

Reviews



LEADERSHIP FORMATION IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT: MISSIONAL LEADERSHIP REVISITED, by Samuel Deressa, Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2022. 191 pages. \$29.00.

Everyone acquainted enough with World Christianity knows that the center of Christianity has shifted from the Global North to the Global South, with Africa boasting the largest concentration of Christians on earth. This new reality has enormous ecclesiological, theological, social, and political implications for Africa and beyond. Against this historical backdrop, Samuel Deressa, based on extensive sources, including interviews with native Ethiopian Christians, has meticulously explored and presented a fascinating story of four churches of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). Stressing how the close interaction between African culture and Christian heritage has positively molded the lives of the emerging African church leaders, including himself, he writes, “There exists an intersection between the culture that nurtured my ethos and my faith. I have become aware that it was the culture that dictated my faith and *vice versa*” (1–2). His overarching argument suggests that African culture and Christianity have mutually impacted, enriched, revitalized, and reshaped each other.

Deressa revisits and highlights the underlying idea and key terms of what missiologists and scholars call the missional church and leadership conversation, while starting his work of exploring and analyzing the leadership formation in the four Oromo-speaking churches in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (chapter 1). With the intention of looking into and understanding the social, cultural, and theological facets of the four congregations, he reviews the classic literature in the field of congregational studies (chapter 2). In chapter 3, he looks at biblical and theological perspectives on missional leadership to understand the missional trademark and cultures of the four churches. While digging into the doctrine of Trinity and missional leadership, he carefully studies renowned theologians like Martin Luther, Karl Barth, Catherine LaCugna, and Jürgen Moltmann.

Using what he calls theory of culture and theory of leadership, Deressa examines the works of well-known scholars of culture, including Clifford Geertz, James MacGregor Burns, and Katrine Tanner, with the purpose of analyzing leadership formation, cultures, and holistic ministries of the four selected churches (chapter 4). In chapter 5, he describes his painstaking process of data collection using a qualitative research method. The core of his work follows (chapter 6), in which he presents what his field research

discovers and carefully analyzes his data. In the last two chapters, he reviews and reflects on his research findings from biblical, theological, and theoretical perspectives. His addendums filled with questionnaires, information, and data should not be overlooked.

A number of factors make this book an important source for students, scholars, and church leaders interested in contextual theology, African Christianity, Ethiopian studies, or missional leadership formation. A combination of his advanced theological education in the Global North and his extensive knowledge of his native African context has uniquely placed Deressa to look at the different ideas of missional leadership formation in the two contexts and to bridge them, underscoring the possibility of mutual learning

and enrichment between churches in Africa and elsewhere. He discusses the usually unnoticed, but crucial role of native missionaries and evangelists in the making of African Christianity (21, 91, 137), which most certainly resonates with the historically overlooked role of native missionaries and evangelists in Asia proselytizing their own people and highlights the historical importance of the indigeneity of Christianity in the Global South. Historians and scholars specializing in Burmese studies also neglect a lasting contribution made by native Christians to the making of Burmese Christianity.

Negating the idea of complete separation between church and state and calling for the public vocation of missional church leaders in society, Deressa argues that the church called and sent

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