

Book Reviews

Culture change in Ethiopia: An evangelical perspective

Mekonnen A 2013

Oxford: Regnum. xviii + 197 pages. ISBN 978-1-908355-39-3. No price quoted

This book offers considerable insight into one of the most historically isolated countries in Africa from the period of the early church. This isolation – geographical, economic and political – has enabled its culture to be preserved perhaps more than any of its neighbours. Traditionally, this is a nation of one faith, that of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. But since the opening up of the country which destroyed its fierce sense of independence, beginning with the United States controlled modernisation of former Emperor Haile Selassie and continuing through Mengistu's Marxist-Leninist regimes, both Islam and evangelical Christianity have grown significantly. To all this, which began as a doctoral thesis, the author adds an evangelical perspective and years of experience, and the result is edifying, especially in terms of cultural change and resistance.

The author begins by defining the historical context of his work, as far back as the Old Testament Solomonic dynasty, without which it would be difficult to understand more recent events. Here he engages in a useful contextualised discussion of worldviews since that of Ethiopia was so different from both the rest of Africa and the rest of the world. In this he adopts an interdisciplinary approach. The rapid pace of change is exemplified in the significant growth of evangelical Christianity.

As a participant observer, he develops a number of themes as he develops his thesis. These include the culture of violence which has become an integral part of political life, leadership crises in Ethiopia. Throughout, he critiques a negative acceptance of ideologies and parochialism/localism and develops an inclusive vision of Ethiopia grounded in its history, traditions and culture and employing technological advances and innovations. But integral to this process will be dealing with the historical woundedness of the Ethiopian which has deep roots, both internal and external, consigning them to never ending misery. He acknowledges that Ethiopia has lagged far behind other African nations. His methodology might be termed, anthropological, theological and missiological.

The vision the author presents is based on a number of premises. From a Christian perspective the vision must be based on the ultimate destination of human destiny in God's economy. This leads to a global perspective which will provide for

the emergence of local leadership. Education has to be provided within a blended approach. Justice must be an integral factor. Innovation and creativity must be encouraged. Communication has to be addressed to all as dignified human beings. Since the environment is all around, exploit natural resources and the tourism industry. Evaluate and reconfigure the concept and use of time. Stress the fundamental value of trust. Enter into a developing relationship with God.

These premises apply, as is obvious to all, not just the suffering hordes in Ethiopia. This book is an eye-opener regarding leadership in all cultures and is to be commended for its simplicity of presentation and explanation.

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Stopping the traffick: A Christian response to sexual exploitation and trafficking

Miles G & Crawford CF (ed.) 2014.

Oxford: Regnum. Xx +318 pages ISBN 978-1-908355-51-1. No price quoted

This is a book about coerced migration and resultant sexual and other kinds of exploitation. It is about a very sensitive and unpleasant subject, one which we would, in reality sweep under the carpet and try to forget it exists. Yet, more and more it is in our faces and we cannot ignore it or pretend it does not exist in our sophisticated societies. And yet, it is supported because there is a demand for it. It is economically viable; not only that, it is extremely profitable; otherwise people would not take such grave risks to promote it. Today, it is a matter of global concern and then authors have done well to provide a valuable resource for those of us who simply do not know how to identify the problem and its victims and how to respond to it.

One of the practicalities of this volume is that it emanates from a conference on Beyond awareness: Empowering a response. Hence it is multi authored which means that the quality of offerings varies but their intent is of high quality and the intent is to recommend better practices.

The introduction to the book poses the initial question: How should Christians respond to sexual exploitation and trafficking? Part one then goes on to ask: What can we know about the problems of sexual exploitation and trafficking? which raises the basic question will this ever end. Part two How should we make sense of sexual exploitation? raises biblical and theological issues. Part three inquires How should we respond to demand? And investigates matter relating to the human

psyche. Part four How can we better work with boys and men? Moves into a hitherto unconsidered area which we have glibly and irresponsibly assumed belongs to the feminine domain. Part five How can we better work with transgender people? takes us deeper into new areas of concern where feelings of rejection and isolation are rife. Part six How should we collaborate introduces the widespread field of networking. Helpfully, it includes a useful list of resources.

This is a very practical manual in the best sense of the word. It is reflective which means praxis oriented focussing on caring for those who are sexually exploited. It seeks to deal with actual questions practitioners are struggling with. It is faith-based and integrates a variety of theologies It will be of enormous help to those who just do not know how to begin to deal with problems which arise which do not automatically and normally arouse the interest and concern of Christians. But more than that it will, hopefully be a sign to those who feel alienated that they are not alone.

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Christian warfare in Rhodesia-Zimbabwe: The Salvation Army and African liberation, 1891-1991

Murdoch NH 2015

Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick. xxxi + 215 pages. ISBN 978-1-62564-681-1. No price quoted.

One might be forgiven for thinking that the Salvation Army (SA) was at the forefront of the struggle for social and political justice as a result of the scant knowledge we have of its actual history. Our perceptions have often by coloured by peering through rose-coloured spectacles out of admiration for its achievements among the downtrodden in society. In this book, Norman Hutchinson implies that the ‘Sally Arm’ has capitalised on such perceptions. Certainly it has been extremely reticent regarding exposing valuable documentary sources to public scrutiny and even its servants have recoiled for offering too much information in interviews. Despite this, Murdoch, facing a long term life threatening struggle with Alzheimers disease, has provided an extremely credible and valuable contribution to the historiography on Salvationism in Zimbabwe, though not restricted to it.

Murdoch writes as an honest insider so he has no axe to grind. He travelled and searches far and wide to secure written and oral sources as far as time and circumstance would permit. Murdoch’s story is that of a mission to white Zimbabwean people in which the SA was caught up through failure to impact

the white population. Its need or greed for land was like a magnet which drew it towards the colonising purposes of Rhodes. The story is bound by the two Chimurenga (liberation struggles in 1896-1897 and the 1970s) between support for colonisation and opposition to 'communism'. Murdoch weaves his study around the collision of three forces colonialism, councils and liberation wars. It is also a tale of the unilateral disposition of power and personalities (including nepotism), of international politics and ecclesiastical politics as senior international and local SA leaders vied for support against the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism, in league with other denominations. In many ways it is a story of a mission to white people and blacks only appear as interlocutors when that failed miserably. But as with all mission, it is also a narrative of sacrifice, however contorted as in the employment of 'colonial mythology' regarding the deaths of SA 'martyrs' so far apart as 1896 (Edward Cass) and 1978 (Sharon Swindells and Diane Thompson). Murdoch concludes with an interesting and helpful note in historiography on the provenance and authenticity of sources.

Murdoch's contribution fills an important gap in African history. Despite claims of political neutrality, from its inception the SA was embroiled with imperial and colonial politics, particularly through William Booth's relationship with Cecil Rhodes; and at the other end of the period through its concerns and subsequent actions regarding the Programme to Combat Racism. I heartily recommend it to those interested in expanding their range of sources for a study on mission history in southern Africa.

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