

**Workshop**

**HISTORICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSIGHTS INTO THE  
MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES IN ETHIOPIA**

**25– 26 July 2003**



**ABSTRACTS**

**LEONARDO COHEN (Haifa University, Israel)**  
**The role of the Jesuit Missionary as a translator**

Translation was one of the various tasks of the Jesuit missionaries in Ethiopia. The missionaries made big efforts to generate reforms in the Ethiopian Christianity, introducing elements from the Catholic counter-reformation in Europe. Many of these elements were introduced through translations of texts to the Ge'ez, such as biblical texts and commentaries, prayer books, manuals and catechetic books. But the missionaries did not limit themselves to the translation of the Portuguese and Latin to the Ge'ez: they also took the opposite direction and translated from the Ge'ez to the European languages lives of saints and chronicles of kings, aiming at a better and more rigorous understanding of the religious and secular history of Ethiopia.

These translations were the result of the collective effort of missionaries and local men of letters who had converted to Catholicism. The goal, then, was contributing to the creation of an Ethiopian Catholic culture with elements imported from the European Catholicism, and in the local sacred language. Nevertheless, the ephemeral triumph of Catholicism in Ethiopia and the following expulsion of the Jesuits would frustrate those aspirations. The development of the Ethiopian Catholicism would be postponed for a couple of centuries.

**ANDREU MARTÍNEZ D'ALÒS-MONER (Hamburg University, Germany)**  
**Why do you circumcise? Genealogy of a missionary fetish**

Wide spread south and north of the Sahara, circumcision has a central place in most of African societies. Perhaps due to the role it played in the traumatic rupture that Christianity officiated with Judaism this institution has also been since early times a main preoccupation of Western imagination. Here we will explore an early clash between Western theological thought and African practices. From simple remain – *superstitio*– of a Judeo-Semitic past to symbol of a devilish Africa, the Jesuit missionaries that lived in Ethiopia between 1556 and 1632 searched different ideas and explanations initially to cope with but with the ultimate goal to erase this practice from Ethiopian Christianity. Faced with an unprecedented questioning of its own traditions, the Ethiopians responded as well with different and often ad hoc explanations. The study – mostly through Jesuit and Western sources– of missionary theories and the dialectical processes they enanchanced will also serve as a contribution to the overall discussion on circumcision reflected in modern anthropological literature on Africa.

**VERENA BÖLL (Hamburg University, Germany)**  
**The encounter of the Christian anthropology of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church during the 17<sup>th</sup> century**

The anthropology of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) determined the whole life of the Christian people. The doctrine of the nature of the female and the male body have had an influence on the complex society and the social and cultural relations between the sexes not only at the court and the church. The confrontation with the Catholic anthropology of the Jesuits during the 17<sup>th</sup> century provoked deep discussions about the

nature of the human body. The Ethiopian theologians defend vehemently the orthodox doctrine during the quarrel with the Catholic missionaries, evidence of these talks can be found in the accounts and other sources of the Jesuits and the EOC. A systematic examination of the relation between the doctrine of the Christian anthropology and the real life of women and men in Ethiopia has to be done. It will show if the theological teachings of both churches differ from the expressed opinions about the behaviour of the people. The paper wants to find an answer to the question if it is possible that the encounter of the two anthropology changed the view regarding the human body in Ethiopia.

**SEVIR CHERNETSOV (St.Petersburg State University, Russia)**

### **Ethiopian theological response to European missionaries proselytizing in the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries**

The activities of Jesuit missionaries and King Susneyos (1604-1632) responsible for introduction of Catholic faith as state religion could not help bringing disarray and protest. The popular response was rebellion, while Ethiopian theologians leaned for support on literary heritage of the Patriarchate of Alexandria. They were translating into Ethiopic such works of militant Monophysism as the "Faith of Fathers" (*Haymanotä abäw*), the "Wider Book" (*Mäṣhafä ḥawi*), and the "Disciple" (*Ardə'ət*). There appeared also some original works, such as "The Consolation of the Soul" (*Nuzaze näfəs*) and the "Pilatus' kin" (*Zämädä Pilatos*).

The result was that all European missionaries were considered not so much as Catholics or Protestants, but first of all as Chalcedonian both by the clergy and Ethiopian Catholic converts as well. When in 1855 Metropolitan Sälama (1841-1887) ordered a Catholic convert Gäbrä Mika'el to be tortured, the latter exclaimed: "Just as I do believe in Divinity of my Lord, so I shall never renounce His Humanity!", and died precisely for this Chalcedonian principle. Another convert, an anonymous author of Amharic memorandum "On the difference in faith between the Ethiopians and the Russians" (*bä'ityopyawyanna bämäskobočč makhäl yalä yähaymanot mälayayät*) declared bluntly: "Neither political advantages, nor worldly considerations can shatter the faith of Ethiopian clergy and entice them into alien faith, which has nothing to do with Ethiopian confessional thesis about only one nature in Jesus Christ". Such was typical Ethiopian theological response to European missionaries proselytizing until the very turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which brought quite a new development for both the Church and state in Ethiopia.

**KEBEDE HORDOFA JANKO (Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia)**

### **Missionaries enslaved Oromos and their contribution to the development of the Oromo language**

The vision of taking the Gosphel to the Oromo was shared by the British, Swiss, German and Swedish missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For the first time Krapf – a key figure at the Protestant missionary center of Konthel, Germany - received a man by the name Rufoo, an enslaved Oromo for the purpose of Bible translation. Later on Krapf visited Oromo land with the version of the New testament partly based on Rufoo's work; but only to be criticised and rewritten by the other Oromo captives at the evangelical base of Imkullu, near Massawa, northern Eritrea. It was in this context

Onesimo, a prominent Oromo in the group, began his epoch-making linguistic translation work, hoping and praying that it would serve the evangelical outreach to his beloved Oromo people. By the end of 1883, Onesimos had translated 100 Evangelical Hymns, John Bunyan's "Man's Heart" and Luther's Small Catechism into Oromo. In fact the first book produced at the Imkullu press was printed in Oromo. Under his personal supervision the entire Bible in Oromo was printed in 1899. Here again Onesimos was to be assisted by another captive Oromo girl named Aster Ganno who arrived at the Imkullu center later on. She was a girl with a real feeling for the language and a genuine literary gift. As such we find that she contributes to the development of Oromo written literature in her capacity as assistant to Onesimos. Together they produced a number of Oromo language material, which became nucleus of the written Oromo language. In this presentation I shall attempt to highlight the history and linguistic literature of Oromo produced by these pioneers: missionaries and the enslaved Oromos.

**WOLBERT SMIDT (Hamburg University, Germany)**

**The role of the former Oromo-slave Pauline Fathme in Switzerland in the foundation of the Protestant Oromo-mission**

Oromo were among the Northeast-Africans to live in Germany and Switzerland in the first half of the 19th century. Mostly forgotten today, they played an influential role as the first informants of missionaries and Africanists. In the 1840s the German adventurer John von Müller, a member of the petty German nobility by birth and descendant of Africans himself, purchased several Africans on slave markets in Cairo, among them Fatima, an Oromo slave girl. He brought them to his home in Southern Germany as his servants. After his bankruptcy Fatima, who was now baptized with the German name Pauline Fathme, was provided shelter by Protestant missionaries in Basle (Switzerland) and received a basic education. Her letters show, that she acquired a good knowledge of German and that she ardently and repeatedly asked the missionaries to go to her "bad compatriots" ("böße Landsleute") and to teach them the gospel, as they had done with her. When she died of a lung disease in 1855, she expressed her last will, that the missionaries should do everything possible to "bring the light" to the Oromo. In the same time two envoys of the St. Chrischona Pilgrim Mission from Basle, Krapf and Flad, arrived in Abyssinia at the court of Tewodros to inquire for possibilities to establish a Protestant mission in Abyssinia. In letters and publications (like a small biography of Pauline Fathme, called the "Galla-Büchlein") the Protestant missionaries repeatedly referred to Pauline's words, interpreting them as an expression of God's will, and underlined that the Abyssinian mission should only be a starting point to spread the Christian faith further into Africa and especially to the Oromo. It took, however, still many years until the Oromo mission could really be established.

**TSEGA ENDALEW (Hamburg University, Germany)**

**Protestant Mission Activities in the Lake Tana Region: Persecutions in Bahir Dar, 1968-1994**

The arrival in 1830 of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) agents, Samuel Gobat and Christian Kugler heralds the beginning of modern missionary activities in northern Ethiopia. The CMS plan at the beginning was to renew the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

with out proselytization. However, when the strategy failed, local converts with or without foreign contacts embarked upon proselytization in Orthodox Ethiopia.

In the 1960s the spirit of Pentecostalism was sweeping across Africa in general which brought about irresistible phenomenon of evangelism with active conversions amidst persecutions throughout Ethiopia. Bahir Dar, a town on the southern shore of lake Tana, is one of the Orthodox dominated towns in Ethiopia with the presence especially of ancient and famous monasteries in the lake. The inhabitants had, for several years, persecuted non-Orthodox followers particularly the Protestants. Any deviation from Orthodoxy cannot be tolerated as the Veneration's of Mary, Saints, Miracles, Relics were strongly fortified here.

Students of two higher educations in the town, Polytechnic Institute and Academy of Pedagogy, played a crucial role in bringing the winds of revival in the region. With some government employees and high school students a new phenomenon of proselytization was introduced which aggravated fierce persecutions.

The present study is an attempt to look into these missionary activities and persecutions in the Lake Tana region. The methodology employed included the systematic interviewing of resourceful informants to supplement the available literature. Their testimonies were carefully cross-checked and systematically analysed through qualitative research methods.

#### **MERDASSA KASSAYE (Evangelical Theological College, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) Leadership Paradigm Shift among the Ethiopian Protestant Missionaries Since 1974**

This paper discussed about the leadership paradigm shift that is going on between the current protestant missionaries and the local churches. The scope of the term *leadership* in this paper is the total impact of the missionaries on the social – political and religious context of their contemporary. This paper also surveyed the historical scenario of missionaries' leadership role in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. These eras were the time that many European had developed more interest to Ethiopia. Different mission institutions from the catholic and protestant visited the country. Even though the missionaries had great interest, many Ethiopian emperors and rulers became less interested with the religious dimension of the missionaries; instead they were more with their foreign support, military and with their skilled men. For the missionaries situations were very complex, religious policies of the emperors and rulers were inconsistent. The Ethio–Italian war (the Italian invasion), was a strong challenge for missionaries especially for the protestant groups. Even though they seemed to faced many challenges from their contemporary they played significant role for the making of modern Ethiopia. Since 1974 the role of leadership of the missionaries has shown a new face in churches, mission organizations, bible schools etc. The leadership is shifting towards the local people, missionaries started to have less impact on the society. Different factors contributed for the role shift. I divided them in to two: *internal* and *external* agent. These factors are social, political and theological - doctrinal. Many forms of dynamisms is going on for the leadership paradigm shift this happened through explicit and explicit dialogue between the missionaries and the local people. The paper discussed the positive and negative aspects of the role shift on both missionaries and the local people leadership. In my conclusion I would like to ask questions, *do we real need missionaries today? Can we, Ethiopians, make ourselves separate from the global experience-sharing paradigm with respect to mission?*

**ALEXANDER NATY (Asmara University, Eritrea)**  
**The Sudan Interior Mission in Aariland, southern Ethiopia**

This paper examines the activities of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) in Aariland, southwest Ethiopia from early 1950s to 1990. The paper explores the various factors that motivated the conversion of individuals from their traditional belief system to Protestant Christianity. I shall examine the narratives of converts in order to identify the different factors that motivated individuals in the society to convert to Christianity. These factors include: (1) the need to get modern medical care, (2) to seek support from the Protestant community, (3) the need to stop bad habits such as the drinking of liquor and the smoking of tobacco in the form of water pipe, and (4) the desire to abandon the traditional Aari customs that are perceived as immoral and unacceptable when viewed from the standards of Christian religion. The paper concludes that the process of conversion in Aariland continues even with the diminishing presence of the expatriate SIM missionaries. The rationale for this continuity is that once the process of conversion to Protestant Christianity is set in motion, it has its own momentum and incredible power for spreading into all segments of the society as well as diffusing into other communities in southwestern Ethiopia that are located at the extreme geographical and political periphery of the country. This potentiality of Christianity to always gain new followers qualifies it as “world religion.”

**SUSANNE EPPLE (Mainz University, Germany)**  
**Missionary Work and Cultural Change among the Banna and Bashada of Southern Ethiopia**

For several decades the Banna, Hamar and Bashada as well as many of the other ethnic groups living on South Omo have been in contact with foreign and local missionaries. Until recently the missionaries have not been very ‘successful’ converting Banna-people into Christianity. But since the last 5 to 8 years more and more Banna have converted their traditional beliefs into Protestant Christianity: in the area around the Protestant Mission of Aldube whole villages nowadays consist of Christianized people, whereas the Catholic Mission in the South of Banna does not have many members. Some of the Protestant Banna have started to work as missionaries themselves.

In my paper I mainly want to discuss the following questions:

1. Why have many people started to convert into Christianity in the last years, and why is only the Protestant mission more ‘successful’ than the Catholic mission?
2. Which are the social, religious/ritual consequences for a Christianized individual who lives among his traditional neighbours and relatives?
3. Are the Christianized Banna still considered as being part of their ethnic community or do they form a new entity together with Christians from other ethnic groups?
4. Is cultural self-esteem an indicator for the willingness to give way to cultural change?

**CHRISTIANE FALGE (Max-Planck-Institut For Anthropology, Halle, Germany)**  
**Segmentary Christianity among Nuer in Gambella**

The presentation will deal with the process of segmentary Christianity among mainly Ethiopian Nuer in a village and a refugee camp setting in Gambella, Southwestern Ethiopia. The data is based on empirical research of a society under strong influence of national and global forces. The iconoclastical accusations of Kuper and others against

anthropologist's writings during structural-functionalism will be crosschecked by looking at how the church structure gets embedded into the Nuer segmentary system.

After half a century of civil war the Nuer are exhausted which also reflects itself in the general atmosphere of refugee camps who are becoming permanent settlements for many Southern Sudanese. As a result of war and increasing global influences many Nuer converted to Christianity in the 1980's and 1990's. I will look at the manifestations and changes of the Nuer social organization in relation to those changes. Rather than looking for the weaknesses of their system, I will try to show how the influence of institutions like the church as well as exclusion from real or imagined resources act as formative forces resulting in increasing fragmentation.

During the 1990's, the world "opened up" to the Nuer, who were offered resettlement to the USA. Their outmigration to the US brought many changes in the church landscape. Through rapid networking with American churches, the Nuer managed to add to the existing mother church Mekane Yesus, a decisive number of new, basically Lutheran, Presbyterian churches. The background of those churches, how they came to Ethiopia and their impacts on the Nuer in Gambella will be described in the second part of the paper.

## **MERSHA ALEHEGNE (Patriarchate of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)**

### **The Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Protestant Missionaries**

Scholars suggested that "cooperation in academic research on the impact of European missions could help to break down tension between the Christian communities in Ethiopia" (Getachew, 1998, preface). Moreover, as Aaslav Lande remarks, research on mission-Orthodox relations "misses the perspective from the side of the Orthodox Church. Their dissatisfaction, their arguments, and their whole experience of the evangelical development as a threat, is not seriously considered" (Getachew, 1998, 193). And, hence, our present attempt may add fresh material towards this gap.

Religious history of the country unambiguously registered that the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church is the first church to bring Christianity in the African continent, South of Egypt. The vast lands of Ethiopia remained untouched by European missionaries for 12 centuries. Thus, Ethiopian society is historically and predominantly adherent to the orthodox faith. However, the emerging protestant challenge has alarmed the orthodox believers to encounter them. From derogatory attitudes and ostracization to serious conflicts, loss of property and life, the tension is not an easygoing social phenomenon.

The paper, therefore, seeks to examine the nature of the relationship between the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church and Protestant missionaries and their attitudes towards each other. Moreover, it, in effect, might investigate the actual causes of disharmony and the evident consequences of their interaction.

## **SVEN RUBENSON (Lund, Sweden)**

### **How the Missionary was Converted: a Personal Account**

In his briefcase – and his head – he carries with him the knowledge he needs: English language, history, geography, etc., above all he has a Bible and considerable knowledge of its content. He is a missionary, an apostle, commissioned to "go forth and make all

nations [Christ's] disciples". Brought up in a pious home permeated with no-nonsense theological fundamentalism and endowed with foreign mission contacts and commitment – he also brings to his task some university education in 'The history and psychology of religion' as the subject was then called, probably the least relevant of the baggage.

He does not know one word of the language(s) spoken by his future pupils, and his knowledge of and attitude towards the religion and faith of the Ethiopians is well described in the title of Fride Hylander's book published in 1928, *Ett år i tält bland hedningar, muhammedaner och tabotister* (*A Year in a Tent among Pagans, Muhammedans, and Tabotists*). "Tabotists" indeed, people bowing their heads to an idol, an object covered up with embroidered cloth to protect it from profane eyes!

Made headmaster of the Swedish Evangelical Mission boarding school for boys with sixty-seventy pupils gathered from all Ethiopia's twelve provinces except one, I (the fellow presented above) understood that the training of teachers was a priority. And in the training of an albeit modern teacher, should not some Gi'iz be included? After all, did not the Lutheran Swedes still teach Latin in their schools?

It was these considerations that led to my first meeting with *Memhir* Yiheyese on 27 May 1950. Recommended by Qes Badima, pastor of the Swedish Evangelical Mission congregation in Addis Abeba, Yehiyese was employed for two hours of Gi'iz Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. During one year together he was my first teacher of what Ethiopian Orthodox faith is or at least can be.

I am not sure how deep my prejudice was that the Orthodox were obsessed with fasting, unaware of Gospel truth, of salvation by faith and faith alone, but I know it was there. A small practical matter about timetables and breaks between lessons led to one of the most memorable lessons of my life. One Friday afternoon after several irritating incidents during the week I invited the *memhir* for a cup of tea. My wife brought some cookies. Yehiyese gave me a glance. *Friday* – what a fool I am making of myself, offering an Orthodox *memhir* butter and eggs a fasting day! My wife brought in some ordinary white bread. A new glance, and then he took a cookie: "Whatever you do because of love for a fellowman God does not count as sin." Two profound lessons for the *youngferenj within* five minutes!

A second problem for me was the worship of St. Mary and other saints. An English teacher from India named Paul Verghese helped me there: "Is your mother alive? – Yes. – Do you ever wish that she remembers you in her prayers? – Yes. – If she dies, will she have less access to the ears of God?" Certainly no believer in eternal life could answer no.

Some fifty years later my last meeting with Yehiyese took place in his home. His eyesight was poor but he recognized my voice from across the room and asked me to come and sit close to him. We talked for an hour or two about our faith, about life and death, this world and the world to come. When I stood up to leave he said something to the effect, "If you are a Lutheran, so am I." And from the depth of my heart came the response, "If you are an Ethiopian Orthodox, so am I". Thus ended forty years of education: confrontation replaced by consensus.