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Chapter 9

Critique and Emancipation in the Religious Sphere? Revisiting Ethiopia's Modernity through the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos*

Abstract: The *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* offer an alternative source of Ethiopian philosophy that predates the *Ḥatätas* of Zär'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät, containing essential ideas regarding the relationship between the public and private spheres, the critical role of religion as a redemptive form of discourse, as well as a utopian imagination that radically interrogates existing human relations. Their texts reflect their efforts to revolt against dogmatism in fifteenth-century Ethiopia's religious thought and practice. They can thus be read as a revolutionary movement that problematises how Orthodox Christianity has been perceived in Ethiopia. This paper argues that the study of Ethiopian philosophy needs to be set against the background of these precursors of modernity and that there is a need to extend the foundations of modern Ethiopian philosophy beyond Zär'a Ya'əqob's *Ḥatäta*. While the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* have historically been associated with a kind of mediaeval "Geist", valuing religion as an ideological means and expressing life through metaphysical abstractions, a concerted social critique is disclosed within their writings in a revolutionary and systematic manner. Abba Ḥṣṭifanos and his followers exhibit a covert critical attitude wherein we can find historical and ahistorical potential for refuting the irrationality of authorities of mediaeval and modern societies. This chapter explores the historical and political significance of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement and their philosophical relevance in redefining Ethiopian and African critical traditions. In doing so, it also brings out its bearing on the liberation discourses of religion in the contemporary world.

Introduction

The *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* were a group of individuals who introduced a religious, social, and political transformation to mediaeval Ethiopia. The group's founder, Abba Ḥṣṭifanos, attempted to challenge King Zär'a Ya'əqob's control of the state and the church by developing a critique of the conditions in which we can demarcate the public and the private spheres. Even though the idea of the public sphere in philosophy is often connected to a secular rational outlook underlying the proj-

ect of modernity, religion has been a powerful driving force in shaping public discourse and societal beliefs and practices worldwide. It has the potential to inspire individuals and groups to champion causes and to initiate socio-cultural and political changes that can have a considerable impact on a given community. Abba Ἔṣṭifanos and his disciples in fifteenth-century Ethiopia were the most influential figures to explore the interconnection of religion and politics in Ethiopia. Abba Ἔṣṭifanos is credited with initiating a kind of progressive religious and societal revival highlighting the need to explore critically the contemplative and social worth of religion. Getatchew Haile has argued that Abba Ἔṣṭifanos and his followers debunked the totalitarian politics of King Zär'a Ya'əqob and led the struggle for monastic reform in the mediaeval Ethiopian church.¹

In line with its revolutionary vision, the *Däqiqä Ἔṣṭifanos* movement was not merely critical of the conventional religious sphere of fifteenth-century Ethiopia: it also impinged upon the political space of King Zär'a Ya'əqob. The *Däqiqä Ἔṣṭifanos* movement was therefore considered a threat to the confined religious and political spheres.² Its opposition to the two major groups controlling the nation's highest power explains why the movement struggled to achieve monastic reformation. Its goal was to promote a redemptive outlook in Christianity, redefining the ascetic worth of spirituality as uninterested in any material end, and demarcating the political and religious spheres as a basis for accommodating secularism in an Ethiopian context. At the same time, the *Däqiqä Ἔṣṭifanos* displayed emancipatory and transformative ambitions with a religious foundation in seeking to enlighten individuals and society.

Despite its metaphysical content, the *Däqiqä Ἔṣṭifanos'* vision of monastic reformation is connected to the emancipatory project of the modern age. This group was obviously active before “the philosopher” Zär'a Ya'əqob. Yet most Ethiopian scholars and some foreign scholars have tended to view Zär'a Ya'əqob as the architect of modern Ethiopian philosophy and African philosophical traditions more broadly. I argue that the earlier *Däqiqä Ἔṣṭifanos* movement was pivotal in promoting socio-cultural and political change in the community. Its members served as the people's voice, particularly in addressing issues concerning social justice and objectives of secularisation of power. While I do not claim that the *Däqiqä Ἔṣṭifanos* offer a complete philosophical system, I argue that it was a valuable source of philosophical inspiration, opening the way for Ethiopian and African modernity projects. It presents a discourse of relevance to liberation philosophy, which we can understand as a redemptive form of religious critique.

1 Getatchew Haile (2016, p. 23).

2 See further Maimire Mennasemay (2010).

The *Däqiqä İstifanos* and the Religious Move: Historic-Political Relevance

In attempting to present the *Däqiqä İstifanos* as historical figures who sought to promote monastic reformation and foster critical perspectives on orthodox religion, two possible objections must be addressed. The first is that Abba İstifanos and his followers were simply representatives of some alien culture, reflecting a foreign strategy to destroy the indigenous religious values of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church—arguably foreshadowing the subsequent European religious reformation movement embodied by Martin Luther. The second objection instead grants that the *Däqiqä İstifanos* were Ethiopians who displayed critical attitudes to the religious thought and practices of their own particular religious community but claims that all they attempted to do was to re-evaluate religion in a localised context, rather than also initiating a socio-political critique of the state as a sacred entity in general.

Abba İstifanos' and his followers' critical attitude towards the fifteenth-century Ethiopian Church is rooted in their firm stance on the need for a metaphysical and socio-political transformation anchored in a religious liberation discourse. We know from the history of the Orthodox Church³ that the members of the *Däqiqä İstifanos* movement represented many “tribes”⁴ of Ethiopia and that they were driven by a resolve to challenge certain discourses and practices in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Religious interests over others marked the epoch in which the *Däqiqä İstifanos* movement emerged, locally and globally. Since we are broadly speaking about the mediaeval period, it is natural to suppose that religion informed the basic social structures of society. The *Däqiqä İstifanos* posed a challenge to these existing socio-political structures. The guardians of the existing system considered the revolutionary and visionary group a threatening movement seeking to bring about a paradigm shift in the religious and political spheres.

Given their challenge to the status quo, the *Däqiqä İstifanos* found themselves isolated, marginalised, and branded as heretics. Maimire Mennasemay (2010) believes that the identification of the *Däqiqä İstifanos* movement as a heresy resulted from a misinterpretation of the group's interest in accomplishing a critical and rational investigation of their own religion. As he puts it, their “heresy could be read as bearing within itself a Utopian, rational and political critique of Ethiopian

3 Getatchew Haile (2016, pp. 3–4).

4 My use of the term “tribe” refers to ethnic groups in the present day.

society mediated through a religious discourse”.⁵ These three basic attributes that Maimire Mennasemay uses to express the goals championed by the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement inform the depth of its aspirations for social transformation.

Members of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement were seen as a threat to the Church hierarchy and State power in mediaeval Ethiopian history because they actively galvanised their followers, urging them to question structural domination and injustice. As for the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob*, some scholars have argued that the work is of foreign origin, although it is contextualised in an Ethiopian cultural horizon and its purported author borrows a familiar Ethiopian name. This claim has been made to refute the individualistic power of thinking found on African soil in that particular age. Similar characterisations might be made regarding the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement. To have a clear vision of the Ethiopian origin of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos*, I think we need to understand the historical and political context behind the monastic reformation movement. The major religious questions raised by the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement were essentially related to the regime of King Zär'a Ya'əqob. Indeed, the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement was both historically and politically relevant. In the dominant history of the Ethiopian State and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the movement's members have been considered corruptors of true religion and of the unified state's ideological apparatus. Maimire Mennasemay (2010) and Tadesse Tamrat (1966) have suggested that the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* were known for their accusations against the great King of the time, underlining the fact that he acted as an absolute sovereign. King Zär'a Ya'əqob had an almost Hobbesian mindset in controlling all the powers of the state including the religious sphere.⁶

The *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* and the Critical Project: A Projection of Ethiopian Modernity?

In “A Critical Dialogue between Fifteenth and Twenty-first Century Ethiopia” (2010), Maimire Mennasemay attempts to show that the merging of practical and emancipatory interests in the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement bears socio-political relevance in revisiting modernity and modernisation within the Ethiopian context. He argues that mediaeval writings in Ethiopia are rich in both religious and secular ideas and that their interest extends beyond their exact time and place of origin. Building on this general proposal, my central argument is that the birth of

⁵ Maimire Mennasemay (2010, p. 6).

⁶ Tadesse Tamrat (1966, p. 112).

modern Ethiopian philosophy in texts of the *Däqiqä Ḥatäta*, which predates the *Ḥatäta* of Zär'a Ya'əqob, has an important contribution to make to the discussion of the nature of Ethiopian philosophy in two ways. First, they attest to a critical tradition of individuals in Ethiopia before Zär'a Ya'əqob “the philosopher”. Thus, if one considers an individual-based critical attitude to constitute one of the basic preconditions of philosophical thinking, we find candidates in the Ethiopian context prior to Zär'a Ya'əqob. Moreover, we find in the *Däqiqä Ḥatäta* an emancipatory attitude that builds on the claim that to know Christianity properly is to seek the truth and do what is just. The other contribution of the *Däqiqä Ḥatäta* movement lies in its subversive potential in terms of philosophical content, which it shares with the *Ḥatäta* of Zär'a Ya'əqob. The *Däqiqä Ḥatäta* and the *Ḥatäta* of Zär'a Ya'əqob represent a progressive attitude in religion and rational religious discourses. Thus far, attempts to make Zär'a Ya'əqob the father of modern Ethiopian and African philosophical traditions risk over-emphasising the difference between religion and philosophy and undermining the holistic nature of the education and literature of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity.

We must emphasise two significant caveats in attempting to present the *Däqiqä Ḥatäta* as part and parcel of the modern Ethiopian philosophical project. While I believe that both the *Däqiqä Ḥatäta* movement and the *Ḥatäta* Zär'a Ya'əqob contain the critical ingredients needed for the attainment of a full-fledged philosophy, both outlooks should at the same time be read as critical reflections embedded in Ethiopian Orthodox Church teachings. In fact, the *Däqiqä Ḥatäta* movement offers profound socio-political critical insights that serve as a roadmap into modern Ethiopian and African philosophical projects. There is thus scope for reframing the modern Ethiopian philosophical project in a manner that goes beyond the received dominant discourse on the *Ḥatäta*. I believe that the *Däqiqä Ḥatäta* present a significant challenge to the by-now fossilised picture of Ethiopian and African philosophy championed by prominent figures such as Claude Sumner and Teodros Kiros.

Both Sumner and Teodros Kiros compare Zär'a Ya'əqob to René Descartes, arguing that there is a kind of novel approach to doing philosophy embodied by these two figures. Sumner argues that Zär'a Ya'əqob and Descartes are architects of modern philosophy in Africa and Europe, respectively.⁷ And he thinks both of them develop a methodic inquiry grounded in a religious foundation. Indeed, Sumner emphasises that the methodological tools of both Zär'a Ya'əqob and Descartes share an essential feature: searching for ultimate reality. In the same way, Teodros Kiros discusses the similarity between Zär'a Ya'əqob and Descartes

⁷ Sumner (1999a, pp. 176–177).

in terms of their supposedly “rationalist” methodology, wherein clear and distinct thoughts are sought after to ground higher-level reflection.⁸ However, he presents Zär’a Ya’əqob’s rationality as overcoming the Cartesian mind-body problem in that the heart is analysed as the seat of the soul.

My central claim is that works of the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos* as well as the *Ḥatäta*, rather than presenting a secular philosophy, open the possibility for the emergence of a socio-cultural and political critique which is nevertheless grounded in an absolute religious foundation. The reflections found in these works lack meaning without the necessary existence of God. Of course, the *Ḥatäta Zär’a Ya’əqob* has the historical advantage of presenting a wide range of discussions on how religion matters globally. The important point is that while it is true that Zär’a Ya’əqob’s critical insights are manifestations of a reflective tradition in Ethiopia and Africa, one might argue that Zär’a Ya’əqob’s critical attitude is itself part of the historical church tradition of Ethiopia that elicited the radical thought of the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos*, which is grounded on religion.⁹ Crucially, the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos* and the *Ḥatäta Zär’a Ya’əqob* can be taken as precursors of modern philosophical thinking in Ethiopia and Africa, demonstrating the cultural continuity of a critical attitude that arises from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church tradition.

One of the critical aspects of the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos* can be found in the idea of the separation of the church and the state, which we call secularism in modern times. In reflecting on the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos’* accusation against King Zär’a Ya’əqob that the latter lacked a secular worldview, Teweldeberhan Mezgebe writes:

[King] Zär’a Ya’əqob undertook religious reforms in his time. He had a plan to place churches and monasteries under his ultimate authority. He succeeded in putting the majority of monasteries of the country in his religious programme by using a new combination of economic advancement and legal force. However, the Stephanites [members of the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos* movement] kept on refusing the will of the king [...] This is the reason why the Stephanites were seen as a threat by the “orthodox” and by Zär’a Ya’əqob. Thus, he issued a proclamation to all nations in his dominion to persecute them. Furthermore, he defamed them in all his writing such as *Mäṣḥäfä Bərhan* and *Mäṣḥäfä Milad* and other works such as *Tä’ammärä Marəyam* and *Mahəletä Şəge*.¹⁰

Thus, the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos* seriously questioned the separation of the public and private spheres, criticising the bankruptcy to which the Ethiopian State and Church seemed prone in mediaeval times. This strand of the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos* suggests a unique treatment of the conception of secularism in the Ethiopian context.

8 Teodros Kiros (2022, pp. 108–109).

9 For this point, see also Eyasu Berento’s essay (Chapter 5) in this volume.

10 Teweldeberhan Mezgebe (2019, p. 28).

It considers the role of religion in both private and public spaces, and the re-adjustment of how the Emperor ought to be related to the church in a democratic way, as I further discuss below. The *Däqiqä İstifanos* believed that the King is the leader of the state with an honourable political status, but not different from others as a human figure.¹¹ As we look back on the history of Ethiopia from the thirteenth to the twentieth century, the country was an empire ruled by various monarchs who believed that they were the Elect of God and that their authority was absolute.¹² Most of the time, these emperors were harsh in their attempt to control the affairs of the empire, including the religious sphere. The *Däqiqä İstifanos* were challenging the manipulative interest of Emperor Zär'a Ya'eqob in this regard. Their efforts were driven by a rational vision, promoting a democratic boundary between the public and private spheres that rejects despotic rule and exploitative systems.

It is based on this democratic framework that the *Däqiqä İstifanos* negotiated modern notions of power, justice, and institutions. As Maimire Mennasemay argues, the *Däqiqä İstifanos* movement introduced the utopian vision of employing the power of reason in understanding the socio-political condition of the people of Ethiopia in the Middle Ages.¹³ One might take this as one of the alternative sources of the Ethiopian project of modernity, where we encounter a closely related understanding of the role of reason to that found in Immanuel Kant's *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?*. According to Kant, enlightenment is the use of one's own reason to avoid self-incurred tutelage:

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. *Sapere Aude!* "Have [the] courage to use your own understanding!"—that is the motto of enlightenment.¹⁴

Kant says here that individuals are responsible for emerging from their intellectual immaturity by embracing the power of reason in their lives. The *Däqiqä İstifanos* had a similar account of how individuals can search for enlightenment, signifying the power of understanding based on one's own reason.

Regarding their critical examination of power, Maimire Mennasemay argues that the *Däqiqä İstifanos* were highly mature in connecting political and religious practices, the law, and institutional and educational themes. The *Däqiqä İstifanos*

¹¹ Getatchew Haile (2016, pp. 102–103).

¹² Crummey (1988, pp. 14–15).

¹³ Maimire Mennasemay (2010, p. 9).

¹⁴ Kant in Kant and Humphrey (1983, p. 41).

rebelled against the hierarchal image of power given by the monarchical regime that sees human beings as unequal. Maimire Mennasemay states:

Whereas laymen, nobles, priests and monks address the Emperor by using the respectful “You”, the Dekike Estifanos refuse to follow this practice and use the familiar “you” in addressing him; whereas others prostrate themselves before the Emperor, the Dekike Estifanos refuse to do so. When the Emperor demands that they, like everybody else, should use the respectful “You”, and that they should prostrate themselves before him, they respond that since they use the familiar “you” when they address God in their prayers, there is no justification for using the respectful “You” when they address a human being.¹⁵

It is important to note that such a move on the part of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* is motivated by their goal of liberation from the irrational hegemonic powers of both the political and religious spheres. It was not intended to disrespect authorities, but to remind them of their ultimate responsibilities and the grounds of their legitimacy. This attempt should be understood as a shift from an undemocratic and manipulative system of thinking to a genuinely human democratic treatment of the good life in earthly and Godly affairs.

The *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* and Emancipatory Religious Glorification

The groundbreaking revolutionary potential of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* appears in their religious critique vindicating the true goal of Orthodox Christianity. Abba Ḥṣṭifanos and his disciples introduced the notion of a redemptive will, peculiar to the dominant Ethiopian religion of the fifteenth century. Religious reformation was an essential driver in their struggle to challenge the union between Church and State and to reinstate the emancipatory truth of religion amid the Church’s teachings. Foregrounding human liberation as an objective in mediaeval Ethiopia, the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* contributed to refuting systematically the politicisation of religion and the manipulation of the private sphere by the public one. The *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* raised three core points under the general idea of emancipatory religious glorification. These were: (1) an interest in revisiting the teachings of the Church from the perspective of the true sources of religion and the faith of believers; (2) a critique of society and religious discourses sustaining it; and (3) a critique of the lack of a secular boundary between Church and State. Accordingly, the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* believed individuals should use religion and reformation efforts

15 Maimire Mennasemay (2010, p. 9).

to interrogate the manipulative socio-political order. As Maimire Mennasemay argues, this revolutionary group used religion as a weapon to enlighten their society and to achieve human liberation through religious discourses.¹⁶

Cornel West would probably agree that the *Däqiqä İstifanos*' theological engagement with liberation constituted a serious means of reassessing the doctrines and practices of the Church, and of reconstructing social history. According to West, critical leaders of emancipation-based religion have the role of "reexamin[ing] and reshap[ing] the traditional doctrines of the church, engag[ing] in more serious efforts of social theory, cultural criticism, and historical reconstruction".¹⁷ Prominent leaders in the *Däqiqä İstifanos* movement were responsible for transforming the religious and socio-cultural ideals of their time.

The *Däqiqä İstifanos* affirmed that human liberation is the central goal of religion. This is somewhat reminiscent of the contemporary revolutionary teaching of liberation theology. Most liberation theologians of our age think the goal of religion is to make life good through the words of God. They say that "religion has a primary role to play in human liberation, and that in the search for liberation, transmitting the Gospel's message of salvation cannot be separated from the creation of a better life, 'here' and 'now'".¹⁸ The relevance of the liberation discourse of the *Däqiqä İstifanos* is not confined to issues pertinent to mediaeval Ethiopian Orthodoxy; it also has a bearing on modern and postmodern societies wherein religion can be taken as a basis for social transformation.

Another question to which the *Däqiqä İstifanos*' emancipatory use of religion gives rise relates more broadly to the emancipatory potential of religion and religious discourses in modern times. The *Däqiqä İstifanos* were significant in marking an inflection point in Ethiopian history, raising a profound existential concern with challenging the biases of individuals within and outside the confines of the Church. Similarly, contemporary liberation theologians, such as Gustavo Gutiérrez,¹⁹ underline that religion is a powerful force for redemption and social justice, particularly within the framework of liberation theology. Religious beliefs and practices can empower individuals and communities to resist oppression and fight for justice by providing a sense of purpose and hope. Simply put, there must be an existential motive for using our religion and religious discourses to achieve daily liberation. The *Däqiqä İstifanos* movement made significant contributions in instilling such crucial ideas in Ethiopia, highlighting the power of existential critique within religious communities, and its impact on the totality of life.

¹⁶ Maimire Mennasemay (2010, p. 6).

¹⁷ West (1999, p. 397).

¹⁸ Levine (1988, p. 243).

¹⁹ Gutiérrez (1988, p. 24).

As mentioned earlier, some consider the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* to have been heretics in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In fact, Abba Ḥestifanos and his followers publicly criticised the manipulative hold that the will of the Emperor maintained over the Church and his people through the lens of their religious stance, which aimed to alter the religious community profoundly. But rather than being heretics, the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* were mini-reformists of the teachings of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. The kind of reform they called for predates that of Martin Luther, the architect of the European Reformation; it is also situated in a distinctly Ethiopian context, which recognises individuality without glorifying individualism. As Maimire Mennasemay argues:

[...] the Dekike Estifanos are not individualists *avant la lettre*, for they value life in a community: “He who lives in a community fulfills the hope of God’s word” [...] [they] also claim that one should “follow one’s mind” and struggle until “one reaches one’s goals” or “summit”. When these apparently contradictory statements valorizing community life and individual autonomy are mediated through their challenges to the Monarch’s absolute power, their notions of “litigation”, mutual accountability and “not being an insult to Ethiopia”, one sees the emergence of something new: “individuality without individualism”.²⁰

The *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* insisted that humans as a community are the centre of their faith and that an individual critical attitude is vital in reforming discourses and transforming society. From this, we may think that the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* were among the few to establish a solidarity-based reformation and transformation in the world. In contrast to philosophical currents which foreground the subject, a dominant approach in modern discourse, the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* noted that a unifying religious spirit is essential to kick-start a socio-cultural and political transformation. In this context, the individual has a social responsibility to foster the religious way of achieving his/her humanity, equality, and justice. Thus, the goal of such conscious and rational solidarity is to abolish all conditions of dehumanisation. The *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* should be credited with having caused an indigenous revolution focusing more on a religious reformation and socio-political transformation.

As part of their monastic reformation efforts and the socio-political paradigm shift they sought to bring about, the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* denounced the excesses of the Church and state leaders of the time. They challenged the conventional prostration before the Icon of St. Mary, the King of the State, and the holy cross.²¹ They rejected such a practice, saying it is contrary to the true teaching of the Holy Scrip-

²⁰ Maimire Mennasemay (2010, p. 16).

²¹ Getatchew Haile (2016, pp. 29–31).

ture, which states: “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Luke 4:8). At the heart of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos*’ refusal to prostrate themselves before the human subject lies a justified religious account of who should be worshipped, and who should be respected, in keeping with their emancipatory religious concerns.

In addition, the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos*’ understanding of the ascetic life was redemptive, dismantling the desire for a material end of life. They strongly criticised the monks’ existential situation in almost all monasteries of the fifteenth-century Ethiopian Church.²² Most monks of the time had no qualms about satisfying their material needs in the name of religion. But this ran counter to the convention established by the monastic fathers. An ascetic life, as Abba Ḥṣṭifanos stated, requires a revolution in the Church’s monastic centre of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which should promote the right way of living as Christian monks based on the laws of God.²³

Conclusion

This paper has dealt with the philosophical aspirations of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement and showed that its members served as precursors of the project of modernity in Ethiopia. I have tried to situate the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos*, not as purely philosophical thinkers, but rather as religious men who sought to reform the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, drawing on the true teachings of the Holy Scriptures as well as the power of human reason in understanding the laws of God and revisiting the wrong deeds of the Church. I showed how the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* offered some critical insights that are important for the emerging discourses of Ethiopian modernity in accomplishing religious reform and socio-cultural transformations.

To this end, I presented three basic themes at the heart of the project of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos*. The first is the historical and political revolution that Abba Ḥṣṭifanos and his followers attempted to achieve in the Ethiopian Church and the Ethiopian State. This is an important reminder that their ideas are of Ethiopian origin and highly connected to fifteenth-century Ethiopia’s historical and political developments. This speaks against the misconception that their attempts at reformation were motivated by foreign elements with an anti-Orthodox agenda. On the contrary, this movement speaks to the positive impact that religious leaders sought to have in mobilising the people against an oppressive system. The *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifa-*

²² Getatchew Haile (2016, p. 32).

²³ Getatchew Haile (2016, p. 33).

nos unfairly lost what they truly deserved: the State and the Church of their time misquoted and tortured them, and the scholastic and religious thought of more modern times either ignored or abandoned their noble efforts. Much of the political history of mediaeval and modern Ethiopia reflects a failure to recognise the historical relevance of the revolutionary potential of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos*.

I also sought to highlight the philosophical contribution of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* to modern and contemporary Ethiopia. While presenting this point, I critically assessed the basic features and objectives of their thought. The thought of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* is not strictly philosophical, since it reflects a religiously-oriented reformation programme containing various philosophical ingredients. A religiously-inspired philosophy can occasion socio-political change because it can mobilise many people, provide a moral framework for understanding social and political issues, challenge power structures, and create a sense of community and solidarity. The critical approach in the Ethiopian context shows individuals' moral and social role in transforming the community. This approach is critical of "liberalism", which pits the individual against society. Moreover, in exploring how the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement could be among the foundation stones of an Ethiopian critical project, we have seen the distinctive ways in which it conceptualised secularism, power, equality, and democracy.

Finally, I drew attention to the redemptive undercurrent of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement and its bearing on the theological liberation movements of our age. The movement's search for truth underscores the idea that Christians are responsible for choosing the true way through a proper understanding of the Holy Scriptures and the human power of thinking given by God. The *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* rebelled against the Church and State primarily to achieve a religious liberation that arose from their own existential situation. What we find here is a determination to question unjustified social and religious conventions through the words and laws of God. The core questions that the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* developed about religion, such as the importance of the autonomy of the Church, the denial of worldly affairs, and the championing of a proper ascetic Christian life, were all predicated on the religious end of achieving the highest good. On this account, religion becomes a means of liberation. Like the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos*, Zär'a Ya'əqob in the *Ḥatäta* suggests that the power of reason is a disposition and critical way of searching for the truth and challenging social beliefs and views, including religious knowledge and interpretations.