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Review

Ethnic Diversity, National Unity: Moral Pedagogies of Togetherness for Ethiopians:

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Review by Nathaniel Veltman¹

Unity in the midst of diversity is a social and religious challenge around the world. In some contexts, this challenge is often magnified and exacerbated by political, economic and even religious realities. As a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic country, Ethiopia is no exception. Addressing the challenges of diversity and unity in Ethiopia is the aim of Theodros Teklu's recent edited volume, *Ethnic Diversity, National Unity*, with the goal of equipping leaders in both the church and society in the pursuit of unity across ethnic boundaries.

Reflective of the diverse context in which it is written, *Ethnic Diversity, National Unity* is a multi-disciplinary project aimed at producing a diverse foundation on which unity can be established and strengthened. The overarching goal of the book therefore is to “generat[e] Christian moral resources which can respond to [hostilities and humanitarian crises] and other similar situations by drawing on a wide range of disciplines. This multidisciplinary engagement is meant to buttress the task of interpreting ethnic diversity and ethnic relations within both contemporary and historical Ethiopia” To this end, the authors draw from historical, legal and political perspectives to provide a broad survey of the Ethiopian context and establish the diverse nature of Ethiopia's ethno-political environment. This is followed by exegetical and theological accounts of ethnic and personal identity in relationship to diversity, complemented by examples of cultural practices demonstrating moral ethics of togetherness. Even those with limited knowledge of Ethiopia or theology are expertly guided through the tumultuous

¹ (PhD Candidate, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Assistant Professor, Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, Ethiopia).

terrain of the contested spaces of nationality and ethnicity. Altogether, the volume presents various building blocks for the foundation of national unity among ethnic diversity in Ethiopia.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I provides a survey of the contours and nuances of the Ethiopian context. Here, Teklu highlights both historical and current dynamics of ethnic violence and the politics of “the hatred of an enemy”, as conceptualized by Carl Schmitt and Achille Mbembe, that has intensified ethnic tensions in Ethiopia. As a way forward, Teklu highlights essential considerations for successful cohabitation that emphasize the transformation and reform of both political and social institutions. Alongside this top-down approach is a recognition of the importance of bottom-up transformation, in which religious institutions play a vital role. The following chapters address various “moral-reserves” from which such religious institutions can encourage this bottom-up transformation.

Part II revolves around the historical, legal and contemporary political environments of Ethiopia. Afework Hailu considers the challenges of writing Ethiopian history, highlighting methodological deficiencies in historical accounts of Ethiopia that accentuate ethno- and Ethio-nationalist biases. The result is a need for “a balanced approach in handling historical narratives” of Ethiopia and its people. Fasil Nahum broadens historical considerations of Ethiopian past towards the present with insights from a legal perspective. Here, too, the dynamics of ethnicity and diversity are at play within Ethiopia’s constitution and ethnic-based federalism. Nahum ultimately calls for a balance between justice (legal) and reconciliation (extra-legal) and acknowledges the need for greater enforcement of justice in the current Ethiopian context to restore this balance after embracing an approach of reconciliation. These historical and legal perspectives are complemented by Sara Abdella Kedir’s exposition of the interplay between “the practices of use of digital media, the practices of internet governance and those of the politics of ethnic identity” (94). Rather than providing an answer to the question of how Ethiopians can live together while embracing diverse ethnic loyalties, Kedir argues that any path forward must take seriously the digital spaces that Ethiopians occupy and attend to the moral signposts that illuminate these digital spaces.

Employing theological and biblical exegesis, Part III elucidates scriptural resources for unity and diversity. Daniel Assefa Kassaye (Abba) examines the importance of narratives in both the Old and New Testaments, demonstrating their use and relevance to understanding identity in relation to diversity and unity. He concludes that stillness and silence are necessary prerequisites for a deeper understanding of identity, unity and diversity. This analysis is accompanied by an ethnic reading of Paul and his epistle to the Galatians. Nebeyou Alemu articulates a “Christian” identity in Galatians and reads such through the lens of contemporary Ethiopian context, suggesting that Galatians can be read both spiritual (as it has traditionally been approached) and socially. Such a reading embraces the concrete realities of both the reader and the biblical context, producing moral resources for daily life in the midst of ethnic diversity and challenges to unity.

Finally, Part IV examines theological and cultural resources for togetherness through the lens of self and the other. Youdit Tariku Feyessa articulates “*A Perichoretic Imagination of Moral Responsibility*” by examining the “Ethnic Other” as the “Neighbor”. Such an imagination joins together justice and love to serve as the well-spring of embracing the ethnic other and supplies “a model of repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and directing to a new beginning of hope for peaceful co-existence” (154). In the realm of politics, Samson Taddelle Demo engages Hans Urs van Balthasar’s concept of *kenosis* to explicate the morality of *homo kenosus* as embodied in Christ. Here, too, Ethiopians (and all readers) are presented with a moral ethic that provides a challenge for alternative living and the tools for embracing such lifestyle. Opportunities abound for cultural practices to embody a moral ethic that bridges the chasm of ethnic division, and Setargew Kenaw explicates the rite of “footwashing” as such “as a symbol of epistemic and moral humility” (197). With such an example, readers are given insights into the ways that cultural practices, especially those embraced by religious-based educational institutions, can serve a medium through which Ethiopians can demonstrate love for one’s neighbor across ethnic lines. Nishan Cheru Degaga draws all of this together a final chapter that expounds on the Christian moral responsibility to embrace the ethnic other. Through an examination of Miroslav Volf’s *Exclusion & Embrace* and Emmanuel Katongole’s *Mirror to the Church*, readers are afforded insights into the moral resources for a Christian responsibility of embracing the ethnic other.

The complex challenges of ethnic diversity and unity in Ethiopia presents multiple moral dilemmas for political leaders and citizens alike, both inside and outside the church. Encounters with such dilemmas raises the question of where to turn for resources in which to shape an adequate response. *Ethnic Diversity, National Unity* is an exceptional resource, presenting nuanced biblical, theological, philosophical, and cultural perspectives that can serve as tools for overcoming ethnic hatred and violence. It further opens the door to additional dialogue in the realms of economics and economic development (and potentially others), offering a framework for examining the moral responsibilities that animate such spheres. As such, this book stands as an important contribution to not only understanding the contemporary Ethiopian context, but also for laying the foundations for togetherness of Ethiopians. It may also further serve as a resource for establishing unity in other contexts wherein ethnic division abounds. Political and church leaders, pastors, and lay church members, in Ethiopia and beyond, will all benefit from the biblical, theological, philosophical, and cultural resources offered herein.