

Ziade Hailu

In Memoriam: Dr. Tesema Bisrat, 1943–2013

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Dr. Tesema Bisrat— Public Servant, the Philosopher, family man—died on 31st March 2013 at the age of 70 in Addis Ababa. For some time now, Tesema was not unaware of the looming prospect of personal extinction but he always maintained a brave face, 'doing death' in dignified style. Even when he was not feeling well, his interest in the life of the mind was always persistent. Unlike people who had their earlier trainings on leftist politics, Tesema had Marx on one hand and a Bible on the other. He considered some of Marx's social analysis (though differed on some of the prescription offered by him) and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as perhaps the Greatest. Alas, his 'gigantic' Irob humility came in his way from developing his ideas. He was a man for whom a slightest move of 'self promotion' was a mortal sin. One is not sure if he would approve even of this obituary.

Tesema was teaching philosophy at Catholic seminary in Addis Ababa until almost the last days. Earlier he worked for about 13 years at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Foreign Relations Department in various capacities. He was born in Alitena, on March 3, 1943 and attended primary and secondary education in Adigrat-Tigray. Furthermore he was sent to Italy to pursue further education and got a First Degree in Philosophy, Second Degree in Theology and a Doctorate in Political Science in the seventies. Those were revolutionary years in Ethiopian History and his close association with Dr. Tesfay Debesay, EPRP leader, can't be left without being mentioned.

Failing health, poor eye sight and disillusionment with the system must have contributed to his personal unhappiness in the latter years of his life, but one was required to be a psychologist to discover his political disposition. Tesema chose to keep his political views to himself mostly, a practical wisdom he learned through long years of experience. He concentrated instead on pursuit of philosophy and his family. The children gave him a great joy and seeing them all go through higher education system comforted him immensely. The source of his happiness, it seems, is because he had the first hand taste of the fruits of knowledge, a legacy he wanted to pass to the kids.

Like any typical Irob man, he would not be described as someone who displays affection in public in the Western sense of the word, but he was so grateful to his wife for taking care of the family and himself through difficult times, though a statement he would express mostly in her absence, in line with true Irob ethics. One can easily assume Abeba, his wife, didn't need the power of words to understand his feelings. There are alternative ways of communicating and she knows. Dr Tesema is survived by three children and his wife. Perhaps he will be remembered as a man who loved quietly his country, his family, and philosophy, conceivably in that order.