

BOOK REVIEWS

**Tropical Africa and the Old Testament:
A Selected and Annotated Bibliography.**

Holter, Knut.

Oslo: University of Oslo, 1996. No Price. ISBN 82 991913 7 8.

Two guidelines determine the selection of material included in this useful volume. First, it contains only those works which focus on "tropical" Africa, a region Holter designates as sub-Saharan but north of the Republic of South Africa. Holter states that works from other regions and traditions (such as Black Liberation Theology and Dutch Reformed scholarship in South Africa) have been well-covered in other sources and therefore do not warrant mention in this volume. Second, the focus of this bibliography is not scholarship by Africans, but works that relate the two entities of the title, namely Africa and the Old Testament. Therefore, one will find entries with titles such as "African experience of time and its compatibility with the Old Testament view of time as suggested in the genealogy of Genesis 5", "Isaiah 14: Its bearing on African life and thought", and "Sickness, sin, and the curse: The Old Testament and the African church". Since the emphasis in selection lies with the subject matter, African and non-African authors are cited from sources originating from both within and without the continent.

The book contains a brief preface, a six page introduction, 232 annotated bibliographical entries, and three indices (Old Testament references, geography and languages, and key words). Twelve randomly selected items from the indices were checked and all proved accurate. A quick scan of the index of geography and languages reveals that the contents are dominated by "Nigeria" as a region and "Yoruba" as a language. This likely reflects the editor's relationship, cited in the preface, with scholars from the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies. In addition to the necessary bibliographical information, each entry contains brief, helpful annotations arranged by one or more of the following categories: key words, Old Testament reference, geography/language, and a one to two sentence abstract.

This is a welcome reference tool for any theological library in Africa. Holter correctly notes the dearth of bibliographical sources on African interpretation of the Old Testament. A scholar is typically left on his or her own to locate sources such as those referred to in this volume from widely disparate sources. Yet, as valuable as this small volume is, its focus on Nigeria and West Africa to the neglect of other parts of *sub-Saharan Africa* leaves it incomplete. More work remains to be done.

These two observations, the need for tools such as this and the incomplete nature of this particular one, prompt two suggestions. First, one hopes that other bibliographies of this nature will soon appear. For example, a volume on Tropical Africa and the New Testament would be most welcome. The series in which Holter's book is published makes available bibliographies from research conducted exclusively by members of the faculty of the University of Oslo. But are there scholars willing to undertake the task of compiling similar annotated bibliographies (or of developing further a bibliography originally put together for doctoral work)? And are there publishers willing to produce such bibliographies? Biblical scholarship in Africa will take a giant step forward when we can answer "Yes" to both questions.

Second, since Holter includes his address (School of Mission and Theology, Misjonsvegen 34, N-4024 Stavanger, Norway), one must hope for a second edition of this book that might be able to take advantage of additions sent in by scholars familiar with the subject matter. For example, scholars conversant with Christianity in its multiple forms in East Africa surely know of additional work not included in this bibliography that fall within its parameters. A more comprehensive second edition would certainly multiply this volume's already extensive usefulness. [*Tropical Africa and the Old Testament* can be ordered from: The Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, PO Box 1023, Blindern N-0315 Oslo 3, Norway.]

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**The Word of God in Ethiopian Tongues:
Rhetorical Features in the Preaching of
the Ethiopian Evangelical Church**

Eskil Forslund

1993. Mekane Yesus. Uppsala: The Swedish Institute of Missionary Research.
Pp. 274. ISBN 91-85424-35-8.

There is good and bad preaching just as there is good and bad story-telling. I am not thinking here about the moral goodness of the story, or the truth-content of the sermon, but of their qualities as good human communication. What makes good story-telling? What makes good preaching? What is it that fixes the attention of our hearers and holds it from start to finish? What makes us interesting (or boring)? For preachers, what makes us compelling, persuasive and challenging?

Undoubtedly part of the answer lies in the speaker's skill. Some of us have a natural gift for expressing ourselves well, choosing our words, putting our sentences together, so that what we say tastes good. For most of us, this gift (even when it truly is a natural gift) is developed by our own efforts; we have spent time and effort learning to communicate well. For Christian preachers the ideal answer also includes a degree of spiritual gift. We are aware that the Holy Spirit uses prophets and preachers to reveal Christ, and that he takes up our words and makes them powerful for spiritual ends. Mature Christian preachers are not content with speaking well; they desire deeply that the Holy Spirit's power will be found in their words.

But the answer also includes the specific details of how we use our language, what gives our talk 'punch' and 'bite' and 'flavour' – what Forslund calls the rhetorical features of our speech behaviour. His aim is to 'define and describe some rhetorical features in the preaching in the EECMY' [Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus] showing how 'preachers use the language, style and structure of their sermons as rhetorical strategies with the aim of making the message of the sermons relevant as providing answers to various situations.' (p. 3). The book is in four major parts which introduce successively the broader features of the national background relevant to the discussion of the rhetorical use of language; the characteristics of the sample texts and the methodology applied; the 'rhetorical situation' or specific context in which each sermon was used; and the features of style and structure which can be identified as deliberate attempts by the preacher to engage his audience. Each Part consists of a number of chapters.

In Part One the author touches lightly on influential aspects of the national Ethiopian setting including the influence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC); ethnographic characteristics of rhetorical genres and devices; distinctive features of the history and theology of EECMY, including its training programme for the preaching-teaching ministry of the church (pp. 25-82). Some extracts of formal public speeches are quoted, and a brief attempt is made to identify features of these which are potentially important for the study. The sections on the influence of Islam and the ethno linguistic map of Ethiopia are peripheral to the study.

In Part Two the characteristics of the corpus (196 sermons and 72 preachers, gathered over a period of years) are discussed and used for the analysis. The preachers' training and the widespread locations of the preaching is looked at briefly. Five representative sermons are included in an English translation, with Amharic theological terms in parentheses. These usefully allow the reader access to the development of the subject matter, its organisation and so on. As a methodological approach Forslund adopts G.A. Kennedy's application of the classical model of rhetoric to New Testament writings, and provides some justification for doing so (pp. 85-121). In particular, Forslund takes over the three categories of discourse and three persuasion strategies from Kennedy.¹ There is always some tension in applying a model from one literary tradition in a different cultural context. No matter how long its pedigree, the model always runs the danger of emphasising cultural interests and ignoring cultural blind spots. However, Forslund uses the model to provide broad categories with which to tackle the corpus, and doesn't come to much harm.

Part Three reviews the 'rhetorical situation', proposing a wide variety of 'exigencies to which the preachers respond', including the Christian Calendar, social issues (and response to the Marxist-Leninist Revolution, 1974-1992). Sermon responses to the religious milieu (EOC, Islam and traditional religion) are found to be few, as are sermons responding to the charismatic renewal movement that has affected the world-wide church in recent decades (pp. 123-

¹ See George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*. University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1984. The three classical species of rhetoric Kennedy (and Forslund) adopt are epideictic (to adopt/affirm some commitment in the present), deliberative (persuasion towards a future action), and judicial (to adopt a judgement concerning the past), and the three persuasions strategies, or 'proof-types' are ethos (personal credibility of the speaker), the pathos (emotional inclinations of the audience), and logos (the logic of the argument).

178), and the socialist revolution which introduced a context of massive change.

Part Four (Chs. 10-14) is the focus of the work, and examines the rhetorical genres that the sermons conform to, and the structural and stylistic devices employed in them. He finds a preponderance of sermons are epideictic, holding up a model of the good life and exhorting Christians to emulate it, with deliberative sermons also occurring (Ch. 10). The language not unnaturally reflects the theological vocabulary which was already well established by EOC, and uses the same terms. It less often reflects concepts of Marxist-Socialism as the Revolution understood it, but does show the influence of western missionary agencies in this adoption of expressions which emphasise the personal nature of repentance, conversion and the evangelical believer's relationship with God. The language of sermons is formal, solemn and uses numerous biblical expressions (Ch. 11). Forslund notes repeated use of allegorical interpretations, relating this to a fondness for rich allusive rhetorical effect in the national and EOC context. Alongside this is the ubiquitous use of parable as a major explanatory paradigm, and much use of metaphor and other stylistic devices. (Ch. 12). Forslund looks at the 'proofs' preachers use to substantiate their case (Ch. 13). EECMY preachers rely heavily on the 'external' support provided by other biblical texts, and also use illustrations drawn from local life and thought. They also rely on their own 'ethos' (personal and official standing), and the 'pathos', or emotions, of the listeners as grounds for their appeal. Inductive arguments drawn from biblical texts or daily life and deductive, syllogistic, arguments are found, although the former is more common. Sermon structures are fairly simple (Ch. 14). A clear division into Introduction, Exposition and Conclusion is infrequent, and is drawn either from the Preacher's Manual which promotes this (western?) organisation of material, or from formal experience of theological education. The two most common structural patterns are the following. Following the reading of a biblical narrative passage, the preacher will retell it step by step, bringing in applications for the Christian as he progresses. These applications may be explored by introducing other relevant biblical examples, 'proofs' and exhortations. So, the biblical narrative itself provides a model within which the audience is encouraged to view contemporary Christian life. Secondly, an inductive pattern is found, in which a problem of contemporary life is introduced, and a variety of aspects of the biblical answer are propounded in turn. Both patterns reveal the epideictic nature of much of the corpus.

The book is a doctoral dissertation, and requires some effort to read. This will restrict its use to faculty of theological colleges, and some senior students. It has a broad scope, which is acceptable in view of the lack of previous studies of the same sort. It may be worth indicating some directions for further study. The link between homiletic style in the church and the preacher's manual used in the training programme is not developed. It would be

useful to know whether and how homiletical training affected the preachers' approach. Further studies should aim for a more selective sample of preachers, stratified on the criteria of (i) older, less educated and more culturally integrated into rural society and life, and (ii) younger, educated and more modern in outlook and temperament. Further studies should also separate clearly the use of national language and lingua francas outside of a native speaker context, and use of the local language within the native speaker community. Finally, it would be worth looking at recent literature for a model for research, or setting one up, rather than rely on a classical one.

Forslund's focus is central to hermeneutic, homiletic and contextualising studies, and this book should be read by everyone teaching in these fields in Africa. Hermeneutics or exegesis that stops short of expressing biblical content in community languages stops too short. Homiletics that is confined to an approach to sermon-making culled from one culture doesn't go far enough. Contextualisation that misses the language factor is in danger of ignoring a major means of cultural expression. In Africa today, with its ethnic, cultural and language diversity, our theological education must pursue the question of expressing Christian truth beyond the language and forms of the classroom in its search for good preaching. Good story telling and good preaching are evaluations made within a particular language and cultural context. Good American preaching is not good British preaching, and French preaching is different again. What is good in Amharic will not necessarily be what is good in Kikuyu, Ndebele, Lingala... We need a number of careful studies in Africa which explore the rhetorical features of good, contextualised preaching, both with and without the educational influence of (western) homiletic models. We could benefit from similar studies, particularly in situations where African students and scholars could report in detail on the resources of a language community and the use made of these resources by its preaching-teaching fraternity. Theological education needs to be further informed of cultural preferences in the church's oral communication. Having said that, many of the features noted in EECMY sermons seem to be widely found elsewhere in the African church. No doubt there are more structural types that sermons adopt, and some study of these would both enrich and contextualise the message in the African church.

One of the saddest stories comes from my early years in Africa, when a well-educated man of my own age confessed that he could not tell his own story - his Christian testimony to Christ - in his mother tongue. He did not have the words to express himself. He could not put it together without stumbling over his grammar.

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