

Theology of Holy Spirit: Experiences of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

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Abstract: The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is the largest Lutheran church in Africa which proclaims the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ and fast growing Church. The Church is not only serving for spiritual needs of a person but also physical needs. The motto of church service is “serving the whole person” better known as Wholistic Ministry. The church has been called by God to proclaim Christ as Lord and Savior of all humankind. The church believes and professes that the Bible both Old and New Testaments are the Holy Word of God and the only guiding source of her life and ministry. My article is to show the role in its evangelistic growth and its challenges as the church grows very fast. The article meant to give sound and biblical understanding of “Theology of Holy Spirit” and experience of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. I hope this article blesses many believers around the globe. May God bless those who read this article.

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. This pioneer missionary helped lay the foundation for later missionary work in Ethiopia. In the eighteenth century, a great evangelical revival took place in the British Isles. This revival emphasized the transformation of the individual through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.¹ Believers were urged to deny self, dedicating their lives to serve others and to win them for Christ. The revival resulted in bringing about social reform and initiating new mission societies dedicated to bringing the Gospel to those who had never heard the good news.²

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At the beginning, it was not the intention of these newly formed mission societies to plant new churches on Ethiopian soil, but rather to aid the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in carrying out its mission. In order to revitalize ancient churches like the EOC, the Protestant mission societies planned to distribute Christian literature and Bibles in the local language of the people. However, when cooperation between the new converts and the structures of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church became difficult, the Protestant societies felt compelled to plant a denominational church.³ Lutheran missionaries eventually established Lutheran congregations in different parts of the country. Following a series of consultations and meetings among the leaders of these congregations, a consensus was reached to form an Ethiopian Protestant national church.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, pietistic and Moravian ideas entered the country and helped bring revival to the church. These ideas stressed individual conversion and increased lay influence. The pietistic and the Moravian movements had a positive influence on many believers and led them to read the Bible with interest and promote the formation of cell groups in which Bible study and group prayer took place.⁴ Together these events helped lead to the establishment of a national church. The draft of a constitution was articulated and a general assembly was called for the formation of the new church. Eventually, delegates representing the twenty thousand Lutherans in Ethiopia gathered and approved the draft constitution, founding a national Lutheran church known as “The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus” (EECMY) on January 21, 1959.

The mission organizations that played significant roles in the establishment of the EECMY were the Sweden Evangelical Mission (SEM), the German Hermannsburg Mission (GHM), the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM), the Danish Evangelical Mission (DEM), the American Lutheran Mission (ALM), and the American Presbyterian Church, which joined at a later date.

The first group of missionaries from Sweden arrived in 1861. The evangelistic and church planting efforts of the Swedes were confined to the northern part of the country. Under the leadership of Hermann Bahlburg, missionaries from the Hermannsburg Mission in Germany (GHM) arrived in Ethiopia on December 30, 1927. They were to play an important role in the founding of the Ethiopian Lutheran Church. Heeding the request of the SEM, the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) sent missionaries formerly stationed in China to the mission field in Ethiopia. Arriving in 1948, the Norwegians started work in the former Sidamo and Gamo Gofa Provinces in 1949. By 1953, there were more than three thousand members in the congregations in Sidamo. The Danish Evangelical Mission (DEM) also arrived in Ethiopia in 1948, inaugurating mission work in Dodola, Bale province, after securing permission from the Ethiopian government. The Danish missionaries laid the

foundation for the later work of the EECMY in the southwestern part of the country, a predominantly Muslim area.

The coming of the American Lutheran Mission (ALM) to Ethiopia in 1957 was unique in that the request to evangelize in this ancient land was extended by the Crown Prince of Ethiopia. The ALM started work in the province of Wollo in northern Ethiopia and laid there the foundation for future mission work in the north.

We have seen that the eighteenth-century evangelical revival in Europe and the Second Great Awakening in America resulted in the formation of a number of missionary organizations that were very enthusiastic about reaching unreached people groups with the Gospel. The mission societies that came to Ethiopia, such as CMS, SEM, GHM, AUPM, SIM, SMBW, with the exception of the NLM, DLM, and ALM, all entered Ethiopia before the 1930s. CMS, SEM, and SMBW started their mission work in the northern part of Ethiopia. SEM, GHM, and AUPM started their mission work in the western part of Ethiopia among the Oromo and other peoples. SIM, DLM, and NLM began their mission work among the Sidama, Kambata, Wallayta, Bale, Gamo, and other ethnic groups in the south.

The mission societies eventually established Lutheran congregations in different parts of the country. Following a series of consultations and meetings among the leaders of these congregations, a consensus was reached to form an Ethiopian Lutheran national church body. As a result, a draft constitution was articulated and a general assembly was called for the formation of the new church. Consequently, delegates of the twenty thousand members throughout the nation gathered and approved the draft constitution of a national Lutheran church body known as the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) on January 21, 1959. This was the beginning of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). Now this church body is the fastest growing Lutheran church in the world. The combined membership of its twenty-five synods exceeds 6.35 million souls. Sixty-five percent of the membership is young people.

A Brief History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC)

The history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church dates back to the Book of Acts. It is recorded in the Book of Acts (8:26–40) that the evangelist Philip converted to Christianity a certain eunuch, the treasurer of Queen Candace of Ethiopia. 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. According to the Ethiopian tradition, the treasurer returned home in 34 AD and evangelized his people. He also opened chapels for worship. According to Lule Melaku, the royal treasurer was the first to bring Christianity to Ethiopia.⁵ In the fourth century, Rufinus⁶ wrote the romantic story about how Christianity was brought to Axum by

Frumentius and Aedesius. There is good reason to assume that the story of Frumentius and Aedesius is authentic. It is supported by archeological evidence, which seems to show that the young king at the time was Ezana, the son of Ella Amida, a person who started out as a pagan ruler but in his later years had the cross stamped on the coins of his realm. The king died young, leaving behind his wife and his sons Ezana and Saizana to rule his kingdom. Although they were heirs to the throne, Ezana and Saizana were too young to succeed their father. Consequently, their mother, the queen, begged Frumentius and Aedesius to remain in Ethiopia to help her administer the kingdom until her sons reached maturity and were able to rule.

Frumentius and Aedesius accepted the queen's invitation and stayed in Axum, where they faithfully carried out their commission. According to Sergew, in addition to helping govern the country, Frumentius and Aedesius brought up the children and taught them in the Christian faith. The missionaries built a place of prayer for the princes, where the children were taught to sing psalms and hymns.⁷ Later, the same source tells us that the names of the two brothers were Atsbeha (Ezana) and Abraha (Saezana). (*Atsbeha* means "he brought the dawn"; *Abraha* means "he illuminated."). Atsbeha and Abraha were converted to Christianity in 330 AD.

The so-called Nine Saints play a prominent role in Ethiopian history. Their coming must be put somewhere about the end of the fifth century (479 AD). They seem to have been learned monks who migrated from different places in the Roman Empire. At least some of them were Syriac or Aramaic speakers.⁸ The mission of these saints was intended to accomplish two main objectives: to consolidate the moral life among the Christians and to convert and baptize the non-Christians of the country. The first objective was achieved during their stay at Axum, and the second was fulfilled when they left Axum and moved to the countryside. Their work was the starting point of expansion of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

The Charismatic Movement in the Ethiopian Lutheran Church (EECMY)

In this article, I would also like to discuss some ideas that deal primarily with Baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and miraculous healing, since these phenomena have played an important part in the growth of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.

The mission statement of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus stresses the connecting of people to Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel so that the church becomes an embodiment of God's love in holistic service to the world, planting congregations, empowering ministers, nurturing believers, and making disciples in Ethiopia. This mission statement exists to proclaim, to teach, and to empower the members of the church. Various evangelistic and church growth

efforts throughout the EECMY in recent years have given attention to the place of “spiritual gifts” in the life and growth of the church and have sought to help people identify and use such gifts.

In order to accomplish her mission, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus employs a decentralized structure, both on the national and the grass roots level. Church government in the EECMY is structured on four administrative levels: local congregations, parishes, synods, and the national church. There is a decision-making body at each of these four levels of church government. The highest decision-making bodies at the national level are the general assembly, the council, the executive board, and the management committee. The decision-making bodies of the synods are the convention, the council, the executive board, and the management committee. The decision-making bodies of the parishes are the parish convention and the parish executive board. At the congregation level, the decision-making bodies are the congregational convention and congregational elders and lay leaders.

Even though the church has such a strong institutional structure, the influence of the charismatic movement upon the members of the EECMY has not been hindered. This movement has rather helped the church to grow in faith and to fulfill the Lord’s mission. “The Charismatic movement is a constant reminder that God is not dead, nor he is nonexistent. This movement has done an enormous amount to kindle and rekindle faith in the living God who delights to answer prayers, to build his people into one, and to equip them with his gifts.”⁹

By the help of Holy Spirit, Ethiopians have been the pioneers of the planting of new churches in Ethiopia. “Indigenous evangelists were also prominent in bringing about church growth. Commissioned and sent out they preached, taught and organized carrying out their threefold function as missionaries, catechists and teachers.”¹⁰

One of the significant developments in Ethiopian church life during the past decades has been the rapid spread of the charismatic movement within the church. In the early 1900s, experiences and practices usually associated only with Pentecostal denominations began to manifest themselves with increasing frequency in the EECMY. By the mid-twentieth century, it was clear that this movement had also spread to some pastors and congregations of EECMY. “If the Charismatic movement can, in the providence of God, impress on the institutional captivity of the church the truth that every member is called to serve, that leadership exists to equip the saints for their God given work of service.”¹¹

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Mission

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He is God. The activity of the Holy Spirit in mission is too important to be unnoticed. “All scriptures are inspired by God and are useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and

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giving instruction for right living” (1 Tim 3:16). The Spirit through His Word teaches the truth. For example, He teaches through the Word that Jesus alone saves from hell. He also teaches that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. The Holy Spirit through His Word rebukes error. One error, for example, is that there are other ways to salvation for those who haven’t heard of our Savior. The Holy Spirit confers right teaching through the Word. That Word declares that Jesus gives salvation to those who come to Him.

The Holy Spirit through His Word corrects faults. One fault, for example, is that of a missionary dominating the young church he has come to serve, or using the Gospel message to make gain—psychological, if not financial. The Holy Spirit brings people to the incomparable understanding that everything that goes against the Word is incorrect. He corrects such faults. The Holy Spirit through His Word gives instruction for right living. Love, for example, should be so pervasive, so visible, that people will know whose disciples we are. The giving of the Word is the first activity through which the Holy Spirit empowers mission.

The gift of the Holy Spirit helps the Ethiopian church to do its mission. But this has been a challenge for a conservative institutional church. “The movement of the Spirit always poses a challenge to the conservatism of the institution. Somehow the Church of Christ must embody both charisma and order. Movements of renewal movement will remain a lasting challenge to those who exalt institution over life.”¹²

The Holy Spirit Helps the Church to Do God’s Mission

Christ said, “I will build my church” (Mt 16:18), and the Book of Acts is devoted to describing how He did it. In Acts, we see the Holy Spirit empowering people to start local congregations. Jesus said His Church would be unshakable—the powers of hell can’t overcome it, or even withstand its onslaught. Since it is built by the power of the Holy Spirit, other powers never defeat it. Throughout the Book of Acts, it was the Spirit who took the initiative. For example, it was in a prayer meeting that He called the leaders of the church at Antioch to start an intentional worldwide missionary movement (Acts 13:3–5). When Paul and his missionary team miscued on God’s strategy, it was the Holy Spirit who stopped them dead in their tracks and redirected them, not once, but twice (Acts 16:6–10). The Holy Spirit instructs and guides people for mission work. I believe it is the work of Holy Spirit that is responsible for the remarkable growth and maturity of EECMY during the past years since January 1959.

The Holy Spirit Energizes the Messenger

The Holy Spirit alone can empower believers for supernatural living and supernatural ministry. We call this work the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23) and gifts of the Spirit (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12–14; Eph 4:1–11). The Holy Spirit is the only one

able to work unity among strong-minded pioneers, among people of diverse cultures, and among egocentric, fallen humans. He is the only one who can take individuals bent on securing their own lives and make them willing to throw all away for the sake of Gospel. Such is the evidence of the Spirit at work. The Holy Spirit alone can empower people for a missionary vocation. If a person doesn't have the supernatural gift of evangelism, how can he even begin to carry out the apostolic task, planting the Church of Christ in places where it is not? The Holy Spirit is central for missionary life and service. It is He who energizes the evangelists. A few decades ago, the charismatic movement in Ethiopia was the agent of dissention within the church. But now, its concern is for evangelism. The members of the church have come to understand that gifts are not given for self-fulfillment, but for service of God and building of His Church. Now the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is concerned about evangelism and mission work outside the country.

The Holy Spirit gives power to His people so that they perform miracles, such as healing and the casting out of demons. Many who have witnessed such miraculous works of God's Spirit have been transformed from hopeless men and women of this world into children of God. As children of God, many have found great happiness in discovering opportunities to serve God publicly. "Mercifully, I find that many who have come to faith and subsequently to baptism and confirmation, take the opportunity to give a public testimony and to explain the difference the Spirit is making in their lives. Many who have become alive in the Spirit, do not seek to be rebaptised but rather to serve Christ and witness to his power to transform lives."¹³

Christ sent the Holy Spirit expressly to "convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (Jn 16:8). This work of the Spirit is directly tied in with His original work of Creation—creating humankind in the image of God. By making us God-compatible, the Spirit gives us the capacity to belong to God in an intimate, loving relationship. But, by violating that relationship, we humans have been alienated from the Lord, and the divine image we have received has been made dysfunctional. Yet, it is that basic compatibility, implanted in us by the Spirit, that makes possible His communication with us, convicting of sin and need for repentance.

The Holy Spirit needs to transform the individual's core nature so that the activities of the Holy Spirit have meaning in his life (Jn 3:5–8; Ti 3:5). God only is the final judge of who has been regenerated. He wants His people to be interim fruit inspectors, to discern and lead people God-ward.

The Church and Mission

In the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church is called to proclaim faithfully the whole teaching of Christ and to share the Good News of the kingdom—that is, the totality of apostolic faith, life, and witness—with everyone throughout the entire

world. Thus, the Church seeks faithfully to proclaim and live the love of God for all, and to fulfill Christ's mission for the salvation and transformation of the world, to the glory of God.

God restores and enriches communion with humanity, granting eternal life in God's Triune Being. Through redeemed humanity, the whole world is meant to be drawn to the goal of restoration and salvation. This divine plan reaches its fulfillment in the new heaven and the new earth in God's Holy Kingdom. "Healings, exorcisms, tongues, prophecy are merely the spectacular tip of the iceberg, the heart of which is a living, loving, believing Christian fellowship."¹⁴

The community of Jesus Christ exists first and supremely for God. This means God is a relational God who creates relationship with His people, and His people have full authority to communicate with Him. The community of Jesus Christ is that of human creatures whose existence has meaning and purpose because of the opportunities for service they have been given as His disciples. His disciples do not live for themselves, but for the world and all humankind. God calls, gathers, and up builds His community; He rules and is Lord and shepherd.

God has given Himself to and for the world to reconcile it to Him. Supremely and truly, God in Christ has become a human being. He lived among His people as a real flesh and blood human being. It is this incarnate Lord who decides the meaning, mission, and purpose of the community that calls itself by His name. God acts and speaks in Jesus Christ through whom His own true divinity is expressed precisely in His true humanity. By living in and with His people, Jesus transforms the lives of His people.

The true community of Jesus Christ is the community that God has sent out into the world. He Himself is the foundation of that community. How could a church exist for the world and not yet be of the world? Christ's Church exists for others. It is not "of the world," even though it is "in the world" (Jn 17:11), even as He who sends it forth with plenary divine power is not of the world (Jn 17:16). Nor is the power that sustains the community in its mission of the world. Through the members of the Body of Christ living in the people of this world, the Spirit brings a tremendous change in the lives of many. God has placed His people in the midst of people of many different cultures and languages in order to bring His life to those whose lives have been ruined by all kinds of distress and suffering.

The Spirit-filled Church is Missional Church

It is the Holy Spirit who convicts sinners of their sin and guilt, opens their eyes to see Christ, draws them to Him, enables them to repent and believe, and implants life in their dead souls. Before Christ sent the Church into the world, He sent the Holy Spirit to the Church.

In the Upper Room, Jesus emphasized that the distinctive work of the Holy Spirit, whom the Father was sending to make the Son known. The Spirit, above all else, would delight in glorifying and making manifest the Son (Jn 16:14). In the spread of the Gospel throughout the world, the Holy Spirit would be the chief witness. “He will bear witness to me.” Only after saying this, did Jesus add to His apostles, “and you also are witnesses” (Jn 15:26–27).

The church that carries out the mission work in this world must be a missional church, a church that goes or moves to reach unreached people and areas.

1. The missional church proclaims the Gospel. The story of God’s salvation is faithfully repeated and preached in a multitude of different ways. This task is the task of the church. The members of the church must return to the Bible and to find nourishment in God’s Word for their lives as God’s children.
2. The missional church is a community in which all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus. Since all church members are disciples by definition, growth in discipleship is expected of all the people of God. All must experience what it means to be a disciple of the Lord. The public worship in the church brings the members into total expectant dependence on the Holy Spirit.
3. The Bible is normative in the church’s life. The members of the church meet together to read the Bible together in order to learn what they can learn nowhere else—God’s good and gracious intent for all creation, the mystery of salvation, and the identity and purpose of their life together. A participatory style of public worship of praise and prayer are very important in the life of the church.
4. The church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord. In its corporate life and public witness, the church is consciously seeking to conform its life to the Lord instead of to the conflicting demands and lifestyles of the surrounding cultures. It is very significant to use spiritual gifts for ministry in the church by every member.
5. The church seeks to discern God’s specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members. A communal lifestyle is very important for the ministry. The church has made “mission” its priority and in overt and communal ways seeks to be and do “what God is calling us to know, be, and do.”
6. A missional community is characterized by how Christians behave toward one another. Acts of self-sacrifice on behalf of one another, both in the church and in the local community, are characteristics of a missional church. An active commitment by the members of the church to reach out to

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the needy in evangelism and service is very important for the growth of the church.

7. It is a community that practices reconciliation. The church community is moving beyond homogeneity toward a more heterogeneous community in its racial, ethnic, age, gender, and socioeconomic makeup.
8. People within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love. Substantial time is spent with one another for the purpose of watching over one another in love.
9. The church practices hospitality; welcoming the stranger into the midst of the community plays a central role in the church's mission.
10. Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future. There is a significant and meaningful engagement in communal worship of God, reflecting appropriately and addressing the culture of those who worship together.
11. The community has a vital public witness. The church makes an observable impact that contributes to the transformation of life, society, and human relationships.
12. There is recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God. There is a widely held perception that this church is going somewhere—and that "somewhere" is a more faithfully lived life in the reign of God. This means the church is still waiting for the "not yet" kingdom of God.

The Holy Spirit Empowers the Church for Mission

The Holy Spirit empowers the church to resist misusing power. This is a foundational aspect of reconciliation: restoring the relationship between God and human beings. In the church, every baptized believer is endowed with a special gift for mission, for mutual up-building and encouragement. Whether they be male or female, lay or clergy, young or old, all their gifts are to be developed, appreciated, and availed.

God's empowerment extends also to society at large through the mission activities of the church as one of God's empowering instruments in the world. Through its service and diaconal ministries, the church provides help for the immediate needs of people in distress. However, the church is called to go beyond a "hand-out" or charitable ministry to a mission of empowerment. The church seeks ways to assist those in need, regardless of their origin or creed, to regain their human dignity by asserting control over their own lives.

It has been a great privilege for the pastors and evangelists and other church workers to be allowed to work with God in this time. The *qalichas*, which in the Sidama language are people who are ritual experts and spirit cult specialists, had tremendous power over the people in many of the areas where the Evangelical revival was well received. Words such as freedom, peace, and safety were new and beautiful and have helped many people come to faith. It can also be underlined that the liberating power of the Gospel gives people a new sense of self-respect. Many of the Evangelical Christians were landless peasants, more or less at the mercy of the landowners. "If the son makes you free, then you will be really free." The Evangelical movement within the church has created a great need for instruction, counseling, and even administration. *Sheetane*, a spirit of possession or an evil spirit in the Christian understanding, had never been for the people a lord they gladly served. The common people felt exploited by the traditional religion and the economic pressure it exerted upon them. They, therefore, received the Gospel or the message of Jesus Christ, who was stronger than Satan, with joy. The strong desire to be delivered from the yoke and chains of Satan prepared the people for the news of Jesus Christ. The acceptance of Christ also made the economic burdens on the family lighter. Through the power of Jesus Christ, many Christians have been delivered from both the oppression of Satan and of the economic burden of the traditional religion.

Is the Charismatic Movement a challenge?

The charismatic movement is a challenge for Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). One of the problems is the tension and division among the believers themselves. The charismatic movement in an Ethiopian context presents many challenges. One of the problems is the idea that God is still revealing new truths beyond those revealed to us in Scripture. For example, many believers in the church expect messages and new revelations to come from self-proclaimed prophets. Another problem is that the charismatic movement has put a gap between common believers and the extreme charismatics, who claim to have moved to a higher level of spirituality. This leads people to derogate reasons and elevate feelings. Another challenge is that, in our church, many believers repeat over and over again such words as "Hallelujah" and "Amen" without understanding their meaning.

Problems have arisen between the so-called "Spirit-filled believers" and "non-filled believers." Extreme charismatics tend to criticize their leaders and fellow members. Some leaders are said to be "dry ones" and in need of being filled with the Holy Spirit. For that reason, many believers are filled with doubt concerning their salvation and are unable to witness about Jesus Christ. According to the charismatic movement, spiritual dryness is the absence of manifesting outward emotions such as shouting, jumping, roaring, shaking, and many other actions. Charismatics see believing in Jesus Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit as different. In this

view, they go beyond Scripture. If there are tensions and divisions, we can easily understand that they have an effect on church growth. These are the challenges of the charismatic movement in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY).

How Is the Lutheran Church in Ethiopia (EECMY) Handling the Charismatic Movement and Its Challenge?

1. The church leaders, pastors, evangelists, and lay congregation elders are exhorted to prayerfully study the Word of God and its exposition in the Lutheran Confessions and to carefully govern the use of spiritual gifts—taking care to correct any abuse of any spiritual gift in the life of the church in accordance with biblical teaching.
2. Even though the Ethiopian Christians have been delivered from the oppression of Satan and their economic burdens through the power of Jesus Christ, the church believes and teaches that a person is saved by faith alone. It is through faith in Jesus Christ that people are saved, and not through the spiritual gifts they may have received.
3. As we recognize, in certain areas of the church, tensions and even divisions due to the charismatic movement, the church leaders should warn gently and encourage one another with love and patience. And those Christians who claim that they received a charismatic experience should evaluate their gifts, not by personal feelings and emotions but in the light of the Word of God.
4. As we receive the gifts of Holy Spirit and exercise them in the church, we have to be aware that spiritual pride or undisciplined enthusiasm may cause serious offense to the Body of Christ. Thus, the members must pray and work to edify the church and not to be cause for division of the congregations.
5. It is very important to devote greater attention to the work of the Holy Spirit, who is responsible for the rapid and wide spread growth of the church today. Since the Spirit comes to the church in Word and Sacrament, the church must use the Word and Sacraments at every level of its ministry so that the church members may have a renewed sense of joy, peace, and power that God has promised.
6. The members of the church should admonish and encourage one another with love and patience. The wonderful gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the Bible are also being given to God's people today. However, God's people must seek them according to the sovereign will of God.

7. The church should accept those members who claim the Baptism in the Holy Spirit as Lutheran (EECMY) members and teach them the Word of God and instruct them how they should use their experience and their gifts in a harmonious, edifying manner in their local congregations.

The Benefits of the Charismatic Movement in EECMY and Its Role in Growth of the Church

The charismatic movement is playing a significant role in the growth of EECMY. The important aspects in the charismatic movement influencing church growth are love and zeal for others, prayer, Christian living in harmony with others, relevant and good teaching, voluntary ministers, and the place and role of the Bible in healing and exorcism. This is the positive side of charismatic movement for church growth. However, the church can grow without the charismatic movement. Before the charismatic movement became influential in the EECMY, the church was growing both inwardly (spiritually) and outwardly. Consequently, this tells us that we need to focus on various aspects, positive as well as negative, of the charismatic movement for understanding its effects on church growth. I hope the church at large might learn from the EECMY that we pastorally handle the charismatic movement within the church to use it for mission and evangelistic outreach for church growth for the glory of God.

Summary

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is the largest Lutheran church in Africa. Its membership is more than 6.35 million. It was established as a national church on January 1959. At that time, there were only twenty thousand members, and it is still a fast growing church. One of the important developments in the church life during the past decades has been the rapid spread of the charismatic movement within the church. In 1963, experiences and practices usually associated only with the charismatic movement were occurring with increasing frequency, also in the EECMY. By 1975, it was apparent that this movement had also spread to some pastors, evangelists, and elders in the congregations of EECMY.

The author is the president of Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus South Central Ethiopia Synod (EECMY/SCES), which has 1,344 congregations and about five hundred thousand members. Of that number, 65% are youth and 52% are women, the majority of whom are experiencing the so-called “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” Because some of the basic beliefs of this movement resemble those of Pentecostal churches, in the South Central Ethiopia Synod the charismatic movement is referred to as neo-Pentecostalism. However, the movement gradually and increasingly has come to be known as “charismatic”—a word meaning the gift of God’s love. In the word “charismatic,” Ethiopian Christians have found a term that is

both biblical and popular, without bearing the stigma that has often in the past attached itself to the emotionalism of Pentecostalism. That said, the charismatic remains an important ministry challenge.

Endnotes

¹ Gustav Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: Origins of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Stockholm: Epsforlaget, 1978), 45.

² *Ibid.*, 45.

³ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵ Lule Melaku, *History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church: Part I* (Addis Ababa: Tsedenia Publishers, 2008), 42.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 45–47.

⁷ Sergew Habte Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972), 99.

⁸ M. Geddes, *The Church History of Ethiopia*, (London, 1696), 2 quoted in teaching material of Mekane Yesus Seminary College of Distance Education—Ethiopian Church History (EOC & EECMY) (Addis Ababa: Jan. 2014), 7.

⁹ Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 295.

¹⁰ Johnny Bakke, *Christian Ministry Patterns and Functions within EECMY* (Uppsala: Solum Forlag, 1987), 195.

¹¹ Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 297.

¹² *Ibid.*, 287.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.