

PERCEPTION AND IDENTITY: A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND EVANGELICAL CHURCHES IN ETHIOPIA, by Seblewengel Daniel, Cumbria, CA: Langham Monographs, 2019. 486 pages. \$47.99.

In *Perception and Identity: A Study of the Relationship between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Evangelical Churches in Ethiopia*, the author Seblewengel Daniel delves into the rich history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) and the Evangelical/Pentecostal movements. Seblewengel's book provides a thought-provoking exploration of the relationship between the Orthodox and evangelical churches, shedding light on the dynamics between the churches, employing historical and theological frameworks to support her analysis.

Divided into seven chapters, the book progresses through an analysis of the relationship between the Orthodox and evangelical churches. Each chapter offers valuable insights into aspects of perception and identity, enlightening readers on how historical and theological perspectives shape the contemporary self-consciousness of these two religious communities.

The book begins by laying out the author's motivation and intellectual framework, setting the stage for the study that follows. In this initial chapter, Seblewengel delves into the methodological and historical background of her research, providing readers with a solid foundation upon which the subsequent chapters are built. To bring clarity to the intricacies of the Orthodox and evangelical relationship, the author draws upon Andrew Walls' framework, composed of three key principles. These principles include an essential continuity in Christianity, the "indigenizing" principle, and the "Pilgrim" principle. By adopting this framework, Seblewengel encourages readers to view both churches from a fresh perspective, recognizing a shared "adoptive past."

The second and third chapters, which discuss the formation of Ethiopian Christian identity, provide valuable context for understanding these religious traditions. The author adeptly outlines the historical development of both the EOTC and the Evangelical/Pentecostal movements, setting the stage for further exploration.

In the fourth chapter, the author delves into the fascinating interactions between missionaries and their Orthodox counterparts. Specifically, the focus is directed towards the Church Missionary Society and their attempts to revitalize the Orthodox Church through Bible reading and outreach efforts. What stands out in this chapter is the nuanced portrayal of the missionaries' intentions. It becomes apparent that they did

not anticipate forming a distinct congregation. Instead, their aim was to bridge the gap between the Orthodox Church and what they perceived as “heathen” communities. This insight adds depth to the narrative and sheds light on the dynamics at play during this era.

Chapter five delves into the intricate relationship between the Orthodox church and local evangelicals with a captivating tale of mutual antagonism and misunderstanding, shedding light on how each group perceives the other and themselves. Throughout the engaging narrative, the author highlights the prevalent miscommunication and deep-rooted animosity that characterizes the encounter between these two religious communities. Seblewengel’s central argument resonates powerfully within the pages, encapsulating the essence of the Orthodox-Evangelical divide.

According to the author, the crux of this divide lies in the core of their identities and their perception of one another. As Seblewengel eloquently asserts, “[a]t the heart of the Orthodox-Evangelical divide, therefore, is their sense of identity (who they think they are) and their perception of others (who they think the other party is)” (p.400).

Chapter six delves into the reformation impulses within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) known as Tāhādäso or “renewal” movements. These movements are explored in terms of their interactions with each other and with evangelicals, who provide them with financial and other forms of support. The author brings historical figures like the 15th-century monk abba Estifanos into the discussion to highlight the recent reformation attempts.

Moving on to the last chapter, the book concludes with recommendations on how to improve the relationship between the Ethiopian



The image is a promotional graphic for a podcast. At the top left is a circular logo containing a cross and a flame. To its right, the text reads "Enter the BIBLE" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Below this, it says "has a new podcast." in a smaller, bold font. Underneath that, it says "Listen at" followed by the URL "enterthebible.org/podcast" in a bold font with a dark background behind the text. The bottom half of the graphic features a laptop computer. The screen of the laptop displays a webpage with the headline "Everything You Wanted to Know about the Bible" and a sub-headline "...but were afraid to ask". The background of the graphic is white with faint, large-scale icons of a cross and a flame.

Orthodox Tewahedo Church and evangelicals, with the aim of fostering a harmonious ecumenical relationship between the two denominations. The author emphasizes that what unites the two churches, such as their faith in the triune God, outweighs what divides them.

Overall, this book sheds light on the historical context and contemporary interactions between the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and evangelical movements. It offers insights into the reformation impulses within the EOTC and proposes ways to foster a cooperative relationship between the two denominations. One of the book's strengths is the author's unbiased exploration of both sides, offering readers a balanced perspective on the issues at hand. Seblewengel presents the viewpoints and beliefs of both the Orthodox church and the local evangelicals without passing judgment, allowing readers to form their own conclusions. This even-handed approach grants the work an air of credibility, making it an essential read for those seeking a comprehensive understanding of this interplay.

However, one minor critique of the book is the occasional lack of in-depth analysis regarding certain historical events or theological concepts. While Seblewengel provides a rich landscape of encounters and perceptions, delving deeper into specific incidents or theological nuances could have further enhanced the readers' comprehension.

In conclusion, *Perception and Identity* is an insightful book that dissects the complexities of the Orthodox-Evangelical relationship. With a compelling narrative and a well-constructed argument, Seblewengel successfully uncovers the deeply-ingrained miscommunication and mutual hostility that have plagued this encounter. This book is essential for anyone seeking a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics between these two religious groups and an understanding of the factors that underpin their mutual antagonism.

Samuel Deressa
Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota