

Motives for Promoting Higher Education and Research in Theology in Ethiopia

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There is a great growth in numbers among evangelical Christians in today's Ethiopia. What motives for promoting higher education and research in theology can be traced in this context? Based on eighteen interviews with Ethiopian scholars, eight dominant motives like: "To understand the religious context of Ethiopia" and "How to address pentecostalisation of churches in Ethiopia" are discussed.

Keywords: Ethiopia, evangelicals, motives, higher education, research.

I. Introduction

There is a fair amount of teaching in theology going on among Christians in Ethiopia. This is probably much needed owing to the great growth in numbers especially among evangelical Christians. One would think that primarily a general teaching is needed in order to give a basic understanding to the broad masses in the churches. But what about higher education and research?¹

My specific aim in this study is to investigate motives among Ethiopian theological scholars and well-educated church workers to promote higher education and advanced research in theology in Ethiopia. My main question is thus: What motives for promoting higher education and research in theology in Ethiopia can be traced among Ethiopian scholars? This is an overlooked part in Ethiopian theologi-

cal studies and has not been well researched yet.²

The Interviews

My approach to my interviewees is open in order not to direct the responses according to my own wishful thinking by formulating key questions beforehand. I instead ask the interviewees a broad set of twenty fixed questions from a questionnaire. In this way, I let the respondents guide me into what motives they find relevant to discuss, thus detecting dominant and less dominant motives. I have also felt free to follow the narrations of the answers and have added new questions owing to the situation. This can be characterised as a qualitative and semi-structured method.³ The questionnaire consists of twenty questions posed to eighteen well-educated theologians or scholars of other disciplines involved in

theological education, representing a higher well-educated social group living in an urban setting. I now and then refer to a list of the eighteen interviews. I refer to this list when quoting a certain person directly by using inverted commas. In order to avoid connecting my interviewees with certain ideas and to give some room for discretion, I do not quote the name of the interviewees in the text. I keep this list in my private archive.⁴

The interviewees

As mentioned, the interviewed people consist of eighteen people. There are three women in the group. Two are doctors in theology and one has a master exam in theology. The rest of the group are fifteen men, of whom eight have a doctorate in theology, two in medicine, one in geography, one in political science, one in organisational leadership and two have a master exam in theology. The main part of the interviewees teaches at the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology (EGST) in Addis Abeba, giving postgraduate exams. Two are, or have been, principals of theological schools and four are, or have been, deans at various theological schools in Addis Abeba giving a bachelor exam in theology or higher.

My selection of this group of scholars was for convenience sake made out of colleagues when I was teaching at EGST and had an easy access to them. I did however add four other theologians from larger churches in Ethiopia, each representing different theological seminars, giving graduate exams. These are the Mekane Yesus Seminary, the Ethiopian Theological College (Baptist, Kale Heywet Church), the Holy Trinity Theological College (Orthodox) and the Capuchin Franciscan Institute of Philosophy and Theology (Catholic) all situated in Addis

Abeba. A third category of my interviewees is two women from the EECMY Department of Women Ministry, with a high theological education. They help to get a bit more balanced gender perspective within the group.

All the eighteen interviewees have a church affiliation. Five belong to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) Lutheran; ten to the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church (EKHC) the largest evangelical church in Ethiopia, Baptist; one to the Ethiopian Catholic Church, one to the largest church in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) and one to the Emmanuel United Church (an evangelical church with distinct EOTC background). I have not traced any significant differences among the interviewees based on their different church affiliations. What I have found is that the three women generally highlight issues, which affect women to a higher extent than the fifteen men. I have also found that the five non-theologians tend to emphasise holistic issues, like environmental issues and issues of health, more than the theologians do.⁵ I am, however, aware of that as my interviewees represent a limited group of people with a limited perspective, i.e. well-educated, urban, mainly men with a high social status, my conclusions are representative mainly for this group and should be treated with caution.

Scope

Having described my eighteen interviewees above, I want to emphasise that the findings shown in **part II**, which is the descriptive part of my investigation, after some time became similar and the subject seemed to be exhausted with the group I had to my disposition. In **part III**, which is the analytical part, I discuss eight moti-

ves which the interviewees come back to in their answers. As these motives seem dominant, I find them especially fruitful to discuss. The order of these motives more or less follows the order of the questionnaire and are not evaluated against one another. In **part IV**, I draw some conclusions based on the dominant motives I have found in my material.

II. Findings

I will now describe my findings for similar questions, in a summary of the responses.

Questions 1 and 2: “Why is higher education in theology needed in Ethiopia today?” and “Why is research on advanced level in theology needed in Ethiopia?” Some pragmatists⁶ contend that theology on a higher level can correct wrong teaching like prosperity theology and “Apostolic Church of Ethiopia” (also called “United Pentecostals” or “Jesus only”) which are looked upon as some of the present heresies. Due to the growth of Christians in Ethiopia, well-educated pastors are needed and one needs to be cost-effective. To send students abroad for research is costly and there is a risk that they do not return. There are also less pragmatic answers aiming at quality in theology in its own right. One side of this is to think deeply and not just base Christian teaching on experiences. Another is to try to understand the impact of the age-old legacy of Christianity in Ethiopia: “Christianity has been here for 1700 years but it has not been thought through academically. Higher education will help our society.”⁷ Higher education is furthermore said to give a church response to modern Ethiopia and to questions like urbanisation, ecology and globalisation. Research feeds higher education, what

you say in class should be based on research. Society is becoming very complex and needs to be analysed theologically and Ethiopians need to find out where Ethiopian perceptions come from. “There are lots of topics that need to be addressed on advanced level in our own country.”⁸

Questions 3 and 4: “Are there special areas in need for higher education/research in Ethiopia?” and “What are the burning issues in detail to do research on?” A main issue is to focus on the Ethiopian context, to contextualise. It is emphasised that there is a lot of good culture and how does culture relate to theology? A burning issue is how to properly interpret history. This leads on to issues of identity and reconciliation of ethnic groups. Ancient Christian literature is unique to Ethiopia and there are so many manuscripts microfilmed. Reception history and the relation between New Testament study and church history need to be researched. How patristic theology relates to the EOTC is another interesting field. “There is a 16th century literature in the country containing a patristic, biblical, hermeneutical, spiritual and liturgical legacy, which needs to be studied.”⁹ Traditional religions and Islam in Ethiopia need to be studied, as well as historical conflicts between the EOTC and Protestants.

Questions of today, which are not often well contextualised are gender issues and issues of women’s lives. “Why Ethiopian leadership always is traditional. They speak like moderns but act very traditionally.”¹⁰ What does it mean to be spiritual and how does it connect to our worldview? The political sphere and the churches’ impact on it and on social issues need to be studied. Furthermore, the

needs of society like poverty, environmental degradation, ecological imbalance, injustice and the gap between rich and poor. A theology of suffering, poverty and richness need to be developed. “What does progress mean today? How is wealth distributed?”¹¹ The influence of ethnicity, both in church and society, is a burning issue to address as well as the gap between theology and development. The holistic issues, where the government is said to force the churches to separate the spiritual from the physical, are vital. Health issues and issues of healing need to be addressed. So-called prophets and apostles deceive many people and this complex needs to be studied too.

Questions 5 and 6: “In what way will higher education help the need of the masses coming to church in Ethiopia today? Is not B.Th. the thing to focus on?” and “What tangible results can you see that higher education in theology in Ethiopia will lead to?” There is consensus in the responses that both lower and higher education are needed. Both are important and build on one another. PhD and MA exams secure the quality of other lower levels. People who come to church are often well-educated. They need to be met by high-level teaching. “If evangelicals have 20 million members, how many trained people do we need?”¹² Others state that bachelor of theology programs may not flourish without diploma programs in the Ethiopian context and without courses in English. Some sophisticated town churches are said to need a MA exam for their pastors to meet the expectations. Another aspect of this question is the writing of literature to common people the so-called “vulgarisation” of knowledge. It is a challenge to write pastoral comments to the Bible in a simple language,

which will edify people.

There are tangible results of higher education. Educated people do not fall into heresies so easily as non-educated. It develops critical thinkers and deeper knowledge of theology and social issues. People are studying the Scriptures themselves and do not need to depend on others. A positive result of today’s education compared to former times is: “As how you address HIV, gender and health, and child and maternal health.”¹³ Others say: I hope books will be produced in different languages not only in Amharic but also for example in Oromiffa and Tigrinya, good books. Today, educated people stand up for the truth and address false teaching and the requirements for higher leadership positions have become higher.

Question 7 and 8: “What are the hindrances to accomplish such higher education today?” and “Why is not theology accredited by the government in Ethiopia?” There are practical hindrances to higher education like lack of finance, books and reputed journals. Poverty and poor education at grass-root level and lack of human resources like quality teachers are other hindrances. More ideological hindrances can be traced in the following response: “Some people, like charismatics, say that we do not need theology. They discourage people to go to school.”¹⁴ Others describe theology as “a toasted grain”. It does not grow when you sow it! There is not much incitement for women to study theology. There is also a low income for theologians. Church leaders do not support theological education financially. There is a wrong interpretation of what higher education means. A PhD exam is not the end of a study but the beginning.

Concerning the government’s refusal

to accredit theology there are historical, political and religious explanations. One is the Marxist legacy of Ethiopia. Another is the argument from Ethiopian officials that according to article 90:2 in the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Ministry of education cannot accredit theology. The government also contends that there are no experts who can make this accreditation available. Others say that “It is also complicated if the government starts to accredit theology, what about Islamic schools?”¹⁵ It seems as if there are many questions and fear concerning this issue.

Question 9, 10 and 11: “What advantages can you see in cooperating in theology with a foreign institution?” “Do you prefer cooperating with partners from Africa, Latin America, Asia, USA or Europe? Give some reasons for your choice.” “What are the hindrances for such cooperation in theology?” The attitudes to cooperation are very positive: We enrich one another as we have different backgrounds. For the strength of the institutions there are many advantages in cooperating and in terms of theology Ethiopia is far behind. Exchange of expertise, of personnel and projects can be arranged jointly as well as conferences and books. Foreign scholars are important and we need them. However, there are also more independent “Ethiopian” attitudes: “We can challenge one another even if we do not agree on everything”.¹⁶ We are not an island! Ethiopia has something to share!

Concerning hindrances in cooperation, the bulk of responses mention pragmatic reasons like lack of funding and requirements of European institutions, students’ tuition fees and lack of flexibility in trying to understand different contexts. Business, that is, all institutions have a lot of

pressure to show results. There are also language problems. Take the EOTC for example, the whole world could learn from it if it was not for the language problem! There are also theological hindrances: “Female ordination has gradually gone as a problem (for cooperation), now it is same-sex relations.”¹⁷

Concerning preferences to cooperating partners, there are different responses. One answer a bit bluntly states that: If you were asked to go to Africa or America what would you say? Everyone prefers America! Another response is a bit more cautious: With Africans we have just short contacts but with the missionaries, we have long contacts. The majority of responses show a more flexible approach, however: “It depends on which areas are in need to be studied. For example environmental issues can be good to compare with Latin America.”¹⁸ Maybe partners in Europe, Africa and the Middle East are good to cooperate with, due to shared experiences with Orthodoxy as well as with Islam. It is good with South-South cooperation, as there are contextual similarities. North-South relations are good for experience sharing. In Africa, there are Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone institutions to cooperate with and others in other continents. The more cooperation an institution has with different continents, the richer it will be.

Question 12 and 13: “When can it be possible to take a doctoral exam in theology in Ethiopia?” and “What would be the advantage to take it in Ethiopia?” There are very different opinions to a local doctoral exam. Some are more optimistic and others are quite pessimistic. In the EGST plan, the doctoral program can start in the time-span from 2016 to 2018.

The actual exam will then take place in 2020 at its earliest. EGST once started a conversation with the University of Uppsala. As it failed, a conversation with the Free University of Amsterdam was initiated, which is progressing. Other respondents state that they are not so optimistic: Are there really resources for a doctoral exam in theology in Ethiopia? Is it not just pretending? What is the use of giving a low-level doctoral exam with small resources?

Some advantages in taking a doctoral exam in Ethiopia are that you can do it with small funding and without a family break. One person's cost abroad will be enough to train five people here! There are no extended families in Europe, which is a disadvantage when you have a baby and want to study. On the other hand, in Ethiopia there are many social demands you have to fulfil, which takes time. Students will not be detached from their social environment, which is good, and they know the context. "It will meet needs in church and society here."¹⁹ It promotes the global conversation here in Ethiopia. Limitations like library and other equipment may be lacking, however.

Question 14 and 15: "What areas of research in theology would be especially rewarding for foreign institutions to take part in?" and "Would it be possible to do a research project on higher level in theology in Ethiopia together?" Rewarding areas for foreign institutions would be biblical and historical studies. "We are close to the biblical world in biblical studies. Parables taken by Jesus are "at home" in Ethiopia."²⁰ You can do research in monastic areas, where you find ancient manuscripts and hymnology. Jewish literature of the second temple period is inte-

resting because there are many writings in Ethiopic or *Geez*. Many scholars study the Book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees. Other historical aspects are the uniqueness of Ethiopia as a non-colonised country in Africa. Ethiopians lived with Muslims for centuries in a quite peaceful existence and issues of religious co-existence are very relevant today. Ethiopia has a church heritage of 1600 years. Another aspect is syncretism, and how the EOTC has related to African traditional religions (ATRs). The problem of poverty and its impact on the churches' mission needs to be researched. Another rewarding field to study is church growth. The growth of evangelical churches is said to be phenomenal in Ethiopia.

Joint research projects are already taking place on an ecumenical basis where both EOTC and the Catholic Church take part. Different scholars are involved in such projects, like the "canticule project" studying the hymns of Old Testament songs for example. Another one is a mini-conference on the Book of Enoch and contemporary theology where scholars from different countries take part. One suggestion is that a group of researchers can come together and compare the situation of nomads in the south of Ethiopia with the situation of nomads in the north of Sweden. There is also a research project on "mentoring mothers" in cooperation with the Church of Sweden.

Question 16 and 17: "What is the contribution of Ethiopians on a higher level of theology to the wider research community?" and "Which Ethiopian theologians would you especially like to mention in this connection?" The continuity of Ethiopian church history is emphasised and its rich legacy of literature: "The

great contribution is on ancient literature. You have a commentary of each biblical book and how they contextualised each book to their time and context is interesting”.²¹ The Book of Enoch is mentioned again and the long relation between Christianity and Islam as well as the comparatively long relation of the EOTC and the missionary movement.

There is ambiguity concerning contribution in theology by Ethiopians. Some responses are very pessimistic: There are few Ethiopian theologians of higher standard. Nobody comes to my mind. Others respond more positively in referring to scholars with connections to Ethiopia. One is: “Dr Desta Heliso on biblical theology in intertestamental literature.”²² Others mention Dr Ezra Gebremedhin’s thesis on Cyril of Alexandria. Dr Abba Daniel Aseffa’s work on the Book of Enoch is said to be a huge contribution. Others mentioned are Dr Tadesse Tamarat, Professor Getachew Haile, Dr Bahru Zewde and Dr Mikresellassie Gebre Emmanuel. The latter is a linguist whose studies will contribute to theology. Theodros Abraha is a theologian who has published many Ethiopian hymns. He translates hymns from *Geez* into European languages with commentaries. Some Ethiopians whose writings connect to more contemporary issues are: Rev Gudina Tumsa on holistic theology, Dr Tibebe Eshetu on the evangelical movement in Ethiopia and Dr (Ms) Bekure Daba who wrote on “Women’s silence” in Ethiopia. It is also mentioned that there are a number of Ethiopian PhD theses, which are not published yet. They are thus still not available for a wider public.

Question 18: “Holistic theology is emphasised in Ethiopian evangelical theology. What would this mean for doing the-

ology on a higher level together?” Again the responses are ambiguous. Some respondents say that there is no real holistic theology in Ethiopia in practice but a confusion of what the concept means. They continue to say that there needs to be a model of holistic theology but instead there is a dichotomy between development and church, for example between the development section of the EECMY (DASSC) and the rest of the church.²³ Other respondents emphasise the necessity of a holistic approach for theological education: Higher education must learn how to integrate both theological and non-theological disciplines. They contend that theology is more meaningful if it is holistic and will thus have more impact on Christians. One respondent a bit simplistically says that: “As Africans we do not dichotomize between physical and spiritual.”²⁴

Question 19: “How can European or American theologians support the development of an indigenous higher education of theology in Ethiopia?” The responses are positive and point out that already much has been done. However, as in question nine above it is pointed out that Ethiopians have a contribution to give: It is more than finance, let outsiders first listen to Ethiopians rather than coming up with some “ready-made fast food”. There are several suggestions how a support can be made: Scholars can come for five to ten years. That is a model practised at the Addis Abeba University (AAU). Another option is to come for a month or just a week at the time of examination. Well-established institutions are invited to send lecturers and to help with library development, with establishment of various research centres and particularly with organising PhD programs that can produce

Ethiopian scholars who are not narrow minded. Joint research projects are also mentioned. Others emphasise that collaborating and exchange of lecturers are the best approaches. Another voice says that a good support is: “By helping indigenous researchers to study at peaceful places. To help people to publish their research.”²⁵ The peace research institution in Uppsala is important according to one respondent and mentions that Dr Peter Wallensteen from Uppsala was visiting AAU. This interviewee also mentions that SAREC (Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries) has done a good job in Ethiopia by supporting postgraduate education at AAU. One respondent highlights the need of scholarly critique on areas where improvement is needed, for example in methodology and theory.

Question 20: “What is your vision for the future concerning higher education in theology in Ethiopia?” The responses show a strong belief in the need for higher education in theology and touch on hindrances to accomplish it: “Theology should be acknowledged in another way than today. A functionalist, instrumentalist and Marxist model is still here in Ethiopia. It is like an iron curtain which needs to be broken down.”²⁶ One vision is that there must be a national system for accreditation. Another, to persuade the government to establish departments of theology and religious studies in universities. Other visions are to see higher theological education in Ethiopia become strong and stable in its theological and leadership undertaking, i.e. to develop theology so one can take a PhD degree in Ethiopia. To create a vibrant community of researchers, thinkers and practitioners. To col-

laborate with EOTC and with Catholics in an ecumenical approach. One interviewee contends that Ethiopians are more challenged by fideism and fundamentalism today, and not so much by rationalism. The need is thus to pay attention to the actual context of the people and to tackle this challenge.

III. Dominant motives for promoting higher education and research in theology in Ethiopia

I will now discuss eight motives in my interviews, which come back in the answers of my interviewees and thus become dominant. I find them fruitful to analyse.

The motive to understand the religious context of Ethiopia

There is a genuine longing to do theology in order to understand Ethiopia’s religious context and the present situation in the country. This is formulated as a need for “deep thinking” – “not just experience based teaching”. The idea is that experiences, charismatic or other types, seem to take too much room in many churches at the expense of deeper analyses. This generates a theology, which is too shallow to bring sustainable solutions to Ethiopia’s problems.

Another statement in the same line is that: “Christianity has been here for 1700 years but it has not been thought through academically.”²⁷ There is in other words an uneasiness and frustration that the theology of the EOTC has not been academically elaborated. The frustration is strengthened by the knowledge of the rich sources, which are waiting to be explored. It is emphasised that there is an ancient Christian literature unique to Ethiopia and there are so many manuscripts microfilmed. Ethiopian manuscripts in *Geez* and

Jewish literature from the second temple period should be part of this research. Manuscripts of a later period concerns 16th century literature, containing patristic, biblical, hermeneutical, spiritual and liturgical material.²⁸ The field of contextual questions of religion is very wide and seems in a deeper sense to have to do with a search for Ethiopian identity: Who are we as Ethiopians? How has the religious legacy affected us? This research also includes a more scholarly historiography, less ethnically biased, than made so far.²⁹ This will also touch upon issues on how religions in Ethiopia have related to one another. Christianity and Islam have existed side by side for 1300 years in a relation, which could be described as a “pendulum between concord and conflict”.³⁰ Questions of syncretism, especially how the EOTC has related to ATRs, with a focus on more popular forms of Orthodox Christianity, also need to be investigated. A question to raise is how different are the popular interpretations of the theology of the EOTC compared to the official Orthodox interpretations? As an example, one can mention the critique of the EOTC by the early missionaries on practises like *teskar* (masses for the dead) and other rites which can include magical parts from the ATRs.³¹

Today there is also a critique by some Ethiopian Orthodox scholars who criticise evangelicals of “Evangelizing the Evangelized”,³² assuming that the whole of Ethiopia was since long evangelised by the EOTC. It is however pertinent to contend that this critique does not take the consequences of the occupation of Menelik II in the late 19th century and the role of the EOTC as a church of the conquerors of these areas seriously. From a sociological point of view, it is easy to show that the bulk of the evangelical

churches in Ethiopia today are situated in the areas of Menelik’s conquest, that is in the southern and western parts of Ethiopia.³³ It is possible to suggest that these areas with non-Semitic ethnic groups got their Christian identity as evangelicals in a way that was experienced as liberating. They could keep their own language and culture and become Christians avoiding Amharisation.³⁴ These deliberations in turn lead to questions of how earlier church-state relations in Ethiopia influence today’s church-state relations.

Another area to do research on with connection to the religious context is the frustration felt among some concerning traditionalism in church leadership condensed in the statement: “They speak like moderns but act traditionally”.³⁵ The question of democracy versus the age-old *shengo* with elderly men who decide on matters in a consensus manner is part of the Ethiopian context on a local level. Also the centralised top-down hierarchy in the Ethiopian churches, where the signature of the highest official is mandatory before action is taken, seems to reflect this legacy.³⁶ Such traditional models can be interpreted in line with the observation that some beliefs and behaviours are less open to change than others due to the tardiness of mentalities and social structures.³⁷

The motive to address the pentecostalisation of churches in Ethiopia

The motive to address pragmatic questions and to solve current problems in evangelical churches is partly connected to the “pentecostalisation” of evangelical churches in Ethiopia.³⁸ My interviewees mention prosperity theology as a false teaching and a heresy. The idea is that higher education will help people to become more critical and not fall into heresies

so easily. Higher education will thus generate a more mature spirituality. It is obvious that there are tensions concerning charismatic teaching in different churches and among some students at EGST and perhaps among my interviewees. There is for example a controversial trend among evangelicals in Ethiopia today to call leaders apostles and prophets, without proper definition.³⁹ One example is the Gospel Light International Church in Addis Abeba where the leader Daniel Mekonnen is called an apostle.⁴⁰ There are obviously many other areas to study but it seems as if the question of pentecostalisation is a major challenge. This agrees with the statement above of a need for “deep thinking” – not just “experience-based teaching” and that the challenge today among Ethiopians is more from “fundamentalism”, “not so much from rationalism”.⁴¹

The motive to help churches to hold on to holistic theology in Ethiopia

It is interesting to note the ambiguity in the responses concerning holistic theology.⁴² In one way, Ethiopian evangelical theology is well-known for emphasising “holistic theology” not least due to the legacy from Rev Gudina Tumsa.⁴³ In 1969, the EECMY head office was divided into different departments like the Development Department and later on the Evangelism Department.⁴⁴ To put it simply, Gudina’s criticism was that so much more of church aid was allocated to development from donors compared to evangelism. In my investigation, there are indications that the holistic approach still is quite weak today in evangelical theology in Ethiopia. My interviewees tell that: “There is confusion and a dichotomy between church and development.”⁴⁵ The

State’s legislation on Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) has made the situation complicated.⁴⁶ It has for example led the EECMY to divide its church structure into different bodies, which are quite independent from one another. This is true of the Development and Social Services Commission (DASSC) and the Department for Mission and Theology (DMT). DASSC is registered as an “Ethiopian Resident Charity”. The legislation restricts it from involving in areas like human rights where it could use its prophetic role as a “voice for the voiceless”.⁴⁷ The two bodies of the church do not use the same office building any longer, as the former Development and Evangelism Departments did. It furthermore looks like as if many resources are found in DASSC, whereas the DMT has comparatively few.⁴⁸

What looks promising, however, is the contribution of my interviewees to a wide holistic approach in higher education and research. The issues of ethnicity and reconciliation “both in church and society” are addressed and dealt with. Issues of poverty, environmental degradation, ecological imbalance, injustice and the gap between rich and poor are also in focus. There is today a reflection on what progress in Ethiopia means and how wealth is distributed.⁴⁹ It is agreed on that the way churches today address HIV, gender, child and maternal health is a tangible result of implemented holistic theology.⁵⁰ Institutionalised examples of implemented holistic theology are the EGST faculty’s joint research project on theology and development and the Centre for Environmental Stewardship and Holistic Development (CESHoD) started by EGST in 2014.⁵¹

The motive to appreciate the South as a proper place for higher education

Concerning the question on which countries to cooperate with, the answers are again ambiguous. The saying: “Everyone prefers America” seems to be a spontaneous response from the heart by one interviewee.⁵² There are also numerous institutions with roots in USA, which offer a B.Th. or MA degree in Ethiopia with various quality. Some of the more established are Addis Ababa Bible College (ABC) and Shiloh Bible College.⁵³

There is probably a temptation for poor people in Ethiopia to try to get scholarships to USA or other western countries. The interesting part, however, is that these very human ambitions are contradicted by others who try to emphasise a more nuanced approach. In fact, the whole idea of an institution like EGST contradicts the idea of a quick fix of academic learning by easy means and a continued brain drain of Ethiopia by scholars leaving the country. The rationale of EGST is to help people to make advanced studies in Ethiopia and not back off for the demand of quality.⁵⁴ Here we also find awareness by the interviewees, which can be characterised as “more mature”. They spell out that the purpose of the scholarly cooperation will decide where it should be made. The logic of the interviewees is that, as the context in the South is more similar to Ethiopia, some research would be more effective to make together in the South, for example in Latin America. The value of such a research in the South would prove itself by its own results.⁵⁵

The motive to develop a contextual hermeneutics for Ethiopia

Hermeneutical perspectives, concerning on what terms higher education in theol-

ogy and research can be made in Ethiopia and in Africa, need to be discussed. The Ghanaian theologian John S. Pobee contends that this should include an epistemological discussion on research as influenced by western “enlightenment culture”, and a “culture of individualism versus traditional communitarian epistemology” of Africa.⁵⁶ Pobee contends that theology and spirituality cannot be separated in Africa and as such theology in Africa will be an engagement between the God-word and social, economic, and political issues. In Southern Africa, this takes shape as a Liberation Theology and in East Africa as a Theology of Reconstruction. This means that a more integrated approach is possible, where theology and other disciplines supplement one another.⁵⁷ These ideas are in fact reflected in my material showing how spirituality and theology are intermingled in Ethiopia. As mentioned, my interviewees contend that educated people do not fall into heresies so easily as non-educated. On the contrary, higher theology develops critical thinkers who will help the whole society.⁵⁸ On one hand, my interviewees admit that they need to improve on methodology and theory developed in the West but on the other they emphasise their independence illustrated by the following quote: “...let them first listen from Ethiopians rather than coming with some ready-made fast food”.⁵⁹

The efforts by Gudina Tumsa to develop a theology of “integral human development” could perhaps be a starting point for Ethiopians to develop an Ethiopian contextual hermeneutics.⁶⁰ That this for example would include the unique situation of Ethiopia in Africa as a non-colonised independent country and experiences from the time of the persecution under the *Derg*-era can be taken for

granted. A theology, which is collective and has a less sharp distinction between theology and spirituality than a European in line with Pobee's suggestions could be developed. It would then probably include a "theology of the poor" in contrast to prosperity theology, perhaps even a theology addressing – and preventing – starvation. As the context of Ethiopia is different from Europe the need to have a relevant hermeneutics, which suits the Ethiopian situation, is logical.⁶¹ That is a theology which addresses questions which are real to the Ethiopian people living in Ethiopia.

The motive to understand the resistance to higher education in Ethiopia

The negative attitudes to higher education among some church leaders contradict the strong agreement among my interviewees that higher education is needed. The humoristic expression that higher education is "a toasted grain that does not bear fruit" exemplifies the scepticism. What some church leaders seem to measure is quantitative growth rather than qualitative. Is the main point to gather as many people as possible? This raises questions of the depth of such spirituality. Another statement is the quote that some charismatics believe that "we do not need theology".⁶² This would probably then mean that what primarily is needed is supernatural guidance, which connects this current motive to the one on pentecostalisation above. Having in mind the low salaries for pastors and how little theological studies are valued by the state, it is no exaggeration to say that the incentives to do higher education in theology is low in Ethiopia, especially for women. The whole area of these negative attitudes to higher education in theology needs to be studied in order to find out where they come from and what they stand for.⁶³

The motive to discuss accreditation of theology in the non-western world

The legacy from the Marxist period in Ethiopia 1974-91 generates negativism to accreditation of theology and religion by the Ethiopian government according to my interviewees.⁶⁴ As accreditation by the government is necessary in many European universities as a safeguard for quality, these universities also demand it by countries outside Europe. Nevertheless, as this is impossible in some countries it becomes an unfortunate hindrance for the West's scholarly cooperation with some institutions in the South, including Ethiopia. According to Professor Huang Po Ho, institutions of higher education in many countries of Asia are accredited by the government. But this is also: "...inevitably connected to a sense of political control and regulation."⁶⁵ Ho's recommendation is therefore that associations like the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA) are the best for accreditation in this part of the world. He further suggests that accreditation criteria can be negotiated in a process of inter-contextual dialogue under the platform of World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions (WOCATI).⁶⁶ One of the associations accrediting theology in Africa is "the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa" (ACTEA), which is widely recognised in Africa and has a membership of more than 150 theological colleges in Africa.⁶⁷ However, this association was for example not recognised by the Uppsala theologians, when EGST and the Faculty of Theology at the University of Uppsala were deliberating on cooperation in 2010-11. The need to be accredited by the government was an important issue for the theologians from the University of Uppsala in the discus-

sions between the two institutions.⁶⁸ It seems as if it is time to broaden the discussion on what is to be recognised as valid accreditation bodies in different parts of the world. Is it satisfactory to limit or even stop cooperation in theology between countries owing to different historical and cultural legacies regarding how different states look upon the study of theology or religion? Or even worse, to be unaware of political pressure on academic institutions in countries which differ from Europe?

The motive to discuss church growth in evangelical churches in Ethiopia

When summarising areas of interest to be studied in Ethiopia's rich history it is easy to focus on historical fields, which go back hundreds or even more than thousands of years. A field, which should not be neglected according to my interviewees,⁶⁹ however, is the enormous growth of the evangelical churches in Ethiopia from the 1940's and onwards. Several of my interviewees indicate how the evangelical churches have been growing in the 20th and the 21st century and are now estimated to comprise approximately 18% of the growing Ethiopian population.⁷⁰ The study of this evolution could be a real contribution to churches in the West where the trend is opposite.⁷¹ From 1992 to 2015 the EECMY for example grew from a membership of approximately 1 200 000 members to 7 400 000.⁷² EECMY is regarded to be the second largest evangelical church in Ethiopia.

The Kale Heywet Church, which is the largest evangelical church in Ethiopia, is reported as having a membership of 8 000 881 in September 2015.⁷³ The Full Gospel Baptist Church, which is the third largest evangelical church in Ethiopia, is reported to have "more than 4.5 million

members" in September 2016.⁷⁴

Jörg Haustein is discussing the statistics given by the Ethiopian evangelical churches and suggests that most of the increase of the evangelical churches comes from the EOTC,⁷⁵ in what can be called intern migration. This is probably so, according to my own findings but we need to qualify what type of Orthodox faith these evangelicals leave. Is it a more popular, syncretistic faith, or a more orthodox faith in line with the theology of the EOTC's Holy Synod? Besides the EOTC, there are also other sources for the evangelical increase of members. It is well known that certain amounts of converts are former Muslims who have experienced healing in evangelical churches and become members there. Another phenomenon is called *Isa al Masih*, which is a movement among Muslims in Ethiopia, where Muslims identify Jesus as Messiah. They, however, feel a calling to remain in their mosques without becoming members in churches.⁷⁶ Another trend is noticed by "unknown" or detested ethnic groups in Ethiopia who tend to practise ATRs or have a syncretistic religion. Some of them appreciate contact with evangelical churches like the EECMY for example. Two pertinent examples in the south-western part of Ethiopia are the Majenger people around Tepi who after such contacts started to build several evangelical churches in the 1990's and onwards, and the Manja people around Bonga, who invited the EECMY for support in 2011.⁷⁷

When church growth in Ethiopia is scrutinized, I suggest that the following questions need to be posed: Is the church growth in evangelical churches due to intern migration from the EOTC mainly, or from Islam or from ATRs? What types of EOTC or Muslim belief do the con-

verts come from? More popular, syncretistic, or more orthodox? Or is the church growth simply due to the population growth in Ethiopia? What kind of spirituality characterises the evangelical church growth? What sociological factors contribute to the growth? What can churches in the West learn from this church growth?

IV. General Conclusions

When we look at motives for promoting higher education and research in theology in Ethiopia a vast field presents itself. My aim in this study was to investigate such motives in line with my main question: What motives for promoting higher education and research in theology in Ethiopia can be traced among Ethiopian scholars? I have answered this question under section “II. Findings” and identified and discussed eight dominant motives under section “III. Dominant motives for promoting higher education and research in theology in Ethiopia”. I will now, draw some conclusions based on the dominant motives I have found in my material.⁷⁸

One of the most emphasised motives in my material is the need to understand the religious context of Ethiopia. This cannot be made without research and more qualified theological studies. In its deepest sense this ambition deals with issues of Ethiopian identity. By use of the rich written material from different eras in the history of Ethiopia, it seems possible to come to a deeper understanding of the roots of the Ethiopian religious context. Of special interest in theology is the EOTC's contact with different religions and other forms of Christianity than the Orthodox. Ethiopian traditional leadership structures need to be studied in order to grasp the mentality of Ethiopian governance in state and church, and the

impact of this legacy in present relations.

Another recurring motive for higher studies concerns the pentecostalisation of churches in Ethiopia. Through such study, church leaders will have a stronger ground to meet new types of theology and generate a mature spirituality. Higher studies will furthermore help churches to maintain continuity in holistic theology and remind them of their calling to be a prophetic voice when freedom is threatened or hampered by the state's legislation.

By doing higher studies and research in theology in Ethiopia, especially in cooperation with institutions in the South, it will first be proven that this is possible. The results of these studies will then probably speak for themselves. A benefit is that this approach will address issues owing to similar contexts, which easily are neglected by scholars from the West. Questions concerning differences in hermeneutics and epistemology between the South and the West will be discussed. This will deal with the western dichotomy between theology and spirituality, and between individualism and the community. If these dichotomies can be dealt with from an Ethiopian perspective it will probably generate a greater interest for higher education in theology among ordinary Ethiopians. That is, issues relevant for Ethiopians will be dealt with in a more contextualised way. This approach may also decrease the resistance to higher education detected among some church leaders in Ethiopia.

In order to open up for a deeper cooperation in higher education and research in theology between countries in the South, including Ethiopia, and western countries, principles for a valid accreditation need to be discussed and qualified from a global perspective. These delibera-

tions should include considerations of historical and political differences concerning different governments' views of how to look upon education or research in religion and theology.

Besides studies of manuscripts and commentaries to the Bible in *Geez*, and intertestamental literature, and the continuous Ethiopian church history, church growth in evangelical churches in Ethiopia is a field of interest. A research of the expanding evangelical churches of today's Ethiopia may offer a great contribution to churches in the West, which are losing members in their secularised countries. A study in depth of the different sceneries by way of comparison may generate a win-win situation. For Ethiopians this would create a deeper understanding of the ongoing process of church growth in their own country. For western churches, it could contribute new knowledge and inspiration.

There are also other motives for higher education and research in theology in Ethiopia, and it is impossible to cover all. Some are very pragmatic and aim at solving current problems for example heresies owing to lack of basic theological teaching. Others are just curious and enjoy the sheer satisfaction of knowing and learning more.

Appendix – Questionnaire

1. Why is higher education in theology needed in Ethiopia today?
2. Why is research on advanced level in theology needed in Ethiopia?
3. Are there special areas in need for higher education/research in Ethiopia?
4. What are the burning issues in detail to do research on?
5. In what way will higher education help the need of the masses coming to church in Ethiopia today? Is not B.Th. the thing to focus on?
6. What tangible results can you see that higher education in theology in Ethiopia will lead to?
7. What are the hindrances to accomplish such higher education today?
8. Why is not theology accredited by the government in Ethiopia?
9. What advantages can you see in cooperating in theology with a foreign institution?
10. Do you prefer cooperating with partners from: Africa, Latin America, Asia, USA or Europe? Give some reasons for your choice.
11. What are the hindrances for such cooperation in theology?
12. When can it be possible to take a doctoral exam in theology in Ethiopia?
13. What would be the advantage to take it in Ethiopia?
14. What areas of research in theology would be especially rewarding for foreign institutions to take part in?
15. Would it be possible to do a research project on higher level in theology in Ethiopia together?
16. What is the contribution of Ethiopians on a higher level of theology to the wider research community?
17. Which Ethiopian theologians would you especially like to mention in this connection?
18. Holistic theology is emphasised in Ethiopian evangelical theology. What would this mean for doing theology on a higher level together?

19. How can European or American theologians support the development of an indigenous higher education of theology in Ethiopia?

20. What is your vision for the future concerning higher education in theology in Ethiopia?

Notes

1. By higher education, I mean a master exam in theology or an even higher exam.
2. Literature on higher education in theology in Ethiopia (master exam in theology or higher) is not easy to find. A fresh overview of theological education in Ethiopia in general is given by Desta Heliso "Theological Education in Ethiopia" in *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, eds. Isabel A. Phiri et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2013), 164-174. The handbook as such discusses theological education in Africa. Another contribution with voices from different parts of the world including Africa and Asia is given in *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*, eds. Dietrich Werner et al., (Oxford: Regnum, 2010).
3. Steinar Kvale, *Den Kvalitative Forskningsintervjun* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1997), 13ff., 34ff.
4. The list of interviews is kept in Staffan Grenstedt Private Archive (SG-A) Uppsala. All interviews were made in Addis Abeba from 2015.02.22 to 2015.03.13, that is, in three weeks time. The answers to the questions posed were written down by the author by hand at the same time as the interviews were taped. The interviews were later on written out on computer and were at the same time double-checked with the taping.
5. I do not bother to define general theological concepts like holistic, contextualise, theology etc. explicitly. I contend that such terms are well-known to most theological readers or else the reader will understand the meaning while reading the text in this article.
6. By pragmatist, I mean people with practical concerns.
7. Interview no.15.
8. Interview no.8.
9. Interview no.17.
10. Interview no.1.
11. Interview no.2.
12. Interview no.6.
13. Interview no.9.
14. Interview no.11.
15. Interview no.8.
16. Interview no.4
17. Interview no.5.
18. Interview no.2.
19. Interview no.9.
20. Interview no.4.
21. Interview no.17.
22. Interview no.3.
23. DASSC stands for "Development and Social Services Commission".
24. Interview no.13.
25. Interview no.4.
26. Interview no.3.
27. See above, question 1.
28. See above, question 3.
29. See for example the critique made by Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia. A History 1570-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) to the writings of Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians. An Introduction to Country and People* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).
30. See Peter Ford, "Christian-Muslim Relations in Ethiopia: A Checkered Past, a Challenging Future", *Reformed Review*, Vol. 61:2, Holland, Mich, (2008), 2.
31. Gustav Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia. Origins of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Stockholm: EFS, 1978), 412; Calvin E. Shenk, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Church: A Study in Indigenization", *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XVI, no.3, Oxford: Regnum, (1988), 265 ff.
32. Tadesse Tamrat, "Evangelizing the Evangelized: The Root Problem between Missions and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church" in *The Missionary Factor in Ethiopia*, eds. Getachew Haile et al.(Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), 17-30.

33. Staffan Grenstedt, *Ambaricho and Shonkolla. From Local Independent Church to the Evangelical Mainstream in Ethiopia. The Origins of the Mekane Yesus Church in Kambata Hadiya* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2000), 17f.
34. Arne Tolo, *Sidama and Ethiopian. The Emergence of the Mekane Yesus Church in Sidama* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1998), 262ff.
35. See above, question 4.
36. See for example, Agne Nordlander, *Väckelse och Växtvärk i Etiopien* (Stockholm: EFS, 1996), 135ff.; 176ff.
37. See for example, Jacques Le Goff "Mentaliteterna en Tvytydig Historia" in *Att Skriva Historia, Nya Infalls-vinklar och Objekt*, eds. Jacques Le Goff et al. (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1978), 248ff.
38. The "pentecostalisation of Africa" is discussed by many scholars today, e.g. Adriaan Van Klinken, "African Christianity. Developments and Trends" in *Handbook of Global Contemporary Christianity. Themes and Developments in Culture, Politics and Society*, ed. Stephen Hunt (Leiden: Brill 2015), 135ff. For a perspective of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia, see Jörg Haustein, *Writing Religious History. The Historiography of Ethiopian Pentecostalism* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011).
39. It was interesting to experience the students' excitement concerning a lecture by Dr Agne Nordlander on apostles and prophets at EGST on March 17, 2016.
40. www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=182126291840552&cid=180721955314319 (accessed Oct 14, 2016).
41. See above, question 1, 20 and "The motive to understand the religious context of Ethiopia".
42. See above, question 18.
43. See for example, Gudina Tumsa, "On the Interrelation of Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development" 1972, in *Witness and Discipleship, Leadership of the Church in Multi-Ethnic Ethiopia in a Time of Revolution* (Addis Abeba: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003), 81-94.
44. Staffan Grenstedt, "Etiopien" in *Det Stora Uppdraget. EFS Mission 1866-2016*, eds. Klas Lundström et al. (Uppsala: EFS Läser, 2016), 137.
45. See above, question 18.
46. See the EECMY, *Draft Strategic Plan Report 2013-17* (no place, n.d.), 26ff.
47. Ibid.
48. See Development and Social Services Commission, *Annual Report 2014* (Addis Abeba: EECMY) and Department for Mission and Theology, *Annual Report 2015* (Addis Abeba: EECMY). The DASSC report includes a budget, whereas the DMT report does not.
49. See above, question 4.
50. See above, question 6.
51. EGST Newsletter, Oct 2014, www.egst.edu.et (accessed Oct 19, 2014).
52. See above, a response to question 11.
53. www.africaarts.org (accessed Oct 14, 2016); www.shilobiblecolleges.com (accessed Oct 14, 2016).
54. See, *EGST Succession Chronicles. Institutional Memories (1997-2015)*, (Addis Abeba, Dec 2015).
55. See above, question 10.
56. John S. Pobee, "Stretch Forth thy Wings and Fly: Theological Education in the African Context" in *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity* (2010), 338f.
57. Pobee, "Stretch Forth thy Wings and Fly", 339.
58. See above, question 1 and 6.
59. See above, question 19.
60. Gudina Tumsa, "On the Interrelation", 85. See also Misgana Mathewos, "Gudina Tumsa's Hermeneutical Interpretation of the Bible", *Swedish Missiological Themes*, vol. 2, (2010), 193-209.
61. According to Desta Heliso 97.3% of the Ethiopian population claim to have a religious affiliation of some sort. Desta Heliso, "Theological Education in Ethiopia", 172.
62. See above, question 7.
63. Desta Heliso contends that there is not much resistance or negative attitudes to theological education in Ethiopian churches today. This is contradicted by my sources. Cf. Desta Heliso, "Theological Education in Ethiopia", 164.
64. See also Desta Heliso, "Theological Education in Ethiopia", 172.
65. Huang Po Ho, "Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Theological Education: Asian Perspectives" in *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity* (2010), 142.f.
66. Ibid.
67. James Amanze, "History and Major Goals of Regional Associations of Theological Schools in Africa" in *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity* (2010), 359f.
68. It was stressed by the representatives of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Uppsala that the Swedish higher education agency needed to make a validation of EGST, not the Faculty of Theology itself.

“Minutes of EGST-Uppsala consultation, Uppsala May 11, 2010, § 1, point 2”. It was later stated that the Swedish higher education agency does not accept institutions that are not recognised by government departments. “Minutes of EGST-Uppsala consultation, Uppsala Sept. 29, 2011, § 3”; (“Minutes of EGST-Uppsala Consultation, Uppsala May 11, 2010 and Uppsala Sept.29, 2011”, in SG-A, Uppsala).

69. See above, responses to questions 5 and 14.

70. www.ecfethiopia.org/history.htm (accessed Oct 14, 2016).

71. Jenkins elaborates on how churches in the West now need to learn from growing churches in the South. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: the Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). I personally agree with Jenkins on this issue.

72. Grenstedt, “Etiopien”, 170.

73. www.ekhc.net (accessed Oct 14, 2016).

74. www.ctfullgospel.org/index.php/en/building-department/all-round-capacity-building-project (accessed Oct 14, 2016).

75. Haustein, *Writing Religious History*, 18.

76. Staffan Grenstedt, “Några Studentröster från Nakamte Christian Education College”, *Ingång*, vol.3, (2006), 3ff.; Essay Miressa Woyessa, o.i., (SG-A, Jan.30, 2015).

77. John Eriksson, e-mail message to author, Oct. 7, 2015; Agne Nordlander, o.i., (SG-A, Aug.30, 2016).

78. As I have stated above in the introduction “I am, however, aware of that as my interviewees represent a limited group of people with a limited perspective: well-educated, urban, mainly men with a high social status, my conclusions are representative mainly for this group and should be treated with caution.” Even so, I contend that my investigation is a contribution to understand why Ethiopian scholars argue that higher education and research in theology in Ethiopia is vital. It generates new knowledge to this field, which needs to be investigated in depth.