

JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN
Mission

June 2015 | Vol. 2 | No. 3

Table of Contents

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| THE CULTURE OF CHRISTIANITY BY SCOTT MURRAY | 6 |
| AMERICA’S CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC LANDSCAPE BY LARRY M. VOGEL | 10 |
| REFLECTIONS ON SEVEN MEGATRENDS SHAPING 21ST CENTURY MISSION BY ALBERT B. COLLVER III | 29 |
| CHURCH SURVIVAL IN ADVERSE SOCIETY BY ALEXEY STRELTSOV..... | 37 |
| FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE GROWTH OF THE EECMY IN GENERAL AND CENTRAL ETHIOPIAN SYNOD IN PARTICULAR BY ABRAHAM MENGESHA MITKU | 44 |
| RESPONSE TO ABRAHAM MENGESHA-MITKU’S “FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE GROWTH OF THE EECMY IN GENERAL AND CENTRAL ETHIOPIAN SYNOD IN PARTICULAR” AND ALBERT B. COLLVER III’S “REFLECTIONS ON SEVEN MEGATRENDS SHAPING THE 21ST CENTURY” BY KLAUS DETLEV SCHULZ | 60 |
| A LETTER FROM THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL MISSION..... | 64 |
| BOOK REVIEW: <i>THE PILLAR NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY: THE SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS</i> BY JOHN T. PLESS | 66 |
| BOOK REVIEW: <i>A LUTHERAN PRIMER FOR PREACHING: A THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL APPROACH TO SERMON WRITING</i> BY ALBERT B. COLLVER III..... | 68 |

© 2015 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.
Reproduction of a single article or column for parish
use only does not require permission of *The Journal
of Lutheran Mission*. Such reproductions, however,
should credit *The Journal of Lutheran Mission* as the
source. Cover images are not reproducible without
permission. Also, photos and images credited to
sources outside the LCMS are not to be copied.

Editorial office:
1333 S. Kirkwood Road,
St. Louis, MO 63122-7294,
314-996-1202

Published by The Lutheran Church—
Missouri Synod.

Please direct queries to
journaloflutheranmission@lcms.org.

This journal may also be found at www.lcms.org/journaloflutheranmission.



RESPONSE TO ABRAHAM MENGESHA-MITKU'S "FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE GROWTH OF THE EECMY IN GENERAL AND CENTRAL ETHIOPIAN SYNOD IN PARTICULAR" AND ALBERT B. COLLVER III'S "REFLECTIONS ON SEVEN MEGATRENDS SHAPING THE 21ST CENTURY"

by Klaus Detlev Schulz

I WANT TO THANK Rev. Abraham Mengesha Mitku for his inspiring presentation on "Factors that Contributed to the Growth of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) in General and Central Ethiopian Synod in Particular," and also Dr. Collver for "Reflections on Seven Megatrends Shaping the 21st Century." Whereas the latter presentation gave us a panoramic view of what to look for when surveying the state of Christianity in the world, the former opened for us a window into a particular church that struggles with some of those trends listed. I'd like to transition into my two points on deeper ecumenism and urbanization, which I gained from these two presentations, with an introductory note on mission history.

The Ethiopian situation had captured the Lutheran imagination for well over a century. In a penetrating description of Lutheran missions to the Oromo, entitled, "*Ihr Ziel war das Oromoland*" (Their Goal Was the Land of the Oromo)¹, a former missionary to that region, Ernst Bauerochse, gives a stirring account of the initial attempts of the Swedish and Hermannsburg missionaries to reach the Oromo people. These initiatives began 160 years ago; the first started in 1853. The story is compelling, to say the least. After hearing promising accounts of potential

mission starts among the Oromo people from a missionary Hans Ludwig Krapf² stationed outside Mombasa, in 1853 the Lutheran mission society of Hermannsburg sent a whole team to Mombasa on a boat named *Candace* after the Ethiopian queen in Acts 8. Unfortunately, the local imam denied them access to the land of the Oromo people, saying that the Oromo were too fierce and rebellious, a people known for their excellent horsemanship, and that no one could guarantee the safety of these Lutheran colonists if they were to go inland. In 1857, the

Hermannsburg missionaries launched a second attempt, only to be rejected again. This time the sultan of Zanzibar turned them down. It seems that the Arab leaders' concern for the safety of the missionaries was just a subterfuge contrived to hide their real fear that these missionaries would interfere with the slave trade. For this reason, the coastal belt of Arab Muslims along northern Kenya and

Ethiopia became for quite some time an impenetrable barrier for Christian missionaries.

The first successful Lutheran attempts to reach the Oromo fell to the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM) known as *Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelse* (founded in 1856).³ Starting in Eritrea in 1877, north of Ethiopia, SEM

EECMY has grown significantly to become the largest Lutheran church in Africa and second in the world with over thirty dioceses. ... To hear of this phenomenal growth humbles us all, knowing that our struggle is the exact opposite, namely, a dwindling Christianity and denomination.

¹ Ernst Bauerochse, *Ihr Ziel war das Oromoland* (Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2006).

² A laudatory biography is offered by Rune Imberg, "Dr. Krapf—the (almost) forgotten missionary pioneer." *Svensk Missionstidskrift* 98, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 49–67.

³ Bauerochse, 106ff.

History's lesson is that Christianity's growth and decline have always lain side by side and still do. How can Lutheran churches bolster one another during both?

missionaries made four futile attempts to advance into the land of the Oromo before they succeeded the fifth time. In 1898, they reached the area around the cities of Jimma and Neqemte in West and South West Ethiopia.⁴ Fortunately, they were accompanied by a few former Oromo slaves from Eritrea, who they had bought and freed. Among them was the man called Hikaa (ca. 1855–1831), which means in Oromo “the translator.” This Hikaa was baptized and had his name changed to Onesimus Nesib (1855–1931). He became the translator of the Bible into Oromo using the Ethiopian alphabet. Through that significant work of translating the Bible, Onesimus also founded the Oromo written language. In 1927, the Hermannsburg mission finally managed to reach Ethiopia, and so Lutheran mission was fully underway among the Oromo people.

The persistence and tenacity of Lutheran mission in Ethiopia was truly admirable, and it bore fruit. But then it became the “young” Christians’ turn to endure a series of significant ordeals: two world wars and hunger spells ravaged the population in 1974 and 1984–85. Then came the Communist Derg regime under Mengistu Haile Mariam, who in 1977 started a persecution of Ethiopian Lutherans and other Christians, resulting in martyrs and confiscated buildings and properties.⁵ Finally, in 1991, Mengistu’s regime was deposed by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). In spite of all these setbacks, Christians of the EECMY prevailed. In fact, the EECMY, which was founded in 1959, actually grew, reaching out to the Amharic-speaking people. For some time there was tension within the EECMY over whether the worshipping language in the Central Diocese should be only Amharic or include Oromo as well.

The news of the EECMY’s current growth and her interest in entering into a stronger relationship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod should move us all. The good news we heard today from the presentation by Rev. Abraham Mengesha Mitku is that the EECMY has grown significantly to become the largest Lutheran

church in Africa and second in the world with over thirty dioceses. Some factors contributing to that growth are worth noting: Theological training was provided on a broader level; there was an ambitious national outreach plan; the Bible and literature were translated into the vernacular; holistic ministries cared for the people; people consciously felt the reality of the Holy Spirit and God’s Word was widely shared though the witness of the priesthood of all believers. From Dr. Collver’s reflection on Timothy Tennent’s “Seven Megatrends Shaping 21st Century Mission,”⁶ the EECMY’s growth is one example of the major trend in which Christianity is shifting to multiple centers around the world away from the West.

To hear of this phenomenal growth humbles us all, knowing that our struggle is the exact opposite, namely, a dwindling Christianity and denomination, as was so ably, yet starkly, presented to us by Larry Vogel. However, history’s lesson is also that Christianity’s growth and decline have always lain side by side and still do. Martin Luther already commented on Christianity’s shift with these prophetic words:

The news of the EECMY’s current growth and her interest in entering into a stronger relationship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod should move us all.

The movement of the Gospel is now among us, but our ungratefulness and scorning of the divine Word, pettiness, and decadence make it so that it will not remain for long. There shall then follow after it a large rabble, and great wars will come later. In Africa, the Gospel was very powerfully present, but the liars corrupted it, and after it the Vandals and the wars came. It went likewise also in Egypt: first lying then murder. It will also go exactly the same way in the German land. The pious preachers will first be taken away, and false prophets, enthusiasts, and demagogues will step into my place and that of other preachers and divide the church and tear it apart.⁷

This historic reality gives us no reason to resign from missionary activity in this country. The tenacity of former missionaries as they sought to reach the Oromo is inspi-

⁴ Ibid., 113–114.

⁵ The high rise building serving now as the EECMY central office in Addis Ababa was returned in 1991, and a plaque on the wall remembers that occasion.

⁶ Timothy Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 15–51.

⁷ Luther in a sermon on Matt. 24:8ff. preached in 1539. See Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 52.

rational. Our task here demands similar tenacity in the face of declining numbers and dwindling support for Christianity from society and government. It is in view of the vagaries of our time that our mission needs to remember the Lord's assuring words: "And surely I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20).

Furthermore, Christianity's shift to other parts of the world impacts also LCMS's foreign policy of initiating and nurturing foreign partnerships. It is interesting that the EECMY's growth occurred without LCMS missionaries being involved and contributing toward it. In the first decade of this century, the LCMS wanted to assume a leading role in the worldwide growth of Christianity, trying to inspire partner churches to multiply, when ironically these partner churches really needed no prodding, since they were already multiplying. Instead, it is really us who are to learn from others. Timothy Tennent's observation on this is worth noting:

We must learn to listen better to the perspectives and struggles of other Christians and to endeavor to see ourselves as members of a global Christian movement. ...We in the West have been accustomed to playing the melody. We directed the orchestra and decided what pieces would be played and where, and the players were mostly from the West. Now, the orchestra is far more diverse, and we are being asked to play harmony, not melody.⁸

What does that mean for our LCMS relationship with the EECMY and other denominations around the world? What can we do together in terms of mutual support and learning from one another? First, it has to do not just with any type of ecumenical relationship, but rather one that, as Tennent calls it, works on "deeper ecumenism." Deeper ecumenism should not be "an uncritical accommodation to modernity by sacrificing kerygmatic essential of the historic Christian proclamation." "The kind of ecumenism I am referring to," he says, "is the deeper, older ecumenism that finds its roots in historic Christian

⁸ Tennent, 51.

confessions... it will lead us to a deeper understanding of the *depositum fidei*, that ancient apostolic faith that forms our common confession."⁹ It is good to hear such words from a voice outside the LCMS that reflects the current nature of LCMS ecumenical relations as she engages partner churches. Indeed, the LCMS is forging a deeper ecumenism with others around the question, "What is a Lutheran identity?" That agenda is not self-chosen and imposed on others, but it was brought to the table precisely by churches such as the EECMY who are searching for a clearer definition of their own identity. We should be glad to assist. And such a partnership will not become a unilateral endeavor. By sharing we can also receive and learn. We may be the ones who can provide moral and theological guidance to a church that has severed ties with Lutheran partner churches in North America and Europe, that is struggling with Pentecostalism, as Mitku himself pointed out and that is influenced by what Tennent calls "the emerging fourth branch of Christianity."¹⁰ But we

The LCMS is forging a deeper ecumenism with others around the question, "What is a Lutheran identity?" That agenda is not self-chosen and imposed on others, but it was brought to the table precisely by churches such as the EECMY who are searching for a clearer definition of their own identity.

also receive a valuable moral boost and encouragement from her, that in spite of our own challenges with postmodern relativism and societal skepticism, the Gospel in this country must go on, and our missionary zeal need not stop. And so, in a quest to forge a deeper ecumenical relationship, both churches can help each other to understand their Lutheran identity better, not only in terms of deepening her theology but also in sharing it with missionary zeal.

Second, both denominations, the LCMS and EECMY, seem to

face the second trend previously discussed, which is urbanization. To be sure, Ethiopia still has a strong rural population. However, the Central Ethiopian Diocese with the city of Addis Ababa is, as we just heard from Mitku, caught up in the trend of urbanization, and so are we. We heard from Abraham Mitku about the push and pull factors of urbanization that contributed also to the growth of the EECMY in the metropolis. Predictions state that future mega cities around the world of thirty million

⁹ Ibid., 49.

¹⁰ This fourth branch is noted for introducing many novelties such as certain legalistic taboos, strange liturgies, peculiar doctrines and new worship practices. Read more in Tennent, 41.

or more citizens will all emerge in Africa and Asia. In this trend of urbanization, there is room for a mutual enrichment between the EECMY and LCMS. Both churches share a common tradition, namely, that in their past “most evangelistic and church-planting strategies were formulated for and implemented in rural settings because that was the dominant context of nineteenth-century missions.” Today both must re-conceptualize the mission field and ask, “What does it mean for our missionaries to communicate and proclaim the gospel in a holistic way in order to address the complex challenges of urban life and experience?” For neither Ethiopia nor North America are spared the ill effects of urbanization “characterized by widespread corruption, poverty, disease, and oppression.”¹¹

These are the two areas that I seem to catch from both previous presentations. First, offering an ecumenical depth that puts the theological conversation and missionary formation in the forefront, and then also working on a mutual solidarity in sparring together against challenges of urbanization. May the Lord bless our partnership with the EECMY and with all others around the world.

The Rev. Dr. Klaus Detlev Schulz is professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions, dean of Graduate Studies and director of the Ph.D. (Missiology) program at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

¹¹ Ibid., 45–46.