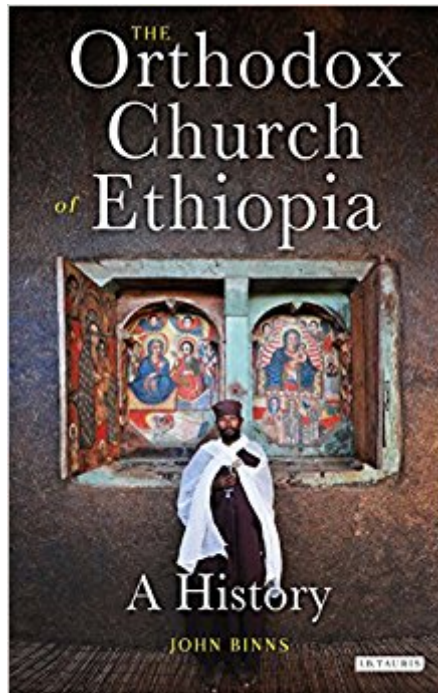




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The Orthodox Church Of Ethiopia: A History



Synopsis

Surrounded by steep escarpments to the north, south, and east, Ethiopia has always been geographically and culturally set apart. It has the longest archaeological record of any country in the world. Indeed, this precipitous mountain land was where the human race began. It is also home to an ancient church with a remarkable legacy. The Ethiopian Church forms the southern branch of historic Christianity. It is the only pre-colonial church in sub-Saharan Africa, originating in one of the earliest Christian kingdoms-with its king Ezana (supposedly descended from the biblical Solomon) converting around 340 CE. Since then it has maintained its long Christian witness in a region dominated by Islam; today it has a membership of around forty million and is rapidly growing. Yet, despite its importance, there has been no comprehensive study available in English of its theology and history. This is a large gap which this authoritative and engagingly written book seeks to fill. The Church of Ethiopia (or formally, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church) has a recognized place in worldwide Christianity as one of five non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches. As Dr. Binns shows, it has developed a distinctive approach which makes it different from all other churches. His book explains why this happened and how these special features have shaped the life of the Christian people of Ethiopia. He discusses the famous rock-hewn churches; the Ark of the Covenant (claimed by the Church and housed in Aksum); the medieval monastic tradition; relations with the Coptic Church; co-existence with Islam; missionary activity; and the Church's venerable oral traditions, especially the discipline of qene-a kind of theological reflection couched in a unique style of improvised allegorical poetry. There is also a sustained exploration of how the Church has been forced to re-think its identity and mission as a result of political changes and upheaval following the overthrow of Haile Selassie (who ruled as Regent, 1916-1930, and then as Emperor, 1930-74) and beyond.

Book Information

Hardcover: 320 pages

Publisher: I.B.Tauris (January 30, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1784536954

ISBN-13: 978-1784536954

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1 x 8.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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Best Sellers Rank: #1,028,770 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #68 in Books > History > Africa > Ethiopia #283 in Books > History > Africa > East Africa #6666 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Churches & Church Leadership > Church History

Customer Reviews

'John Binns has a long and deep acquaintance with the Ethiopian church - its liturgy, prayer, ancient ascetic practice and unique art and architecture. In this lush and authoritative book he leads the reader on a journey into the spiritual world of those he has so often visited, and does so with a striking sensitivity to their theological world and fractured political milieu. Much more than a travel book, this volume is more truly a whole spiritual education.' - Sarah Coakley, Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity, University of Cambridge, 'This remarkable book helps its readers not only to learn about the Ethiopian Orthodox Church - its history, theology and spirituality - but also to live its amazing journey over the centuries. John Binns has poured all his experience and deep love of the church into his volume, which is unique in its breadth, scope and sympathy. I cannot recommend it highly enough.' - Mounseer Hanna Anis, Archbishop of the Episcopal/Anglican Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa; Primate of the Episcopal/Anglican Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East

John Binns is a Visiting Professor of Eastern Orthodox Studies in the University of Cambridge and Vicar of Great St. Mary's, Cambridge. He serves also as Chairperson of the charity Partners for Change Ethiopia. His previous publications are *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches* (2002) and *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314-631* (1994).

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