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Review

JOHANNES LAUNHARDT, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa (1919–1991). With special reference to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Addis Ababa Synod*

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JOHANNES LAUNHARDT, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa (1919–1991). With special reference to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Addis Ababa Synod* (= Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte. Band 31. Herausgegeben von MARTIN TAMCKE). Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004. New Brunswick (U.S.A.) and London (U.K.): Transactions Publishers. 347 pages. Price: €24,90. ISBN: 3-8258-7791-4.

The material provided by the two subsections under *Introduction and Background*, (“Some Historical Remarks About Addis Ababa” (pp. 9–12) and “The Religious Background In And Around Addis Ababa” (pp. 13–28), gives a good background to Launhardt’s work. The period (1919–1991) was characterised by tension within the Ethiopian body politic in general. There was, in the early part of this period, a struggle for power in high places. Furthermore, we have the overall tension between Ethiopia’s desire to maintain its own traditional, religious and cultural identity and its desire for modernization.

The author touches on the question of the presence of Roman Catholics (pp. 17–19), Jews (pp. 19–22), and Evangelicals (pp. 22–28), with a presentation of the historical background for their presence in the capital city.

In Chapter I, “Addis Ababa attracts Evangelical Believers and Protestant Missions (1919–1941)”, the author deals with the Evangelical Bodies Taken up in Study, e.g.

- the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM),
- the Seventh Day Adventist and Ethiopian Union Mission (SDA),
- the American Presbyterian Mission (AUPM),
- the Sudan Interior Mission and Abyssinian Frontier Mission (SIM) and
- the German Hermannsburg Mission (GHM).

The Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions in North America, which started work in Ethiopia in 1947, should be included in this list. So should the Baptist General Conference Mission (BGC), which came to Ethiopia 1949, two Pentecostal missions of Scandinavian origin, the Finnish Mission which arrived in Ethiopia in September 1951 and the Swedish Philadelphia Church Mission which started its work in 1959 should also appear on the list.

Most of these missions, gave rise to “daughter” churches. Among those mentioned by the author in Chapter II are, *the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (connected with the SEM and GHM), *the Lutheran Church Bible-true Friends*, *The Evangelical Church Bethel*, *the Meserete Kristos Church*, *the Kale Heywet Church in Ethiopia*, and *The Berhane Wengel Baptist Church* (connected with the BGC).

That evangelical Christians who moved from Eritrea to Addis played an important role in the establishment of an evangelical congregation in the town is brought out clearly (pp. 34–38). The author points out that the presence of these Protestants in high government offices strengthened the evangelical movement in the city and in society in general (pp. 34–35).

Medical, educational and social work, were the vehicles on which a low-key, evangelistic activity was conducted in Addis Ababa, an area which was, otherwise, off-limits for missionary work! Both the mission organizations and the Ethiopian civic authorities seem to have acted on the basis of a tacit understanding on this issue. These three kinds of activity appealed to even the most suspicious among Addis Ababa's conservative elements.

In Chapter II, "Addis Ababa Church Leaders And Elders Guide The Ethiopian Evangelical Christians (1941–1969)", is reported that Ethiopian Evangelical Christians gradually crystallised into a core of leaders, recognized by both their own constituencies and by the civic and political authorities in the country. Among the leaders mentioned are: Qes Badima Yalew, Ato Emmanuel Gebre Selassie and Ato Emmanuel Abraham, all representing what Launhardt calls "the Evangelical Congregation of Wellete Yohannis Street" (pp. 96–100), Qes Mammo Chorka and Qes Gidada Solan, connected with the Addis Ababa Bethel Congregation (pp. 102–103), as well as *Blatta* Kifle Egzi Yehidego and *Ato* (later Pastor) Gebre Amlak Gebre Rufael of The Swedish Mission Bible-true Friends (pp. 103–104).

These and other members of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) in government positions became channels of appeal for evangelical Christians subjected to persecution in the outlying regions of the country.

This basic sense of evangelical solidarity provided much of the good will which characterized the early decades of the *Council of Ethiopian Evangelical Christians* (CEEC).

These people, groomed and chastened by trials, were gradually moulded into valuable leaders. The years of Italian occupation, with the resulting departure of the mission organizations, as well as the trying period of the Derg, moulded these leaders, with all their weakness, into Fathers to whom all evangelical Christians could look up, in all matters barring that of specific doctrinal tenets! However, The CEEC was an adventure in evangelical solidarity that never passed beyond a general platform for evangelical Christians. As Launhardt has pointed out, loyalty to the confessional backgrounds of the mother-organizations (i.e. the missions) was too strong to allow for a common evangelical church (p. 115). The council ceased functioning after having held annual conferences from 1944 to 1963 (p. 108).

Chapter II narrates, furthermore, the story of the Lutheran Missions Committee (LMC). The EECMY received its *organizational* and *pedagogical* structure or scaffolding through this body. Though it initiated its specific working committees on its own the LMC always made it a point to draw the church and its representatives into its multi-dimensional activity. What Launhardt has written about this aspect of the work of Lutheran missions is instructive.

Chapter III, “Churches Form Organisations In Response To Urban Needs (1969–1974)”:

The phenomenal growth of the population of Addis Ababa during the last 30 years speaks its own language. People, not least the young, were driven to or attracted by Addis Ababa because of hunger, war, political turmoil, unemployment, poverty. Hundreds of thousands of people were literally streaming into the metropolis. Addis Ababa was a besieged city, in several senses. The city was becoming a problem area, in a general sense. Launhardt writes, “The negative side-effects of the development (i.e. rapid population growth) were insufficient job opportunities, juvenile delinquency, burglary, theft, prostitution, urban beggary, suffering from loneliness and insecurity, housing and sewage problems and many more. In the long range, this development provided a seed-bed for dissatisfaction and political unrest” (p. 175).

But, as well, Addis Ababa was becoming, for the first time, an area of serious pastoral concern also for evangelical churches. It was time for the development of new strategies for urban work.

The formation of The Council of Lutheran Congregations (CLCAA) reminds one, somewhat remotely, of a parallel to the formation of The Lutheran Missions Committee. This is a case of a useful “pedagogical transfer” from mission organizations to Ethiopian evangelical Christians: The role played by Gudina Tumsa in the formation of the council cannot be underestimated. Launhardt writes, “Besides the office work and the preparation of documents on theological issues and the role of the church in society, one of his concerns was a holistic presentation of the Gospel to urban man.” (p. 187).

Launhardt was appointed to his “Urban Desk” (pp.195–208) partly as a result of the conviction of CLCAA that a thoroughly planned urban ministry was now a matter of priority for the EECMY and its Addis Ababa congregations. The GHM played a vital role in the actualization of this ministry, not least by making Launhardt available for the programme (p.195, footnote 626).

In Chapter IV, The Addis Ababa Synod and Evangelical Christians during the Derg Regime (1974–1991), Launhardt describes how the Addis Ababa Synod of the EECMY (AAS) and other evangelical Christians in Addis

Ababa found themselves at the centre of a cruel and bloody Marxist revolution in Ethiopia in 1974. Evangelical Christians in Addis Ababa, and not least the youth of the various congregations, were under enormous pressure to either deny their faith or withdraw quietly from practising their Christian faith openly (pp. 246f.) The AAS became a witness to the confiscation of one institution after the other from the hands of the central administration of The EECMY (pp. 259f.). Towards the end of his book Launhardt writes, "There is no question that the lay people were and are the treasure of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus" (p. 299).

In Gudina Tumsa the EECMY had a courageous apologist for a church, which sometimes felt, confused and pushed back against the wall. He mobilized resources both inside and outside the country to counter this tendency and to give the EECMY a clear picture of the relationship between Christianity and Socialism.

In his foreword to the book, Siegbert Uhlig writes, "The book impressively reveals the author's knowledge of many valuable details." (p. 1) With this statement Uhlig has underlined perhaps the most important virtue of the book. Here we have something of an one-volume lexicon on the beginnings and evolutions of Evangelical missions in and around Addis Ababa.

The various footnotes are a rich mine of detailed information. The sources, quoted, written, published and unpublished as the results of the various interviews, reflect an enormous amount of work on a grassroots level and in libraries.

There are some obvious omissions. The Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) is not included in the list of abbreviations on pp. 5–6. The transliteration of non-English words is always a problem in writing books on Ethiopia. The rule should however be "consistency". The author is fairly consistent but there are some cases where this rule is broken. The title *Aleqa* is spelt rightly. But why should 'Kebena' (p. 47) and 'Kechene' be spelt with a 'k', when the 'k' in these words is in fact explosive?

On page 108 there is a sentence, which is unclear: It was resolved that whoever came to be baptised should be baptised. This is Orthodox practice.

One more observation: in the index my father's name is listed as Gebre Medhin Egzi. His 'surname' is Habte-Egzi.

Launhardt makes the interesting observation, "That the SIM was allowed to restart work in Ethiopia after the war can only be explained by the fact that three former SIM missionaries had taken military service with the British army and taken part actively in the liberation of Ethiopia" (p. 77).

In fact, Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia, won favour at court and among the rank and file among the population, precisely because of their patriotism.

Reviews

I would have liked to see some analytical, critical comments on such basic questions as the attitudes of Evangelical mission organizations and individual Christians towards the spiritual and liturgical heritage of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. After all, the missionaries who were sent under the various mission organizations had their own national, cultural awareness, even in religious matters. How hard did they try to promote respect for an *Ethiopian* religious culture (in its different expressions) among their children in the faith? To work in Addis Ababa is, after all, to work in the vicinity of Orthodox centres of learning and worship. In a country that is being overflooded by a type of charismatic spirituality which has many of the marks of another culture, how much have Evangelical missions tried to lift forth the importance of an indigenous awareness of worship and language?

Having said that I would like to state that Launhardt has documented a very important part of the history of evangelical Christians in and around Ethiopia's metropolis. He has acted not simply as a copyist but as an engaged and historically conscious recorder of the events of a period with deep human dimensions in the Addis Ababa of 1919–1991.

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ARAM MATTIOLI, *Experimentierfeld der Gewalt: Der Abessinienkrieg und seine internationale Bedeutung – 1935–1941*. Mit einem Vorwort von Angelo Del Boca = Kultur – Philosophie – Geschichte. Reihe des Kulturwissenschaftlichen Instituts Luzern. Herausgegeben von ARAM MATTIOLI und ENNO RUDOLPH. Band 3. Zürich 2005. 239 pages. Maps are integrated in the text pages. Price: € 32,80. ISBN: 3–280–06062–1.

Glancing at the title of the book under review and at the pictures that accompany it, a pessimist might imagine that the same old story is being presented once again under a different cover. There is of course a reason for such a presumption. The Fascist military campaign and its subsequent rule in Ethiopia of 1935–1941 is perhaps the richest era of Ethiopian history in literature and documentation. Numerous national and international historians and writers have dedicated books and articles of all sizes to the study of this period. The results of the studies are nevertheless monotonously similar. Italian cruelties and the bravery of the Ethiopian resistance fighters feature top in most of them. Another characteristic of the lot is that they focus on the causes and course of the war, a war of mere colonial venture as they thought it was.