

African Traditions and Charismatic Gifts in the Worship of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY)

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Abstract

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) was established through the efforts of western missionaries. She maintains her Lutheran identity, mainly in her doctrine, the sacraments and in the basic content of her liturgy. And yet she is open to accommodate African and or Ethiopian styles of worship practices and the usage of Charismatic gifts. Incorporating African/Ethiopian ways of worship reflects her attempt to inculturate her liturgical worship into different cultures of the peoples in Ethiopia, and her being open to the practices of charismatic gifts is much more based on her understanding and teaching of the Sola Scriptura about the spiritual gifts which in turn contributed so much in her being the fastest growing Lutheran church in Africa and perhaps in the world as well. She was established with about 20,000 members in 1959 and has about 9 million today in 2017.

Keywords: Evangelical, Inculturation, Liturgy, Sacraments, Charismatic gifts

The aim of this paper is to analyze the influence of African Traditions and of Charismatic gifts in the liturgy and worship practices of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). After brief background of the EECMY, the development of liturgy and worship, the understanding of sacraments and the charismatic movements in the EECMY are presented and analyzed in this paper.

I. Brief background of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY)

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is a fast-growing Lutheran Church in Ethiopia, East Africa. The establishment of Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is related with the Mission organizations originated from the 18th century pietist movement in Europe. According to Fekadu Gurmessa, the revival of pietist movements “transformed believers into genuine followers of Christ who were loyal to the church and committed to bringing the gospel of peace to the unevangelized. Over time, the revival became a movement which gave rise to several Mission Societies whose members took the gospel to the world.”¹ Some of the protestant mission societies who played great role in bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to Ethiopia are German Hermannsburg Mission, the Swedish Evangelical Mission, the Danish Evangelical Mission, the Norwegian Lutheran Mission and the American Lutheran Mission.

Before the establishment of the EECMY as a confessional Lutheran church in Ethiopia, there was an effort to establish the United Ethiopian Evangelical Church. To establish a united Evangelical Church in Ethiopia, the evangelicals with different backgrounds established a Conference of Evangelical Churches in Ethiopia (CEEC).

¹ Fekadu Gurmessa, *Evangelical Faith Movement in Ethiopia: Origins and Establishment of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.*, Translated and Edited by Dr. Ezekiel Gebissa (Lutheran University Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2009), 66.

Olav Saeverås explains how this conference was started, quoting a paragraph from the letter of Dr. Erik Soederstroen to the Director of Sweden Evangelical Mission as follows.

A cause for joy is that the national evangelical Christians on their own initiative have issued an invitation to a meeting to be held here in Leqemt on the 10th of December [1944] and the following days. The various evangelical groups in Ethiopia have been requested to send representatives. The purpose of the meeting is spiritual fellowship and to plan the formation of a united evangelical church. The missionaries have not been invited, which I think is good. May God grant His guidance and blessing to the meeting and the deliberations.”²

The heartbeat of Dr. Erick towards this indigenous initiated meeting to form a united evangelical church is clear from his letter because he said that it was good that they didn’t invite missionaries. Again, Saeverås said that the Evangelicals saw the denominational borders between the different missionaries as a threat to their unity and so wanted to up-root the denominational thinking and decided at the first conference that “no church should be referred to as American, Swedish or British, in other words, the evangelical churches in various places should not be connected with foreign missions.”³ They thought that there would be no doctrinal obstacles in their efforts to establish a united evangelical church in Ethiopia but their fear was the missionaries. It is interesting to note here that the CEEC said that their primary purpose is not to cause the missionaries to come together into one church. However, they envisioned that “when the Ethiopians have their own administration, when they become stronger in the teaching of the gospel, and when they know that the message of the Spirit of Christ is love and unity”⁴ then bringing missionaries together will take place.

About the factors that led to the formation of CEEC, Fekadu writes,

Several factors converged in 1941 to make the first conference of the Ethiopian Evangelicals possible. In the first instance, the Evangelicals had learned an enduring lesson from their persecution during the [Italian] occupation years and the unity of purpose it had fostered among them. As such, they were able to foresee the potential rewards of continued cooperation in the post occupation period. Secondly, the Italian law that banned public meetings was annulled once the Italian forces were expelled, and the Christians were anxious to take advantage of their newly-found freedom to meet and exchange ideas publicly. Furthermore, the missionaries who had earlier led their converts along the path of their respective doctrines and rites had not yet returned to Ethiopia.⁵

Moreover, Fekadu mentions that there was more freedom for Evangelicals this time because the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church was in struggle to get her independence from the Coptic church of Egypt.⁶ According to Magarsaa Guutaa, the CEEC held its annual meeting from 1944-1966 in which they discussed to establish a united Ethiopian Evangelical Church, encouraged attendance of their church members in nearby churches/congregations irrespective of denominational background and discussion to establish a common pastors training center.⁷ Then, they formed a committee to write a single confessional document or book of the united Ethiopian Evangelical Church (EEC). As Saveras said, “Qes [which means pastor] Gidada Solen⁸ from Dembidolo referred to the differences among the foreign missionaries with regard to theological standpoints, and stated that the CEEC was in need of a book in which its belief should be defined on a biblical basis. This book was to be the Confessional book of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church.”⁹

² Olav Saeverås, *On Church Mission Relations in Ethiopia 1944-1969: With Special Reference to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Lutheran Missions*, (Lunde: Forlag og Bokhandel, 1974), 41-42.

³ Saeverås, *On Church Mission Relations*, 43.

⁴ Saeverås, *On Church Missions*, 43

⁵ Fekadu, *Evangelical Faith Movement*, 205.

⁶ Fekadu, *Evangelical Faith Movement*, 205

⁷ Magarsaa Guutaa, *From A Humble Beginning to Advanced Standing: A History of Mekane Yesus Seminary (1960-2010)*, (Addis Ababa: Mekane Yesus Seminary, 2011), 11.

⁸ Just to note that Gidada Solon was a first national missionary to my area and he served with the Presbyterian missionaries. He was blind but spread the gospel of Jesus in my area. His son Negasso Gidada whom he used as a guide for evangelism work became the first president of Ethiopia after the fall of Communist regime in 1991.

⁹ Saeverås, *On Church Mission Relations*, 60.

But, unfortunately the committee couldn't produce any document for ten years because the committee members were from different church affiliation and couldn't agree on each other's confessional heritage.¹⁰ Then, according to Saeveras the two Lutheran missionaries from Sweden "...Aren and Lundgren had prepared a draft constitution for the church to be formed."¹¹ But, Fekadu says that "Because the two were from a Lutheran background, the document they prepared was obviously tilted toward the Lutheran faith tradition"¹² and thus, the document was rejected by some members of the Conference when it was presented to the meeting in 1954 in Addis Ababa.¹³ Similarly, Saeveras explained this more when he said that a "church constitution prepared by Lundgren and Aren, is an interesting document. It may be described as an attempt to organize a church, which is to be Lutheran, without being a "Lutheran Church".¹⁴ And Saeveras quoted an interesting letter of Aren to the Home Board as follows,

A preliminary proposal from our side will be that the church to be professes Holy Writ as the only authority for doctrine and life and it adheres to the Apostolic and the Nicene Creed. It shall further be stated that it is the responsibility of the Church to teach all members in accordance with the Lutheran catechism, here called "**The Christian Teaching**."¹⁵ We do not necessarily wish to have "Lutheran" in the name, but it shall be there in reality as the Church commits herself to teach according to the Lutheran doctrine.¹⁶

They were not successful because Gutama Rufo and Murray Russel from the Presbyterian representatives raised their concern against the inclusion of Luther's Small Catechism in the confessional statement and said that they could not "accept Luther's Smaller Catechism, because of its doctrine of Holy Communion."¹⁷ As a result, the vision of establishing a united Ethiopian Evangelical Church began to weaken and the missionaries with Lutheran backgrounds began to convince church members not to mix with Christians from different backgrounds.

With the impossibility to establish a united evangelical church in Ethiopia, Christians with Lutheran backgrounds begun to talk to form a Confessional Lutheran church in Ethiopia. The decision of LWF in 1947 at Lund, Sweden to establish National Lutheran churches in the place where Lutheran missions operated was among the factors that hastened the process of establishing EECMY.¹⁸ After many subsequent meetings by Lutheran Missions committee and the indigenous leaders in preparing the constitution and bylaws for the upcoming Lutheran church in Ethiopia from 1951-1957, the Founding Assembly held in the Addis Ababa Mekane Yesus Church from April 23-25, 1958. The preparation of the Constitution and Bylaws which became the basis for the EECMY, originated from "the constitution and bylaws prepared by the Addis Ababa EECMY in the 1940s and adopted from the Ghimbi District congregations in 1949."¹⁹

Thus, the Lutheran church is established in Ethiopia by the name Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) in January 21, 1959.²⁰

¹⁰ Saeveras, *On Church Mission Relations*, 60

¹¹ Saeverås, *On Church Mission Relations*, 90

¹² Fekadu, *Evangelical Faith Movements*, 232.

¹³ Magarsaa, *From A Humble Beginning to Advanced Standing*, 11.

¹⁴ Saeverås, *On Church Mission Relations*, 65.

¹⁵ Emphasis is mine to note that title for Luther's catechism which is translated into Amharic is still titled as "The Christian Teaching".

¹⁶ Saeverås, *On Church Mission Relations*, 65

¹⁷ Saeverås, *On Church Mission Relations*, 92. Here it is important to note that this effort partly come to fruition in 1974 because the Presbyterian Church in Ethiopia (the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Bethel) is united with EECMY in 1974 after the American Presbyterian Missionaries left the country (Ethiopia) because of persecution from Communist regime. Today EECMY have six big synods with Presbyterian backgrounds under the EECMY leadership with the same constitution and the same liturgy and the same Lutheran confessions. They have no Presbyterian doctrine except maintained the name Bethel and are called EECMY Bethel Synods.

¹⁸ Magarsaa, *From A Humble Beginning to Advanced Standing*, 12.

¹⁹ Fekadu, *Evangelical Faith Movement*, 246.

²⁰ Fekadu, *Evangelical Faith Movement*, 253.

Instead of using the name Lutheran, they used Mekane Yesus because though it is known that this name was adopted from name of Addis Ababa Mekane Yesus Congregation which was in use since 1940s. It seems with the influence of evangelical movement to have a united Evangelical church in Ethiopia, Lutheran missionaries intended to have a Lutheran Church without having the name “Lutheran” as we can read from Aren’s letter which says “We do not necessarily wish to have “Lutheran” in the name, but it shall be there in reality as the Church commits herself to teach according to the Lutheran doctrine.”²¹ And according to Fekadu, it is known that Luther himself had warned against the usage of his name for the church and said that “the church should never bear any adjective other than Christ.”²² If so Luther would agree with establishing a church which follows Lutheran teachings but with different name. The meaning of the name *Mekane Yesus* is **The Place of Jesus** which come from Geez language. The name may reflect how Ethiopian Lutherans tried to use the indigenous name rather than western name which in turn may have contributed to the inculturation of the Gospel into Ethiopian cultures through EECMY to the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ with a name which was not foreign to the people of Ethiopia. However, the SMBV (Swedish Bible True Friends) withdrew from the effort of establishing an indigenous Lutheran church in Ethiopia arguing against the usage of another name than the name Lutheran. But, Saeveras was against the position of SMBV for name Lutheran and he says, “We cannot tell if the question of the name alone was of such importance that a united Lutheran Church be sacrificed, or if prejudice in Sweden and Ethiopia have also worked against a united Church.”²³ The SMBV established a church by the name Lutheran in Ethiopia in 1960 but they are not growing and even not known in most parts of Ethiopia. In contrast, EECMY is growing so fast from 20,000 members with four synods in her establishment to about 9 million members with 30 synods throughout the country today in 2017 with 7% annual growth. And today EECMY is the largest Lutheran church in Africa as well as in the world. She follows Lutheran teachings in her doctrinal basis. As mentioned under Article II of the Constitution, the doctrinal basis of EECMY is Lutheran as indicated below.

Section 1: The Ethiopian Evangelical Church- Mekane Yesus believes and professes that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments are the Holy Word of God and the only source and infallible norm of all church doctrine and practice.

Section 2: The EECMY adheres to the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed, which were formulated by the Church Fathers and accepted by the early church and sees in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, which was worded by the Reformers, as well as in Luther's Catechisms, a pure exposition of the Word of God.²⁴

This Lutheran doctrinal basis is foundational for every activity of the EECMY, her Synods, congregations and institutions such as Mekane Yesus Seminary. And she also inherited her liturgy from Lutheran missionaries as we are going to discuss the development of her Liturgy below.

II. Worship and the Development of Liturgy in EECMY

According to Senn,

the fundamental meaning of liturgy is that it is the public work of the church in which the gospel of Jesus Christ is publicly proclaimed; adoration, praise, and thanksgiving are offered to God the Father along with petitions and supplications for the life of the world and; and the Lords supper is celebrated in anticipation of the banquet of the Kingdom of God. The doing of liturgy therefore also says something about the identity and mission of the Church.²⁵

Senn again writes about the freedom to develop new forms of worship in the cultural context of the community for the service of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As he says, “Liturgical forms must be judged according to their effectiveness in communicating the gospel and their appropriateness to the liturgical assembly. In evangelical freedom the Christian community is at liberty to develop new forms of worship that will meet the criteria of effective communication of the gospel and edification of the fellowship in the gospel.”²⁶

²¹ Saeveras, *On Church Mission Relations*, 65.

²² Fekadu, *Evangelical Faith Movement*, 40 (see also p. 248).

²³ Saeveras, *On Church Mission Relations*, 104.

²⁴ Saeveras, *On Church Mission Relations*, 169.

²⁵ Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 41.

²⁶ Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 44.

Christian liturgy is incarnational although it has the same core foundation which is the narrative of the gospel. We will see how EECMY developed her book of liturgy in the Ethiopian context below.

It took more than fifteen years for the EECMY to have a common book of Liturgy written in Amharic. But, practically it took her more than three decades to use a united liturgy which is written in Amharic and translated into different languages of Ethiopia. Perhaps, this was partly because of the differences in worship rites and national traditions among the missionaries. According to Fekadu, "Each mission was interested in keeping its autonomy and ensuring continuity in its worship rites and traditions in its respective sphere."²⁷ Whereas the Swedish Evangelical Missions and the German Hermannsburch Missions were liturgical, the Norwegian Lutheran Missionaries were not in favor of "liturgical rites conducted by ordained ministers donned in clerical garbs."²⁸ Thus, the process of developing the first united and contextual Amharic liturgy seems to have started eight years after the establishment of EECMY in 1967 by the input given on the fifth General Assembly of the EECMY.²⁹ Then, the sixth General Assembly of the EECMY which was held in Aira, Western Wollega in 1969 assigned a committee to work on how to include the culture, the music and traditional style of the country Ethiopia in the Liturgy of the EECMY.³⁰ The terms such as culture, music and traditional style of Ethiopia in the guidance given to the committee by the Assembly may show that the previous liturgy or liturgies were western. The effort to incorporate Ethiopian ways of worship reflects EECMY's attempt to inculturate the Gospel message and her liturgical worship into different cultures of the peoples in Ethiopia.

In the preface of the revised EECMY Liturgy, it is noted that a Liturgy which was developed by Onesimus Nesib in the year 1926/27 and printed by Rev. Martin Nordfeldt in December 1934 and in usage till 1960 in the churches among Oromo of Western Wollega was taken from the liturgical tradition of Swedish Lutheran Church except the language of worship that was Afaan Oromo.³¹ The liturgy of Gimbi board was originally from the liturgy called "Agende I" which was issued by the united Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD).³² The free worship style of NLM was practiced by the EECMY congregations in the southern Ethiopia such as Sidama and Gamogofa Synods.³³ After years' work, the first edition of the united Amharic liturgy book was approved by the 58th executive committee of the EECMY in September 1982, that is twenty three years after the establishment of EECMY.³⁴ The first edition was revised in 1991 and the current one is revised and published in 2009 in which forty services are included as follows.³⁵

1. Sunday Service led by Pastor
2. Sunday Service led by lay minister
3. Sunday Service with Holy Communion
4. Holy Communion Service
5. Holy Communion Service in Private
6. Sunday Service for Children
7. Baptism of Infants
8. Emergency Baptism and its announcement
9. Baptism of adults
10. Confirmation
11. Engagement
12. Marriage
13. Blessing of Marriage
14. Funeral and Burial
 - a) Funeral Service in the Church
 - b) Service at the Cemetery

²⁷ Fekadu, *Evangelical Faith Movement*, p. 247-8.

²⁸ Fekadu, *Evangelical Faith Movement*, 247.

²⁹ *The Revised EECMY Liturgy*, (Addis Ababa: DMT, 2009), 12.

³⁰ *EECMY Liturgy*, 12.

³¹ *EECMY Liturgy*, 10.

³² *EECMY Liturgy*, 10.

³³ *EECMY Liturgy*, 10.

³⁴ *EECMY Liturgy*, 13.

³⁵ *EECMY Liturgy*, 13.

15. Prayer for the bereaved
16. Confession and forgiveness in private
17. Ordinations of Pastors
18. Installation of Pastors
19. Installation of Evangelists
20. Installation of elders
21. Installation of ministers
22. Installation of Church and Synod officers and directors
23. Blessings for Missionaries
24. Blessing for Missionary Journey
25. Inauguration of a church building
26. Inauguration of a building or a home
27. Inauguration of a Cemetery
28. Establishing of a new Congregation
29. Laying a corner stone for a church building
30. Reception of members by transfer
31. Farewell of members by transfer
32. Celebration of Christmas Holyday
33. Laying on of hands, anointing the sick and prayer for healing
34. Dedication of Music instruments
35. Opening of a church convention
36. Closing of a church convention
37. Opening of a school year
38. Closing of a school year
39. Adoption of a child
40. Reconciliation services
 - a) Affirmation of the reconciliation among blood enemies
 - b) Affirmation of the reconciliation of conflicting groups

In the lists of services above the services on number 39 and 40 are directly taken from Ethiopian traditions, especially from Oromo tradition of *Gudifecha* (adoption of a child) and *Guma* (reconciliation among the blood enemies). The liturgy of EECMY is inherited from her Lutheran missionaries and adopted and adapted into the culture/s of Ethiopia. The revision of Liturgy by EECMY from time to time itself shows her effort to inculcate the liturgy and make it useful to her members. As it noted above EECMY is a Lutheran Church in Ethiopia. And in Ethiopia we have more than 86 different ethnical languages with different cultures. In the capital city Addis Ababa alone, there are more than 72 languages though the official language which is used as a common language is Amharic. So, when we speak about inculturating the Gospel message and liturgical worship, we must note these diverse languages and cultures of Ethiopia into which EECMY is attempting to inculcate the Gospel message and her liturgical worship which is not simple and easy. However, Amharic is the language of worship for the people with different languages but worshipping together in same or one church building. For example, my congregation, Mekanisa Mekane Yesus Congregation is using Amharic for worship services though her members including myself are from different languages but can understand Amharic.

When we come to liturgical songs of the EECMY, we have a hymnal book with about five hundred songs most of them translated from West into Amharic with the western melody or tune which make it difficult to be sung by most of the congregations. They are rich in biblical contents or messages but hard to be sung. That is why it is not in use with many congregations of EECMY. It may be important to note here how a radical African theologian Bolaji Idowu thinks about the “predicament” in the realm of liturgy in Africa which is partly true in EECMY. He says,

[It] has now become obvious that the prefabricated liturgies which have been imported from Europe and imposed upon this continent have proved inadequate. There are certain emotional depths which are not being reached in Africans by these liturgies and the whole system is making for spiritual sterility as far as they are concerned. Hymns are European verses sung to European tunes, the phraseology of the liturgies are either archaic, or barely intelligible, or often irrelevant in Africa.³⁶

³⁶ Bolaji Idowu, *The Predicament of the Church in Africa*, in C. G. Baëta, Op.cit., 434.

As noted above, Idowu's cry may partially apply to the EECMY liturgy and liturgical songs which are not yet free from western tunes and melodies. As mentioned above, the liturgical hymns of EECMY which are translated from western churches are not in use as such not because they are irrelevant but because they are not Ethiopian. Except the mother congregation (Addis Ababa Mekane Yesus), most of the EECMY congregants found it difficult to sing. Instead when they come to sing during liturgical worship they have to insert spiritual songs composed by local singers. However, some of locally composed songs are not rich in Biblical elements. Idowu summons may somehow fit here, for him, an authentic African Christianity "is to be found in the direct, deliberate and self-conscious appropriation of Jesus Christ as a living and present reality experienced in African terms."³⁷ Here it is true that the liturgy of EECMY is open to include local ways of worship and singing. That means we find a mixture of liturgical and spontaneous worship styles in most of EECMY congregations. Moreover, both modern/western music's such as synthesizers and guitars with traditional musical instruments such as *Kirar*, *Masenqo*, *tsinatsil*, and *kebero* are used in singing. In the singing, body and emotions are involved. Here it is important to note what Michael Hawn says about worship in the southern hemisphere is also true in EECMY. Hawn says, worship in the Southern hemisphere includes the physical with people enjoy the singing and dancing, and it continues throughout the service and between the sermon.³⁸ People can sing in different languages in many congregations of the EECMY though Amharic is used as a common liturgical language for the people worshipping under one congregation but from different languages. That means when it comes to singing, multicultural worship style can be easily used in EECMY congregations because we have common way of expressing ourselves except the language differences. The tunes and melodies from other languages of Ethiopia are not difficult to be sung with others. Yet though the expressions are different the foundation of Christian worship is the same. That is why Chupungco says, "Inculturation is basically the faithful translation into different but suitable cultural values, patterns and institutions of what the churches have received from the apostles. Hence, inculturation does not break unity nor does it introduce practices that are totally alien from the gospel message."³⁹ Following the footsteps of the reformers, our foundation is the word of God, *Sola Scriptura*.

According to Senn,

The great reformers of the church in the West ordered worship according to one important principle: the holy scripture, the word of God, which they placed again at the heart of the church life. Worship was to conform, in one way or another, to scripture; scripture was to be read in public worship in the language of the people; sermons were to be preached on the scripture readings; and liturgical practices were to be judged according to biblical norms...If *sola fide* became the principle on which personal life was based, *sola scriptura* became the principle by which liturgical life was formed.⁴⁰

With our common foundation, the Scriptural readings of EECMY are from lectionaries which are adapted from Lutheran traditions of the west.⁴¹ The sermon for the Sunday worship is mainly from the readings. But EECMY and all other Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in Ethiopia follows the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido church's (Eastern Orthodox) year calendar for the Church holydays or celebrations such as Christmas and Easter. As a result, a blend of Ethiopian (Eastern) and Western style of liturgy and worship have been practiced throughout the congregations of EECMY. This may go with what Senn says, as "the Church [EECMY] gives the Gospel body (*corporat*) in different cultures and at the same time leads peoples with their own cultures into its own community."⁴² For Senn, "True inculturation means replacing [foreign] forms and orders with indigenous forms and orders as well as linguistic and artistic expressions indigenous to the local culture."⁴³ And the universality and locality of Christianity is further explained with what Mbiti says,

³⁷ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*, (Oxford, Regnum Books, 1999), 276.

³⁸ C. Michael Hawn, *Praying Globally: Pitfalls and Possibilities of Cross-Cultural Liturgical Appropriation* in Charles E. Farhadian ed. *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 227.

³⁹ Anscar J. Chupungco, *Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006; original: New York: Paulist, 1982), 60

⁴⁰ Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 229-300

⁴¹ About the Church Year Calendar and Lectionary see Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 657-61

⁴² Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 677.

⁴³ Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 677-8.

Christianity is a universal and cosmic faith. It was universalized on Calvary, and cosmicized on the first Easter Day. Our duty now is to localize this universality and cosmicity. Europe and America have westernized it, the Orthodox Churches have easternized it; here in Africa we must africanize it. It belongs to the very nature of Christianity to be subject to localization, otherwise its universality and cosmicity become meaningless.⁴⁴

That is why EECMY liturgy which is originated from western missionaries is revised from time to time and still needs more work of indigenization into different languages and cultures of peoples in Ethiopia.

Although the congregations of EECMY uses the liturgy, the worship style in most of EECMY congregations are not too liturgical. The worship is not confined to the liturgy. In the congregations of EECMY without neglecting the liturgy, there is freedom to use popular and gospel songs with Ethiopian ways of singing and dancing with joyful sounds such as ululation, practice of charismatic gifts such as speaking in tongues, predicting (prophesying), exorcism and healing. That is why in the revised version of the EECMY book of Liturgy and worship we find the section on the discipline of worship and the benefits of Charismatic gifts to address abuses and wrong application of the spiritual gifts. Yet with affirmation of Charismatic gifts seeking to develop an un understanding of spiritual gifts from a Lutheran tradition and encouraging the local leaders to value, guide and train the Charismatic youths.⁴⁵ How the how EECMY accommodated the Charismatic movements in her Lutheran Church tradition is discussed below. Before we deal with the Charismatic movements in EECMY, it is right to briefly mention the understanding of EECMY about the sacraments.

III. The Sacraments in EECMY

As it is stated in her article of faith (see p.7), EECMY sees in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, which was worded by the Reformers, as well as in Luther's Catechisms, a pure exposition of the Word of God. That means EECMY follows the Lutheran teaching in her sacramental understanding as stated in the Augsburg confession. As it is mentioned in Augsburg confession, the church is the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments [Baptism and Lord's Supper] are administered rightly.⁴⁶ EECMY believes and teaches that Baptism for both adults and infants is necessary for salvation, for the grace of God is offered through it. She also believes and teaches the real presence of Christ or the true body and blood of Christ in the Lord's supper under the form of bread and wine.⁴⁷ Thus, the congregations of EECMY offers adult and infant baptism and gives The Lord's Supper every month. This is because as a Lutheran church she understands "People do not acquire saving faith on their own; it is a gift given by the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace—the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, for which the office of the word and the sacraments was instituted."⁴⁸ On top of her sacramental belief and practices, EECMY also accommodates the Charismatic gifts in her worship practices.

⁴⁴ John Mbiti, 'Christianity and Traditional Religions in Africa', *International Review of Mission* 59:236 (October 1970), 431.

⁴⁵ *Charismatic Renewal, Denominational tradition and the transformation of Ethiopian Society* taken from <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/17028/1/Haustein%202011c.pdf> accessed 11/7/17, p. 49

⁴⁶ Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 32

⁴⁷ Tappert (ed), *The Book of Concord*, 32-34.

⁴⁸ Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 319.

IV. Charismatic Movements in the EECMY

“The issue of spiritual revival is as old as the Christian Church” says Rev. Magarssa Guutaa,

The Seven Churches in Asia Minor were given messages from the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, through the Apostle John, reminding each one of them to repent and revive. [...] God commands His Church to repent and experience spiritual revival whenever it has erred in spiritual matters. As a certain Church Leader has prayed, saying: "Revive Your Church and begin with Me", God may use devoted individuals to bring spiritual revival to His Church. Reformation History, which began with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther and his partners in mission, is an example. The European Pietist Movement of the Eighteenth Century in Europe is yet another example. This Movement led some European Churches to spiritual revival, which in turn encouraged them to plan and implement the spreading of the Gospel both nationally and internationally. The establishment of Mission Organizations in Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and the USA was the outcome of the spiritual awakening.⁴⁹

According to Bakke, Charismatic movements begun in Ethiopia in 1963, just four years after the establishment of EECMY as a national Lutheran church in Ethiopia.⁵⁰ The first charismatic movement started in EECMY in the 1970s in Gore, Iluababur among the youths including Rev. Itafa Gobana who later became the president of EECMY for eight years (2001-2009). A Similar movement started in Nekemte (Central Synod) by young Christians which resulted in conflict with the congregational elders. Eide noted how the Congregations at Gore and Naqamte reacted to the movements: “In Illubabor the elders of the congregation were able to establish good relations with the charismatic youth. In Naqamte, however, local EECMY leaders resisted the revivalists to such an extent that the group left the Church in 1974. Negotiations brought about a settlement and the group returned to the EECMY in 1975.”⁵¹ Rev. Gudina Tumsa, the late general Secretary of EECMY and Olav Saeveras intervened and encouraged the youths to stay in their church and use their spiritual gifts for the service of their church.⁵² This was a wise position of Gudina Tumsa though he himself was not charismatic in a sense of the spiritual gifts among the youths. He valued the importance of the gifts for the growth and edification of the church which played a great role in the growth of the EECMY. However, it took some years to settle the problems and conflicts occurred in the EECMY as result of misunderstanding and misusing of the Charismatic gifts.

Among the early revivalists from Nekemte some of the students such as Balinaa Sarkaa, James Gobena and Tolesaa Guddinaa came to study at Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa and started a vibrant Charismatic movement in the compound and chapel of this EECMY (Lutheran) seminary from 1973 onward.⁵³ With this emerging charismatic movement, the campus divided into two because whereas some welcomed the charismatic experience, others rejected it over issues such as style of worship, style of prayers, speaking in tongues, personal commitment and ethical demands like abstinence from **alcohol**⁵⁴. The students who practice charismatic gifts were accused of practicing Pentecostal doctrine against the Lutheran doctrine of the EECMY. And again Rev. Gudina Tumsa with Mr. Sebhat Leab brought both parties together for understanding and solved the tension for a while. Dr. Bakke, the then Principal of MYS was positive to the charismatic movement and said that it adds a new dimension to the church.⁵⁵ The charismatic worship in the compound MYS attracted both evangelicals and Pentecostals in Addis Ababa to come attend the worship services.

⁴⁹ Magarssa, *From A Humble Beginning to Advanced Standing*, 154.

⁵⁰ Johnny Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions within the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus*, (Oslo: Solum Forlag, Humanities Press, 1987), 251, see also Eide, *Religion & Revolution in Ethiopia*, 246.

⁵¹ Eide, *Revolution and Religion*, 246.

⁵² Eide, *Revolution and Religion*, 246.

⁵³ Magarsa, *From A Humble Beginning to Advanced Standing*, 156.

⁵⁴ In our informal discussion about charismatic movement, Daniel Wolteji, a PhD student at Concordia Seminary told me that the way his church elders check youths whether they are involved in charismatic movement is providing them alcoholic drink. If a person rejects to drink alcohol, then s/he will be persecuted as a revivalist. Normally alcohol drink is prohibited among evangelicals in Ethiopia including EECMY.

⁵⁵ Magarsa, *From A Humble Beginning to Advanced Standing*, 156; see also, *Charismatic Renewal, Denominational tradition and the transformation of Ethiopian Society* taken from <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/17028/1/Haustein%202011c.pdf> accessed 11/7/17, p. 48.

V. The Response of EECMY and MYS to the Charismatic Movement

The first consultation on the role of youth in the life of the church was conducted in February 1976. On the consultation the leaders were advised to counsel the youths but not to oppose and hate them. At the end of the consultation, the delegates recommended that the pastors, evangelists and elders of the congregations study the Bible on the work of the Holy Spirit. Those who have received the charismatic gifts are also advised not to boast with the gifts but to serve and glorify with the spiritual gifts given them.⁵⁶ There was also another seminar on the movement in August 1976 at MYS compound for participants both from Ethiopia and expatriate missionaries. The guidelines in how to use the spiritual gifts were developed at this seminar.⁵⁷ Here it is important to note how freedom in the modes of worship is defined, in which the Augsburg Confession is used as base:

The conflict over modes of worship should be resolved by the recognition that every new revival will bring with new demands for change of worship. Basing itself on Augsburg Confessions, Article 7 (“It is not necessary that the human traditions or rites or ceremonies instituted by man should be like everywhere”), the consultation recommended that there be a possibility in the congregation of having meetings with more freedom and openness to the charisms of the Spirit. But the young should also be taught the meaning of the traditional worship forms. A warning was issued against rigid formalistic worship. Also, to be recognized is the danger of free worship “becoming disorderly and too subjective.” The conclusions: the church must welcome the charismatic renewal; the source of misunderstanding between young and old is the lack of teaching, especially the want of teaching based on the Scriptures.⁵⁸

The conflicts among the MYS were resolved through the seminar on the Holy Spirit, conducted in November 1979 in which the students signed “a form of doctrinal integrity, where they also promised to inform the Seminary and their Synod in case they come (take up) a different doctrinal understanding during their stay at the Seminary.”⁵⁹ The division among the MYS student come to end through this seminar. To solve the persisting problems and to cope with the charismatic movement the Theology Commission of the EECMY prepared a memorandum which was approved by the 54th Executive Committee of the EECMY in May 1981 to be followed by all Synods and congregations of the EECMY.⁶⁰

Through all these hard efforts, consultations, seminars, the decisions at different levels by the decision-making bodies of the EECMY such as Executive Committee and General Assembly, EECMY come to differentiate the Charismatic Movements in EECMY from that of Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal movement and gradually integrate the Charismatic revival into the worship practice of the Church without compromising her Doctrine and Order of Worship.⁶¹

The difference between EECMY and Pentecostals or Neo-Pentecostals regarding the Charismatic gifts is that whereas the EECMY as a Lutheran church believes, teaches and relates the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit with the water baptism, the Pentecostals do not relate the water baptism with the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit and sees it as a second baptism in the Spirit. Furthermore, speaking in tongues is regarded as a sign of the gifts of the Holy Spirit among the Pentecostals but this is not scriptural according to the understanding of the EECMY for she believes and teaches that all Christians who are baptized in the name of Triune God have the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The response and the policy decisions of EECMY to tackle the problems and conflicts among her members in relation to Charismatic movements shows her openness to incorporate the practices of charismatic gifts to her Lutheran tradition.⁶²

⁵⁶ Bakke, *Christian Ministry*, p.253; see also Magarsa, *From A Humble Beginning to Advanced Standing*, 157.

⁵⁷ Kilian McDonnell, *Presence, Power, Praise, Documents on the Charismatic Renewal*, Vol. II, (Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1980), 151.

⁵⁸ McDonnell, *Presence, Power, Praise*, 153.

⁵⁹ Magarsa, *From A Humble Beginning to Advanced Standing* p. 157.

⁶⁰ Magarsa, *From A Humble Beginning to Advanced Standing*, 159.

⁶¹ Eide, *Revolution and Religion*, 247.

⁶² Here it might be important to mention that in contrast to EECMY’s integration of the Charismatic movement in to her Lutheran worship tradition to the extent of referring it to freedom of worship style in Augsburg Confessions article 7 (however, the context of specific article was not necessarily about the charismatic worship style), the

The ground for her theological position in accommodating the charismatic gifts is much more based on her understanding and teaching of the *Sola Scriptura* than confessional explanation of the work of the Holy Spirit, especially the Paulin Epistles about the spiritual gifts and their application to the contemporary worship practices.⁶³ This is somehow related to the position of Hawn: “Charismatic winds and Pentecostal fires on Catholics and mainline protestants shows the repackaging of the Good News of the centuries in new and unexpected ways.”⁶⁴

In addition to Biblical references to incorporate the charismatic worship style and use the spiritual gifts in her Worship services, the Ethiopian traditional religious background of her members makes it easy to see spiritual gifts and practices positively because in their traditional religions they had the experience of relating themselves with the spiritualists, traditional prophets and healings through the religious leaders. In most if not all cases the traditional religious leaders were considered as spirit-filled persons. Therefore, it could be argued that the Biblical teaching about the spiritual gifts and its practice well fitted in African ways of worship and replaced the traditional African spiritual yearnings. Thus, Bible and African and or Ethiopian ways of worship is blended in the worship practices of EECMY and yet her teaching on the sacraments and liturgy follows the Lutheran heritage. This blended worship style and the practice of charismatic gifts contribute greatly to the fast growth of EECMY. This is because the charismatic movement has really “been a movement of evangelization, with individual Christians, often untrained, being sent out and supported by two or three friends who are working and pay part of their salaries for the support of the evangelist. The expansion of the movement is mainly due to this evangelistic zeal.”⁶⁵ The purpose of our worship, according to Smith is “to be sent, and we are sent to do- to undertake Christian action that participates in the *mission Dei*.”⁶⁶ Some other factors for the growth of EECMY are the usage of different languages and translations of the Bible and the liturgy into different Ethiopian languages.

Conclusion

EECMY is an ever-growing Lutheran church in Africa as well as in the world. The inculturation of the gospel and liturgy into different cultures of Ethiopia, and accommodating the charismatic gifts into her worship services contributed to the great part in her growth. Being a Lutheran church, she used local name **Mekane Yesus**, the place of Jesus. She is revising her liturgy from time to time to contextualize it into the different languages and cultures of Ethiopia. She is open to use locally composed songs into her liturgical worship. She accommodates the charismatic gifts into her Lutheran worship services. And yet, EECMY maintains her Lutheran identity, mainly in her doctrine, the sacraments and in the basic content of her liturgy.

policy of LCMS shows how neo-Pentecostalism is not in agreement with the scriptures and Lutheran confessions. The policy also clearly says seminarians who will continue the practice of neo-Pentecostalism will not be assigned in the LCMS congregation (See McDonnell, Presence, Power, Praise, 15-22).

⁶³ McDonnell, Presence, Power, Praise, 153-170; see also, Charismatic Renewal, Denominational tradition and the transformation of Ethiopian Society taken from <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/17028/1/Haustein%202011c.pdf> accessed 11/7/17, 50.

⁶⁴ C. Michael Hawn, Praying Globally: Pitfalls and Possibilities of Cross-Cultural Liturgical Appropriation, in Charles E. Farhadian ed. Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 215.

⁶⁵ McDonnell, Presence, Power, Praise, 151.

⁶⁶ James K. A. Smith, Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 157.

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Introduction: A Brief History of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Lutheran Mission in Ethiopia The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is a national Lutheran Church with its own remarkable history going back to the seventeenth century when Peter Heyling, a Lutheran missionary from Germany, arrived in Ethiopia in 1634 and started evangelical work within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC). for a short period.Â The treasurer had traveled to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel. On his way back home, he encountered Philip, whom God had sent to proclaim the Gospel to him. Upon confessing Christ as his savior, Philip baptized the royal treasurer. While the Orthodox Church had a long history in Ethiopia and had shaped much of the culture of the center, there were still large pockets of cultures unaffected by the church, especially in the peripheral regions where the EECMY experienced most of its growth, such as the south and the west.[2] One of the prominent early Ethiopian evangelists, Onesimos Nesib was crucial.Â External links. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus website. [6]. Africa Lutheran Communion, news from Ethiopia and Africa.