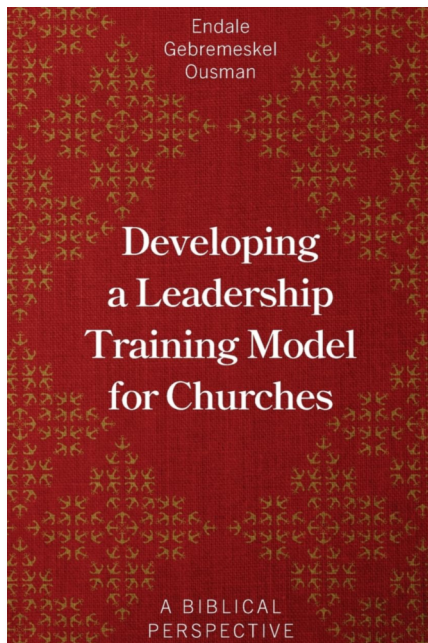


REVIEW: *Developing a Leadership Training Model for Churches* by Endale Gebremeskel Ousman

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Ousman, Endale Gebremeskel, *Developing a Leadership Training Model for Churches*. Langham Academic, 2024. Pp 178, ISBN: 978-1786410016 \$22.99 paperback.



Endale Gebremeskel Ousman's *Developing a Leadership Training Model for Churches* explores the need for an alternative approach to leadership development in Ethiopia, one that differs from traditional theological education. He addresses the shortcomings of current models that often neglect local context, fall short in spiritual formation, and fail to meet the language needs of learners. His proposed model is biblically grounded, culturally contextualized, and community owned.

I deeply appreciate the author's emphasis on the Holy Spirit, the empowerment of women and children, and his commitment to dismantling ethnocentrism. His desire to preserve cultural values while also challenging perspectives that conflict with Scripture is especially commendable. Yet his most striking contribution is in his critique of the divide between the seminary and the church. As he writes, "the findings of this research are warnings of how the Western model of training has caused a divorce between church and theological training" (121). This is a particularly insightful observation.

Although his focus is on Ethiopia, the challenge he names is also relevant to others shaped by Western education, including within the West itself. It is past time to revisit the purpose of theological education and realign it with the needs of the church. This is a call to reimagine how church leaders are formed, not only where Western models have failed to serve local communities, but even in the West, where this divide hinders the mission of both church and seminary.

The author did not include the word “*Ethiopia*” in his title, and for that I’m grateful. Too often, Western readers overlook valuable works by assuming that a focus on another context—especially one outside the U.S.—has little relevance for them. This book would be especially helpful for seminary professors and administrators, leaders of international Christian organizations, and denominational or network pastors reflecting on leadership development. The literature review in Chapter 2 would also benefit graduate students grappling with the importance of contextualization.

There is one point that may simply require further explanation. The author helpfully emphasizes a biblical theological foundation and explores Jesus as an example. However, near the end of the book, he states, “Biblical training is authoritative whereas academic training is opinion oriented. Biblical training says, ‘The Bible says...’ whereas academic training says, ‘I think...’” (114). This kind of dichotomous approach feels somewhat out of step with the rest of his thoughtful and balanced approach to the topic.

While I do not question the authority of Scripture, when it is taught by a fallible human who must make interpretive decisions, biblical training may not always hold a pure advantage over academic training. Perhaps the contrast between ‘the bible says,’ and ‘I think...’ reflects less a statement of truth and more a difference in posture—one of humility that academia often cultivates, as opposed to the tone of certainty that preachers may sometimes adopt.

This small critique does not diminish the overall value of the book. The text powerfully articulates the need for contextualized leadership training in a world that too often attempts to replicate models from one context to another without considering the impact. I remember a time when I served as coordinator of an MA Leadership program. The program director, with great enthusiasm, once shared with me a proposal about partnering with other schools to offer our MA in several different countries. As I looked through the list of locations, one of which was Ethiopia, he was surprised that I did not share his excitement. I was not at all confident that we had done the necessary work to contextualize our program for vastly different places. I now wish I had been able to share the wisdom of this book with him at that time.

One of the great blessings for Christians today is the ability to connect and share ideas with believers around the world. But doing so requires wisdom. Endale Gebremeskel Ousman’s work is a meaningful step in that direction.

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