

BOOK REVIEWS

Steffan Grenstedt

**Ambaricho and Shonkolla:
From Local Independent Church
to the Evangelical Mainstream:
The Origins of the Mekane Yesus Church in Kambata Hadiya**

Studia Missionalia Svecana, 82. Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2000.

ISBN 91-85424-60-9 ISSN 1404-9503

<http://www.staffangrenstedt.se/files/ambaricho-and-shonkolla-doctoral-thesis-2000.pdf>

Reviewed by Steve Bryan
Ethiopia Graduate School of Theology, Addis Ababa

Submitted to the Faculty of Theology of Uppsala University in 2000, this PhD thesis evaluates the origin of the Kambata Synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) in southern Ethiopia. The result is a fascinating, moving and sometimes heartbreaking story of religious change in what has become a part of the Evangelical heartland of Ethiopia. The evangelical movement in the Kambata-Hadiya region, which includes the two significant mountains *Ambaricho* and *Shonkolla*, had its origins in the pioneer work of missionaries from the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) who entered the area in 1929. The Kambata Evangelical Church (KEC) which emerged from this work grew rapidly during the Italian occupation (1936-1941) when the SIM missionaries were absent. But it then underwent a split in 1951 that proved resistant to numerous efforts on several fronts to bring reconciliation.

The chief reason for the split was that from around 1949 SIM leadership, principally Guy Playfair, the SIM General Director and Gordon Beacham, the SIM Ethiopia Field Director, insisted that the KEC enforce a ban on the consumption of all alcohol, including the mildly alcoholic cultural drink, *borde*. Prior to this, the drinking of *borde* was such an integral part of the culture that it was even served at meetings of church elders. Those who refused to stop drinking alcohol in any form and to end other “worldly

practices” (including use of tobacco, polygamy, dancing, and adult circumcision) were refused communion and baptism and denied access to the SIM schools and Bible school. From Grenstedt’s point of view, the ban represented a departure from SIM’s strong adherence to indigenous principles which, among other things, were reflected in the adaptation of a culturally traditional elder-led system of governance, locally supported church workers, and the formation of congregations marked by freedom from central control.

The split within the KEC would prove to have broader ramifications. Through the 1940s and 1950s there was little evidence of the denominationalism that now characterizes the Ethiopian evangelical movement. Despite the presence of various foreign mission societies involved in church planting, the early hope of many was that there would be a single united evangelical Church in Ethiopia – a hope embodied in the formation of the Conferences of Ethiopian Evangelical Churches (CEEC), which met annually from 1944 to 1963. Initially, the CEEC was an all-Ethiopia affair, though later missionaries from various societies also attended. Though participation was broad, the attendance of SIM-related churches and SIM missionaries was much more sporadic than that of other groups. The leadership of the CEEC primarily came from churches related to the Lutheran and Presbyterian missions. Grenstedt cites evidence from the 1950s indicating that even SIM missionaries referred to the CEEC as the “Ethiopian Evangelical Church” as though it were the sole evangelical ecclesiastical body, though he does not indicate whether members of SIM-related churches consistently viewed themselves as part of this wider body. When the group of churches that had broken away from the SIM-related KEC applied to the CEEC for membership in 1955, the division within the Kambata-Hadiya churches burst onto the national stage.

Neither of the Kambatta groups was accepted for membership at the CEEC of 1955, but it was here for the first time that the issue of baptism was brought to the fore. Grenstedt indicates that baptismal practices were diffuse within the breakaway churches at this time. The two key SIM missionaries who influenced the KEC prior to the Italian occupation were the SIMers Clarence Duff (a Presbyterian) and Norman Cousar (a Baptist). Though it does not appear that Duff ever baptized infants in the area, the believers in the area were aware that Duff regarded his own baptism as an infant as valid. This, along with the influence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church practice of infant baptism, may have contributed to the acceptance of the practice. It is a bit surprising that Grenstedt does not evaluate baptismal practices in Kambata

during the Italian occupation. In the absence of foreign missionaries, the handful of converts grew to 10,000 in approximately 100 churches, not least because the neighboring Wollamo (Wolaytta) churches were sending Ethiopian missionaries into the area. Whatever the influence of the Wollamo missionaries on baptismal practices (Grendstedt does not say), it does not seem that the early converts received univocal direction on the practice of baptism from the SIM missionaries prior to their departure.

As an interdenominational mission, SIM could accommodate a variety of baptismal views, though it seems to have decided in 1932 that it would support the practice of believer's baptism in the churches it planted. At the same time, it also seems that Duff did not require rebaptism of converts in Kambata Hadiya who had been baptized as infants within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC). Following the Italian occupation, however, Duff decided not to return despite the fact that he and Cousar had gained fluency in the Hadiya language. (No other missionary would do so following the occupation because of the imperial decree of 1944 which dictated that the missionaries would only learn and speak Amharic.) Duff's decision to go instead to Eritrea with the Orthodox Presbyterian Mission seems to have been determined in part by his Presbyterian views on baptism. Cousar did return and his influence on baptismal practices in the area seems to have followed a broader trend within SIM toward stronger baptistic views after the occupation, including an insistence on the rebaptism of those who had been baptized as infants within the EOC.

Nevertheless, baptismal practices were not consolidated in the churches prior to the split in 1951, and these do not seem to have been an issue in the split. However, after the split, the baptism of infants – in practice, the baptism of toddlers old enough to walk down to the river! – seems to have continued in the breakaway churches even while the influence of SIM meant that it was dying out within the KEC. Still, baptismal practices did not become an issue between the two Kambata groups until representatives of the breakaway churches realized that an affirmation of infant baptism, including the acceptance of infant baptisms performed by the EOC, would be viewed positively by the Lutheran and Presbyterian leadership of the CEEC. The apparent opportunism of the breakaway churches notwithstanding, there was clearly a growing sense of affinity with the key participants in the CEEC. The 1957 declaration of the SIM-related KEC that they would no longer participate in the CEEC because of the CEEC acceptance of the breakaway Kambata churches signaled the end of the CEEC as the embodiment of a single, unified

evangelical Ethiopian Church. Very likely the demise of the CEEC would have been precipitated by other events including the formation in 1956 of a fellowship of SIM-related churches in Ethiopia and the growing interest among some of the Lutheran missions to establish a confessional church along Lutheran lines.

Despite the events of 1956-7, the CEEC did not rush to incorporate the breakaway Kambata faction as a member. Indeed efforts to effect reconciliation continued, culminating in a final failed attempt in 1960. Though the initial signs were positive and baptism scarcely an issue, the meeting fell apart when a member of the breakaway group asked if it were really true that they would be barred from fellowship were they found to take even a small glass of alcohol. Shortly before, in 1959, the CEEC had become the basis for the new Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). With the growing acceptance by the CEEC and then EECMY, the breakaway group was looking for help. However, a key factor inhibiting outside assistance was the comity agreement established by the various foreign missions under the oversight of a joint committee. The purpose of the agreement was to avoid overlap and duplication in missionary outreach by delimiting territories. Despite the efforts at cooperation, relations between the missions were not free from competition and tension. Some of the missions, including SIM, believed that the agreement should apply to the mission-related churches as well, and there is evidence that the CEEC felt the weight of the comity agreement at least for some time. Grenstedt illustrates the strength of this view by referring to an incident in 1955 when the CEEC sent a government minister and the former Ethiopian ambassador to Italy to speak to SIM leadership about the split in the Kambatta Church. They were rebuffed with Mr. Playfair's admonition that these senior Ethiopian leaders were not to intrude into an SIM area! Though the EECMY eventually rejected the idea that they were subject to the comity agreement, the agreement effectively precluded any direct support for the breakaway churches from the foreign missions until the late 1960s. The comity agreement also inhibited support from the EECMY until 1961 when it notified SIM of its intent to provide support for the breakaway churches.

Grenstedt indicates that steps toward integration of the breakaway churches into the EECMY began in 1963, but it wasn't until 1969 that these churches became a fully integrated synod of the EECMY. Prior to integration, the EECMY was looking for ways to come alongside these breakaway churches and the churches were looking for assistance. For Grenstedt, this is evidence

of an underlying impulse toward “Ethiopian evangelical solidarity,” which forms the major thesis of the book. However, it is also clear that the breakaway churches saw themselves at a disadvantage in comparison to those of the SIM-related KEC, who were enjoying such benefits as schools and training provided by the connection with SIM. But the assistance could only take place if a way around the comity agreement could be found. This took the form of EECMY’s Kambatta Home Mission Program (KHMP). Although this did not initially allow any involvement by foreign missionaries associated with the EECMY, it did provide a source of outside funding as the KHMP drew much of its budget from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). It was from this budget that salaries of Kambatta church workers were paid. The KHMP also paved the way for the entrance of the Finnish Mission Society (FMS) into Kambatta in 1968, as the EECMY moved to incorporate the work of the various foreign missions with which it was connected into its own work. With the FMS working as part of the KHMP, it could be argued that they were not a foreign mission in breach of the comity agreement but rather part of the EECMY home mission to Kambatta.

With the entrance of the FMS there came not only a move toward doctrinal regularity but also a move away from some of the indigenous church structures and practices. As late as 1972, baptismal practices within the Kambatta synod remained diffuse and the congregation-centered, elder-led church structures continued. The Finnish missionaries, however, placed great emphasis on ordained ministry and the “right” administration of the sacraments. For Grenstedt, the need for a 1972 discussion on whether to baptize in a river or a church “shows that Baptist influences were lingering on among the pastors of the [Kambatta Synod] still in 1972” (221). The Finnish missionaries also proposed rules and punishment for such misbehavior as “false teaching, lying, drinking, and committing adultery” (222).

There are several question-creating ironies which emerge from Grenstedt’s work. First, Grenstedt seeks to show how the EECMY sought to encourage what had become an African Independent Church in Kambata, and in doing so helped this church both to maintain their cultural independence in the face of outside pressure and to become a synod of the EECMY. For Grenstedt, the primary motivation for doing so was a commitment to “Ethiopian Evangelical Solidarity”. Grenstedt offers up a wealth of evidence for the remarkable unity which obtained among Ethiopian evangelicals up to 1955. There is irony, however, in the fact that the sense of solidarity with the breakaway churches became part of a dynamic which led to the unraveling of the broader solidarity

which had existed among Ethiopian evangelicals up to that time. Grenstedt notes that the sense of solidarity with the breakaway churches emerged most strongly when the breakaway churches affirmed infant baptism, however opportunistically. But why did a limited solidarity based on baptismal practices prove more important than the broader solidarity that had until that time kept denominationalism at bay?

Second, Grenstedt rightly stresses the cultural inflexibility of SIM leadership, though he does not note that the SIM leaders involved would not have regarded abstention from alcohol as a cultural preference but as part of a doctrine of separation from the world that was strongly held by many SIM missionaries at that time. There is irony in the fact that the Finnish Mission Society promulgated its own alcohol-related rules and that the EECMY framework proved just as unfriendly toward the indigenous polity which the breakaway churches had taken from their KEC/SIM origins as the KEC/SIM had been toward specific cultural practices. Why did proscriptions against alcohol create a rift in 1955 but not in the 1970s? Why did outside pressure on indigenous practices provoke resistance in some cases but not in others?

Third, Grenstedt is critical of the comity agreement worked out among the missions. When applied to the Ethiopian churches, Grenstedt is doubtless correct to detect an incipient colonialism. However, it is ironic that the comity agreement gave structure to what might also be understood as an enlightened ecumenism that doubtless helped nurture the broad Ethiopian evangelical solidarity that Grenstedt praises. But if in the early days the foreign missions could lay aside various differences over baptism and look past denominational distinctives for the sake of the gospel, why did this prove impossible to sustain? Doubtless there was plenty of blame to share on all sides for the break that eventually occurred, but would not the cause of unity have been well served by an agreement on core doctrinal commitments?

Finally, the decision by the EECMY to integrate the work of the foreign missions into the EECMY was based on indigenous principles whereby the institutions and projects of the foreign missions had full Ethiopian ownership from the very beginning. While this structure created an opportunity to assist an indigenous “independent Church”, it also led this Church to become “financially much more dependent” than it ever had been and to abandon much of its indigenous character (225). The integration of foreign missions within the EECMY formed a striking contrast to the “parallel structure” adopted by SIM in which the mission and the Church remained “two separate self-governing entities” (224). In practice, this latter structure meant that

outside funding flowed into capital-intensive SIM-owned projects such as schools and hospitals but not directly to churches or the salaries of its workers. Ironically, both forms of relationships between local churches and foreign missions were based on indigenous principles. Both forms continue to be a significant feature of current Church-mission relations in Ethiopia and Africa. Grenstedt's work is thus an important case study for those wrestling with appropriate ways to structure fruitful partnerships between Church and mission.

Grenstedt's work is an important case study for those wrestling with appropriate ways to structure fruitful partnerships between Church and mission. While Grenstedt's study does not point to the perfect model for these partnerships, like all good history it does impart wisdom. Both for good and for ill the missions have been a key source of contact between emerging churches in Africa and historic evangelical traditions. In Ethiopia, when the missions placed little emphasis on the differences between these traditions, the Ethiopian evangelical churches remained remarkably unified. However, as differences between the traditions emerged, the churches formed denominations on the basis of commitments regarding secondary issues which largely mirrored commitments held by the missions. Too often, issues related to funds accessed through the missions seemed to fuel the fragmentation. Still, the early history of the evangelical churches in Ethiopia provides some hope that the fundamental impulse to unity provided by the gospel will enable African churches to find fresh ways to transcend the differences which have too often defined the evangelical movement in the West.

Barbara M. Cooper

Evangelical Christians in the Muslim Sahel

Indiana University Press, 2006

ISBN 0-253-34739-4 \$24.95 (pb)

Reviewed by Phyllis Ndoro,
Christian-Muslim Lecturer,
St Paul's University, Limuru – till May 2010.

The Sahel region under consideration is predominantly a Hausa Muslim area on the southern fringe of Niger. Cooper explains in great detail the setting of the book and her reasons for researching this topic. She is a historian and raises issues like the 'family resemblance' between two movements - evangelical Christians and Islamic reformists. This might not be comfortable comparison for Christians, but she uses a scholarly approach, and therefore readers are encouraged to form their own opinions. Both Christianity and Islam are missionary religions. Cooper addresses some of the issues encountered in such interactions.

Her focus is on the protestant, evangelical Serving In Mission (SIM) – which she traces through the different stages of its metamorphosis. It started off in 1893 as Sudan Interior Mission, later it flirted with "Sudan Industrial Mission". Wherever SIM set up a mission, they tended to isolate themselves as much as possible from the work of liberal or ecumenical institutions as the century progressed. That is the main reason for the author treating them separately when discussing the other more charismatic or Pentecostal variations – which are mainly American and speak English. Today there seemed to be some tensions among the Christians, but the main bone of contention was not simply theology but its delivery. SIM describes the Vie Abondante church's evangelisation as aggressive.

When the Protestants came out to the Sahel, the mainly French speaking Catholics, were already present. The other major players in the region were the colonizers – who were mainly the French and the British. The focus of her research is on the American missions as opposed to the British

Church Missionary Society (CMS) – which was headed by Bishop Samuel Crowther, before tensions arose within the CMS and he was rejected as the leader of that mission. Many changes took place as the missions engaged with Africans within the context of their traditional, colonial and religious interactions.

In the opening chapter, she used a violent religious riot that took place in Maradi, Niger, on November, 2000, to show the intricacies of Christian-Muslim relations. To the casual observer the riot would have been dismissed as an attack on the Christians by Muslim fundamentalists – but Cooper tackled the underlying issues by investigating the history and traditions of the different groups of people. A great deal of research was done giving detailed accounts to support the author's findings. Most of the observations were very well balanced as she tackled the different 'variations' of Evangelical Christians as they were viewed by the locals. The work shows depth and also her analytical skills which help to unearth the real issues – or the stories behind the stories.

For example, in the riot the single women, whether Muslim or Christian, were shown to be the real targets. In the press it was reported that a group of angry Muslim youths rioted because of the proposed International Festival of African Fashion (FIMA) in the capital, Niamey. Even though the festival was going to benefit the local communities, the men highlighted the other issues. One of the highlights was the fact that one of the leading leather products used in the fashion world was Moroccan leather. Yet the spotlight was on the women – who are the models, the sort of lifestyle they lead, and the image of female independence which is seen in the eyes of the local communities as evidence of loose morals.

An analysis of where the attacks were made included the SIM mission compounds. The rioters attacked the mission grain stores – in a year of famine! Women had been the main beneficiaries of this grain supply. These were mainly widowed, divorced and abandoned women who lived in the surrounding villages and who would come to the mission in times of stress to seek food for themselves and their children. This did not augur well in an Islamic setting where the image of the ideal woman is only in the setting of marriage. The Muslims needed to set limits on the women's movements and visibility and perhaps even enforce some limitations on the form of women's spirituality. Cooper raises the gender issues quite boldly. The youth also targeted the bars, which according to the Muslim, promoted a nightlife culture that included prostitution as well as alcohol. The FIMA festival portrayed this kind of lifestyle as attractive.

Attacks were also made on the compound and grain stores of the charismatic Vie Abondante church, also founded by Americans. Cooper records the history of how the missions used their public address systems and other media like radio in a way that to the Muslims was a form of encroachment. The Muslim reaction during the riot was a response to their religion being described as false, without saving power and their prophet as false by the recent charismatic broadcasting of the Vie Abondante church. Perhaps one of the worst insults for the Muslims was the presentation of Jesus as God! They know only one God - Allah.

The Muslim women who were attacked belonged to the *bori* cult. Followers of this cult acknowledged the existence of Allah, but had other practices that included spirit possession and controlling the spirits in the period before *Ramadhan* – the holy month for the Muslims. They attacked the female leader of the *bori* and her legs and arms were severely burnt. Her followers moved to a neighbouring village because of the persecution.

The evangelical missions were also involved in the medical field which yielded much fruit. The author affirmed that SIM's success in medical work, especially by women missionaries, had continued even to date. But earlier neglect in the area of education to the local African communities had negative effects much later.

The relationship of the missions with Islam seems to have gone full cycle. In the beginning, Islam was viewed as "Satan's masterpiece." Later missionaries referred to Muslims as "slaves to empty ritual", and later still, Islam became a social problem. As the African mission fields moved closer to decolonisation, Islam came to be viewed as one of a number of threats, one of the "isms" which included nationalism, Marxism etc. The attitude to Islam came full cycle on September 11, 2001 when the World Trade Centre was bombed in the United States.

The book is very well illustrated with maps and photographs. The way the author deals with the themes makes it an excellent resource and an accessible read.

Ajith Fernando

***The Call to Joy and Pain:
Embracing Suffering in Your Ministry***

Crossway Books, 2007

ISBN 978-1-58134-888-0 (tpb) \$11.24 US

Reviewed by Eunice Wambui Njenga, Nakuru.

The Call to Joy and Pain is a useful and helpful devotional book. It explains why every Christian experiences joy and pain as part of the Christian's walk and calling. From the Bible Christ lived a life of sacrifice, and He made it clear that whoever wants to emulate Him must expect to go through pain and joy, which are important components in Christianity.

The Call to Joy and Pain has been divided into four sections. In section one, Fernando has focused on the fact that both suffering and joy are basic to Christianity. The eight chapters in this section are listed as: two basic aspects of Christianity, a forgotten treasure, bursts of pleasure, lament, faith and endurance, surrender, not gluttons for punishments and a theological blind spot. Suffering is an essential part of the Christian life, however today many people feel and teach that Christians should not suffer: when one suffers they must examine themselves, since it is not God's will for one to go through suffering.

Fernando has focused on how joy and suffering are two important aspects that are part and parcel of Christianity. He emphasizes the fact that Christians have forgotten the treasure of serving Christ through the pains of life, and that even in the time of suffering one should rejoice. Many are the times when people don't wait to experience complete joy; they are quickly satisfied with the fake satisfaction that worldly things bring. Fernando challenges us that our joy should be based on our relationship with God. He argues that the joy of the Lord is deeper, more reliable and more fulfilling than pleasures people are looking for without God. Fernando has also explained that people derive happiness from different experiences that can provide good pleasures or harmful pleasures. God wants us to experience pleasures and mountain top

experiences. He also remains with us and gives us peace and joy, and He is willing to fulfill the deep yearnings of our hearts.

In section two, the main theme is, “suffering brings us nearer to Christ”. Here focus is on five topics: the fellowship of suffering, becoming like Christ, motives purified, shame and honor, and solidarity with Christ. The author says Christians should not deny pain, but when faced with discouragements, sorrow and anger there is a place to lament, mourn or express our pain to the Lord. Fernando states that when we lament, we open ourselves to God’s comfort and to healing from bitterness. The second necessity for joy amidst pain is faith. The Lord allows our faith to be tested so that we may develop endurance. The Christian must walk by faith hoping in God in the midst of trials. We not only need faith to maintain our joy, we need to daily surrender to the Lord. We need to stop clinging to material possessions and instead give our idols to the Lord constantly, so we may experience the Lord’s freedom. Surrendering is not an easy task, but we are called to surrender. Christians should not seek suffering, but when suffering comes to us we should realize that God will turn it into a blessing for us. According to Fernando, every culture has a theological blind spot in its explanation of suffering. This leads to people not seeing suffering from a positive perspective. Many people try to teach ways we should avoid suffering, thus when faced with suffering many are in danger of turning away from the faith.

Section three’s main theme is, “our suffering helps the Church”. Here the eight chapters discuss the following topics: suffering and church growth, demonstrating the gospel, identifying with people, deepening our impact, suffering and credibility, commitment begets commitment, avoid commitment and avert suffering, and commitment and the joyous life. There is fellowship with Christ when we accept to suffer for His sake. The author says there is oneness with Christ that we experience only through suffering (p. 54). Suffering brings us closer to Christ. The Lord needs to purify our motives so that we may do everything for His honor and glory. According to the author, one of the hardest aspects of the suffering of Christians is enduring shame. Just as Christ had to endure shame to earn our salvation, those who serve Him will also face shame. When Christians undergo suffering for the sake of Christ, they are reminded that their sufferings are only momentarily afflictions preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison (2 Corinthians 4:17). The author clearly explains that our ‘solidarity with Christ not only gives us strength to face the blows we receive – it also gives us an experience of His love that banishes our bitterness’ (p. 71).

In part four the main theme is, “servants of the church”. This theme is discussed in eight chapters entitled: ministers and stewards, how servanthood springs from grace, we are rich, the hope for glory, Jesus: our message, disciples are made not born, toil in disciple-making, and He gives strength. Fernando concludes the book with the challenge of a paradox in the Christian life. Fernando says that through Christian suffering the church experiences growth because suffering provides opportunity for the gospel to be proclaimed. Through persecution people are scattered to various destinations and as they move, they move with the gospel witnessing. The Christian through acts of mercy and a willingness to suffer for the gospel demonstrate salvation to the world. For one to effectively evangelize, there is a need to identify with the people, learn about them and take time to understand them. Suffering makes Christian grow deeper in the faith, this suffering shapes them and enabling them to have a significant impact in the lives of other people. God uses our suffering to give leaders credibility inside and outside the church. The church today suffers a crisis of commitment where many people do not want to commit themselves to the ministry. Leaders must be committed to greatly influence their flocks. The author points out that some stress is unnecessary, that we must learn the discipline of maintaining our joy in the Lord even when things get difficult, and we might decide to leave some situations where stress is occurring to avert pain. This shows that commitment can lead to pain in the life of a servant. Commitment can also result in joy when we look back at the results of the pain one has gone through.

Christians are called to a life of servanthood and stewardship that is possible only through grace. Servanthood is threatened by a lack of happiness caused by an attitude of resentment because of feeling used and exploited. Servants may also feel that people are not kind to them and are insensitive.

Fernando has been used powerfully by the Lord to bring out the message of accepting suffering as Christians and always rejoicing with or without suffering. Fernando says that our suffering draws us closer to the Lord and makes us effective in ministry since we learn to depend on the Lord. Fernando based the teachings of his book on Colossians 1: 24 – 29 where he brings out suffering for Christ and how we should respond to suffering when we experience challenges in our lives. God uses suffering to bless our lives and that of the church. Fernando shared many personal experiences that most people can relate to. This makes it possible for people to apply the message of his book to their own lives.

This book finds its strength in the teachings of scripture, and the author did not hesitate to quote and expound on many passages from both the Old and New Testament. This gives readers a way of understanding the scriptures better as they reflect on how God is allowing suffering in their lives and those of other people. Fernando emphasized the need to develop a practical theology of suffering and not just a therapy of suffering. He shows the importance of Christians having an adequate theology of suffering so that when faced with suffering, they do not become unnecessarily unhappy about the suffering. The book has been arranged so the reader can use it as a devotional tool. This is a helpful personal tool for any Christian who wants to grow in wisdom and knowledge of the scriptures. Fernando has also chosen topics that flow into each other making the book readable and interesting.

Although the author has tried to do some exposition of different passages of scripture, he failed to do a thorough exposition of texts that he used in the book. He probably did not intend to make it a classroom text or a book that could be used by theological institutions as a textbook to teach a complete theology of suffering.

I highly recommend this book to be read by all Christians. This book was a blessing to me. As I read through it I began to see why God allows suffering in my life. God uses this suffering to draw me close to Him and to depend upon Him more. This book is essential for all pastors so that they may understand that the Lord allows suffering even in the church for it to grow. The author shares personal experiences and practical examples that demonstrate the overwhelming blessing that comes with facing life challenges with joy. He shows that Christians can witness through their words and deeds and by living consistent lives in the Lord.

Herman J. Selderhuis

John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life

Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009 \$17.50 US

ISBN 9781844743759

Reviewed by Jack Mitchell, Scott Theological College

One might ask what another biography of John Calvin could contribute that has not already been said? Prof. Selderhuis, however, offers a fresh and intimate portrait of one of history's most controversial figures, based almost entirely on the Reformer's voluminous personal correspondence. The author is a professor of church history and church polity at the Theological University Apeldoorn (Netherlands) and a foremost Reformation scholar. His efforts have resulted in the revelation of a person hidden through the years behind notorious caricatures on one hand, and near idol worship on the other. The book is an insightful and thoroughly integrated story of one of the Reformation's most prolific writers and influential leaders. This biography, however, is not simply another objective historical record of the events of Calvin's life. Rather, Selderhuis has sought to capture Calvin through a series of ten individual portraits that form a collage of the pilgrimage of this many-sided man. In his own words, the author has "tried to tell the story of his life to discover what he was like as a person" (p. 8).

In seeking to achieve this goal, the author has sought to concurrently uncover the genuine humanity of Calvin, objectively and thoroughly debunk numbers of historical caricatures, and finally set Calvin's vision, contributions, and struggles within the contexts of both his extensive network of personal relationships and a turbulent Europe. The result is a revelation of Calvin as much more than an unfeeling and tyrannical pastor and academician. Selderhuis pictures Calvin more as a sensitive and zealous prophet called of God to pastor the church in Geneva while also touching nearly all the rest of the world through his writings.

Selderhuis clearly exposes Calvin's humanity as Calvin sought to deal with personal issues, his struggles with Genevan politics, and his own health. Informing all of these arenas was his ongoing wrestling match with an absolutely sovereign God whom he surrendered to but often did not understand. Calvin's correspondence reveals him as a man who struggled with guilt and grace. He was sensitive to criticism and misunderstanding, but also a man who bravely endured it all so that God's people and everyone else might hear the truth of the Holy Scriptures. Calvin's tendency to be melancholic and subject to fits of temper is part of the man Selderhuis has discovered. In the end, the author paints a picture of a man keenly aware of his own limitations, but always seeking to move beyond them.

The author also appears to take delight in clearly and objectively unmasking numbers of historical misperceptions of Calvin. As examples, Selderhuis informs us that Calvin loved music and was not enemy of the arts (p. 135); he was no emotionless stoic (p. 187); he cannot be seriously considered to be the father of capitalism (p. 219), he did not oversee the church of Geneva as a king in a theocracy (p. 243), and finally and most notoriously, he was not the designer of Michael Servetus' trial and execution (p. 203-206). All in all, the author believes Calvin has been the victim of theological and personal misconceptions.

Throughout the book, the political and religious conflicts form the backdrop for Calvin's life. The author carefully integrates factors like Calvin's refugee status (from France), the strivings of the Church of Rome, the politics of Geneva and Switzerland, the struggles within the Reformed Church, and the devastating effects of the Plague, to name a few, with the particulars of Calvin's pilgrimage. He was man of his times. As a spiritual and ecclesiastical revolutionary, he was foremost a servant of the God who had captivated his heart, intellect, and will.

All of this and more is delightfully paged in 259 pages of wonderful prose. The story is full of anecdotes, and keen historical insights that speak loudly of the author's prodigious scholarship.

Finally, this volume's importance for African church leaders is essentially 3-fold. First, the book is a stirring and instructive model of pastoral ministry. Calvin was serious about God's word, God's mission, and his role as a pastor of God's people. As a result, what the author has uncovered is the chronicle of an increasingly skillful, wise, and courageous shepherd. Today's Africa is also a land of political and religious turmoil that will require men like Calvin to

lead Christ's Church. The book would serve well as a secondary textbook for a course on pastoral theology.

Secondly, the book offers some keen insights into the life of a visionary. Calvin saw much further than Geneva and Europe. As the author reveals, Calvin understood the dynamic interchanges between history, the world, and God's kingdom. African church leaders can profit greatly by grasping how Calvin viewed himself in the midst of God's eternal mission in Christ Jesus.

Finally, this biography pictures a man who thoughtfully and courageously sought to engage a rigorous life of faith in a rapidly changing world full of dangers, yes, but also full of opportunities for God's mission. This may perhaps, be the most significant contribution Selderhuis' work. And considering the vision and character of John Calvin it is entirely appropriate that it should be so.

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