

Book reviews

Haustein J 2011. *Writing religious history: The historiography of Ethiopian Pentecostalism*. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag. xvi +295 pages. ISBN 978-3-447-06528-3. Price €38.00.

This book appears at a time when there is an increasing interest being shown in the growth and development of the Pentecostal movement in Africa. It focuses on the Ethiopian context where Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity have become prominent features of religious history in an area where traditional Ethiopian orthodoxy has remained aloof from the upsurge of both Islam and alternative forms of Christianity for many centuries. Apart from two early histories, this is the first recent substantial history of Ethiopian Pentecostalism written from a contemporary historical perspective.

What is distinctive about the author's methodology is its use of anthropological theory and terminology to communicate his 'Being There' approach which asserts authorship and authority ('author-ise') as it signifies his presence and his distinction from the others present and also provides a different form of representing past events. Here we have a form of participant observation which aspires to a certain kind of reflectivity through observation despite linguistic disability. This is employed alongside multifarious traditional historical methodologies including interviews, documents and personal impressions. This resulted in a move beyond traditional historiography whereby Pentecostal identities are constructed and maintained in the Ethiopian church scene, both past and present.

The first chapter explores the parameters of Ethiopian Pentecostalism which appeared only in the mid-twentieth century, first of all as an underground movement and from 1991 as an active expression of Ethiopian Protestantism which interacted with its denominational neighbours and as a separate entity within diverse political, legal, ideological and historical contexts which are examined in which Pentecostalism experienced both oppression and liberation. This is followed by a discussion of the history of Pentecostalism and its sources. Prior to the Ethiopian revolution in 1974 there were no histories. Post revolution, the first histories were produced by expatriate missionaries; these were quickly followed by indigenous histories. They all reflect the oppressive situation under the empire and the relative freedom following the 1974 revolution and relate to the contemporary context. More recent histories indicate that the rise of a many voiced Pentecostalism needs to be situated within a broader narrative of Protestant growth as well as the transition from an imperial government to a pluralist democracy. The issue of linguistic representation as a basis for

historical fact has received scrutiny from a number of perspectives eg. postcolonial studies and is integral to historiography as a source for material evidence and the manner in which it is represented are fundamental to historical discourse since the fact and its narrative give meaning to one another.

Chapter two discusses histories relate the growth and development of the Pentecostal movement to the earlier missionary endeavour. The missionary contribution may be summarised as a study of legacy and influence alongside the historical idea of missionary independence as emancipation from the missions. Chapter three looks at how these histories use revival movements to form a consolidated account of the origins of Pentecostalism. Chapter four analyses the narratives of the persecution of Pentecostals under the closing years of Haile Selassie's rule and how persecution and politics are represented. Interestingly, in all its engagements with the state authorities the author discerns three foundational narratives – a foundational critique of the system integrated into a persecution plot, a deep spiritual endurance based in the conviction that this is part of a divinely determined history and the call to negotiate a resolution within the established political dispensation. Chapter five examines the period following the revolution and attempts to relate the persecution of the charismatic movement to its overt expression. The conclusion focuses on historiographical questions.

This volume is a significant contribution to African historiography and an important addition to our knowledge of the Pentecostal scene. It unfortunate, however, that it does not live up to its early promise to focus on an approach based in 'being there'. This would have provided an innovative dimension that could enhance many such histories that are in process. Nonetheless, this does not detract from its value.

Reviewer: Prof GA Duncan, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, PRETORIA, 0002.