



Missiology in Africa

Authentically African, Magisterially Missional

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Kwiyani, Harvey, ed. *Africa Bears Witness: Mission Theology and Praxis in the 21st Century*. Nairobi: African Theological Network Press, 2021. Pp. xiii + 218.

Reprint edition: Kwiyani, Harvey, ed. *Africa Bears Witness: Mission Theology and Praxis in the 21st Century*. Foreword by Emma Wild-Wood. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2024. Pp. xix + 220.

Joshua Robert BARRON

ORCID: 0000-0002-9503-6799

ACTEA, Nairobi, Kenya

Joshua.Barron@ACTEAweb.org

The chapters of this ecumenical volume are built around the premise that mission theology must reflect the “polycentric and multidirectional nature of mission in the twenty-first century” (xi). Exploring “mission theology and practice taking place in Africa today” (xii), it makes African theologizing on mission accessible both to those of us who live here and to World Christianity at large. Its contributors represent Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia, as well as the African American Diasporic community. Editor and contributor **Harvey Kwiyani** is a Malawian missiologist and the founder and editor of *Missio Africanus: A Journal of African Missiology*. Because of its importance as a contribution to the literature on African missiology, this book warrants a review essay rather than a short review.

In the eponymous first chapter, **Kwiyani** sets the tone by reviewing how “mission history” or “history of missions” should not be, but too often has been, merely the history of Western missionaries. I will add that the same is true of missiology. He calls us to recognize the importance of African agency in the growth of Christianity on the continent and explores the roles of migration and revivals in African Christianity. For Kwiyani, “the mission of God in Africa must connect with African theology in ways that make it truly African,” “start from the premise the mission belongs to God,” and be freed from attachment to

Joshua Robert Barron

Missiology in Africa: Authentically African, Magisterially Missional
BOOK REVIEW ESSAY: *Africa Bears Witness*, edited by Harvey Kwiyani

empires and colonialism (12–13). He proposes the Malawian concept of *umunthu* (analogous to the more-widely known South African concept of *ubuntu*), or personhood, as a helpful foundation for contextualizing mission theology which allows for a soteriology and missiology which are holistic in scope. His development of an *umunthu* approach to the practice of *Missio Dei* is reminiscent of patristic ideas of *theosis* (θέωσις) and *perichoresis* (περιχώρησις).

J. N. J. Kritzinger of South Africa writes on “**Mission in Prophetic Dialogue: Exploring the ethos of transformative encounters in Africa.**” He defines *dialogue* as “embracing, listening and identifying” and *prophetic* as “communication that unmasks evil while imagining hopeful alternatives” (18). He develops his themes through case studies from Burundi and South Africa. American missiologist Susan Higgins has observed that “all cultures have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Likewise, Kritzinger observes that cultures have both healthy and unhealthy aspects. He then insists that all healthy aspects of a given culture must be mobilized “in the struggle against violence and injustice” (22) if we are to have a hope of transformation. Christian mission cannot be silent in the face of systemic injustice and abuse. The witness-bearing prophetic voice of mission “is inherently communal and public” and “is the courage to call publicly on people to turn away from their self-centred, loveless and violent ways, towards the way of God” (30).

The third chapter, “**Mission as New Catholicity, Afro-Westernization and Globalization,**” is written by Jean Luc Enyegue of Cameroon. Acknowledging that some previous Roman Catholic missionaries were guilty of being more interested in proselytization (in the form of making Africans to be [Roman] Catholic or even simply to make them culturally Spanish or Portuguese) than in the conversionary processes involved in making disciples, he highlights the connection between the westernization of Africans and the Africanization of Christianity (34–37). While decrying the past reification of western culture as inherently “Christian,” he warns the African Church against a pendulum-swing overcorrection into “African cultural essentialism” (35). Proper Africanization is simply “the deepening of the Christian faith in Africa” (37). As I and others have explored elsewhere, Christian conversion offers the opportunity for Africans, within their various particularities, to become more authentically African; there is no need to forsake one’s Africanity to follow Christ. Likewise when African Christians migrate to increasingly post- and non-Christian areas of Europe and North America and take up the task of evangelization, they should recognize that Europeans and Americans can be (or become) authentically Christian *as* Europeans and Americans. African Christians on mission should not repeat the proselytizing mistakes made by many Euro-American missionaries in Africa but should instead “remain mindful of the catholicity of inculturation” (41).

Joshua Robert Barron

Missiology in Africa: Authentically African, Magisterially Missional
BOOK REVIEW ESSAY: *Africa Bears Witness*, edited by Harvey Kwiyani

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu of Ghana writes the fourth chapter, “**In the Power of the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal Theoretical Framework for Missiology in Africa.**” It is impossible to consider African Christianity without reckoning with its pentecostal and charismatic forms, which Asamoah-Gyadu refers to as “pneumatic Christianity.” Within these traditions, mission is understood as “an interventionist strategy of the Holy Spirit in the execution of a Christological mandate in a world that is alienated from a holy God” (44). This type of missiology explicitly both makes room for and expects the supernatural, in a way that is an inherently better fit for African worldviews which are far more holistic than the narrower mapping of Euro-American thinking based in the Enlightenment. For African pneumatic Christianity, the encounter with “the Holy Spirit [is] the dynamic presence of Christ in the church” which should, and does, lead to revival and to spiritual renewal. The movement of pneumatic Christianity in Africa reminds us of “the importance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church today” (57) and thus that our mission is only the mission of God when it is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

J. Frederick Marais of South Africa wrestles with the legacy of bad theology and sinful praxis in the fifth chapter, “**Kenosis as a Missionary Strategy for a church in need of conversion: Re-imagining mission in Post-Apartheid South Africa.**” As an American who has lived in South Africa, I can attest that American Christians who are still living with a pre-desegregation Jim Crow theology could learn much from this chapter. During the apartheid era, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa was in a position of power. Likewise the Church in general used to occupy positions of power throughout Europe as well as in North and South America. Within current political realities, however, this is no longer the case. Marais explores “the possibilities that arise when the kenotic nature of the life of Christ shapes the identity and mission of a church that lost its power” (63). Building on the work of Michael J. Gorman’s *Inhabiting the Cruciform God* (Eerdmans, 2009), Marais applies a “kenotic of status” as a foundation for the DRC to develop a “missional habit” that repents from the injustices of apartheid. In order to participate in God’s mission today, the DRC must “become aware” of its privileged socio-economic status, repudiate “abuse of power”, and engage in “selfless act[s]” (67–69) in a repenting and redemptive manner. Only by transforming from a “community of hierarchy” to a community of “equality and participation” can a church turn away from “a deep[ly] engraved culture to the enslavement of power” and turn towards Christ and to participation in Christ’s mission.

Elias O. Opongo of Kenya writes on “**Catalytic Church Mission and Peacebuilding in Africa: A review of the Church’s Prophetic Role in Socio-Political Change.**” Building on the assertions of Stan Chu Ilo that in order to be transformative, “missional theology in Africa” which emphasizes “reconciliation must be both Trinitarian and Afrocentric” (75), Opongo notes

Joshua Robert Barron

Missiology in Africa: Authentically African, Magisterially Missional
BOOK REVIEW ESSAY: *Africa Bears Witness*, edited by Harvey Kwiyani

that reconciliation and justice are not mutually exclusive. The Church is obliged to work for community reconciliation just as her members have been reconciled to God in Christ, but it is absolutely necessary that all abusers and “perpetuators of violence ... be held accountable” (76). Neither identifying “with any political community” nor “bound to any political system,” the Church should take up a prophetic role. Not only do churches engage in proclamation of the Word and in charitably providing various social services, but they also have a “responsibility to speak up against injustices, oppression and marginalization of people, as well as social, political and economic structures that threaten the wellbeing of human persons” (78). We are not called to be keepers of the *status quo* but to be makers and builders of peace. Opongo argues that the African Church’s peacebuilding is no mere sideline “in her commitment to mission” but is rather a core part of the *missio Dei* and of the Church’s participation in that mission.

Rowanne Sarojini Marie of South Africa contributes chapter 7, “**Mission and Development.**” She argues that “mission and development share,” and have shared from New Testament times, “a symbiotic relationship” (87). This reflects the holistic approaches common both to biblical texts and to African cultures. While “the Christian church has always been involved in the transformation of society, particularly as it relates to the poor and oppressed, as an imperative of its missional responsibility” (92), it is necessary that her ministries move beyond mere relief and welfare to address the underlying issues of justice. The need for welfare and relief have often been created by forms of injustice. The Church must challenge the very causes of oppression and of poverty. Development empowers people and gives them agency to create change. Empowering mission fuels both empowerment and participation, the processes which enable healthy, people-centered forms of development, which are free of dependency and enslavement.

Chapter 8, “**African Charismatic Movements and Urban Missiology,**” is co-written by **Ignatius Wilhelm Ferreira** of South Africa and **Joseph Bosco Bangura** of Sierra Leone. As noted above, African Christianity is increasingly pneumatic in character. Demographically, the African continent is becoming urbanized at an unprecedented rate. This is especially reflected within pneumatic African Christianity. Rapid growth in urban settings has resulted from the robust engagement of pneumatic Christianity with African cultures and from the deliberate “meeting the needs and aspirations of the marginalized” (105). However, many African Charismatics are enamored of centralized and hierarchical leadership structures, which in turn lead metropolitan missions to be centripetal, focused on those of higher economic status (the urban elite) who can support the movements, rather than having a centrifugal commitment to “all segments of society” (111). Likewise urban missiology is limited by the

Joshua Robert Barron

Missiology in Africa: Authentically African, Magisterially Missional
BOOK REVIEW ESSAY: *Africa Bears Witness*, edited by Harvey Kwiyani

excesses of prosperity theology,¹ which can result in a form of Christianity which is ultimately ungrounded from biblical texts.

Chammah J. Kaunda of Zambia provides the ninth chapter, “**Neo-Propheticism and Re-Branding of *Missio Dei* in African Christianity.**” He provides a review and critique of neo-prophetic movements within African Pentecostalism, focusing on two case studies. He notes that their missiology borrows heavily from African worldviews, especially in the ascription to spiritual leaders a mediatorial role between the spirit-world and the physical realm. But the claims of such Christian neo-prophets that their words are “supernatural utterances” effectively disempower ordinary worshippers (123). According to a constructionist missiological turn, “the measure of life-giving participation in the mission of God is whether it promotes abundant life for all, whether it is sustained by just and equitable social actions, and whether it emerges from the margins” (116–117). But the practiced missiology of the neo-prophets fails this test, because instead of participating in God’s mission, they consider themselves to be the very “embodiment of God’s mission” (125). But neo-prophetic movements are successful as movements because they offer answers to the questions that Africans are asking, and do so in traditional terms of African worldview. Kaunda adroitly explains African neo-propheticism, but leaves the reader with more questions than answers about missiologically appropriate responses to these movements.

Peter Maribei and **Kyama Mugambi**, both of Kenya, collaborate in the tenth chapter, “**Contextualised Missions and Theological Education in the Global South: A Case Study from East Africa.**” All too often, formal theological pedagogy in Africa is modeled on methodologies and approaches designed in the West and delivered prepacked to African contexts. It is questionable whether those models are effective even in the West. It is unquestionable that those models often fail in Africa. As a result, sometimes formal theological education fails to be relevant on the ground. This is not the place to discuss the many current positive developments in formal theological education in Africa, nor its remaining challenges. But because of those challenges, a number of congregations, usually megachurches, have launched innovative non-formal models of theological education. Maribei and Mugambi examine one of these models, developed by the Mavuna family of churches in Nairobi. Called the “Transformation Loop”, it seeks for personal transformation of believers as well as institutional and cultural transformation in society.

¹ See my discussion on this in my “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel? An Examination of the Prosperity and Productivity Gospels in African Christianity,” *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 33, no. 1 (2022): 88–103. A revised version of was published as “Is the Prosperity Gospel the Gospel? The Prosperity and Productivity Gospels in African Christianity,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 47, no. 4 (2023): 321–338.

Joshua Robert Barron

Missiology in Africa: Authentically African, Magisterially Missional
BOOK REVIEW ESSAY: *Africa Bears Witness*, edited by Harvey Kwiyani

Learners move from being *complacent* Christians to being *consumers* of Christian content, then become a *connected* member of a Christian community (both at a small group and at a congregational level), mature to a *commitment* to mission and then eventually to a Christian who is “*compelled* to go out to transform society” (131). Mavuno emphasizes that merely knowing a lot about one’s faith isn’t enough, but that one’s commitment to the Christian faith must result in “tangible impact on society” (137). Maribe and Mugambi propose “integrative theological training methods” that combine the best of non-formal and formal theological education to better prepare church leaders for “mission-oriented approaches” (140). Such will necessitate innovative cooperation between theological institutions and churches.

William O. Obaga of Kenya writes about the importance of indigenous forms of music for Christian mission in the next chapter, “**The Pambio in Mission: Meaning and Significance in African Christianity.**” *Pambio* is a kiSwahili word referring to a chorus or refrain of a hymn; it is also the East African regional name of a new genre of Christian music in Africa. These “chorus hymns” involve much repetition, elements of antiphonal call-and-response, and (of course) dancing.² The *pambio* has effectively become a heart-song within African cultures, and is used in secular contexts as well as religious. Because ordinary believers express their theologizing through the *pambio*, that medium has become a powerful “vehicle of communicating the Christian faith in an African context” (145) in ways which make sense within local cosmologies. Because it has proven so adept in inculturating the gospel, theological pedagogy, and “diffusion of the gospel” (154), mission theorists and practitioners should pay serious attention to the *pambio*.

Joseph Ola of Nigeria notes the “disparity between the youthfulness of African Christianity ... and its leadership” (155) and calls for a “**Missiology for a Youthful Continent**” in the twelfth chapter. Instead of generational divides such as I have witnessed in baTswana congregations in South Africa and in Maasai congregations in Kenya, African Christianity needs a cross-generational mutuality (as well as mutuality between the sexes) which “recognises the relevance of both the young and the old” (and of both the female and the male!) “and makes both of them feel welcome” and at home in church (167). When a given denomination or congregation exists merely to meet the needs of one generation (whether older or younger), it has placed itself on a path towards death. But ministry models and missiology which make room for creativity and encourage the participation of all believers across generational lines “will produce an even more vibrant Christianity in Africa with more churches

² In many African cultures, the concepts of “dance” and “sing” are linguistically inseparable.

Joshua Robert Barron

Missiology in Africa: Authentically African, Magisterially Missional
BOOK REVIEW ESSAY: *Africa Bears Witness*, edited by Harvey Kwiyani

looking more like a river that is kept alive by constant movement and energy, rather than an unadventurous and unperturbed lake” (168).

Linda Ochola-Adolwa of Kenya and **Harvey Kwiyani** collaborate on the chapter that is the most difficult to read, but perhaps the most important to read: **“African Women in Mission Challenging Gender-based Violence in East Africa.”** At one and the same time, African women are today responsible for some of the most exciting growth in all of Christian history and are the most affected by abuse and violence on the continent. Ochola-Adolwa and Kwiyani make a cogent case that

An African women’s theology of mission is necessary not only for the African continent but also for the wider context of World Christianity. The world needs to hear of the missional fortitude of the African woman who, against all odds, continues to bear witness of Christ, shining his light and sharing his love. As a block, black women form quite a significant portion of world Christianity. Their theology matters and . . . their missiology should matter as well. . . . A missiology according to African women must exist because, of course, African women have played a key role in the spreading of Christianity not only in the continent but also around the world. (170–171)

African women theologians, such as the members of The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, have “made theology accessible to other African women” (176) in ways that both African men and Western theologians have shown themselves unable to do. Empowering theologizing in turn encourages engagement in mission. This is true not only in times of *shalom* but also in experiences of violence. Theologizing women are equipped, and equip others, to name and unmask “the evils that diminish the lives” of other women (183).

Kimberly Hill, an African American, writes on **“African American Presbyterian Mission Work as an Exercise in Recognizing and Redefining Identities, 1916–1935”** in the penultimate chapter. It is increasingly well-recognized, at least by World Christianity scholars, that African agency was the heavy lifter for the modern growth of Christianity in Africa and that, as Lamin Sanneh puts it, that “colonialism was an obstacle to the growth of Christianity” in Africa (qtd. 184). Some of these Africans were returnees descended from captured and enslaved Africans. Hill examines the work and legacy of two of these, Althea Brown Edmiston and her husband Alonzo Edmiston. They successfully identified with the Kuba people in what was then central Belgian Congo, learning local language and culture and, most importantly, acting as advocates for the local concerns of the Kuba community. En route, their ecclesiology was informed (and formed) by indigenous African polity more than their inherited Presbyterianism. Hill finds their methods mirrored in missional

Joshua Robert Barron

Missiology in Africa: Authentically African, Magisterially Missional
BOOK REVIEW ESSAY: *Africa Bears Witness*, edited by Harvey Kwiyani

activities of African immigrant churches in the West, showcasing the importance of leaders who understand and invest in their neighbors.

Kwiyani returns to conclude the volume with a final chapter, “**African Christians and Missionaries in Europe.**” He starts by examining “the rise of African migration to Europe, and the consequent growing presence of African Christians in Europe and proceeds to focus “on mission and the missional role that African Christians could play in Europe” (196). The *blessed reflex* of future believers from then un-evangelized lands back to Europe and North America to reinvigorate Euro-American Christianity, hoped-for by missionaries and mission proponents in the days of William Carey, is upon us. African Christianity in Europe is growing apace. However, it is almost entirely growing within the communities of African immigrants, remaining “an exclusively African phenomenon” (203). They are tremendously effective at evangelizing other African migrants, but they are not yet reaching out to the native indigenous Europeans. Leaders of these growing African churches are fluent in the “language of mission” (205) but in practice only engage in outreach to other Africans. What is needed is for these African-European Christians to embrace the work of contextualization and to begin to imagine “what cross-cultural mission to Europeans should look like” (204). Only then will they be able to move beyond “homogenous unit missiology” and “to engage Europeans in mission” (206).

Finally, **Kwiyani** and **Angus Crichton** of the UK (and of Uganda) pen a short conclusion, “**Tending and Attending to an African Missiology,**” which I will leave for readers to discover. This book belongs in every anglophone theological library on the African continent — and in the Global North as well. Thankfully, the first edition of this book is affordable in local markets in East, West, and Southern Africa — something that is rarely the case. It should also find a place on the shelves of theological institutions in the West / Global North, wherever any are willing to move beyond parochial approaches to Christianity and into the broader world of World Christianity. I heartily recommend it to my fellow practitioners, whether they are engaged in mission on the ground or in the academy. Kwiyani, as the editor, and Mugambi, as the publisher of first edition, are to be commended for a job well-done. Thanks is due to the Langham Global Library imprint for keeping this important volume in print and making it accessible to readers across the continent as well as in the West / Global North. I should add that Kwiyani and Langham have taken the opportunity to make a few minor corrections and one clarification in the new edition and that **Emma Wild-Wood**’s new Foreword serves as an excellent short introduction to this anthology. *Tolle lege.*