

Identify Formation and Perceived Social Roles of the Protestant and Orthodox Churches in Ethiopia

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Abbreviations Used

CMS = Church Missionary Society

DASSC = Development and Social Services Commission

ECFE = Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia

EECMY = Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (“Place of Jesus”)

EOC = Ethiopian Orthodox (Tewahedo) Church

EPRDF = Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front

LWF = Lutheran World Fellowship

QH = Qale Heywat Church (“Word of Life” Church)

SIM = Sudan Interior Mission (now called “Serving In Mission”)

SNNPR = Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People’s Region

Additional Notes:

Due to the ecumenical implications of this work, I have tried to be intentional about my use of the word “church.” The semantic range of this word is broad, and the various connotations it can invoke can be both antithetical and polarizing. While perhaps no treatment of the word will be satisfactory, I have chosen to distinguish a few of the implications by means of capitalization. Therefore, “Church” (capitalized) I will use to refer to the worldwide, ecumenical body of those who identify as Christians, who believe in Jesus as Christ and son of God, and who would hold to the Niceo-Constantinopolitan creed (in either its Western or Eastern form). That is to say, this is inclusive of all of the branches of Christianity discussed in this paper (i.e., Orthodox, Coptic, Catholic, Protestant, or Oriental). By “church” (no capitalization), I mean a specific denomination, sect, or tradition within the larger Church. The only exception to this rule is in the use of proper names, for which I will hold to the proper English grammatical standard of capitalization.

On another note, the nomenclature system in Ethiopia functions such that a person’s first name is his or her given name, the second name is his or her father’s name, and the third name (not often included in academic work) is the grandfather’s name. This does not accord well with the standard MLA system that requires that the last name appear first, as this would credit the author’s father for the work. Thus, for the Ethiopian names in the bibliography and footnotes, I have oriented them so that the first name appears first and the father’s name appears second, with the absence of comma denoting this; no other aspects of the citation have been altered.

Introduction, Questions, and Thesis

Ethiopia is the landscape of perhaps one of the most profound and fascinating performances of religious interplay on the African continent, and perhaps the world, today. Oriental and Occidental Christianity engage in converging and diverging dances to appropriate the soul of Ethiopian religious expression. Islam also asserts a potent vitality as well, and Animism remains quite alive on the margins of society. Religion and faith are not only issues of daily decisions, but of perennial allegiances, as one's faith not only reflects one's perception of God, but one's perception of the world and history, as well one's place in these. Religious expression, then, represents much more than theology, but speaks of international, national, and local narratives being enacted within and among individuals and communities in Ethiopia. It is because of these narratives that the unity of the Body of Christ is being strained in a land where the fear of and dedication to God are stronger than many places in the world. That is to say, it is not by lack of fervor that division has occurred.

In fact, Ethiopia's religiosity is renowned throughout the world. For the last 1,700 years, Ethiopia has traditionally followed the Orthodox rite of Christianity, maintaining it more purely than perhaps anywhere else in the world. However, in the last century and a half, Protestantism has exploded within the country, from non-existence in the early 19th century to nearly 20% of the populace today. This leads us to a number of questions, then, especially for a student studying faith, religion, and theology's role in the everyday lives of people in the Global South. Why and how was a new church implanted where one had existed for hundreds of years? Why and how was the Protestant church so successful in procuring adherents? How do two branches of the Church with very distinct histories and evolutions interact with one another after hundreds of years of near-absolute isolation? How does the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), which has long enjoyed dominance in the Ethiopian public sphere, operate in a pluralistic milieu and/or as a

minority? Besides the strictly religious realm of praxis and piety, what other forces are at play in Ethiopian religiosity? In what ways do the various religious traditions in Ethiopia view their social role and responsibility? These are just a few of the questions addressed in this paper. In trying to answer these questions, we will begin with a relatively in-depth survey of the religious history of the nation, after which we will explore the current relations between, within, and among the religious groups. From there, we will also look at the perceived and actual social role occupied by the various religious groups, and the way in which each group plays this out.

Methodology

The nature of this study requires a somewhat nuanced knowledge of the history that has led up to the current state of affairs. Therefore, a large portion of the study has involved researching the history and milieu surrounding the religious development in Ethiopia, especially around Hosaena and Dodola, the two cities where I carried out my study. Much of the local information was gathered through personal interview and interactions – both formal and informal – as well as locally published material. Although small in number and scope, surveys were used to try to locate the social dimension of the gospel as expressed in the practice of the Church.

For the more broad historical strokes necessary to put the story of the Ethiopian Church in a more comprehensive context, however, academic studies, books, manuscripts, journals, theses, and other resources pertaining to Church history and the socio-religious dynamics at the national and regional levels were used. What primary sources could be found were also used, especially concerning the missionary movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This chiefly entailed library and/or book research.

Although Islam was engaged in the field and in the study and represents about one-third of the population in Ethiopia, this work is more concerned with the various Christian sects

represented in the country. Integrating Islam and Animist religions more comprehensively in this conversation could prove to be an interesting topic for further research, however. It must also be noted that while Catholicism has indeed had a pronounced and lasting effect on Ethiopia's religious history and continues to be a vibrant force in the nation today, this study engages mainly the Protestant and Orthodox branches of Christianity. It should not be diminished, however, that the Catholic church has often been among the most influential forces of Ethiopia Christianity, especially as pertains to missionary impact. However, the scope of this study chiefly encompasses Protestantism and Orthodoxy, except when the sheer significance of another institution requires that it be engaged.

Western culture is something that will be engaged quite frequently in this paper. Although all attempts to quantify what Western culture exactly is would be oversimplified and somewhat narrow, Paul Hiebert names several characteristics of a Western world view by which we can at least orient and locate ourselves.¹ Some of the chief categories he mentions are a Cartesian dualism; materialism; seeing humanity in contrast to and in power over nature; a belief in progress to solve the world's basic problems; analytical and pragmatic approaches to these problems; a mechanistic worldview; individualism; equality; a priority of time over space; a concept of linear time; future-orientation; emphasis on youth; and an emphasis on sight, which begets an emphasis on literacy. While these are not the only indicators of Western culture, they represent an adequate summary of it. It must also be remembered, however, that Westerners are also defined by a recent history of greater material prosperity than their Ethiopian counterparts, which is played out within these categories as well as can be a category unto itself.

Another aspect of this study that is a necessary part of it is conversion, as much of the relationship between the EOC and the Protestant churches have been defined by this. Much of

¹ Hiebert, Paul G. Anthropological Insights for Missionaries. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985) 111-137.

this work endeavors to explain or analyze the causes and consequences of conversion in Ethiopia. Conversion is a broad field, and many qualified theorists have attempted to understand and explain it. I am certainly not among this group, and so will borrow from Donald Dunham's definition that, "Conversion is fundamentally about the assumption of new identities – often in situations in which macrohistorical changes have undermined old systems of status and self-validation."² While this type of situation is not the exclusive domain of conversions, it demonstrates two points with which this paper will work intimately: first, that conversion requires the changing of identity, and second, that it is influenced by macrohistorical (and I would continue to also emphasize microhistorical) narratives.

It must also be noted that this study was done almost exclusively within cities or towns, and facilitated primarily through Protestant structures and institutions. Although I am confident that my descriptions and interpretations will accurately portray the general realities experienced by the people living in these contexts, I am aware that my specific perspective may represent a distortion of the true character of the practiced faiths in Ethiopia. Most of the worship in Ethiopia – be it Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, or animist – takes place where 85% percent of the population lives: in the rural areas where there is neither electricity nor Bible translations.³ In articulating my observations, I must yield that they while they hold much truth, they are still grossly incomplete and are taken out of a specific context within Ethiopia.

Finally, it should be noted that the life and faith of the Church is preserved and expressed in the liturgy and the practice of its members, especially in the Orthodox tradition. Without the benefit of seeing the practice of the faith in both the Protestant and Orthodox traditions as expressed in prayers, liturgies, Sacraments, musical worship, fasts, feasts, Bible studies,

² Donham, Donald L. Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution. (Berkeley: University of California, 1999) 120.

³ The World Factbook. CIA.

evangelistic meetings, youth events, confessions, rituals, festivals, conferences, and celebrations, it is difficult to realize the great extent to which religion plays a role in the daily lives of many Ethiopians, as well as to appreciate the full depth and complexity of Ethiopian religious practice. Thus, participation in the life of the Church has also informed much of what will be said in this work.

History

Pre-Christianization

Although the early religious history of Ethiopia is shrouded in legend, these stories form a deeply-ingrained worldview that illuminates much of the past and present attitudes and developments in the country. One example is the anomaly of the falasha Jews who have called Ethiopia home.⁴ There is little question that Judaism had somehow reached Ethiopia well before the onset of Christianity; however, there is some debate as to how exactly that happened. The *Kebra Negast* (“the Glory of the Kings”), an authoritative book in the Orthodox faith, offers the prevailing view, which finds its root in the Old Testament. It identifies the Queen of Sheba⁵ as Queen Makeda of Ethiopia, and tells of how, in the course of her visit to King Solomon of Jerusalem, she conceived his firstborn, and in their subsequent interactions, Judaism was exported to Ethiopia. The veracity of this story is under no insignificant speculation, but that is beyond both the scope and purpose of this paper. Whether or not the story is true, it has profoundly shaped the Orthodox

⁴ Also known as the Bête Israel (House of Israel), these people comprise a large community of Jews who lived especially around Gondar and are thought to be descendants from the tribe of Dan. Most have now been removed to Jerusalem and have been reinstated as a lost tribe of Israel.

⁵ 1 Kings 10:1-13; 2 Chronicles 9:1-12. New American Standard Bible. (La Habra: Lockman Foundation, 1995).

belief - long the majority in Ethiopia – and is therefore still the operating religio-historical narrative for most adherents.⁶

This story is also important because it helps explain the worldview of many Orthodox that the EOC has not only been the protector of Christianity for nearly two millennia in a hostile and isolating environment, but is proof to them that they are indeed the elect of God, not only by faith, but by seed. The EOC sees itself as the natural continuation of God’s chosen people in all regards, not merely in a sense of being spiritual “grafted in.”⁷ In fact, according to the *Kebrā Negast*,⁸ not only was the Ark of the Covenant removed to Ethiopia, but along with it was taken the birth-right and promise of the Jews,⁹ and “from then on, the Ethiopians considered themselves, rather than the Jews, to be the chosen people of God.”¹⁰

For that reason, the EOC takes its role very seriously: “no church anywhere in the world has remained as faithful to the letter and spirit of the Old Testament as the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.”¹¹ Not only does this help to illuminate the professed authenticity of the EOC, but also works as “the basic metaphor for legitimacy and authority within Ethiopian culture.”¹² Indeed, in

⁶ Other explanations have also been posited as to how exactly a Jewish community became rooted in Ethiopia. Jon Abbink has said that the Jews arrived to Ethiopia in periodic waves of migrations, beginning with the Babylonian exile; another traditional belief is that a segment of the tribe of Dan broke off during the Exodus to settle south of Egypt; still others claim a migration through present-day Yemen, perhaps also from the Babylonian exile. Whatever the case, linguistic and cultural evidence suggests that the Jewish influence is ancient, and was well established even in pre-Christian Axum (before c.321 AD). Kaplan, Steven. The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia: From Earliest times to the Twentieth Century. (New York: New York UP, 1992) 22.

⁷ Romans 11, NASB

⁸ The importance of this book is denoted by one of its monikers among many as “the Ethiopian national epic.” Kaplan, *The Beta Israel*

⁹“And after he slept, there appeared unto King Solomon [in a dream] a brilliant sun, and it came down from heaven and shed exceedingly great splendour over Israel. And when it had tarried there for a time it suddenly withdrew itself, and it flew away to the country of Ethiopia, and it shone there with exceedingly great brightness forever, for it willed to dwell there. And [the King said], “I waited [to see] if it would come back to Israel, but it did not return. And again while I waited a light rose up in the heavens, and a Sun came down from them in the country of Judah, and it sent forth light which was very much stronger than before.” Budge, E.A. Wallis, trans. *Kebrā Negast*. (Cambridge: In Parenthesis Publications, 2000)

¹⁰ Isichei, Elizabeth Allo. A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1995)

¹¹ Kaplan, *The Beta Israel* 21

¹² Kaplan, 23

their respective histories, both the church and the state in Ethiopia have appealed to the Old Testament for the legitimacy of their authority.

The Inception of Christianity

Although Christianity had not been spread into Ethiopia as an official religion until the fourth century, it counts itself as an apostolic church based on two significant events. The first and most important is the Ethiopian eunuch's conversion in Acts 8 by the Apostle Philip.¹³ The second apostolic connection runs through the Coptic church of Alexandria, to whom Mark the evangelist is said to have preached.¹⁴

Indeed, with very little exception, the first 1,500 years of Christian development in Ethiopia was located squarely within the sphere of Coptic Orthodoxy under the auspices of the Alexandrian see. Although the political, cultural, social, and economic relationship between Axum¹⁵ and Alexandria had been established well before the time of Christ through trade routes along the Red Sea and Nile,¹⁶ their relationship gained a more fraternal and religious character in the 4th century AD, largely through the work of Adesius and Frumentius, the latter of whom was appointed by the great St. Athanasius to be the first bishop in Ethiopia sometime between 341 and 346 AD because of his key role in the evangelization of the nation and his unique understanding of it.¹⁷ Frumentius then returned to oversee the fledgling church until his death around 383. The

¹³ Many scholars agree that this court official mentioned in Acts 8 was actually an official in the court of Meroe, a neighboring kingdom more properly identified with Nubia. To be fair however, it was not long after this official's conversion that Meroe was overcome by and appropriated into the Ethiopian kingdom of Axum. Regardless of any of the actual effects the eunuch's conversion may or may not have had on Ethiopian Christianity, it serves as another source of the Church's legitimacy and authority, and this story along with the various references to "Ethiopia" in the Bible, play a large part in the overall story of Christianity in the nation.

¹⁴ Woods, Joseph. "The Church of Alexandria." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1. New York: Robert Appleton, 1907. Web. 30 May 2012. <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01300b.htm>>

¹⁵ The name of the empire located in northern Ethiopia that was known as "Ethiopia" as early as the 1st century BC

¹⁶ *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea: Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean by a Merchant of the First Century*. (Fordham University, London. Ancient History Sourcebook, 1912)

¹⁷ Frumentius and Adesius were young men from Tyre, Syria who accompanied their uncle on merchant ship to India around the year. On the return journey, they were captured along the Ethiopian Red Sea port of Adulis, and were brought to the court of Axum as slaves. During their several years of service in the royal court,

Ethiopian Church has since kept close ties with the Church in Alexandria, being located within its patriarchate until the 20th century.

The Church and State Develop

Another significant development in the evolution of Ethiopian Christianity was the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Although only a few Ethiopians were present at this council, the implications for the EOC were enormous. For one, it brought a band of refugee monks from Syria to Ethiopia who inaugurated and installed monasticism in Ethiopia.¹⁸ More significantly, however, the ecclesiastical implications for any church on the wrong side of the council's decision (i.e. the Ethiopian Orthodox) meant that the EOC was no longer in fellowship with the greater part of Christendom, both in regards to number and power. Although the EOC did not abandon its ties with the Egyptian Copts – who had also been alienated by the affirmations of Chalcedon – this situation certainly decreased its dealings with most of Byzantine Christendom. Then, beginning in the seventh century, having already lost much of its contact with the Christian world, it was even further isolated as Islam began to expand in the centuries that followed.

Islam and Conflict

Frumentius especially was able to use the authority with which he was slowly entrusted to create a haven for Christian merchants. In this manner, the kingdom of Axum began to field a larger and larger Christian presence throughout Frumentius' tenure in the royal court. After he had served the royal Axumite court for more than twenty years, King Ezana of Axum was converted to Christianity in about 321 and made it the favored religion of the empire, following the footsteps of his contemporary, Constantine. Frumentius was eventually given his freedom, and on his return journey to Syria, reported to Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, regarding the Church in Axum and the need for a bishop there; Athanasius immediately appointed him. Sundkler, Bengt, and Christopher Steed. *A History of the Church in Africa*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2000) 35.

¹⁸ Sundkler, 37. This band of monks was later called the Nine Saints. As well as inaugurating a system of monasteries, they also instituted a religious movement that reached many of the uneducated masses with a liturgical and literary revolution. Other monks, such as Tekle Haymonot in the 13th century, then worked to develop this monasticism and create a certain religious splendor in the rugged hills and mountains of northern Ethiopia. It also solidified connections with the Syriac Church. Ethiopian monasticism is another very interesting topic, and its social and developmental implications could perhaps be another fruitful topic of research.

As the dust began to settle after the Ottoman domination of most of the Near and Middle East in the 15th century, the forces of Islamic expansion moved to the Red Sea region, and the kingdom of Ethiopia in Gondar was left to fend for itself against the impending Islamic flood that manifested itself in the armies of Ahmed “Gragh.” Unfortunately for the Christian kingdom, Ethiopia was not only left to itself, but was also splintering after a period of unsavory successions, theological disputes, and clashing regional kings.¹⁹ A certain Muslim affinity toward Christians in Ethiopia Ethiopians²⁰ had facilitated a relative peace from the 7th century until the 16th, until the armies of Ahmed Gragn not only destroyed hundreds of churches and monasteries – with priceless treasures, artwork, and manuscripts – but also any semblance of peace that may have uneasily existed between the two groups.²¹

Perhaps just as important as the clashing of these religions, however, is the implications these skirmishes had on foreign involvement in Ethiopia. As Gragn utilized the military technology that was being exported from their allies in the Ottoman Empire, the Christian rulers in Ethiopia found themselves forced to look outside their borders as well in order to survive. Thus, they began to look to Christian Europe for aid, which they found in the Portuguese who were just beginning to explore the interior of the lands near the Red Sea in search of the legendary Prester John.²² The Portuguese brought military aid to King Gelawdewos of Gondar in 1541, and less than a decade later also brought Catholic missionaries, who were mostly concerned

¹⁹ Tadesse Tamrat. *Church and State in Ethiopia (1270-1527)*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972) 301. Constantinople, Armenia, Syria, and Alexandria – the centers of Christianity with which Ethiopia had the best relations – were all overrun by the Ottomans.

²⁰ This stems from the Quran’s general respect for “people of the book” (i.e., Christians and Jews), as well as the fact that the prophet Mohammed took asylum in Harer, Ethiopia, and was well received by the people of that land. Tadesse, *Church and State*

²¹ Although his real name was Ahmed Emanuel, he was better known as “Gragh” (“left” – he was left-handed). Gragn was an Imam who lived from 1506-1543. His life is said to be a pivotal point in Ethiopian history between the Middle Ages and the New era because, as will be seen, it led unmistakably to greater globalization just before a great, several-hundred-year campaign of isolationism by the Christian kings of northern Ethiopia. Tamrat, 73.

²² Prester John was a legendary Christian king who was said to have set up a kingdom in the African interior. While there certainly was a Christian kingdom in Ethiopia, the legend did not anticipate that this king would be non-Chalcedonian (AKA heretical) and/or black, both of which disillusioned Europeans in the coming years

with bringing the “heretics” of the EOC into the fold of Rome.²³ Thus began the still-ongoing process of the “evangelization” of Ethiopia by Western Christians.

Isolationism

Although for the first time in history the Ethiopian church was engaging Christianity from a Chalcedonian tradition on its homeland, this would actually contribute to the further isolation of the kingdom and faith from outside (especially Western) influence for hundreds of years. By the early seventeenth century Catholicism had gained such a stronghold in the country that King Susinyos (1606-1632) placed himself and his nation’s church under the see of Rome in 1622,²⁴ but a series of misunderstandings; veiled and dubious intentions; the spirit of colonialism; parochialism; and political power plays led to conflict and several battles, mostly motivated by theological or cultural-political disputes. Seeing the conflict and death this new faith tradition was bringing to his people, the king forcibly invited the Catholic guests and the newly adopted religion of the state to leave the empire in 1632.²⁵ This experience with Western Christians initiated an intense isolationist tendency in the nation that lasted until the reorganization and reorientataion of the Ethiopian empire with the rise of Tewodros II in the nineteenth century.

The Age of “Evangelization”

²³ Alazar Abraha. Saint Justin De Jacobis: His Missionary Methodology in Eritrea and Ethiopia. (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995).

²⁴ Sundkler, 76. This is a simplified account. The first main Jesuit evangelist, Pedro Paez, saw beauty in the thoroughly contextualized EOC, and did not concentrate on conversion, but rather was intent on reformation of the church from the inside. He was the missionary who actually succeeded in converting the king to Catholicism; after his death, his successor, Afonso Mendez, the “patriarch of a now supposedly Catholic Ethiopia,” set out to fully Catholicize the nation, according to the Western Latin rite. “Narrow and conceited, he was bent on doing a thorough job: the faithful were to be re-baptized...the ‘schismatic [clergy] were to be re-ordained; and the Ethiopian circumcision ritual and their feasts and fasts had to be abolished.” This attitude is what prompted the conflict that followed.

²⁵ From the kings’ official correspondence: “...For which reason we restore to you the faith of your forefathers. Let the former clergy return to the churches...and do ye rejoice.” Sundkler, 76.

Although the age of foreign missionaries began with these seventeenth century Catholic missionaries,²⁶ the immense distrust that situation created kept large-scale and/or overt missionary efforts out of Ethiopia until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.²⁷ Once again, Catholic missionaries began working in Ethiopia, and while they were not able to garner the formal support of the empire as before, they began to make some headway both among the Amhara in the North and among the Oromo in the South.²⁸ Protestant missionaries were also able to establish their presence in Ethiopia, especially in the South of the country, where the EOC's presence was less concentrated.²⁹ Although there are manifold reasons why European faith traditions found such ready soil in southern Ethiopia that would eventually irreversibly alter the socio-religious face of the nation, perhaps the greatest reason for the opportunities available for Protestant and Catholic missionaries in Ethiopia was "the political and material aid which the Ethiopians now began to expect from Europe," as well as "Ethiopian desires for political or

²⁶ Although the Catholic missionaries were more prominent at the time, there were incidents of Protestant missionaries who also began to venture into Ethiopia, the first of whom most recognize as Peter Heyling (c. 1608-1652), a German Lutheran who helped to translate some of the New Testament from Ge'ez into Amharic. He also had favor with the Ethiopian court, and is attributed with putting into place the foundation for the EECMY and other Protestant churches.

²⁷ Although a number of important events took place in Ethiopian history during this time period, they are not necessarily integral to the understanding of the religious developments among the Protestants and Orthodox. However, there are two events worthy of mention. The first is the Oromo migration, during which a band of tribes called the Oromo (or "Galla" by some) immigrated into Ethiopian territory from the south. They are important because they were largely Islamized, which proved unhelpful for the Christian kingdom in its fight against the Islamic Adal Sultanate. The second large development during this time was theological debates within the EOC, most of which centered around the divine nature of Christ. These debates were so fierce that they often resulted in physical conflicts, and required several times that the emperor intercede. Tamrat, 150, 230.

²⁸ Ott, Michael. "Blessed Justin De Jacobis." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. (New York: Robert Appleton, 1910). Justin de Jacobis and Bishop Massaia are the two most prominent Catholic missionaries who came into Ethiopia at this time. De Jacobis is another missionary who is recognized for his love and respect for the EOC, as well as his humble posture towards them in spite of differences. For this and other reasons, he has since been beatified.

²⁹ Böll, Verena, et al. *Ethiopia and the Missions: Historical and Anthropological Insights*. (Münster: Lit, 2005) 114. "Several observers of 20th century Ethiopia have also commented on the tendency of people in southern provinces to accept not the Orthodox Christianity of the state, but Islam or other forms of Christianity which emphasized their continued ethnic distinctiveness"

practical benefits from religion, something with which the missionaries were not altogether comfortable.”³⁰

As the Protestant and Catholic churches began to grow and develop, global and national forces worked to shape and develop the character and success of these efforts. From the time of the Battle of Adwa in 1896³¹ to the brief attempt at colonization carried out by Mussolini’s Italy in the early 1930s, foreign missionaries were often looked upon warily in the nation, as Catholics tended to be sympathetic towards the Italians, and vice-versa.³² When Haile Selassie finally did return to power after a five year exile from 1931-1935, he found foreign aid for development and modernization a useful tool, but also thought it prudent to diminish foreign cultural and religious influence in Ethiopia. He therefore placed restrictions on non-EOC church work. However, especially in the areas of medicine and education, the success of development efforts by the Protestant and, to a lesser degree, Catholic churches facilitated their diffusion in the country.

³⁰ Arén, Gustav. Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: Origins of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. (Stockholm: EFS-förl., 1978) 42-4. Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life. (Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Orthodox Church, 1970) 37. Eide, Øyvind M. Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia: The Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974-85. (Oxford: Currey, 2000) 259.

This is most evident in the medical and educational work that missionaries undertook, but is also evident in the Bible translations that began to sprout in this time. Perhaps the most notable is that done in Egypt by Aba Rumi (Abraham), an Ethiopian scholar who worked with an agent from the CMS to produce a nearly complete New Testament in Amharic, the vernacular around Gondar (the location of the Ethiopian court). In his personal memoirs, Haile Selassie also mentioned that the chief reason he allowed Protestant missionaries access to Ethiopia was the medical and educational benefits their presence entailed.

³¹ This battle, in which the Ethiopian forces under the threat of colonization were led by Menelik II to parry the technologically superior Italian army, was one of the most important battles in Ethiopian history, and has since been romanticized because of the symbolism it invokes in Africa shrugging of European colonialism. One historian has bestowed it with such importance so as to say, “Though apparent to very few historians at the time, these defeats were the beginning of the decline of Europe as the center of world politics.” Henze, Paul B. Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia. (New York: St. Martin's, 2000) 180.

³² Although there were mixed Catholic reactions to these and other Italian invasions, there were many who undoubtedly supported Mussolini’s army. Some bishops’ letters read: “Our duty as Italians, and still more as Christians is to contribute to the success of our arms.’ Another said, “The blessing of God be upon these soldiers who, on African soil, will conquer new and fertile lands for the Italian genius, thereby bringing to them Roman and Christian culture. May Italy stand once again as the Christian mentor to the whole world.” Rhodes, Anthony. The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators: 1922-1945. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973) 74. There are many more examples of such opinions. However, it would be an incomplete picture if one did not also mention Pope Pius XI’s criticism of Mussolini’s war-mongering, to which Mussolini responded contentiously, calling the papacy a malignant tumor in the body of Italy that must “be rooted out once and for all”. Bottum, J., and David G. Dalin. The Pius War: Responses to the Critics of Pius XII. (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2004).

Even with the restrictions, the foreign-planted churches began to experience exponential growth in the twentieth century.³³

Revolution and Religion

During the entire reign of the illustrious Haile Selassie I (1930-1973), the aforementioned missionary policy remained intact. His reign ended in his old age with a “creeping coup” executed by the Derg, a Marxist-Leninist regime led by Mengistu Haile Mariam, who effectively reigned from 1973 until 1991.³⁴ During the course of their rule, the Church in Ethiopia – orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant – underwent intense persecution: several leaders were killed or imprisoned, and thousands of churches were closed, destroyed, or confiscated. However, even during this time and the years immediately following, the Protestant church especially experienced great growth.³⁵

Christianity under the EPRDF

As Ethiopia emerged in 1991 from the decades under the Derg into the secular democracy under the newly-elected Prime Minister Meles Zenawi’s EPRDF party, Protestants began to have more freedom than ever previously enjoyed. It had finally been recognized as a legitimate Ethiopian religion, and continued to grow steadily. In fact, the EECMY is now the second largest Lutheran-affiliated church in the world – despite the fact that it is still only the second largest Protestant denomination in Ethiopia – and Protestants now represent nearly one-fifth of the Ethiopian populace.³⁶ However, with an increasing presence in the public sphere, the tension with the EOC

³³ At the time of the EECMY’s founding in 1959, it recorded 20,000 members. Now, only 53 years later, the church records its membership to be more than 5,279,822.

³⁴ Shinn, David Hamilton., Thomas P. Ofcansky, and Chris Prouty. Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2004). 120-1.

³⁵ Eide, 1-2.

³⁶ "Ethiopia." CIA - The World Factbook. CIA.

that was set aside during the Derg years has reemerged as each attempts to understand its place in the new and ever-morphing Ethiopian religious milieu.

The current situation is an uneasy one, and the relations among the EOC and the other Christian branches in Ethiopia remain somewhat strained. As we will continue to explore, however, this situation is a manifestation of the unique set of historical, political, economic, and religious conditions outlined above. Although it would be naïve to say theology and/or spirituality does not play a role in the general suspicion characterizing the relations between the two parties, this distrust is largely the result of cultural and historical divergences and disagreements, as well as ignorance and mistrust of the other.

Current Situation

One of the main reasons for the difficulty in understanding the other is found in the difficulty each branch has in categorizing the other. Even within the various religious branches, there is no religious homogeneity today in Ethiopia. The Orthodoxy in the heartlands of northern Ethiopia has a noble, historic, and majestic flavor alien to that of the rest of the country's Orthodoxy; Islam is the proud majority in the East of the country and its practice there shapes the society itself, whereas it is still an oppressed and fledgling minority struggling to maintain its character in other regions; Protestantism, while still undeveloped in much of the country, has reached a certain maturity both in the South and in the capital Addis Abeba; Catholicism finds itself the minority in these and all other locales in Ethiopia, and therefore takes on more of the character of its surroundings than the other branches. Each of these regions and traditions has a different history, creating particular socio-religious fibers peculiar in each. However, it is important to note that while each area may have a unique religious "melody," they all are shaped by and fit within the larger historical "themes" developed above.

Study Environment

The two specific locations in which my study was undertaken are no exceptions to this rule; thus, by integrating perceptions from these locations with the broader realities observed, I hope to paint a picture that neither sacrifices the peculiarity of local situations for the sake of sweeping syntheses, nor smudges out the diversity of experience within Ethiopia for a grand explanatory narrative. To that end, the following is a brief description of Hosaena and Dodola, the two locales in which I was placed. They are both located in South-central Ethiopia and are situated on the West and East rims of the Rift Valley, respectively.

Hosaena is a medium-sized city in the Hadiya Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR). It is on the crossroads of two of the major highways in the South of the nation, and due to its recent growth, has been chosen to house one of the countries only 23 universities. More important to this discussion, however, is the fact that it was one of the first footholds for the SIM-affiliated Qale Heywat church³⁷ (QH), which makes it one of the first footholds for Evangelical Protestantism in Ethiopia. The EECMY also has administrative offices in Hosaena for its South Central Synod, the oldest and largest Synod of that church. For this reason, the religious landscape of the city is largely Protestant, with nearly 90% claiming it as their religion. This is unique within Ethiopia, and Hosaena is known throughout the country for this anomalous demography.

The second location where I spent my study is called Dodola. Dodola is a town (significantly smaller than Hosaena) in the West Arsii zone of the Oromia Region. The significant majority of the population in and around Dodola is Muslim, with the Orthodox representing the largest minority, and Protestants following close behind. The EECMY Wabe Batu Synod administrative offices, however, are located in the town, and occupies a significant role in the

³⁷The "Word of Life" Church is the largest and first Protestant denomination in Ethiopia. It was officially started by missionaries from SIM in the early 20th century. The area around Hosaena was the first place where SIM settled down, and there are still development and regional administrative offices in Hosaena.

society there, not only because of its relatively large congregation, but also because of the eye clinic it operates and the secondary and elementary schools it has started, the former of which was appropriated by the state during the Derg regime. Dodola is not large, but because of its location on a major highway and because of the lack of other urban areas in the surrounding area, it is both officially and unofficially the district center for government, banking, NGO work, tourism, and other services.

Part and parcel of both of these and all other EECMY synod offices is an organization called the Development and Social Services Commission (DASSC), a quasi-religious development organization that works to “serve the whole person, physically and spiritually” so as to see a “reconciled, just and prosperous society.”³⁸ This organization is important not only because it was the means through which I was able to carry out my study, but also because it represents a fundamental difference in the mindset of Protestants and Orthodox in terms of their perceived and actual societal roles, and is an outworking of international and ecclesiastical allegiances that the Mekane Yesus church has historically embraced.

Identity (Who is the other?)

Although many would look at the history of the Church and see only schism and division, this is not her inherent modus operandi; indeed, the Church is perhaps the most universal institution in the world today. However, looking into the situation of the Church in Ethiopia and taking into account the recent explosion of faith systems developed mostly in Europe, unity seems to be unnervingly absent. While the situation is regrettably familiar, there are unique stories and perspectives that will help to explain how an institution in Ethiopia that has endured the downfall of empires; the fear of decimation; the suspense of an ebbing remnant; the glory of kingdom

³⁸ "EECMY-DASSC Vision/Mission." EECMY-DASSC. DASSC was originally a part of the EECMY's official structure, but now technically operates under separate administration (although in many ways, its de facto status is inextricably intertwined with the Mekane Yesus church). It is through this organization and Lifewater International that I was able to carry out my studies.

reign; the expansion of Islam; the threat of colonialism; the antagonism of competing traditions; and the rise of secularism still continues to thrive in the highlands of Africa's horn.

Another important aspect about religious identity to note is that in many of the rural areas and small towns, where most of the population lives in Ethiopia, the church (or mosque, as it may be) is often the most tangible and influential social institution. Religion is not so much a personal discipline as it is a mark of community identity and purpose; who you are often has much to do with your religion.

Protestant Voices

A representative Protestant voice in Ethiopia is difficult to identify; an inherently diverse branch of Christianity injected into a nation as varied as Ethiopia does not make for homogenous group. However, in order to simplify, we will take a look at a few voices from Ethiopian Protestants living in the reality of a faith tradition incubated under a "modern enlightenment" worldview coloring the religious atmosphere in Europe, subsequently planted by missionaries into a context that has only ever known Christianity through a "Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period."³⁹

Indeed, many of those in the EECMY fold see themselves having more in common and in more complete fellowship with Lutheran Christians in Germany or Norway than with the Orthodox believers half a kilometer away. This is not to say that they see their faith as an imported one, but that they accept and affirm the faith which they received, recognizing that it is biblically rooted.⁴⁰ Although Protestants cannot help but see that they have been formed by external forces, they do not see the current church as dependent upon foreign churches either theologically or structurally. They see themselves as a truly Ethiopian church, an entity not bound by force to the *ferenj*⁴¹ church, but rather by a fraternal unity. They see interdependence as

³⁹ Grenstedt, Staffan. *Ambaricho and Shonkolla*. (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2000).

⁴⁰ Degu Gentte. "EECMY Theology in Society." Personal interview. 12 July 2011.

⁴¹ "Ferenj" is the colloquial for foreigner, mostly used in reference to white Westerners

important for the growth of the church, and continue to maintain relations with churches with whom their faith rhymes historically and theologically,⁴² a fact illustrated by the EECMY's membership in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the presence of EECMY-affiliated guest houses for Swedish, Norwegian, German, and American Lutherans around Addis Abeba and the nation as a whole.

The view of Protestants towards other Protestants can be demonstrated by the presence of the Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE), an institution enveloping the nine largest Ethiopian Protestant denominations. While they have theological disagreements, they accept each of the other groups as a legitimate expression of biblical Christianity.⁴³ Both the Orthodox and Catholic churches are excluded from this organization, as well as being effectively excluded from any sort of fellowship with the Protestants.

Although not meant to be malicious, both the Catholics and Protestants see themselves as reforming the EOC's backwards ways. They see the Orthodox church as an institution which had been faithful at one time, but over the centuries has slipped away to develop a syncretic or otherwise heretical church. It is interesting to note, however, that in none of the interviews performed with EECMY theologians, professors, or pastors was the issue of Monophysitism or Unionist doctrine⁴⁴ brought up as a dissenting point with the EOC, which has historically been the reason for the EOC's exclusion from the rest of the Church. What the Protestants see as

⁴² Eide, 58-60. In this regard, the EECMY represents the extreme of the spectrum, not only because of the intensity and intimacy of their foreign relations, but also because of their sheer size. The EECMY is known even by other Protestants in the country for their relations with foreign Lutheran churches, especially those from Northern Europe, as well as for the extent of its development work. This is interconnected, as most of the resources for development come from the foreign churches or agencies.

⁴³ The QH church, for example, does not accept the infant baptisms of the EECMY, but still holds that the EECMY represents a true manifestation of the Church.

⁴⁴ The doctrine of Monophysitism (unionism) is the historical reason for the separation of the EOC and other oriental churches from the rest of the Christian community. In contrast to the hypostatic union (which asserts that Christ's divine and human natures are neither separated nor mixed, but exist and are joined in hypostasis), Monophysitism says that these two natures of Christ are mixed, yet without losing the fullness of substance of either.

angelology or Mariology is the greatest source of dissent, as well as the use of “apocryphal” books and other books not found in the standard Protestant canon. Some also mentioned the adhering to meaningless or false traditions as a point of contention.

Orthodox Voices

Perhaps the greatest deficiency in this discussion is that, especially in the West, the voice of the EOC is grossly underrepresented. There is a great deal of literature and academic studies available dealing with both the Protestant churches in Ethiopia and the “Evangelical Pioneers”⁴⁵ who helped to found them; there is much less on the perspectives of the those in the EOC concerning what they see as an invasive form of Christianity, whose “evangelization” of Ethiopia was not an exercise in conversion of the unsaved, but rather of “proselytization” of those who already knew the Christian God. Getatchew Haile engages this, as well as the implicit and explicit condemnation handed down by many Western missionaries, conceding that Jesus has charged His followers to diffuse the Gospel throughout the world. He continues to say, however, that:

“There is no biblical obligation to convert Christians to Christianity...Trying to resolve differences by ‘come to me’ is condescending and prejudicial. It is like saying....‘I am better than you; I have a better mental ability to understand the Scripture.’”⁴⁶

It is not primarily an attack on the intellect, however, that perturbs the EOC, as much as it is a denial of the validity of their faith and religious experience. In fact, Orthodox theology is less concerned with complete reliance on the Scriptures as the means to God than with the Truth and Light that the Church is able to provide as the body of Christ. Even if it were true that the Protestant tradition produced better interpreters of Scripture, the EOC places at least as much reliance on the Tradition handed down from Jesus Himself – itself a reminder of the traditions

⁴⁵ This is the title of one of the landmark studies performed concerning Protestant missionaries in Ethiopia. Completed by a Swedish Lutheran, it concentrates on the entrance of the “evangelical pioneers” into Ethiopia and the beginnings of the EECMY with only minimal acknowledgment of the EOC.

⁴⁶ Haile Getatchew, et al. The Missionary Factor in Ethiopia. (Frankfurt Am Main: P. Lang, 1998) 2.

instituted by YHWH on Mt. Sinai⁴⁷ - as on the words of scripture written by various individuals over the course of several centuries.

For this reason and by these means, the EOC sees their connection back to the Apostles as a kind of certificate of authenticity, as well as the faith and covenant of the Jews that it has also guarded meticulously. The question in the mind of the Orthodox, then, concerns the legitimacy of this new, somewhat obstinate form of Christianity borne of schism after schism. Not only have the Protestants broke off their connection by faith to the one Lord Jesus Christ, but now they insist on defying and rebelling against the Church that has guarded the faith for at least 1,700 years. The religion of the Apostles, which was taught by Jesus Christ Himself, is the rule of faith, and from this come not only the Scriptures, but also the liturgy, theology, tradition, fasts, and feasts of the Church.⁴⁸ Any sect that has broken off from that which preserves the authoritative religion of the apostles, whose authority is given them by Jesus Himself, is not practicing an orthodox faith. Especially after the treatment received by some Protestants in Ethiopia, there are many in the EOC who see Protestantism as an example of one such sect of Christianity that has lost or forfeited its true character.

It is not that the EOC is so arrogant so as to think they are the only Christians in the world completely faithful to the religion passed down by Jesus. In fact, recent decades especially have seen a rise in the EOC's ecumenical emphasis, as they have reached out to several Oriental, non-Chalcedonian churches around the world.⁴⁹ There have also been dialogues initiated between these Oriental Orthodox and the other Orthodox churches around the world, as well as having

⁴⁷It is also important to remember the EOC's attitudes towards the Old Testament, and how much even the Law of Sinai is deeply entrenched in their religious experience.

⁴⁸ 2 Thessalonians 2:15 "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us." NASB

⁴⁹That is, the Armenian Orthodox, the Egyptian Copts, the Syriac Orthodox, and the Indian Orthodox

begun the process of theological dialogues with the Anglican communion and the Roman Catholic church.⁵⁰

The EOC does, however, see itself within the society as a force representing the general public and the problems and joys associated with the lives of the people especially living within its family, but also those in the wider Ethiopian context. There is a sentiment extant within the EOC that the Protestants have only had success because of their association with national, international, and local powers. This presents an antithesis to the prevalent Protestant (mostly European) belief that sees Protestantism as a religion that was developed in the periphery in opposition to the power-mongering EOC.⁵¹ Many Orthodox see the “problem” of Protestantism arising “because the kings entertained Protestant missionaries” in decades past,⁵² and not only created a haven for their work, but actively aided their work because of the material and political benefits of such an alliance.⁵³ As a result, while the Protestants have persuaded many to their side, their faith is seen by the EOC as an obtrusion or parasite within society that is working to conform it to its own, narrow worldview.

Hosaena

Because the recent history in and around Hosaena is uniquely saturated with Protestantism, many of the practices there reveal some of effects this has had both on Protestantism and Orthodoxy in that area. Each has taken on characteristics of the other, even while they continue to repudiate the other. The worldviews of the Protestants, while incompatible with much EOC tradition, also would not be coherent with that of the Western Protestant church from which they derive their ecclesiastical history. Many of the festivals and holidays originate from the traditional Orthodox

⁵⁰ "Middle Eastern Oriental Orthodox Common Declaration." (Syriac Orthodox Church, 2001).

⁵¹ Eide.

⁵² Qes Zewde. "The EOC and Society." Personal interview. 6 Dec. 2011.

⁵³ Haile, et al.,

practice. The Orthodox, for their part, engage in “evangelical” evening prayer services, and have begun to do much of the liturgy in one of the vernacular languages.⁵⁴ While many of the Protestants have noticed the change in EOC practice and sentiments in the past few decades, and some admit that the EOC does indeed preach the gospel, they would still not consider joining in fellowship with the church.⁵⁵

Dodola

In Dodola, partly because Islam has been the significant majority for the entirety of the existence of Protestantism in the region, there has been less forced interaction, as both Christian groups are minorities that tend to be rather insular, both in their social and religious spheres. One instance of this is the hiring policy in Dodola, which requires that applicants will adhere and have adhered to the “principles of the EECMY.” While not meant to be a statement for or against the practice of the EOC, a problem was raised recently when a practicing Orthodox believer applied to work in the Wabe Batu Synod’s DASSC branch. The prejudice encountered during the selection process and the insular dynamics of the social work environment has created a sense of isolation for Orthodox who attempt to interact with those in the Protestant sphere, illustrating the ubiquitous distrust of the other’s religious practice and character.⁵⁶

Culture and Social Roles

It has been asserted by scholars that Protestantism is something of a modernizing and democratizing force, often because of its ties with Western European Post-enlightenment

⁵⁴ Most of the EOC churches only do the liturgy in the traditional Ge’ez, a language analogous to Latin in that it was once the lingua franca, but has since declined in the vernacular to the point that it is extinct besides use in archaic roots, classical texts, and religious liturgy.

⁵⁵ Degu Gentte. "EECMY Theology in Society." Personal interview. 12 July 2011.

⁵⁶ Teshale. "The Wabe Batu's Stance on the Orthodox Church." Personal interview. 25 Nov. 2011.

worldviews.⁵⁷ Therefore, it is no surprise to say that not only are theologies misaligned between the Orthodox and Protestants, but the cultures that have shaped and been shaped by the worldviews inherit in their theologies work to divide the two already-rifting demographics. While cultural inconsistencies pervade, there are certain cultural complexes within which each group can be said to interact,⁵⁸ and these can help provide a clue to how each tradition views itself, the other, God, and the society in which it finds itself.

At the risk of gross oversimplification, the EOC can be said to be a conservative force in Ethiopia, while the Protestants are a more liberal force. That said, the EOC seeks development and betterment for its people, but does so while holding the traditions not only of its faith, but also of its nation as significant for the formation of character and identity. While it does not condone indiscriminately the cultural practices, hierarchies, structures, and systems of those living around them, it has been more understanding of them historically, and has also been involved in the formation of much of the culture that has extended even beyond the church grounds.⁵⁹

To simplify once again, the Protestants represent a liberalizing force that seeks to reform the culture in which it has only recently found itself. Although history has not been completely abandoned, it manifests itself as more future-oriented than its counterpart and open to the

⁵⁷ "As an egalitarian religion profoundly opposed to hierarchy, Protestant Christianity would seem to enjoy a powerful affinity with democracy." Woodberry, Robert D., and Timothy S. Shah. "The Pioneering Protestants." (*Journal of Democracy* 15.2, 2004) 47-61.

⁵⁸ Böll, et al., 101. It should also be noted that there is a recognizable difference in the practice of urban and rural adherents to either branch. Although only generally true, urban Orthodox culture may be comparable to semi-rural Protestantism in that both religious expressions have been affected by *ferenj* worldviews to a similar extent.

⁵⁹ The EOC has an interesting history in this regard, partly because it has been a vibrant force in Ethiopia for so long. At the beginning, it was a missionary religion (although the early missionaries can often only be related to recent missionaries only by nomenclature) and encountered enculturation as it was made to be comprehensible in the various contexts of (mostly northern) Ethiopia. Although the process of enculturation is renewed with each new generation, the church has had such a strong presence for such a long time, that oftentimes the EOC is the defining aspect of the cultures.

acceptance of new narratives to define its reality, such as those imported from the sixteenth century European Reformation.

Orthodox

In general, the EOC is still relatively free of a worldview tinted with Enlightenment influence, and its teachings reflect this. For those who have remained in the fold of the EOC, there is a certain wariness concerning the religion of the West. With a memory that goes back centuries, the EOC see itself as a bulwark against the forces of cultural, religious, and actual imperialism.

For the EOC, there is little separation between religion and society, as religion plays a key role in the formation of society, and society is defined and punctuated by religion; there is no delineation between religion and public society to overcome so as to effectively engage the society because the society does not exist outside the church, but fits within it. The dualistic view of spirituality and physicality that is often associated with Western thought is not prevalent in that of the EOC, and therefore its spiritual work coincides with its work in the material lives of people.⁶⁰

The EOC also finds an important role as protector and comforter, as a mother to the people she has been given to care for. In all things joyful – whether weddings, feasts, holidays, artistic expression, baptism and other ceremonies, harvesting, graduations, healings, or success of any kind – the church is the place of celebration, just as in all things sorrowful – funerals, fasts, spiritual conflict, sickness, hunger, loss of family, grief, and lament – the church is integral in the grieving, comforting, and healing processes. The church is seen as the protector of the traditions handed down to the benefit of the community. Whereas Westerners tend to see the key to society's progress in the future, the perspective of the EOC sees the wisdom accumulated over the

⁶⁰ An example of this would be an EOC interpretation of James 5:14-16 that understands the healing of one who is sick not only to be the Lord's restoring of him/her physically, but also the forgiveness of the sins.

ages in the “democracy of the dead,”⁶¹ and can thus be sad to be looking more toward the history than the future. It does not see its primary role in society as developing it towards a goal, but in emulating, preserving, and practicing faithfully the story given to it.

The influence of the surrounding society is also evident in the EOC’s practice in the inherent nationalism visible in church tradition, canon, and practice. The *Kebra Negast* is perhaps the most tangible example of this. The *Kebra Negast* is a deuterocanonical book in the faith of the EOC, as well as a national epic that describes the legendary beginnings of the Semitic Ethiopian state in the time of Solomon, as well as describing the “kings” of ages past, that is, well-known biblical characters whose faith has given them the glory of kings. It describes the glory not only of the Ethiopian church, but also of the state that will rise to a glory above that of Israel and of Rome.

The *Kebra Negast*, however, is only one example of this nationalism. The EOC regards itself as the true Ethiopian church, and has enjoyed special privilege from the emperors for centuries. However, while this nationalism still defines much of the EOC’s sentiments concerning the public sphere, the intensity has begun to ebb in recent years with the successive secular governments of the socialist Derg and the current EPRDF-controlled democracy. Now, the EOC recognize more and more that their political “currency,” their power, comes from the people who continue faithfully, and that is where they are beginning to turn rather than the government, especially as they see the government turning to foreign powers for development, which often implies an influx of Protestantism, if not secularism.

Although the EOC has revered emperors as religious leaders, there is a certain ambivalence towards the recent governments as the EOC learns to live in an era of secular governments and humanist politics. There is acknowledgement that even when the EOC enjoyed

⁶¹ Chesterton, G. K. *Orthodoxy*. (New York: Lohn Lane, 1909).

a privileged position in Ethiopian politics, in the past, the “kings used the church to support themselves” and legitimize themselves in unstable political situations. Some priests even see the lack of government connection as liberating, in that it allows the church to do what it wills, and be more effective in the community.⁶² Although there are many examples of church leaders prostituting themselves to whichever king could guarantee them the most power, many lay-members and leaders in the church are somewhat relieved to be free of being used as the government’s tool, especially in the past decades where the government has been at best ambivalent towards them. Therefore, while nationalism is by no means absent in the EOC, they are learning to live in an environment where the politics are not necessarily favorable to them.

However, even while the EOC may not revel in its historic role as an actor in the state, it is still very much Ethiopian, and oftentimes the traditions of the church become entangled with those of the society and nation around it. This is most visible in the liturgy and décor of the churches around the country, as they both represent continuities and discontinuities with Orthodox practice elsewhere; there are certain aspects of church practice that do not change – such as the Sacraments and the Nicene Creed – but there are certain aspects of the EOC, such as the *debtera*⁶³ and *debab*.⁶⁴ Amulets were also traditionally carried to ward off the evil eye or other evil spirits in Ethiopia long before Christianity was present. While amulets per se are no longer common to wear on the body, there is a protective spiritual significance conferred upon objects, such as the wooden crosses worn by all males after baptism, which is reminiscent of amulets common in spiritism present within Ethiopia outside of the Christian sphere.⁶⁵

Also, the hierarchy of the EOC, especially within monasteries, represents the kind of political structures created at the local levels of governance, especially before the imposition of

⁶² Qes Zewde.

⁶³ Priestly order of musicians

⁶⁴ A ceremonial umbrella used to denote the presence of the Holy Spirit during the liturgy

⁶⁵ Qes Zewde.

some of the *ferenj* structures on the society. This preservation of hierarchy represents one of the manners in which the EOC preserves a culturally intelligible form of leadership⁶⁶ where the Protestants have tended towards Western, imported forms of leadership structure.

In this regard, the members of the EOC seem in general to be less captivated by Western culture than both the government and the Protestants in their midst. This can be seen in many aspects of life, from the manner of dress, to the nature of domestic relationships, to the expectations and dreams of youth, to the rituals of life performed in daily, weekly, yearly, and life-long cycles. This is due in part to the religious history of the EOC; although the EOC has been officially autocephalous for less than a century, the *de facto* reality has been that the EOC has operated on their own terms almost since their inception under the *ichige* in the Debre Libanos monastery.⁶⁷ Because of this and the aforementioned isolationist tendency in the EOC, the church has tended to be inward looking, holding its own traditions and religious culture in much higher regard than any other. Therefore, as Western religious culture has grown in Ethiopia in the past century, the EOC has stuck to its own tradition and culture as the high ground, suspicious of that which does not look like the faith or lifestyle handed down to them.

Protestants

Perhaps the most important aspect of Protestantism to remember in analyzing its social and cultural role is its historic and present connection with Western religious centers. Although Protestant culture is by no means a Western clone, it has been the recipient of no small endeavor

⁶⁶ Bahru Zewde, and Siegfried Pausewang. *Ethiopia: The Challenge of Democracy from Below*. (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2002). Although it is often difficult to differentiate between the historic dominance of the Amhara and the EOC as they overwhelmed other, smaller kingdoms within the Ethiopian highlands, the forms of leadership within the EOC still reflect a more culturally intelligible form of leadership as one patterned in consensus and elder leadership than one based upon egalitarianism and competition

⁶⁷ Although there has always been an archbishop ("*abuna*") sent from the Coptic Alexandrian see, oftentimes he was only a leader in name only, and could neither speak the language of the church nor the people in Ethiopia. Thus, the *de facto* leader of the EOC through much of her history has been the *ichige*, traditionally the abbot of the monastery at Debre Libanos. This was true until Haile Selassie was able to garner enough leverage to establish a patriarchate in Addis Abeba in 1959.

at enculturation, and it bears the marks of this still today; within a given group of people, I found the general rule of thumb useful that the Protestant community is likely to be one of the most Westernized.

A distinction must also be drawn here between “recipient” and “victim,” as victim would imply that Protestants were coerced into conforming to Western culture and had no agency in this transformation. While there are varying degrees to which this is true, it must also be remembered that Westernism often came as a by-product of Protestantism – to accept one was to accept another. Often, accepting Protestantism more signified one’s accepting some degree of Western enlightenment ideals or perception of democracy than saying that the theology and/or praxis of the church was superior to that of the EOC. “[Protestant doctrines provided] a pattern for coming to terms with, and benefitting from, dominant modern values and institutions.”⁶⁸ Others accepted Protestantism because they saw its structure and means of education as more appealing or less demanding than the traditional form.⁶⁹ That said, it would be a simplified picture not to say that there are not many Protestants who are less Westernized than their Orthodox counterparts, and that many, if not most, conversions were motivated by a genuine belief in the tenets of the Protestant tradition.

There is much talk in the Protestant sphere, particularly among European evangelical scholars, that the EECMY and other Protestant churches were communities formed on the margins or peripheries of society. While this is true to some extent – the largest explosion of Protestantism has taken place among the Hadiya and Kambata near Hosaena, as well as other isolated nations in the SNNPR and southwest Ethiopia – within communities and at an international level, these Protestants are no longer the powerless or marginalized ones, at least in the same manner as before. In the case of Dodola, for example, where the Protestants are a

⁶⁸ Böll, et al., 124.

⁶⁹ Solomon.

minority by numbers, their influence extends beyond that which is normal for a community of that size to have because of the international support they enjoy, and therefore the services they are able to provide and with which they are provided. While there is still some marginalization that many Protestants have come to expect from the Orthodox majority, there are many ways in which Protestants are no longer the periphery.⁷⁰

Having noted this, however, it must be remembered that in a nation as diverse and layered as Ethiopia, there are many ways in which people experience marginalization. True, in the course of history, the Hadiya and Kambata, for example, have been subject to the Amhara of the North, and could therefore be considered marginalized; their language and customs were subsumed to those of the Amhara, and they were hardly part of the socio-economic and/or religious hierarchy. Even so, at the local level, there was a significant degree of autonomy, and social systems continued to function as they had in the past.⁷¹ However, within communities, as European Protestants began to enter into communities and bestow favors upon those who belonged to their tradition, power was given to those who knew Luther's catechism, not necessarily those who the seera dictated should hold it.⁷² Thus, while Protestantism may have entered with the intention of ministering to the marginalized, because of the weight it carried as a result of its relatively large wealth pool, it created an artificial stratification in the society.

This, along with the fact that the Western upper class lifestyle is displayed on television and other media wherever there is electricity in the country, has created a desire among certain demographics in Ethiopia for Westernism. This desire is reflected in the way one dresses (to look rich is often to look Western), in the language one speaks (to speak English well is to be well-educated), and in the desires a community or individual cultivates. It shapes one's social circle,

⁷⁰ Solomon.

⁷¹ Bahru, 48-49.

⁷² Bahru, 48-51. The seera is a way of organizing society, as well as dictates who should have power among the Kambata people that was largely disregarded by Western missionary work.

the decisions one makes, and the values one holds in these decisions. It changes one's culture; it changes one's life. Therefore, as worldviews and priorities begin to align more and more with that of the West, the EECMY and the other evangelical churches that have also been formed by Western paradigms begin to speak more and more to people's priorities and processes.

Another aspect of Protestantism in Ethiopia is its propensity towards Pentecostalism⁷³ and the prevalence of the prosperity gospel.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, the Christian airwaves in Ethiopia and much of Africa are saturated with televangelists preaching the Bible through the unmistakable lens of the prosperity gospel. The reality is that from pulpits in North America, South Africa, and Nigeria, this "gospel" is often being preached to church leaders, who then carry these messages to the masses in Ethiopian Protestant churches.

Pentecostalism also characterizes the Protestant churches in Ethiopia, and can be seen in the worship styles, as well as in the presence of apostles, prophets, and tongue-speakers in the church. Although there is an emphasis on the spiritual world even in the EOC that has perhaps influenced the Ethiopian Protestant tradition as well, the manner in which it is lived out in the Protestant churches denotes a large discontinuity with Orthodox spirituality. This is interesting, however, because it also marks a discontinuity with the traditions of the missionaries who first taught the Protestant tradition in Ethiopia, and most probably represents a hybridization of a largely Western-formed tradition with Ethiopic-inspired spiritism.

One aspect of the Protestant faith that differs markedly from the worldview of the EOC is in its hope for the improvement of society. Where the Orthodox are defined by the Traditions

⁷³ The nickname for Protestants in Ethiopia is "Pentay," (a play off the word "Pentecostal") which, while not true in many cases, has stuck with all who hold to the Protestant tradition. Also, although it is also not denominationally accurate, it can often accurately describe the kind of worship that takes place within the churches. Thus, the "Lutheran" church in the Shiromeda sub-city of Addis Abeba has several "prophets," two "apostles," and almost no sign of liturgy.

⁷⁴ The channels I saw most often during the course of my study were Prophet TB Joshua's Emmanuel TV from the Synagogue Church of All Nations in Nigeria and Prophet Kobus van Rensburg's Spiritword channel from South Africa

given to it, the Protestants are characterized by reformation; where the Orthodox hold steadfast by the Spirit, the Protestants discover the Spirit anew; where the Orthodox remember, the Protestants anticipate. There is a fundamental difference in the worldviews generally held by Orthodoxy and Protestantism: where the former looks to the past, the latter looks to the future. Protestantism, especially relative to the EOC, is an institution based on progress and development. It holds dear reformation and renovation⁷⁵, and seeks these as the instruments to a better society and a truer faith.

Another way in which the Protestants differ from their Orthodox sister is in its dualistic view of human nature. Although some may see this resulting from the monophysite/hypostatic theological tension, it seems to have more to do with the inherent worldviews in each faith tradition, which are important because it is often from one's faith that one forms ideas on spirituality and physicality, as every Sunday sermon is working to educate and form minds in this regard. Orthodoxy comes from a worldview that sees the physical and material as intimately intertwined, perhaps even inseparable, whereas Ethiopian Protestantism is informed by a more dualistic, Cartesian worldview that has shaped thoughts on spirituality in Europe for the past several centuries.

This is perhaps no more evident than in EECMY-DASSC's insistence on a "holistic theology" that works itself out in "serving the whole person." In the EOC, there is less insistence on this because there is no need to rectify the divorcing of body and spirit; indeed, there has been no cognitive separation of the two in the life and mind of the EOC. Spiritual healing and physical healing are not held in separate spheres, as in the EECMY, which works for physical healing not as a "means of evangelization," but as a "matter of conviction"; that is to say, the EECMY – in

⁷⁵ "Tahedeso" – renewal/reformation – is a word that can often be heard in the sermons of Protestant preachers

contrast to the EOC – does not see physical healing as a spiritual act per se, but as an acting out of faith.⁷⁶

Another way in which Protestants differ from their Orthodox sister is in the manner in which they understand their relationship to the government. Although contemporary relations with the government are perhaps as alike between the two groups as they have ever been, their historical relations have been quite dissimilar. In the same way, although each branch has its own brand of nationalism, the motivations for this nationalism are also quite different.

Because the EOC has enjoyed the role of the popular and/or “folk religion” in many parts of the country, the emperors and princes of years past used it to buttress their position as ruler.⁷⁷ Therefore, while it was distorted by the crown, it was also to some extent exalted by the same. However, this has not been the case anywhere in the nation for nearly fifty years, and the recent governments have either outright opposed it (as with the Marxist-Leninist Derg regime) or have been ambivalent towards its prosperity (as with the current EPRDF government). No matter the case, the EOC has always been identified as uniquely Ethiopian, and the nationalism evident within her, while often cultivated to the good of whoever happened to be wearing the crown, has been identified as a popular religious nationalism that has been at least as much a part of creating a religious legitimacy as a national one.

The nationalism of the Protestants, however, comes from a much different background. Although Protestant missionaries enjoyed the protection of the regional or feudal rulers in their burgeoning stages,⁷⁸ their religious beliefs were often discordant with the religious environment of Ethiopia. Even as they were honored for their political potential, their religion was looked

⁷⁶ EECMY-DASSC Vision/Mission." (EECMY-DASSC, 2009).

⁷⁷ Crummey, Donald. Priests and Politicians: Protestant and Catholic Missions in Orthodox Ethiopia, 1830-1868. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).

⁷⁸ Crummey. In an age before official diplomatic relations in Ethiopia, the missionaries from Europe were often seen by Ethiopian leaders as the means to favorable diplomacy with European countries, and were therefore allowed to work in Ethiopia, sometimes in spite of popular and/or religious resentment towards their unorthodox or subversive beliefs and teachings.

upon with suspicion, although engaged in discussion and debate.⁷⁹ The reality for the lay Ethiopian Protestant was a religion that did not fit within the government's religious framework, and therefore this religious tradition was often disregarded by the authorities. The exception is when the government could benefit from its foreign relations or the fruits of Protestantism, such as in the fields of medicine or education.⁸⁰

Despite the mostly negative interactions the Protestant church has had with the authorities of Ethiopia, nationalism within the church is still very much alive. Much of this is imported from the EOC's sense of election by God mentioned above; however, Protestants in Ethiopia tend not to use the language and framework of God's chosen people, or at least appeal to it less than their Orthodox counterparts.⁸¹ In true Reformation form, the source of Protestant religious nationalism has much to do with *ad fontes*, rather than having its origins in Tradition.

The biblicism inherent in Ethiopian Protestantism has shaped much of her faith and work in the country.⁸² It is also by and through this lens that much of the nationalism evident in the church is drawn, or at the very least legitimated.⁸³ Ethiopia (or "Cush") appears throughout the Bible, and this appearance in the Bible is a source of pride for many Ethiopian Protestants, as they read themselves into the history of God's chosen people from the beginning, and see the current Protestantism as the fulfillment of psalmist's prophecy in Psalms 68:31 of Ethiopia stretching out

⁷⁹ Crummey.

⁸⁰ Eide.

⁸¹ Mulugeta Kebede. "From EOC to EECMY: One Man's Story." Personal interview. 30 Nov. 2012.

⁸² Although much different than the Evangelicalism Bebbington lived among when forming his well-known "Bebbington Quadrilateral," much of Ethiopian Evangelical Protestantism still fits relatively well within his model. However, while this is generally true (especially in comparison to the EOC), it probably has a more Pentecostal or charismatic bent than can strictly fit within this framework.

⁸³ Ethiopianism does not pertain to the scope of this work, but is an interesting topic unto itself, even if it has little to do with the realities of the nation itself. The nomenclature comes from the idea of Ethiopia as representative of that which is essentially and proudly African and Christian, both because it has a long history of indigenous, contextualized Christianity, as well as because it retained autonomy throughout nearly the entire colonial era. An Ethiopian strand of Christianity, then, is seen as pure African Christianity, untainted by foreign powers and thriving through adversity. Protestants see themselves as protecting the purity of Ethiopian Christianity, and fit themselves into the larger narrative of God's chosen people through the scripture story in which they place themselves. "Ethiopianism (African Religion)." [Encyclopedia Britannica Online](#). (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2012).

her hands to God as an example to and for the nations.⁸⁴ As they see it, Ethiopia has always had a special place in the God's history, and they are working to restore its former glory, which they see being distorted and diminished in recent years. They see their nation as representative of both Africa and Christianity at its finest and purest, and see themselves as the people of God, establishing their place as a vibrant worshipping community among those who have fallen asleep spiritually.

Finally, this leads to the most important aspect of Protestantism, especially as relates to the religious traditions surrounding it: the fact that it is in its nature a protest. The Protestantism of Ethiopia is perhaps more true to its name in this regard, then, than that of the United States. The ideals of the Reformation in Europe are not lost on Protestants in Ethiopia, who see their social role as one of reformer. Whether "harmful traditional practices," misinformed theology, or simply wrong religion, Protestants often see themselves as reforming Ethiopian society to that of one more faithful to the Christian God, more humane, more civil, more just, and more dignifying.⁸⁵ This is evident not only in the implicit and explicit claims that the EOC has slipped in its Christian practice, but also in the fact that Protestants often see themselves on the margins of a society that does not accept them because of its erroneous nature.⁸⁶

This self-marginalization also represents an interesting development, as Protestants have in some ways distanced themselves from mainstream Ethiopian culture by its acceptance of Western values and structures over some of the more traditional customs. As stated earlier, the missionaries saw themselves as preaching to the marginalized, as they went to those outside the Orthodox "church areas." However, as Protestants assume different cultural-religious values, and

⁸⁴ "Envoys will come out of Egypt; Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God."

⁸⁵ Solomon.

⁸⁶ An interesting addendum to this discussion is the existence of a heavily Protestant-influenced Ethiopian Tahedeso ("renewed/reformed") Orthodox Church. Although a very small minority, its existence was only recently brought on by missionary activity, and while it calls itself Orthodox, is not in fellowship with the more well-known Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, which we have been referring to as the EOC.

as many of the church leaders begin to benefit from their association with the ferenj church, they continue a cycle of exclusivity that can also be seen in other religious traditions.

Synthesis, Implications, and Conclusions

In Jesus' so-called high priestly prayer, Jesus appeals on behalf of the believers in the world as a whole, "that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You."⁸⁷ The unity of the Church is something that is vitally important to Her life, and was on the forefront of Jesus' thoughts on the night before His passion. In Ethiopia, a unique backdrop is laid out upon which the struggle for this is being undertaken often at great cost. Unfortunately, the Church in Ethiopia, Europe, and the United States has generally failed to recognize the importance of, or at least accomplish, this endeavor, once again reenacting the divisiveness that has plagued Christians over the centuries. The religious history of Ethiopia has created a situation there that is unique within the global Church, where we see many of the principles of the Reformation rising up again; unfortunately, we also see many of the failures of the Reformation haunting the scene as well.

Even with this pertinent comparison in mind, there are many different forces at work in Ethiopia today than there was in Europe in the 16th century. For one, the missionary and colonial factor gives the swelling Protestant presence a far different flavor than the discontents of Medieval Catholicism. The global political and economic position of Ethiopia puts it in a place where it cannot exercise the amount of power many of the richer nations can, and has therefore been the oft unwilling recipient and victim of cultural, economic, political, religious, and actual imperialism. This relative powerlessness in the global scene is important in understanding the unfolding of events in the past one hundred years.

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However, Ethiopia has a unique history of disproportionate power itself, especially within the African continent. It has become a symbol over the years, albeit an imperfect one, of that which is truly African, which can be seen in many aspects of religious and social life throughout the world, such as Rastafarianism and the eponymous “Ethiopianism” through Christian Africa just to name a couple. It also has a unique religious history that creates much potential for ecumenical healing in the Church, even if it has not realized this potential.

Outside the Christian realm, Ethiopia represents a frontier in intercultural interactions. Not only do we see the interplay of Christianity (in its manifold forms), Islam, and traditional African religions, we also see a diversity of people, cultures, and languages perhaps more densely located than any other place in the world. In many ways, the stories being played out in Ethiopia is a microcosm for the clash of cultures, worldviews, and religious traditions happening worldwide. For this reason, in turning our eyes to the highland and desert regions of the East African Horn, we can learn some important lessons that can have profound effects on the Body of Christ in the ever-contracting yet endlessly diverse world.

While this is true of a number of the public and private spheres in Ethiopia, in this paper, we have focused our attention on the religious face of Ethiopia, particularly the Christian one. We saw how the formation of Orthodoxy in the Ethiopian setting has worked to create a unique and thoroughly contextualized Christian entity in East Africa that is a window to some of the ancient traditions of our ancestors in the faith.

We also examined how missionaries brought in a foreign faith and worked to contextualize it as best they knew how. We saw how the folly of human pride and shortsightedness can stain even the Bride of Christ as She seeks to gather more souls under Her wings. We saw how global political, economic, social, and cultural forces collaborated with individual desires to shape the face of a nation and develop an interplay of unique religious entities in

Ethiopia. In this interplay, the churches in Ethiopia began to react and interact with other traditions and religions. In particular, both the Orthodox and Protestants underwent and are still undergoing an identity formation that sees the other as a discontinuous and incongruent – many would say heretical – faith. Even so, they have unmistakably affected one another, as Protestants drew from the recognized and thoroughly diffused traditions of the EOC, and the EOC also drew from certain concentrations within the Protestant tradition that they saw as beneficial to their understanding of the Christian faith.

However, even with this confluence within Ethiopian Christianity, the EOC and Protestant churches have come to understand and occupy their roles within society very distinctly. Yet, as both branches of Christianity have sought to understand their roles in society and fulfill them as faithfully as possible, both branches have been co-opted by surrounding cultures and politics in some regard. They have both been used by states for colonial and imperial purposes; they have both been tainted by impure motives of those representing it; they have both misunderstood their mission and motivation at times.

In moving forward, patience, understanding, graciousness, and love will be paramount if relations between these two Christian sisters are to be healed. There will need to be dialogue and education, but there will also need to be a tangible shift in the approach of each group to the other. This is something that will take time and will require that the exclusive circles that have formed within each group begin to open and overlap. It will require humility and in all likelihood no small number of uncomfortable interactions on the personal, congregational, and ecumenical level. It will require that leaders of one tradition take the initiative in approaching leaders of the other tradition with a posture of humility, and that private lives begin to interact more with those of the other camp. It will require that foreign Christian leaders reexamine their motives and the implications of their actions as they support various groups within Ethiopia. The kind of healing

needed is both deeply personal and deeply institutional. It will require the kind of “wisdom from above” described in James 4:17-18, which is, “First pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”⁸⁸ And it must be understood that the substance of this seed is worth the sweat of the sowing.

I will say it again, the importance of this endeavor is something that must be grasped; it must be understood that this issue, both in Ethiopia and the world at large, is of vital importance for the Church as we continue seeking the Kingdom in the 21st century. It is perhaps the most important issue facing the Church in the days and years to come, as it has been since its inception. It is my hope that this work and the attendant study will have contributed to that goal in some small manner.

⁸⁸ NASB

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