) | Bethany | August 20/2015 |
| 13 | Matthew (Eva.) | Rehoboth | July 30/2015 |
| 14 | Yared (lay person, ID) | Bethany | December 8/2014 |
| 15 | Yohans (Rev.) | Rehoboth | June 1/2015 |
| 16 | Zechariea (Eva., ID) | EECMY Central Office | May 24/2019 |
| Confirmands | | | |
| No | Fictive Name | Congregation | Interview date |
| 1 | Daniel | Rehoboth | August 2/2015 |
| 2 | Dina | Rehoboth | August 12/2015 |
| 3 | Lidia | Bethany | August 21/2015 |
| 4 | Martha | Bethany | August 24/2015 |
| 5 | Paul | Bethany | August 21/2015 |
| 6 | Rachel (ID) | Bethany | December 27/2015 |
| 7 | Samuel  (ID) | Pilot study cong. | July20/2014 |
| 8 | Saron | Rehoboth | July 26/2015 |
| 9 | Solomon | Rehoboth | July 30/2015 |
| 10 | Thomas | Rehoboth | August 8/2015 |
| 11 | Timothy | Bethany | August 21/2015 |

| 12 | Titus | Bethany | August 23/2015 |
|----|-------|---------|-----------------|

VID