



Encounter beyond routine

Cultural roots, cultural transition, understanding of faith and cooperation in development

International Consultation, Academy of Mission, Hamburg, 17th-23rd January 2011



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Redaktion: Owe Boersma (EMW, verantwortl.), Wilfried Neusel (EED)
Grafik/Konzept: tjulipp, Hermannsburg
Titel: Getty Images/Stockbyte
Layout: Birgit Regge
Druck: MHD Druck + Service, Hermannsburg

Hamburg, Juni 2011

Die Publikationen des EMW können unter der o.a. Adresse kostenlos bezogen werden, Spenden zur Deckung der Herstellungskosten sind willkommen: Spendenkonto des EMW
Nr. 400 300 bei der EDG Kiel (BLZ 210 602 36)

Charismatic Renewal, Denominational Tradition and the Transformation of Ethiopian Society

In the year 2005, I spent a few weeks in the northern Ethiopian town of Bahir Dar as part of my field research on Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in the country. After having conducted most of my work in Addis Ababa and in the town of Awasa in the mostly Protestant south, I wanted to study Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in a predominantly Orthodox area. Next to conducting a number of interviews, I tried to visit as many Pentecostal and Protestant churches as possible. For my first Sunday service, I went to a church which I will call “church A” for the moment. Church A was in the process of erecting an impressive concrete building, quite tall and roomy as if to compete with Orthodox sacral architecture. In fact, it was the tallest building in town. The worship service itself, however, was less spectacular in comparison to many other churches I had visited. The building filled to barely half its capacity, and the singing seemed rather subdued for Ethiopian conditions. People only clapped their hands when asked to do so, nobody prayed in tongues, and spontaneity was rare. When a number of deacons were invited to come forward to pray, a woman from the choir erupted into ecstatic praise; the deacons waited patiently for her to finish, but nobody in the church followed her lead. During the sermon, there was no spontaneous crowd response; and the service ended without one of the typical altar calls.

Two weeks later I visited quite a different church, let’s call it church B. Church B met in a tiny rented house, which could not hold all the worshipers gathered there. About half of the church therefore sat in the courtyard under a tarp, following the service through an open window. The singing was highly energized and loud, with spontaneous bursts of praise and tongues, as it went on for about an hour. The preacher introduced his sermon with a warning that he would have much to say and needed everyone’s patience, and in the following forty-five minutes he presented an array of bible passages and contemporary tales, all centering on his theme “joy in Jesus.” After the sermon, more praying and singing followed, and at one point the music leader prompted the church to sing in tongues. The worship service was led by a young and very energetic evangelist, whom I had gotten to know as someone who easily strikes up conversations with strangers in order to share his faith.

It may be suspected by this comparative characterization, that one of these churches belongs to a mainline Protestant denomination whereas the other is Pentecostal. This perception is true. However, the actual identification of the con-

gregations is not what one may expect. For church A – the one with the tall building and the rather structured service – belongs to the most important *Pentecostal* denomination of the country, the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers’ Church (EFGBC), whereas the loud and slightly chaotic Sunday celebration was the worship service of the *Lutheran* church in town, the Bahir Dar branch of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY).

This example is not all that uncommon and it points to two important trends in the development of the Ethiopian confessional landscape. First, only twenty years ago, it would have been impossible to find such a wide array of Protestant churches in an Orthodox town like Bahir Dar, where in 2005 there were so many that I could not visit them all for Sunday worship. This change points to the significant increase of religious plurality and Protestant growth, which ensued after the downfall of the socialist military dictatorship of the Derg in 1991. In these last decades Protestants enjoyed greater religious freedom than ever before and grew at an astonishing rate. Before the downfall of the Derg, roughly 2.1 million people identified as Protestant in the 1984 census, which corresponded to about 5.5 percent of the total population.¹ By 1994 their number had more than doubled to 5.4 million, or 10.2 percent of the overall populace,² and by 2007 Protestants amounted to 13.7 million people, or 18.6 percent.³ Between 1994 and 2007 the annual growth rate of Ethiopian Protestantism was 7.4 percent and by far exceeded that of the country and those of other religions.⁴

Secondly, this Protestant growth coincides with an unprecedented spread of Pentecostal spirituality and theology to the mainline Protestant churches. It is not uncommon to observe praying in tongues in mainline Protestant churches, even from the pulpit, as well as prophecy, exorcism, and prayers for healing with the laying on of hands. The structure of services is very similar between all Protestant churches, and pulpit sharing between Pentecostals and mainline Protestant is a common practice. There are only a few smaller churches and denominations in the evangelical spectrum that explicitly resist being identified as Charismatics. The largest mainline Protestant denominations, the Kale Heywet Church (KHC), the EECMY, and the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC), are deeply influenced by the Charismatic movement. All three denominations have centrally accommodated Pentecostal theology and spirituality in their theological discussions and regulations.⁵ This conflation of Protestants and

Pentecostals has a terminological correlate in the use of the term “Pente” (coming from “Pentecostal”) for all Protestants. The collaboration between Pentecostals and mainline Evangelicals is also furthered by the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE), which is the only significant ecumenical body for Protestants in Ethiopia. Pentecostal and Charismatic spirituality and theology, therefore, is not an undercurrent but a central feature of Ethiopian Protestantism. Though the intensity of Pentecostal influence on mainline churches varies between congregations and different regions, there is no church that is not influenced and challenged by the Charismatic movement in one way or another.

The following remarks will explore the consequences of these developments for Christianity in Ethiopia and church partnership between Ethiopia and Europe. They will begin with a short history of Ethiopian Pentecostalism, followed by a detailed account of how the movement entered the EECMY. The conclusion will delineate some theological implications of these developments, especially with regard to collaboration and support in mission and development.

History of the Pentecostal Movement in Ethiopia

Ethiopian Pentecostalism⁶ does not have American roots, but began with Finnish and Swedish Pentecostal mission initiatives who entered Ethiopia in the 1950s. The first Pentecostal missionaries with a long-term presence in Ethiopia, were the Finnish couple Anna-Liisa and Sanfrid Mattson who arrived in Ethiopia in 1951. Their organization was structured like an umbrella organization for otherwise independent Finnish missionaries. In 1956 a female missionary belonging to this organization opened a work center in the Addis Ababa Merkato area and began spiritual meetings there, which allowed her to connect with some Ethiopian youths, mostly high school and university students.

The second group of missionaries were Swedish Pentecostals, who embarked on a number of mission initiatives from 1959 onward. The most important one of these was the work of the Swedish Philadelphia Church Mission established in the southern town of Awasa in 1960. While the main work of the mission there was a vocational school, the mission also conducted meetings and formed a small congregation. The main importance of the Swedish mission in Awasa for the early Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia, however, lies in the annual summer Bible schools the mission conducted. These revival meetings lasted several weeks and were attended by students in their summer break from all over the country. The mission thereby functioned as an important early hub for the emerging Pentecostal groups.

The Pentecostal movement gained momentum toward the middle of the 1960s, with a number of young Ethiopians claiming the central Pentecostal initiation experience: baptism in the Holy Spirit. Some of the youths attended the Finnish or Swedish missions, but most of them congregated in mission-independent prayer groups and came in contact with Pentecostal teachings through friends or literature.

Such groups existed, for example, at the Teacher Training Institute in Harar, at the high school in the town of Nazaret, and among university students in Addis Ababa. A number of these initiatives converged in Addis Ababa and founded the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers’ Church (EFGBC) in 1967. The group selected its first leaders and invited two Swedish missionaries to ordain them as elders. This incident led to a serious conflict between the Finnish and the Swedish mission, since the Finnish Mission had lost some of their following to this new movement and were under the impression that the Swedish were building a new following at their expense. However, this was not the case, since the EFGBC kept its distance from the Swedish missionaries and asserted their independence.

Only a few months after its foundation, the church applied for registration as a religious association. This was a bold attempt reflecting the modernizing impulses of the Pentecostal youths, given that in public sentiment and political reality the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) was the only legitimate representative of Ethiopian Christianity. All Christian groups outside of the Orthodox Church were operating under the “Regulations Governing the Activities of Missions” from 1944, and the legislation making Ethiopian religious associations possible had only been put into place very recently. The 1955 revision of the constitution for the first time had provided some measure of freedom of religious practice. This was taken up by the Civil Code of 1960, which outlawed discrimination on the basis of religion, and deemed all religious organizations outside the Orthodox Church as associations. The “Legal Notice No. 321” of 1966 provided guidelines for the registration of associations. Therefore, less than a year after this new legislation had been drafted, the EFGBC explicitly invoked the registration guidelines and became the first religious group to test this new legislation. The Ministry of Justice apparently did not know what to do with such an application and forwarded it to the Ministry of Education, which had been in charge of registering foreign missions. Nobody felt in charge there either, and after some months the application was rejected by the Minister of the Interior, which also entailed the closure of the church’s meeting places.

The EFGBC at first complied with this ruling and relied on smaller meetings in private homes and for a time used the Swedish mission property in Addis Ababa. Swedish missionaries also attempted to use some of their Imperial contacts to intervene on their behalf. During this time, the Ethiopian Pentecostal movement encountered its first doctrinal division when one of its evangelists teamed up with Oneness Pentecostal missionaries and subsequently founded the Apostolic Church of Ethiopia. Oneness Pentecostalism denies the doctrinal concept of the trinity, which of course was an extremely problematic outlook in Orthodox Ethiopia.⁷

From the end of 1971 onward, the political pressure on Pentecostals increased again, culminating in the arrest of approximately 250 worshippers on Sunday, 27 August 1972. The legal and political aftermath of this incident did not turn out

in favor of the Pentecostals, even though they had managed to bring their case to the attention of the international press (there was an article in the international edition of Newsweek) and found some Lutheran supporters, who sparked an investigation by the World Council of Churches regarding the role of the Orthodox Church in the matter. The Full Gospel Church was not the only religious group targeted by the government during this time. Alongside the Pentecostals, the government rounded up Jehovah's Witnesses, the Apostolic Church suffered severe repressions, and even the Finnish Mission in Addis Ababa was shut down for longer intervals.

When the popular revolution began in 1974, the Pentecostals were hopeful that now they would be able to attain religious liberty. The EFGBC resumed public meetings in the summer of 1974 and immediately set up a new national structure. The renewed leadership power also entailed the second doctrinal division in the church, when a group began to emphasize exorcisms more than before and contended that even born-again and spirit-filled believers may be possessed by demons. They were forced out of the church and established the Gospel Deliverance Church.

The EFGBC meetings continued until 1976, when they were interrupted as result of a neighborhood riot. In 1977 the church was granted land by the city and completed its first own building in October 1978. However, this was already at a time, when the ruling committee (the Derg) turned toward scientific socialism, violently co-opted the Orthodox Church, and settled internal differences in the bloody campaigns of the Red Terror. Many of the liberties that the revolution had initially brought were now revoked. In the country side, a number of rural EFGBC congregations had already been shut down and leaders imprisoned,⁸ and a few months after its opening the Addis Ababa church was closed as well, and its property was taken over by the government. Once again the EFGBC relied on home meetings until almost the end of the Derg regime.

Between 1975 and 1978, the Derg forced the Northern European Pentecostal missions out of their development projects and the missionaries began to turn over their church work to Ethiopians. The Swedish Philadelphia Church Mission invited representatives from its different congregations to the yearly mission meeting in Awasa in 1975, where they agreed to form the Hiwot Berhan Church (HBC). The HBC's application for registration as religious association, however, was not favorably received by the revolutionary rulers. In 1978 the Swedish missionaries were expelled from the Kefa province, and the churches there were closed and had to continue in secret cell structures. One year later the Addis Ababa HBC was shut down as well. The long-standing Awasa mission station and church continued until 1983, when they too were closed by the government and their property was confiscated. Only few local HBC congregations managed to stay open during the Derg. The Swedish mission continued some work in the country, mostly in the form of relief projects.

The Finnish Mission at Merkato in Addis Ababa appointed Ethiopian leaders for their work in 1976, who less than one year later notified the mission of their desire to be established as a financially independent national church. In 1978 the Finnish Pentecostal missionaries were forced out of their projects in the provinces of Kefa and Shewa by the Derg, and decided to leave Ethiopia. A fellowship of Finnish mission related churches was formed in June 1978, which took on the name of Gennet Church (GC), and the last missionaries departed one month later. In 1979 the Derg closed the Addis Ababa GC and imprisoned its leaders for some months. A number of other GC congregations were shut down throughout the country as well, from now on relying on private house meetings and secret programs. Only the southern Sidamo branch of the church flourished and operated publicly throughout the Derg, due to fairly tolerant local authorities.

After the regime of the Derg had been brought to an end by a coalition of guerrilla liberation movements in 1991, the new government allowed Pentecostal churches and missions to resume public meetings and returned much of their dispossessed estate. All churches reported significant gains when they reopened. In the traditionally Orthodox northern provinces, the public re-emergence of Pentecostal churches was a more difficult process accompanied by occasional riots, but the new executive and judiciary most often sided with the Pentecostals. The provisions of the 1960 Civil Code and the "Legal Notice No. 321" of 1966 pertaining to the registration of associations, were now put into practice, allowing and mandating the official registration of all religious bodies. A list of registered associations obtained from the Ministry of Justice bears witness to the mushrooming and fraying of the Christian denominational landscape in recent years. The majority of the approximately 291 religious associations in this list are Protestant denominations, smaller churches, or ministries, many of which belong to the Pentecostal and Charismatic spectrum. The most relevant recently established Pentecostal denominations are the Assemblies of God, the Bible Army Church, the Gospel Light Church, the Harvest Church of God, the Maranata Church, and the Winners' Chapel.⁹ The largest trinitarian Pentecostal denominations are the EFGBC and the HBC with approximately 500,000 members each. The Oneness Apostolic Church (ACE) is comparable in size. Other Pentecostal churches are considerably smaller with membership estimates in the five-figure-range.¹⁰

A number of important observations can be made in this history of Ethiopian Pentecostalism. First of all, the movement was Ethiopian almost right from the start. The important early adherents of Ethiopian Pentecostalism were members of the young and highly mobile student elite. The international and arguably modern style of Pentecostal Christianity matched their educational ambitions, and as agile travelers they were capable of quickly spreading their faith and forming an Ethiopian network. Moreover, they developed a strong sense of mission independence early on, partially because their own leadership ambitions clashed with the setup of the

missions, and partially because they wanted to be seen as a purely Ethiopian Christian movement.

Secondly, though the Ethiopian Pentecostals did not intend to found a political movement, they practically became one, since the political pressure on them was met by their religiously inspired defiance of the government overreach into their faith. During Emperor Haile Selassie's reign, Pentecostals practically spearheaded the fight for religious liberty by being the first group to test the new legislation for the registration of religious associations, suffering the consequences for their failure to comply with the prohibition of Pentecostal worship, and setting up effective underground structures. During the Derg regime, the same dynamics applied in an increasing manner, in part setting up Pentecostals as an alternative to compliance with the regime.¹¹

Thirdly, the relationship between Pentecostalism and development was less strained than in some Northern European contexts. For the Finnish and Swedish Pentecostal missionaries, development projects were a moral imperative and a necessity for acquiring residence permits, and they often needed to defend their development work against their European critics. During the Derg, development was the only way for the missions to stay in touch with their underground churches, although many projects had to be turned over to the Derg.

Finally, there is an unusual ecumenical component to Ethiopian Pentecostal history in their appellation to the World Council of Churches early on. This was due to Lutheran missionary supporters that the Pentecostals had, who also helped to initiate contact to mainline Protestantism during this time. Consequentially, when the EECMY general secretary, Gudina Tumsa, initiated the formation of the Council for the Cooperation of Churches in Ethiopia in 1976, the EFGBC became one of its founding members. This Council became the predecessor for the ECFE, in which Pentecostals also plays an active role.

The Charismatic Movement in the EECMY

The early ecumenical contacts, of course did not yet entail a strong Charismatic influence within the EECMY. They do, however, indicate a number of connections early on, which became important for the development of the Charismatic movement within the church. One of the first reports about Charismatic groups in the EECMY pertains to a revival in Gore; Illubabor in 1970, in which the later president of the church, Iteffa Gobena (2001–2009), was involved.¹² Iteffa had previously received the Holy Spirit baptism through a person from one of the early Pentecostal revival groups.¹³ Apparently a Full Gospel Church evangelist also worked with the EECMY in Illubabor during this time and was involved in spreading the revival to the nearby town of Metu.¹⁴ A similar and more prominent movement rose up in the Nekemte EECMY, and the youths involved here later became figureheads of the Lutheran Charismatic movement.¹⁵ At least one of these persons also had contacts to an early Pentecostal

revival group of the 1960s. The Nekemte movement clashed with the local church leadership, but the General Secretary of the church at the time, Gudina Tumsa, intervened on their behalf.¹⁶ Gudina, who had been pastor in Nekemte, by all accounts was no Charismatic himself, but he apparently valued the invigorating effects of the movement and sought to keep the youths inside the church.¹⁷ These early revivalists soon came to study at the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa, where a vibrant Charismatic movement emerged from 1973 onward, effectively dividing the campus into pro and contra-Charismatic groups over issues of worship style, personal commitment, and ethical demands like abstinence from alcohol.¹⁸ Pentecostal Christians from Addis Ababa also participated in the worship meetings on the seminary compound.

However, this early Charismatic movement in the EECMY should not be overestimated regarding its reach within the church at the time. When the Norwegian missionary Tormod Engelsen presented a documentary report about Ethiopian Pentecostals at the general assembly in 1973, which also included recommendations on how to deal with the movement, his report was dismissed on procedural grounds and the whole issue was not seen as relevant to the Mekane Yesus Church.¹⁹ The importance of the early charismatic movement does not lie so much in the events of the time, but rather in the fact that prominent church leaders emerged from this group, which helped to spread the movement and facilitated its acceptance later on.

The oppression of all Protestant churches under the Derg regime in certain ways functioned as a catalyst for the Charismatic movement, although in a rather indirect way. By 1976 the issue of the Charismatic movement had reached enough prominence for the EECMY to hold its first official consultation on matter. The report of this meeting essentially welcomed the movement as a long anticipated revival, but also addressed conflicts regarding authority and doctrine.²⁰ However, this declaration hardly had any effect because the increasing politicization of the Charismatic movement now resulted in quite different dynamics. The considerable public attention Pentecostals and Charismatics drew on account of their defiant attitude toward worldly authorities made them an easy target for the revolutionary rulers. For example, Charismatic youths were arrested on occasion for refusing to publicly chant socialist slogans like "The revolution above all!", maintaining that they should not put anything above God.²¹ The EECMY, on the other hand, under the leadership of the Gudina Tumsa, at first welcomed the revolution and sought to find a positive response and an active role. The church cooperated in turning over its development projects to the government and cast its vision of a more just society as an opportunity awarded by the revolution.²² On the issue of chanting slogans Gudina also opted for a pragmatic and accommodating approach, arguing that such chants were only meant to inspire people for the revolution and had no religious relevance, and that therefore they were not worth risking arrest for.²³ However, in 1977 and 1978, it became increasingly clear that the government also felt challenged by

the political ambitions of the EECMY, and a period of confrontation began, which culminated in the abduction and murder of Gudina Tumsa. In its crackdown on churches, the Derg now began to apply the derogatory term “Pente”, originally invented for Pentecostals only, to all Protestant churches. Some of the people so labeled, had never even heard of Pentecostalism.²⁴ A number of EECMY congregations reacted to this politicization of Pentecostal spirituality by banning or restricting Pentecostal attendance in their services (i.e. in places where Pentecostal churches had already been closed), and by disciplining and expelling their own Charismatic groups. At times churches even turned Charismatic youths over to the police in order to avoid difficulties.

In the following years, many EECMY congregations were closed as well and most of them established underground cell groups. It is likely that the more Charismatic elements in the churches led the way, and there may have been some conflation with Pentecostal cell structures under such circumstances. However, the amount of contact between cell groups strongly varied with local conditions. Especially in areas with high political pressure, security concerns among cell group leaders were too high to admit people from other denominations in fear of government spies.²⁵ However, it is possible that in certain areas and over time cell groups were structured less by denominational boundaries and more by interpersonal relationships and local proximity, so that as church identification lessened, spiritual practices became more homogenous.²⁶

Altogether, it can be said that the spread of the Charismatic movement during the Derg was not due to church policies but rather due to the politicization of the movement. Government propaganda increasingly identified Protestant as Pentecostal and its repressions of EECMY congregations strengthened the Charismatic wing because of its more defiant political outlook. Especially for youths in the EECMY, Charismatic spirituality offered a political alternative to the at times more accommodating approach of their church.²⁷ Furthermore, the church’s attempts to curb the political dangers invoked by these groups enabled Charismatics after the Derg to produce a narrative of moral superiority on account of the suffered persecutions by the government and their church.²⁸

After the Derg had come to an end, the new policies of religious freedom led to a rapid spread of Pentecostal churches all over the country, creating more competition between churches. This also helped the spread of Charismatic groups, even in more conservative districts. In Callia, Western Synod, for example, the missionary Hermann Domianus reported that in 1995 Charismatic youths, who were under church discipline, threatened to join the Full Gospel Church.²⁹ This led to negotiations and finally a reconciliation. In other instances the Full Gospel Church effectively took over EECMY congregations, and the so-called “sheep-stealing issue” at a time reached a dimension in which it even threatened to disintegrate the Evangelical Churches’ Fellowship. For a while, the split between the Ethiopian and the Addis Ababa and

Surrounding Mekane Yesus Church also enabled Charismatic groups to break away from their church and join the other faction.³⁰ In some of the new mission areas, the EECMY arrived later than the Pentecostals. This was the case in Bahir Dar, for example, and from the introductory remarks it is evident that by following a Pentecostal paradigm they became an attractive church in a competitive field.

The mushrooming of Charismatic groups is also evident in the writings of Bachelor students at the Mekane Yesus Church Seminary. The vast majority of Bachelor theses there deal with Charismatic groups and related issues of theology or spirituality. The EECMY steadily worked to accommodate the movement theologically. In 1993 the 14th EECMY General Assembly proposed to embrace the Charismatic movement and to work on differentiating it from Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal groups. In the same year, the Executive Committee of the Church accepted a report by the Evangelism and Theology Commission that found Charismatic experiences compatible with biblical teaching as well as Lutheran doctrine and tradition.³¹ A presentation to the 16th EECMY General Assembly in 2001 by the General Secretary, Megersa Gutta, basically reiterated these resolutions and pointed to the continuous need to educate the church and to address certain problems related to forms of worship, prophecy and the questioning of church authority.³² In 2008 the church reformed its liturgy in order to incorporate more Ethiopian worship forms, but also in order to address the issue of Charismatic practices. This revision to the EECMY Book on Liturgy and Worship was drafted by a German Lutheran adviser and contains a four-page section on “Worship Discipline and the Benefit of Spiritual Gifts,” which contains numerous warnings about potential abuses and erroneous applications of spiritual gifts, outlining the problems the church has experienced in this area. However, in general the document is affirmative of Charismatic gifts, seeks to develop an understanding of spiritual gifts from a Lutheran tradition, and encourages local leadership to value, guide, and train Charismatic youths.

It is evident that the EECMY has come to adopt the Charismatic movement in practice and theology. Problems and irritations persist with regard to the Pentecostal movement at large, but the main points of contention are not so much in Holy Spirit theology, but rather issues like infant baptism versus adult baptism and proselytizing.

Charismatic Movements in Ethiopia – A Theological Evaluation

The rise of Ethiopian Pentecostalism and its spread to the mainline churches in the form of the Charismatic movement contain a number of important implications for the European perception of African Christianity as well as for church partnership in mission and development.

As these brief remarks have about Ethiopian Pentecostalism and its influence on the EECMY have shown, there are a number of specific historical factors and developments that

contributed to the inception and growth of the Charismatic movement. In analyzing such movements, it is therefore important to carefully delineate the historical, theological and political complexities of such processes instead of explaining them with fairly general culturalist arguments such as “Africanization” of Christianity. Such explanations are not helpful in at least two ways. First, the underlying generalizing notions of “African culture”, “African Pentecostalism”, or “African Christianity” do not do justice to the complexities and vast differences we find in Africa, and arguably have more to do with remnants of a colonial image of Africa than the realities at stake. Ethiopians, for example, find pride in noting that they are not like sub-Saharan Africans. But even the country itself is fragmented in many ways, and any adequate theory of contextualization would have to take multiple regional, sociological, economical, and political identities into account. Secondly, culturalist explanations tend to undercut the theological thrust of Pentecostalism. Exorcisms, for example, may appear as a way of Pentecostal contextualization, because by “demonizing” traditional cosmologies and casting out these “spirits”, they relate to and appropriate an existing culture. While this is a lucid and relevant analysis from the point of religious studies or cultural anthropology, it is not the *theological* project Pentecostals are involved in. Sure enough, in Ethiopia spirits are addressed by their local names during Pentecostal exorcisms, but I have yet to meet a minister who would explain this as a contribution to indigenizing Christianity. Instead, Pentecostals insist that the spirits are named and driven out, because they are real personal entities and because Jesus came to set the captives free. So, while it may be helpful to look at the dynamics of contextualization in anthropology or religious studies, in theology “contextualization” is in danger of becoming a tool of provincializing a theological challenge: If it has to do with an “African world view” it is not as relevant to “Europeans”, who therefore do not need to be overly engaged by it. Thus, instead of assigning theological positions to separate world views, European Christians should engage in theological dialogs with Pentecostals about their assertions of the workings of the Spirit today in glossolalia, prophecy, healing, exorcisms, and more.

We need to rethink the articulation of confessional identities. The EECMY is part of a large Protestant network, in which Pentecostal ideas and practices spread without much respect for confessional boundaries. Therefore, it is indistinguishable from other Protestant churches in many aspects, and the question of where the Lutheran identity of the church can be found, is – for the most part – one of European missionaries.³³ There are, of course, official attempts to develop a specifically Lutheran approach to the Charismatic movement, for example by drawing from the Augsburg confession or even Luther’s conflicts with the left wing of the reformation. However, when one studies actual congregations or even the many seminary theses on the Charismatic movement, it quickly becomes apparent that the only relevant currency in these debates is the Bible. Therefore it seems prudent to articulate theological positions on the grounds of “sola scriptura” and not of confessions, outlining the different approaches

to biblical passages and their application to contemporary worship practices. Of course what goes for Charismatic practices also would be relevant to the more contentious issue of baptism, in which the EECMY holds the minority position within Ethiopian Protestantism. Using biblical arguments to sensitize its members for the possibility of infant baptism arguably is the more effective way to prevent members from seeking re-baptism, in an environment in which the confessional boundaries between Lutherans, Mennonites, Baptists, and different flavor Pentecostals are blurry at best.

Pentecostalism and ecumenical engagement do not necessarily collide. Pentecostals in many Western contexts are not known for their ecumenical engagement, but in Ethiopia, Protestant ecumenism was actually strengthened by the Charismatic movement. A number of youths in the revival movements deliberately opted to stay within their church instead of participating in the establishment of the EFGBC. When Pentecostals endured political pressure under Haile Selassie’s government, they sought the aid of the World Council of Churches through Lutheran missionaries. In 1976, the EFGBC church became one of the founding members of the Council for Cooperation of Churches in Ethiopia, and remained an active member of its successor, the ECFE. With the ECFE also holding theological consultations, this fellowship is more than a mere cooperation facility, but a venue of ecumenical dialog. In addition, there is the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, which sees participation from Pentecostals and mainline Protestants. This close cooperation between most Protestants has to do with their relative minority situation in Ethiopia and is not without problems of course. However, so far pragmatic solutions have carried the day, and a continuation of this close cooperation between mainline Protestant and Pentecostal churches is vital for Ethiopia. On the one hand, ecumenical bodies like the ECFE help to prevent the immense fragmentation that Pentecostalism is susceptible to and keep it theologically accountable. On the other hand, the EECMY has a lot to bring to the ecumenical table for Pentecostals, from its emphasis on development and its theological resources, to its potential role as a bridge-builder toward Ethiopian Orthodoxy on account of its acceptance of Orthodox baptism.

We need to rethink the relationship between Pentecostalism and politics. From the historical account of Ethiopian Pentecostalism it is clear that the stereotype about Pentecostals failing to positively engage in politics does not apply. In Imperial Ethiopia Pentecostals spearheaded the fight for religious liberties and freedom of assembly. During the Derg, they did not settle for compromise and set up a model of civil disobedience with their effective underground structures. It is true, however, that Pentecostals do not tend to make their political arguments on a systemic level. Pentecostals did not feel compelled to fight for religious liberty in order to create a more democratic or pluralistic Ethiopia, but because they sought to be faithful to God, or as a Pentecostal publication put it in defiance of the government shut-downs: “When people come seeking the Lord, it is impossible to turn them back.”³⁴ This non-systemic outlook arguably is very robust

because it prevents the church from compromising with dictatorial regimes in search for a higher goal and creates a confident defiance of totalitarian authorities. However, this resource appears to be more compatible with clearly oppressive regimes directly attacking churches, rather than with a more nuanced and complex political environment like present-day Ethiopia. Today, Pentecostals are struggling just like other churches with the ethnicization of politics and culture, with finding a voice for the political and economic injustices of the country, with standing for civil liberties in the midst of increased government regulation, and with sustaining peace among Christians and with other religions. However, even now Pentecostal spirituality may be a way to recover the political power of the prophetic if together we learn to discern the Spirit of God.

Much the same could be said for the relationship of Pentecostalism and development. Despite a general skepticism toward any worldly involvement, Pentecostal missions in Ethiopia embarked on significant development projects from the beginning and defended them against critical voices from the north. The relatively late involvement of the independent Pentecostal churches in aid and development has more to do with the crippling effects of the Derg than theological reservations. In addition, a strong drive for independence and negative experiences with the effects of foreign money, has left many Pentecostals with a certain reluctance to accept financial aid from abroad. However, this skepticism may be an asset for defining clearly delimited projects, mobilizing local resources, and avoiding long-term dependence. Moreover, Pentecostals have not learned to speak the systemic language of development. In their narrative, the messianic promise of Luke 4:18–21 is not realized through hospitals, foreign aid, and educational programs, but directly by the Spirit of God in every worship service. Their insistence on God's immediate personal intervention, perhaps at the expense of celebrating systemic improvements, is at times a challenging notion for Western observers. However, in a system like Ethiopia that requires a strict demarcation between religious organizations and development agencies, this is the most efficient way to proclaim and celebrate the holistic mandate of the Gospel. Healing services, exorcisms, and the ever-present testimonies assert that God did not just send the Church to save souls, but also to address and aid in every problem one may encounter, and as such, Pentecostals send the same message as Christian development agencies. There are, of course, numerous problems and potential abuses that come with prophetic speech, Deliverance Pentecostalism, and proclamations of HIV/AIDS healings. However, when one studies the intricate and intense debates that develop around such issues within Ethiopian Pentecostalism, it is apparent that the movement already possesses the theological and pastoral resources to address these difficult issues. The question then becomes, which voices Western observers will amplify.

Finally, the resilience of Ethiopia's Charismatic movement throughout difficult political times and their impressive growth points to the enormous resources inherent in this

movement. The underlying theologies, however, often make Western liberal theologians uncomfortable on a number of levels, and arguably these feelings often have to do with conflicts with Pentecostals or Evangelicals in the West. Herein lies the primary challenge of developing common goals and programs of mission and development with Pentecostals in Africa. European financial and theological resources can still be of help to African churches, but in order to maximize this benefit, we must acquire a much better knowledge of Pentecostal and Charismatic theologies. In order to articulate our ideas about God, mission, and development in a theological language still largely unknown to us, we need to become intimately familiar with the large variety of Pentecostal theological debates and spiritual practices. Unlike thirty years ago, there now are many academic resources for this endeavor. In the past decades, a number of Pentecostal theologians have made important contributions to the established theological discourse in exegesis, church history, dogmatics, ethics, practical theology, theology of religions, and more.³⁵ The ubiquity of Pentecostalism in the majority world has sparked research in various disciplines, and a number of networks have been formed to connect these efforts in an interdisciplinary fashion.³⁶ As the available literature on Pentecostal movements steadily increases, many university libraries have begun to systematically gather the available material. With all these resources at our disposal it has become possible to gain a profound understanding for what drives the growth of Pentecostalism in Africa, and to discover potential theological allies. This may entail a steep learning curve, but for as long as we are privileged to participate in the present southward shift of Christianity, it is well worth the effort.

- 1 Transitional Government of Ethiopia, Office of the Population and Housing Census Commission: *The 1984 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Analytical Report at National Level*, Addis Ababa: Central Statistical Authority 1991, p. 60.
- 2 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Office of the Population and Central Statistical Authority Housing Census Commission: *The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Results at Country Level. Volume I. Statistical Report*, Addis Ababa: Central Statistical Authority 1998, p. 129.
- 3 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Population Census Commission: *Summary and Statistical Report of the 2007 Population and Housing Census: Population Size by Sex and Age*, Addis Ababa 2008, p. 17, http://www.csa.gov.et/pdf/Cen2007_prelimineray.pdf (accessed on 13 December 2010).
- 4 The annual population growth rate country-wide was 2.6 percent, those of major religions as follows: Islam 2.8 %; Orthodox 1.3%; Catholicism 1.1 %; traditional religions 1.7%. Own calculations on the basis of detailed census tables released at http://www.csa.gov.et/index.php?option=com_rubberdoc&view=category&id=72&Itemid=521 (accessed on 13 December 2010)
- 5 Cf. Hausteine, Jörg: *Writing Religious History: The Historiography of Ethiopian Pentecostalism*, Heidelberg: DTh thesis 2009, pp. 18–21.
- 6 For a detailed historical discussion of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia see Hausteine, Jörg: *Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Ethiopia (Studien zur außereuropäischen Christentumsgeschichte (Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika))*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011.
- 7 For Oneness Pentecostalism in general see Reed, David Arthur: "Oneness Pentecostalism," in: Burgess, Stanley and Eduard van der Maas (Eds.): *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002, pp. 936–944. The ACE is a

- very strong church, especially in southern Ethiopia, and was featured in a number of English Oneness publications, see Freeman, Nona: *Unseen hands: The Story of Revival in Ethiopia*, Hazelwood, MO: World Aflame Press, 1987; Freeman, Nona: *Then Came the Glory*, Minden, LA: Nona Freeman, 1994; Gezahegne, Teklemariam: *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, Hazelwood, MO: World Aflame Press, 1989; Gezahegne, Teklemariam: *Acts of God in Ethiopia*, Hazelwood, MO: Apostolic Experience Publishing, 2007.
- 8 Some were held for many years without a trial, for example the Yirga Alem EFGBC pastor Tesfaye Gabbisso, who spent seven years in prison and today is a popular Pentecostal singer.
 - 9 For an annotated list of the most important Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, see Hausteijn, Jörg: *Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in Ethiopia 2009*, <http://www.glopent.net/Members/jhausteijn/ethiopia/pentecostal-charismatic-churches-in-ethiopia>. See also Schröder, Günter: *Äthiopien. Religiöse Gemeinschaften, Organisationen und Institutionen. Ein Überblick*, Unpublished manuscript, 1997.
 - 10 Most churches do not have reliable statistical information about their membership. For the EFGBC estimates obtained with church leaders in interviews ranged from 500,000 to one million, Especially smaller churches tend to offer greatly exaggerated estimates in interviews, in hopes of recruiting foreign support.
 - 11 Cf. Eide, Øyvind: *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia: Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974–85*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Currey, 2000, p. 247.
 - 12 See Teka Obsa Fogi: *The Charismatic Movement in the EECMY: Some Doctrinal and Practical Issues: An Explorative and Evaluative Case Study: The Case of the EECMY Congregations in Nekemte*, M.Th. thesis, Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, Addis Ababa, 2000, p. 36; Molte, Iteffa Gobena: *Autobiography 2008*, <http://www.ethiopianetwork.org/GobenaBio.html> (accessed on 14 December 2010).
 - 13 Cf. Teka Obsa, *The Charismatic Movement*, p. 92.
 - 14 Taye Abdissa: *The Pentecostal Development and the Rise of Charismatic Movement in Ethiopia*, B.Th. thesis, Mekane Yesus Seminary, Addis Ababa, 1977, p. 44.
 - 15 Tolosa Gudina, Tesfaye Dinegde, and Belina Sarka.
 - 16 Teka Obsa, *The Charismatic Movement*, pp. 86–89; Thomas Debela: *The Effect of Charismatic Renewal upon Church Growth in the Central Synod*, B.Th. thesis, Mekane Yesus Seminary, Addis Ababa, 1999, pp. 15–16.
 - 17 Engelsviken, Tormod: *Gudina Tumsa, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, and the Charismatic Movement*, Unpublished manuscript, 2003, p. 11f.
 - 18 Bakke, Johnny: *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions Within the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia; 44)*, Oslo: Solum-Forlag 1987, p. 252f.
 - 19 Cf. Hausteijn: *Writing Religious History*, p. 23.
 - 20 See McDonnell, Kilian: "Lutheran Church – Mekane Yesus, Ethiopia, 1976: The Work of the Holy Spirit," in: McDonnell, Kilian (Ed.): *Presence, Power, Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal. Vol. II - Continental, National, and Regional Documents Numbers 38 to 80, 1975–1979*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1980, pp. 150–182.
 - 21 See Eide, Øyvind: *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, p. 247f.; Jeto Hordofa: "Troubled But Not Destroyed": *The Effects of the Persecution of 1978–1991 (1970–1983 E.C.) on the Congregations of Western Wollega Bethel Synod*, B.Th. thesis, Mekane Yesus Seminary, Addis Ababa, 1999, p. 31; Tibebe Eshete: *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia: Resistance and Resilience*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009, p. 242f.
 - 22 Cf. Hausteijn, Jörg: "Navigating Political Revolutions: Ethiopia's Churches During and After the Mengistu Regime," in: Koschorke, Klaus (Ed.): *Falling Walls. The Year 1989/90 as a Turning Point in the History of World Christianity (Studien zur Außereuropäischen Christentums-geschichte (Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika); 15)*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2009, pp. 117–136, here pp. 124–127.
 - 23 Tumsa, Gudina: "The Role of a Christian in a Given Society," in: Hoffman, Paul (Ed.): *Witness and Discipleship. Leadership of the Church in Multi-Ethnic Ethiopia in a Time of Revolution: The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa, General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (1929–1979)*, Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003, pp. 1–12, here p. 8.
 - 24 See Donham, Donald: *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1999, pp. 144, 164.
 - 25 Cf. Hausteijn: *Writing Religious History*, pp. 222–226.
 - 26 See Bekele Woldekidan: (*Revival. Ethiopia and the Final End*), Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa Full Gospel Believers' Church, 2002, pp. 107, 160.
 - 27 Cf. Eide: *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, p. 246f.
 - 28 E.g. Assefa Mekonnen: *A Clean Hearth for the Fire to Blaze. Evaluating Charismatic Movement in EECMY by Lutheran Theological Tradition*, B.Th. thesis, Mekane Yesus Seminary, Addis Ababa, 1997; Jeto Hordofa: "Troubled But Not Destroyed"; Mintesinot Birru: *The Impact of Charismatic Movement and Its Result Among Evangelicals in Gedeo Area*, B.Th. thesis, Mekane Yesus Seminary, Addis Ababa, 2002.
 - 29 Domianus, Hermann: *Essay zum TEE-Lehrbuch: The Charismatic Movement within the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus: A Theological Foundation for an African Lutheran Church between Tradition and Revival*, Unpublished manuscript 2005, p. 9.
 - 30 This was a route taken by a Charismatic group in Awasa, for example.
 - 31 Cf. Fogi: *The Charismatic Movement*, p. 97f.; Alemu Shetta: *Reflection Paper to 23rd Meeting of the Committee of Mutual Christian Responsibility*, January 21–24, 2002, Unpublished manuscript, 2002, p. 1.
 - 32 Quoted in Alemu Shetta: *Reflection Paper*.
 - 33 Cf. also Nordlander's observations on the little awareness of Lutheran identity in Nordlander, Agne: "Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus," in: Sannes, Kjell Olav (Ed.): *Med Kristus til jordens ender. Festskrift til Tormod Engelsviken*, Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2008, pp. 193–202, here p. 197.
 - 34 Church, Full Gospel Believers': (*The Full Gospel Church from Birth Until ... Well, it is Impossible to Turn Back the People When They Come Wanting Jesus*), Addis Ababa 1978, p. 19.
 - 35 Cf. e.g. the two leading journals of Pentecostal theology, *Pneuma* and *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, published by Brill.
 - 36 E.g. the European Research Network on Global Pentecostalism (<http://www.glopent.net>).