Festo Mkenda, SJ

A Mission for Everyone. A Story of the Jesuits in Eastern Africa (1555–2012),

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This volume is a summary of the history of the Jesuits in Eastern Africa, in particular Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Sudan (these countries comprise the modern Jesuit province of Eastern Africa, therefore the book does not include the history of the Jesuits in Mozambique). The first part of the book considers the history of the Jesuit mission in Ethiopia during the second half of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth. The second examines the development of Jesuit work in Eastern Africa from 1945 to the present.

Up to the suppression of the order in 1773, the Jesuit presence in Eastern Africa was limited to certain areas of present-day Ethiopia. Ignatius of Loyola exchanged letters with the emperor of Ethiopia and dreamed of one day going to the country to reconcile the Ethiopian Orthodox Church with the Catholic Church. However, what Ignatius conceived as a mission of reconciliation, soon became a troublesome relationship between Jesuit missionaries and the local clergy and sectors of the Ethiopian nobility. The Jesuits intended to abolish local practices such as circumcision and the observance of the Sabbath, especially after Catholicism became the state religion in 1625 and the Catholic patriarch re-ordained the clergy and re-baptized the faithful. The early chapters of the book offer a synthesis of the main events of this period. The central narrative and the fundamental reasons for the failure of the Jesuit mission in 1632, as presented by Mkenda, coincide with those in the work of Philip Caraman, who in *The Lost Empire* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1985) postulated a dichotomy between the sensitive tact and moderate character of Pedro Páez and the harshness and arrogance of Patriarch Afonso Mendes, who generated antagonism with the clergy and the Ethiopian faithful. This view was questioned in work by Girma Beshah and Merid Wolde Aregay in their *The Question of the Union of the Churches in Luso-Ethiopian Relations (1500–1632)* (Junta de Investigações do Ultramar and Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1964), a volume to which the author does not make reference, and in recent years it has been reconsidered by other researchers: How much of the failure of Catholicism can be attributed to the patriarch's lack of flexibility? How much was Mendes himself a victim of post-Tridentine conceptions of his age and to what degree did he have to submit to the demands of the Propaganda Fide which held ultimate responsibility for the Eastern missions after 1622? All of these questions await further research. For a survey of

existing work see Leonardo Cohen and Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, "The Jesuit Mission in Ethiopia: An Analytical Bibliography," *Aethiopica* 9 (2006), 190–212.

The second part of the book deals with a broader area. In response to an imperial invitation, Canadian Jesuits found themselves immersed in educational work in Ethiopia and contributing to the foundation of what would become the University of Addis Ababa. However, soon after the success of independence movements that shook Africa in the 1960s, the Jesuit presence extended to other regions. The Second Vatican Council opened up new ecclesiastical opportunities for Jesuit missions in Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, and Sudan. In contrast to the earlier period in which the character of the mission was predominantly Iberian, missionaries now hailed from countries such as Ireland, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States as well as Ceylon, India, Germany, Chile, Sri Lanka, and Malta. Thus, for the reconstruction of this period it is necessary to consider diverse sources and alternative narratives. Chapters six and seven of the book cover this history up to the creation of the Eastern Jesuit province in 1976 and its subsequent development during the last twenty-five years when Jesuit work diversified. In Ethiopia, missions focused on secondary and higher education; in Tanzania they worked in parishes and schools; in Sudan they were dedicated to the education of the local clergy; in Uganda to schools and seminaries and parishes, and in Kenya to the ministry around Nairobi. Standing out in this period is the positive disposition of the church, and especially of the general of the order, Pedro Arrupe, regarding the processes of inculturation in regions of Africa and Latin America. Mkenda describes how recent generations of Jesuits in Eastern Africa have been attentive to the needs of Africa in order to generate adequate structures, recognizing, in the words of Arrupe, that inculturation is "one of the best services that the Society can render in the cause of evangelization" (234).

Mkenda's work is complex and praiseworthy, not least in its use of sources: as he explains, important documentation and information can be found in the possession of individuals or archives in countries such as India, the United States, and Canada; in the private archives of the Eastern Africa province in Nairobi; in the parish of Niakahoja in Mwanza, Tanzania; and in interviews with Jesuits who worked in Eastern Africa since 1970.

With his work Mkenda contributes a comprehensive overview of the development of Jesuit missions in the region over the last 450 years. Parts of this history have already been told, others are new and innovative. The book, published in 2013 on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Jesuit province in Eastern Africa, represents an invitation to reconsider certain aspects of

the history of the mission in this region of the world and to assess the global role of the Society of Jesus in the development of Catholicism in Eastern Africa.

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