FAITH, TRADITION, AND ACCOMPANIMENT IN ETHIOPIA

Global South Theological Journal
Volume 5, Issue 1

Welcome to Volume 5, Issue 1 of the *Global South Theological Journal*. This issue turns a focused lens toward Ethiopia—a land of deep Christian antiquity, remarkable ecclesial endurance, and vibrant contemporary witness. Through historical analysis, biblical hermeneutics, and lived cross-cultural narrative, the contributions in this issue invite readers to engage with the dynamic realities of Ethiopian Christianity across traditions, regimes, and global partnerships.

With this issue, we are also thrilled to launch a new category in our publication spectrum: the "Chronicle." Designed as a space for structured reflection, a "Chronicle" provides a narrative account of lived interactions and relational engagement between Western churches or congregations and communities in the Global South. By pairing rigorous academic scholarship with reflective practical narrative, we aim to offer a more holistic picture of how theology is both conceptualized in the academy and embodied across global Christian networks.

ACADEMIC ARTICLES

PERSECUTION, RESILIENCE, AND GROWTH IN THE MESERETE KRISTOS CHURCH

In our first academic contribution, Kebede Bekere explores the profound impact of state-sponsored persecution on the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) during Ethiopia's Marxist-Leninist Derg regime (1974–1991). Originating from mid-20th-century Mennonite mission efforts, the MKC developed into a major indigenous charismatic and Anabaptist movement. When the Derg regime targeted evangelical believers—labeling them with derogatory terms such as *mete* ("imported/foreign") and *pente*, closing church buildings, confiscating assets, and subjecting members to imprisonment, workplace discrimination, and social isolation—the MKC was forced underground into clandestine home cell networks.

Bekere details how this period of intense adversity catalyzed theological and practical transformations within the church. Rather than dismantling the community, persecution reshaped believers' understanding of God’s sovereignty, deepened their reliance on divine justice, cultivated an urgent eschatological hope, and sparked intense evangelistic zeal. Strikingly, during the 17 years of underground operation, the MKC grew from 5,000 members and 14 congregations to 34,000 members and 53 congregations upon its public re-emergence in 1991. Bekere’s study offers a poignant analysis of how marginalized religious groups cultivate resilience, holistic community advocacy, and spiritual vitality under political oppression.

INDIGENOUS HERMENEUTICS IN THE ETHIOPIC *ANDEMTA* TRADITION

In our second academic article, Tibebu Teklu Senbetu examines the indigenous biblical commentary tradition (*Andemta* or *teregwame*) of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC). Addressing the long-standing scholarly debate between Roger Cowley—who emphasized the *Andemta* tradition's fundamental continuity with Antiochene literal-historical exegesis—and Mohammed Girma—who highlighted its Alexandrian allegorical and typological foundations—Senbetu demonstrates that the EOTC hermeneutic cannot be reduced to a single patristic stream.

Focusing on the *Aqedah* narrative in Genesis 22:5–8 (the sacrifice of Isaac and the provision of the ram), Senbetu illustrates how the *Andemta* commentary synthesizes Antiochene historical realism with Alexandrian spiritual polysemy. The commentary preserves the historical grounding of the narrative while simultaneously layer-mapping allegorical Christological readings. Senbetu proposes a post-critical retrieval of patristic methodologies for contemporary African scholarship and preaching—one that

embraces spiritual depth while keeping allegorical interpretations disciplined and organically rooted in the historical-literal sense of the text.

INAUGURAL "CHRONICLE" ARTICLE

One in Christ: Mutual Accompaniment and Global Partnership

Opening our new "Chronicle" section, Karen Walhof presents a reflective 18-year narrative (2004–2022+) documenting the global relationship between the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), alongside local Ethiopian immigrants at Our Redeemer Oromo Evangelical Church.

Framed around the missional principle of "accompaniment"—which rejects top-down, unidirectional mission in favor of mutual solidarity, interdependence, and shared relationship—Walhof details reciprocal visits, educational scholarships for young women through REAL, child rehabilitation in Nekemte, environmental reforestation and clean water projects in Yubdo, medical equipment supply and administrative consultation for Aira Hospital, and vernacular theological publishing with *Yemisrach Dimts*.

Crucially, the chronicle candidly addresses institutional stresses, such as when the EECMY formally severed institutional ties with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 2013 over disagreements regarding human sexuality. Walhof illustrates how personal trust, mutual affection, and shared faith sustained congregational and regional partnerships despite broader institutional divisions, providing an encouraging case study of what it means to remain "One in Christ" across cultural, geographic, and institutional boundaries.

AN INVITATION TO READERS

Together, these three articles demonstrate the depth, resilience, and global connectedness of Ethiopian Christianity. Whether exploring the historical crucible of church growth under political hostility, the rich interpretive synthesis of indigenous patristic commentary, or the practical realities of long-term global church partnership, this issue offers vital insights for scholars, pastors, and lay leaders alike. We invite you to read, reflect, and engage with these contributions from the Global South.