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## Review

JOACHIM G. PERSON, *Spirituality, Power and Revolution: Contemporary Monasticism in Communist Ethiopia. With an Overview of the Orthodox Church during Communism* by Václav Ježek

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es of Ethiopia's poverty while their son completed the work of his parents by drawing the necessary maps of various features of the country's past.

The source and implications of the unusual phrase used as the main title is explained at the end of the long Introduction (pp. xv–xxx). It was borrowed from Wikipedia: 'To think outside the box is to look further and to try not thinking of the obvious things, but to try thinking of the things beyond them' (p. xxx). Encouraging people to think profoundly is a good idea. The authors repeatedly state that their idea was to encourage all concerned to think deeply about how Ethiopian society's problems should be solved. That is the theme of the book under review, but one wonders if it was then necessary to produce such a bulky book to get the message across. The problem of Ethiopia's poverty and the difficulties connected to it were well described on pp. 322–331. That alone as an article would have sufficed to impart the important message. Moreover, large works usually make for unnecessary mistakes, and this one is not an exception.

The most serious mistakes are obvious from the choice and use of sources. For example, on p. 55 it is stated that Major Harris, who led the first British delegation to Šäwa, recorded in the three-volume account of his mission that he heard that the ruler of Šäwa descended through his mother from the ruling house of Gondär. However, the footnote relating to this statement refers to D. N. Levine, *Wax & Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972). Why could one not refer to Harris's book (W. C. Harris, *The Highlands of Aethiopia*, I–III (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1844)) instead of citing a secondary source? In fact, the bibliography contains mainly books and articles written in English; even those written by French, German, and Italian scholars are used only if they have been translated into English. Despite their unacademic stance, the authors have nonetheless produced a readable and interesting book.

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JOACHIM G. PERSOON, *Spirituality, Power and Revolution: Contemporary Monasticism in Communist Ethiopia. With an Overview of the Orthodox Church during Communism by Václav Ježek* (Volos: Volos Academy for Theological Studies, 2014). 545 pp., illus. (pp. 535–545). Price: €20.00. ISBN: 978-618-81264-3-5 (HB).

The theme of this book, as given in the title page, is the relationship between the Orthodox Church and Communism. Persoon sees differences

and similarities between these two widely admired institutions. He writes that 'Communism and monasticism are the antithesis of each other, each embodying utopian visions of the future: the one using political force whereas the other has an eschatological character' (p. 8; see also pp. 213–214). Probably with the relatively recent decline of Communism in mind, Persoon exalts the power of Christianity or monasticism, and frequently refers to '[m]onasticism's ability to manifest transcendence and alterity [which] were instrumental in empowering the community of faith and ensuring its survival' (p. 8).

The Orthodox Churches in question are those in Ethiopia, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania. Whether each country has had exactly the same experience is not clear. Both Persoon and Ježek are theologians and apparently members of the Orthodox Church. At least one of the authors originally came from a formerly communist, or more accurately, socialist country. One can, therefore, assume that they are well versed in the subject. They have written very little, however, about themselves on the back-cover of the book. The so-called 'parts' were apparently written not only by two different theologians but also for two different purposes: the first part (by Persoon) is a result of fieldwork under the guidance of a university while the second (by Ježek) is a simple survey of the experience of the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe allegedly written with the intention of helping the reader put Persoon's account in context. Why each 'part' could not be published as a separate monograph is not explained. In any case I should like to concentrate on the first part in accordance with the interests of our academic journal.

The first part, which concentrates on Ethiopia, is said (see the Foreword, p. 3) to be a reproduction of the author's doctoral dissertation presented at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in 2005. Unfortunately the maps of the original have not been reproduced in the book under review allegedly 'for technical reason' (p. 3).

The research lasted two and a half years during which the author visited Israel and Eritrea, as well as Ethiopia, where he surveyed about a hundred monasteries in Təgray, Bāgemdər, Goḡgam, and Šäwa. Persoon describes practically all aspects of the life and activities of the monks as well as their beliefs and philosophy, and their natural and social environments. But there is no indication as to whether the researcher himself could read and understand Gə'əz, the mark of the monks' erudition, or could speak any one of the local languages of Ethiopia. The reader can only imagine that he conducted his research with the help of one or more interpreters. In any case his extensive bibliography (pp. 225–256, categorized into fourteen groups) contains mainly secondary sources.

The Foreword, written by the second author, states that the book consists of 'two essentially independent parts', because the second part deals mainly with the Orthodox Churches in Russia, the Balkans, Greece, and Cyprus. I wonder to what extent the last two countries were under the influence of Communism. The same writer confirms that the common factors between the two parts are in fact the theme of the work, namely the Church and the socialist State, the latter being dominant during the period of Communism. Prior to communist rule relations between Church and State were, at least in Ethiopia, relatively peaceful and, in fact, its dignitaries were highly respected by the monarchs.

During the relatively short period of socialist rule in Ethiopia, monasticism was mostly silent, thereby avoiding possible conflict with Communism. The most conspicuous attack on the churches and monasteries was that, by nationalizing their land, the socialist government deprived them of their main source of income. But direct conflict was avoided through the tactful silence of the religious institution, an act which the author sees as characteristic of the Church.

The book has a few shortcomings which could have been avoided. Spelling and punctuation errors are recurrent. At the very least an index and one or two maps of the monasteries would have facilitated better access to this large book. Some pictures of persons and things are presented at the end of the book, but the reason for including monkeys on p. 543 is incomprehensible.

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SUSANNE EPPLE, ed., *The state of status groups in Ethiopia: Minorities between marginalization and integration*, Studien zur Kulturkunde, 132 (Berlin: Reimer, 2018). 284 pp. Price: €49.00. ISBN: 978-3-496-01587-1.

This anthology on the socio-economic and cultural state of status groups deals with a problem of basic relevance in present-day Ethiopia. The special position of a minority of occupational groups, craftsmen and hunters, vis-à-vis the mainstream society of farming majorities is a pan-Ethiopian phenomenon which has existed in most parts of the country since time immemorial and continues to be a very conservative characteristic of the present living conditions of the country. It has increasingly attracted the interest of cultural anthropologists and has long been an important topic of research in the pioneering studies of, for example, Eike Haberland, Christopher R. Hall-