



# Ecclesiology in African Perspectives

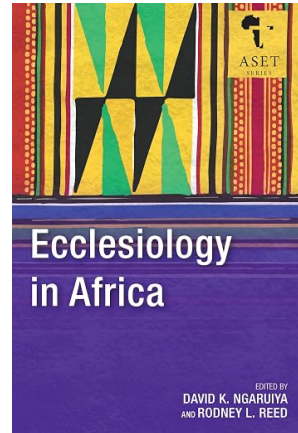
## BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

**Ngaruiya, David K., and Rodney L. Reed, eds. *Ecclesiology in Africa*. ASET Series 9. Carlisle, Cambria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2024. Pp. xiv + 413. £26.99 (paperback)**

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The book is edited by **David K. Ngaruiya** and **Rodney L. Reed**, renowned scholars and university lecturers with extensive experience. David K. Ngaruiya is an associate professor and former acting Deputy Chancellor for Academic Affairs at International Leadership University, Nairobi, Kenya. He holds a PhD in Intercultural Studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, USA. Rodney Reed is also an Associate Professor and formerly Deputy Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs at Africa Nazarene University, Nairobi, Kenya. He holds a PhD in Theological Ethics from Drew University, USA. The book is authored by twenty-three contributors, all qualified scholars and pastors involved in Church leadership and theological education in Africa: **Benjamin Akano**, from Nigeria; **Isaac Ampong** of Ghana serving as pastor in Belgium; **Joshua Robert Barron**, theological educator and curriculum developer in Kenya; **Kelechi Bartram**, from Nigeria; **Edwin Buerthey**, from Ghana; **Catherine Chege**, from Kenya; **Tamie Davis**, from Australia living in Tanzania; **Cornelia van Deventer**, from South Africa; **Rowland D. Van Es Jr**, from Kenya; **Robert Falconer**, from South Africa; **Alberto Cotelto Gomes**, a pastor from Angola; **Florah M. Kidula**, from Kenya; **Jesse Fungwa Kipimo**, from South Africa; **Abraham N. O. Kwakye**, from Ghana; **Paul N. Mwangi**, from Kenya; **Dieudonne K. Nuekpe**, from Ghana; **E. Okelloh Ogera**, from Kenya; **Calum Samuelson**, from the USA formerly working in Kenya; **Marike**



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**B. Sijtsma**, from The Netherlands; **Victor Umaru**, from Nigeria; and **Judy W. Wang’ombe**, from Kenya.

The church in Africa is conceptually complex and numerically diverse. There are churches with a few members congregating under a tree, larger congregations meeting in school halls, cathedrals, and mega-church buildings hosting thousands of congregants. The contributors in this book highlight the diversity of ecclesiology in Africa. The African continent presents a further challenging complexity in that it is almost three times the size of Europe in land area and has a significantly higher population, representing diverse multicultural ethnicities. What is more, Africa is now a major player in World Christianity that cannot be ignored. Prof. Ngaruiya reminds us in the Preface that “the church in Africa has flourished such that one out of every four Christians on the globe is African, and current (2023) estimates indicate that there are about 718,096,000 ... compared to the year 2000 when it was 384,290,000” (xiii).<sup>1</sup>

At first, the book appears to be composed of unrelated chapters. Nevertheless, the church in Africa is its unifying theme: “the chapters ... address the important matter of how African Christians understand the church ... in four parts” (xiii). First, scriptural considerations; second, historical theology; third, systemic assessment of the communal aspect; fourth, practical theology.

### **Ecclesiology: Scriptural Considerations**

In the first five chapters, seven scholars examine the church in Africa from a scriptural perspective.

#### ***“The Priesthood of All Believers and the Celebration of Communion in an African Church”***

In chapter 1, **Gomes** and **Van Es** evaluate the concepts of the priesthood of all believers and the celebration of communion, as presented in the Bible. The chapter critiques the Protestant argument that “Communion is not a sacrifice, but a memorial. As such, it does not need a priest” (2). Its tone comes across as a polemical diatribe against the prerogative of the clergy to celebrate the Holy Communion. Its main thrust is that “there is no theological basis for separating Communion as a special class from baptism” (18–19). It contends that if laypeople exercised the priesthood of all believers in the War in Angola and

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<sup>1</sup> Ngaruiya cites Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson and Peter F. Crossing, “World Christianity 2023: A Gendered Approach,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 47, no. 1 (2023): 11–12, p. 19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23969393221128253>

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during the COVID-19 pandemic, more people would have been served with the Holy Communion. Also, due to the shortage of ordained clergy in Africa and Asia, an all-believers' priesthood would enable a more regular celebration of communion. Although its exegesis of the related biblical passages on the priesthood of all believers is balanced and informative, it remains tenuous and oscillating nonetheless. It does not adequately show any specific connection pertinent to the doctrine of ecclesiology in Africa.

***“False Prosperity Pronouncements in 1 Kings 22:1–28 and Reflections for the Church”***

In chapter 2, **Kidula** critiques the False Prosperity Pronouncements, examining their supposed scriptural basis and how they reflect in ecclesiology in Africa. The chapter gives an exegetical exposition of 1 Kings 22:1–28 and its impact on false prophecy. Kidula shares that “[the prosperity gospel] is the most sweeping movement within the continent of Africa”<sup>2</sup> and pleads, “realities of the spread of prosperity theology call for a serious introspection by the church about its beliefs and teaching” (36). The thrust of its argument is that ecclesiology in Africa must safeguard against false teaching, urging, “in an age where false prosperity preaching is rampant, . . . the church [in Africa must] consider these pointers as it strives to safeguard the truth of scripture” (39). The chapter is a clarion call for the ecclesiology in Africa to be doctrinally vigilant. Although the hermeneutical application of 1 Kings 22 is somewhat tenuous, it nevertheless highlights the need for spiritual and biblical vigilance in African ecclesiology.

***“A Clash of Cultures”***

In chapter 3, **Chege** discusses the encounter between Christian beliefs and related cultural beliefs. It draws parallels from the New Testament Johannine Community in the first century and the African Church, in which “some believers were trying to articulate their ecclesiological self-understanding from their Hellenistic cultural and religious context” (44). The chapter argues that just as ecclesiology in the Johannine community grappled with Hellenistic religious syncretism, so African ecclesiology grapples with African traditional beliefs. It points to a parallel in which “African traditional culture, just as in the first-century Greco-Roman world, [has] no distinction between spiritual and secular life” (51). The chapter further highlights the fact that currently “there has been a resurgence of interest in the traditional African beliefs and practices” (52), meaning contemporary African ecclesiology grapples with similar

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<sup>2</sup> Quoting Joe Maxwell and Isaac Phiri, “Gospel Riches: Africa’s Rapid Embrace of Prosperity Pentecostalism Provokes Concern — and Hope,” *Christianity Today* 51 no. 7 (July 2007): 22–29, p. 26. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2007/07/gospel-riches/>

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challenges to those faced in the first century. The parallels, however, are general, lacking in analysis. The chapter, nevertheless, aptly identifies the anomaly in which “both the African and biblical culture and worldviews need to be taken into consideration, but due diligence should be applied to avoid syncretizing of biblical truth” (53). The chapter suggests the panacea to syncretism is, in the words of Turaki, “not to understand Christianity from the perspectives of African traditional culture and religion, but to understand African traditional culture and religion from the perspectives of a Christian and biblical worldview” (4).<sup>3</sup> The thesis of the chapter insists that “every African cultural element must be scrutinized under the lens of Scripture. Where there is a clash between the Scriptures and the traditional African cultural elements, then the Scriptures should be upheld” (59). Although the evaluation is general, it addresses an essential theological lacuna in African ecclesiology.

***“Church Architecture in the African Vernacular”***

In chapter 4, **Falconer** evaluates appropriate architecture for African ecclesiology. Its central premise is that “most contemporary church buildings in Africa don’t have a distinctly ‘Christian aesthetic’ and neither do many have a meaningful African expression” (61). The chapter begins by exploring the foundations of deliberately vernacular African architecture, building on the work of Diébédo Francis Kéré, the first African laureate of the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 2022. In emphasizing the importance of African church architecture, the chapter advocates that “church architecture is a tactile expression of our theology. . . . [Also,] ‘if a building serves spiritual purposes, there exists a deep connection between its real theme and its artistic beauty . . . a church should have a specifically sacred character.’” (63).<sup>4</sup> The main objective of the chapter is “provid[ing] a starting point for developing a synthesis of church architecture with the African vernacular” (63). The chapter analyzes 1 Kings 5–8 regarding the motifs of Solomon’s temple and applies them to the quest for a vernacular architecture in African ecclesiology. It emphasizes the need for a hybrid approach, using local resources and outsourcing where necessary, as Solomon did in building the Jerusalem Temple. The chapter decries the paucity of vernacular Church architecture in Africa, stating that it “is almost non-existent, except” in Western Ethiopia (69). The chapter advocates celebration of “African creativity and artistry by incorporating vernacular decorative styles, symbols and patterns” (77). In assessing the architectural

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<sup>3</sup> Quoting Yusufu Turaki, *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa: A Christian Theological Method* (Carlisle, Cambria, UK: HippoBooks, 2020), xxvii.

<sup>4</sup> Quoting Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Aesthetics*, vol. 2 (Steubenville, Ohio, USA: Hildebrand Project, 2019), 56.

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form, the chapter proposes considering the question, “What are you communicating with your building?” (81).<sup>5</sup> Although the chapter raises essential points to consider for vernacular architecture in Africa, it does not adequately articulate what vernacular means for a continent as vast as Africa, with its myriad cultural aesthetics and ethnicities.

***“Untethered Agents of Eternal Life: The Ministry of ‘Single’ Women ...”***

Chapter 5, in which **van Deventer** and **Kipimo** evaluate the ministry of single women in the church in Africa, concludes the first section, Scriptural Considerations. It narrates and critiques various negative attitudes toward single women in and outside the church. These include social stigmatization as so-called ‘husband snatchers’, sexual harassment, financial vulnerability, and pressure from church leaders to get married to avoid being regarded as cursed or abnormal, among others. The chapter notes that “some African churches even recommend polygamous marriages to remedy the so-called challenge of single women outnumbering single men” (93). These negative attitudes are based on an interpretation of Genesis 2:18 which makes marriage normative for everyone. It points out incidents where some denominations go beyond showing reticence to completely ruling out the appointment of women as deacons in the church. Against this negative backdrop on single women exercising ministry, the chapter gives a lucid and robust argument from the Gospel of John’s authorial intention that demonstrates four women (the Samaritan woman in John 4; Mary and Martha of Bethany in John 10 and 11; Mary Magdalene John 20; even the Mary the mother of Jesus), in spite of their singleness, “function as insightful disciples in the fourth Gospel . . . in their own right as significant characters for the [auditors or readers] to imitate” (100). Even though women were ineligible to serve as witnesses in Jewish courts because their testimonies were deemed unreliable, John presents these women as witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus, and in particular, the resurrected Christ’s charge to Mary Magdalene to go and tell the male disciples that he is risen. The chapter refers to Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 7:32–35 that single women have more capacity than married women for ministry. It concludes with a clarion call for the church in Africa “to formulate a healthy theology of singleness to empower single men and women to serve the Lord well . . . and [make it] a priority in the strategic planning of African churches” so that “single women are not overlooked for appropriate leadership roles” (103).

## **Historical Theology**

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<sup>5</sup> Quoting Tim Cool, *Why Buildings Matter: The Story of Your Space*, revised edition (published by author, 2017), 15.

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***“In Pursuit of Contextual Christian Ministry in an African Church”***

Chapter 6 begins section 2, in which **Buertey** and **Kwakey** review the historical and theological development of ecclesiology in Africa. Its main thrust is the contextualization of Christianity in Africa. It attributes the lack of contextualization to “Western missionaries who have been credited with institutionalizing Christianity in Africa” and “equally criticized for establishing denominations that were more Western in outlook than African” (108). The authors quote Bediako, a doyen of African Christianity: “The Christian tradition as historically received through missionary enterprise has on the whole been unable to sympathize with or relate to spiritual realities in the traditional worldview” (109).<sup>6</sup> They then describe a particular mission church in Ghana as “a church detached from its context such that its worship and practices had little or no impact on everyday experience of its African members” which “officially frowned upon the indigenous culture and spiritual worldview as merely superstitious” (109), ignoring African belief that malevolent spirits can affect one’s daily life. The chapter details how such attitudes led to the proliferation of AICs (African Initiated Churches) to address the lack of contextualization, most of which were charismatic and Pentecostal in orientation. The chapter narrates in great detail how the ministry of Rev Emmanuel Nyantakyi Anim (b. c. 1928), in a traditional missionary-founded church, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG), led to spiritual renewal that addressed the African spiritual needs in his emphasis on prayer, deliverance, and healing. The chapter provides graphic details of how Rev. Anim’s ministry enabled the PCG to connect with the realities that resonated with African Christians and charted a new direction for African ecclesiology. The chapter also gives a detailed critical assessment of Rev. Anim’s ministry to establish his contribution to contextual ministry in African ecclesiology. Its evaluation of appropriate contextualization asserts “that for the African, religion must invigorate life, and its inability to do so renders it ineffective,” for as “Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye” has observed regarding Akan thought — though this applies to most African thought and worldviews — “‘nothing happens by chance’”<sup>7</sup> (123). Although the chapter concentrates its evaluation on the Presbyterian Church, the same is true of other missionary founded churches. The chapter aptly concludes by pointing out that “Pentecostal prayer, healing and deliverance services are anchored on the faith that there are problems that defy ‘normal’ therapy for which spiritual solutions must be found . . . ‘in Africa, ministry would be judged as deficient if

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<sup>6</sup> Quoting Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of A Non-Western Religion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 69.

<sup>7</sup> Quoting Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 76.

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it does not treat healing as a function of religion”<sup>8</sup> (124). The chapter delineates essential and crucial aspects of Christianity that African ecclesiology must address to remain relevant in its mission.

### **African Ecclesiology is Communal**

Chapters 7 and 8 comprise a third section assessing the communal aspect of ecclesiology in Africa.

#### ***“The Church as a Household of God in African Theology”***

In chapter 7, **Ampong** examines how the church, as a household of God, reflects the values of African households. He criticises the current trend of youth pioneering church worship, catering for the needs of young people, excluding older people, pointing out that it is contrary to African culture, citing a Ghanaian proverb, “Woe to the one who does not have an elderly person in the household” (140). He also raises the challenge of tribalism and ethnocentrism in African ecclesiology and argues that

the emphasis on the church as a family of God in Africa proves effective in pushing against this canker in the African Church. For if the church would embrace itself as a family in which every member, irrespective of the tribe they come from, would be accepted in God’s unified household, then the problem of tribalism in the church might be dealt with. (140)

Utilizing scriptures from both the Old and New Testaments, **Ampong** makes a compelling case for the imagery of the church as a household, resonating with African ecclesiology. He gives a persuasively convincing argument from the Old Testament, Pauline pastoral epistles (1 Timothy, Titus, Ephesians, and Colossians), and the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) to establish and drive the point that “the church as a household is a favorite image among many African theologians, since it emphasizes an essential cultural value cherished by many African communities” (147).

#### ***“The Case for the Ecclesiastical Title ‘Apostle’ and the Gift of ‘Apostle’”***

In Chapter 8, **Nuekpe** looks at the term *apostle* as a concept and a title and its relevance for African ecclesiology. It evaluates the cessationist view and argues that from a biblical and pentecostal perspective, the idea and title of *apostle* is relevant for the church today. However, the chapter criticises its abuse as a means of power, prestige, and control. The chapter adopts the principal biblical meaning of apostle as “someone who is commissioned, released or

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<sup>8</sup> Quoting John S. Pobee and Gabriel Oshitelu II, *African Initiatives in Christianity: The Growth, Gifts and Diversities of Indigenous African Churches, A Challenge to the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1998), 49.

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dispatched by an authority . . . the one sent had a responsibility towards the sending authority to whom he is also accountable . . . The purpose of the apostleship was to participate in the mission of God with the authority given by Jesus . . . and later by the Holy Spirit . . .” The Pauline usage of apostle(s) is “an administrative designation used for envoys, delegates, or people appointed by the church to represent them” (156–157). The chapter traces the current use of ‘apostle’ in the African church to Paul’s usage, referring to himself.

The term *apostolos* in Colossians, as used by Paul, therefore, reveals that modern-day leaders who are divinely commissioned for specific ministerial duties and are recognised by the church as apostolic in nature, may use the term. . . . Etymologically, the words ‘apostle’ and ‘missionary’ were used interchangeably...both words describ[ing] someone with an assignment and the authority to accomplish it. (158)

The chapter interprets *apostles* as mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 as “those spiritual leaders expected to keep the norms for the church’s existence” (162). The modern usage of apostle signifies “the function of missionaries and church planters . . . .” Therefore, “we cannot rule out completely the use of the ecclesiastical title ‘apostle’ for modern-day church planters and proven missionaries recognised by their sending local authorities as possessing the gift of apostles. . . . we may use the word apostle today to mean effective church planters or pioneer missionaries” (163–164). The chapter gives a lucid exposition of the concept and title of apostle and concludes,

“as long as the church remains on earth, the gifts of apostles will operate. . . . The church still needs apostles, and those who are identified as such by their local congregations must be allowed to exercise their gifts with humility and caution that does not lead to heresy and autocratic leadership. (168–169)

Both chapters 7 and 8 review, without being overly polemical, some of the realities facing African ecclesiology: namely, the communal aspect and recognition of the gift of apostleship as existential phenomena of the African church.

### **Ecclesiology as Practical Theology**

The remaining nine chapters, 9–18, constitute the fourth section, which deals with practical theology.

#### ***“Re-imagining Cross-cultural Missional Ecclesiology in an African Context”***

In chapter 9, Wang’ombe evaluates cross-cultural missional ecclesiology in an African context and observes that “past ecclesiological trends” result in African ecclesiologies which tend “to miss a concerted cross-cultural

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missiological focus” (171). The author looks at Jesus’s words, “I will build my church” (*ekklēsia*), in Matthew 16:18 and argues that by this Jesus was emphasizing the “outward-looking” nature of the Church in which he was gathering people to himself beyond the Jewish context, an assembly intended to contribute to the common good of people, an assembly with “transformative potential”<sup>9</sup> that “reaches out to people” currently outside of “its membership and who are culturally different” (174). The author draws from the African ubuntu philosophy, “I am because we are,” to tease out “the description of *ekklēsia* as communities where other-centred relationships thrive” as befitting African missiological ecclesiology (177). The chapter further explores whether the African missiological ecclesiology is communicating the gospel cross-culturally and finds fault in the Western pioneer missionaries due to their close association with the colonization agenda. Additionally, financial constraints due to unhealthy donor dependency syndrome and budgetary priorities are also addressed, concluding that “the economic situation of the African church should not be the bottleneck that prevents the furtherance of the gospel to unreached/least reached people groups” (179). The author also criticises the Africans’ mindset that continues to perceive “the missionary enterprise . . . as a Western thing that must be run with the Western dollar for it to survive on African soil” (180). The author calls for African ecclesiology to consider Okesson’s suggestion of public missiology in which parishioners become “evangelists/missionaries in and through their respective ‘publics’ as they go about their daily life” (180–181).<sup>10</sup> The chapter also suggests an “incarnational” model for cross-cultural witness” (185) through which “the contemporary African Church [engages] in a relevant ‘incarnational’ model that seeks to understand the respective worldviews of the unreached/least [reached] people groups” (187). The chapter concludes with the author giving an example of a church in Kenya that models incarnational and public missiology through congregational, integral, and incarnational approaches. In so doing, it demonstrates the plausibility of cross-cultural missional African ecclesiology. Although repetitive in some places, the author gives a cogent analysis of her chosen topic. The author’s exegesis of Matthew 16:18 could have been improved by explaining the difference between a church, a temple, and a synagogue.

**“Communal Theosis . . . in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwāḥədo Church”**

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<sup>9</sup> Borrowing the phrase of Paul Christopher, Pamela Klassen, and Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *Ekklesia: Three Inquiries in Church and State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Quoting Greg Okesson’s term in *A Public Missiology: How Local Churches Witness to a Complex World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Academic, 2020), 10.

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In chapter 10, **Samuelson** discusses the concept of communal *theosis* in African ecclesiology, with reference to the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tāwahādo* Church (EOTC). He points out that, unlike other Protestant churches, its ecclesiology emphasises collective communion with God in contrast to the individualistic pursuit of personal salvation that accounts for “nominalism and ‘cultural Christianity’ of Africa” and a “discipleship crisis”<sup>11</sup> in which most African Christians still feed on milk rather than meat (195). Samuelson commends EOTC’s understanding of *theosis* and orthopraxis as more conducive to African ecclesiology and best suited to address the ‘discipleship crisis’ in spiritual formation. He examines the meaning of “stretching forward to the things that lie ahead” (Phil 3:12–21, Samuelson’s translation) as an adoption of Jesus’s use of *telos* (Matt 5:48) “to express the divinely-oriented goals of humans” in which “the Christian *telos* is connected to becoming like the Father, or like Paul as he becomes like Christ” (198–199). But Samuelson finds fault with the imitation model when applied contemporary successful church and political leaders, as this application has proven to be insufficient for spiritual formation and growth. The author further critiques individualism that has shifted Africa’s “being ‘incurably religious’<sup>12</sup> . . . from the village and towards the individual” (201). “Just as Africans may need more concrete measures for the ‘forward’ trajectory of the spiritual growth,” he suggests, “so also may they require opportunities to grow *communally* rather than as isolated spiritual soldiers” (201). The chapter points out that most African Independent Churches (AICs) have adopted autocratic leadership that gravitates around the charisma of the leader and suggests that such an approach stifles ecclesial growth because it is “mediated through approved individuals rather than any consistently accessible services or sacraments from the church itself,” thus creating “the bottleneck of narrow ecclesial leadership” (202).

The chapter describes how EOTC over the years has maintained the concept of *theosis*/deification as their understanding of “how humanity grows closer to and experiences increasing communion . . . ‘towards ultimate fulfilment in God’<sup>13</sup>” and considers three dimensions within the EOTC — “the veneration of saints, prayer, and corporate worship” — as key components of communal *theosis* (205). He discusses how the veneration of saints addresses

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<sup>11</sup> Samuelson notes that *discipleship crisis* is a common phrase, and cited as an example Jerry M. Ireland, “A Classical Pentecostal Approach to Discipleship in Missions,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 28, no. 2 (2019): 243–266, p. 244. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-02802007>

<sup>12</sup> Quoting Geoffrey Parrinder, *Religion in Africa* (Hammondsworth, Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1969), 235

<sup>13</sup> Quoting Norman Russell, *Fellow Workers With God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis*, Foundations Series 5 (Yonkers, New York, USA: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009), 21.

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the issue of *telos* and how to imitate godly believers. He emphasises how it gives “a dynamic sense of the ‘great cloud of witnesses’ that participate in the worship and daily activities of God’s church, thus extending ‘backwards’ to beloved Christian ancestors and ‘forward’ towards the prize for which they are cheering us onward (Phil 3:14; Heb 12:1)” (207–208). He describes how EOTC has compendiums of preserved prayers regularly recited to overcome the impediment of a lack of literacy, also promoting communal *theosis* in that “to hear and participate in familiar prayers is a powerful reminder of belonging. . . . the ancient and widespread nature of the prayers used in EOTC unmistakably shift the focus away from any single individual and instead towards the historic community of the faithful” (209). Regarding worship and its place in communal *theosis*, the author highlights the richness of the EOTC’s language in Eucharistic liturgy and its description as “a process of transformation of a community into the body of Christ through the growing communion brough about by the Holy Spirit”<sup>14</sup> (210). **Samuelson** concludes by recommending a form of remembrance and honour to deceased African Christians renowned for their godliness and holiness to promote understanding of the meaning of “the great cloud of witnesses” in Hebrews 12:1 in African perspectives. This could promote contextual African ecclesiology in its attempt “to promote Christlike African Christians for others to imitate” (212); as Foxe did in England in the *Book of Martyrs* and the *Synaxarian* in the EOTC. The author aptly points out that this will resonate with the traditional dynamics of ancestor veneration in the African ecclesial context. **Samuelson** further suggests that “the fasts, prayers, and other corporate activities in the EOTC . . . [are] needed for effective African spiritual formation and transformation of the Christian nominalism spreading through the sub-Saharan Africa” (213). Although the chapter author’s arguments oscillate rather than flow, diverting to other tangential and somewhat unrelated subjects, his exposition of EOTC’s communal *theosis* and its relevance for African ecclesiology is lucid.

***“Spiritual Parenthood as an Aspect of Emerging Kinship and Ecclesiological Structures in Urban African Pentecostalism”***

In Chapter 11, **Ogera** examines spiritual parenthood as an emerging kinship structure in African ecclesiology. He draws from scriptures and finds parallels in Elijah-Elisha, Naomi-Ruth, Paul-Timothy-Silas, and Titus-Timothy relationships. Building on 1 Corinthians 4:15 (NKJV), “you do not have many

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<sup>14</sup> Quoting Emmanuel Fritsch, “Qəddase,” in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 4: O–X, edited by Siegbert Uhlig, 271–275 (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 271.

Editors’ note: This source is freely available at <https://archive.org/details/uhlig-siegbert-et-al.-eds.-encyclopaedia-aethiopica.-vol.-4.-o-x-2010/page/270/mode/2up>

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fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you” (219), he explores an ever-increasing spiritual parenthood in urban churches and asserts that it “puts in sharp focus the significant role that spiritual parents play in the lives of people” (220). Although he acknowledges that Matthew 23:9 forbids attributing spiritual fatherhood to any other than God, he cites examples in an urban church that he has researched, where, despite having mentorship classes, the membership continues to attribute fatherhood and motherhood to the church leader and his wife, who cherish and encourage the attribution. His research in the Jubilee Christian Centre (JCC) found that the structure of the church mimics an African family set up whose loyalty and homage go to the parents, whose “primary goal is to make their spiritual children successful in knowing the Lord and fulfilling the call of God. As daddy and mommy to their congregation, they nurture and protect their ‘children’” (221). The church also has “ecclesial groupings represent[ing] a form of ecclesiological devolution that allows lay Christians to assume and exercise leadership roles,” thus exhibiting ubuntu that espouses “communal relationships;” this is important as “communality is the essence of being human in Africa” (223). The author discusses in detail the concept of ubuntu, finding in it a rich tapestry of African ethics that resonates with biblical teaching in Galatians 5:22–23, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and the promotion of ecumenism, because “the notion of ubuntu has the potential for developing an ecumenical ethic that underpins both the ecumenical search for unity and the social responsibility of the Church”<sup>15</sup> (224). **Ogera** finds support for the thesis of his chapter in the Roman Catholic Synod on Africa’s 1994 adoption of “Church as the Family of God,” based on Africans’ “positive cultural values [of] solidarity, family and community, respect for life and the gift of children” (226). These are indeed positive biblical values in understanding ecclesiology from an African perspective. Nevertheless, the chapter highlights some of the drawbacks of spiritual parenthood, noting that it can be abused to promote authoritarianism and autocratic leadership, thereby constraining individuality through oppressive conformity and loyalty to the group or community. It can also undermine the universal nature of the Church. Although the notion of spiritual parenthood sounds lofty, its promotion of communality, harmony, and ubuntu is praiseworthy; nevertheless, the pitfalls of authoritarianism and parochialism must be guarded against in African ecclesiology.

***“Ecclesiology in Contemporary Africa”***

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<sup>15</sup> Quoting Teddy Sakupapa, “Ecumenical Ecclesiology in the African Context: Towards a View of the Church as Ubuntu,” *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 117, no. 1 (2018): 1–15, p. 9. <https://doi.org/10.7833/117-1-1384>

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In Chapter 12, **Akano** examines ecclesiology in contemporary Africa in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and other insecurities. He evaluates concepts related to ecclesiology in general, including church planting and *missio Dei* in light of Ephesians 2:10. He asserts that “one cannot separate the nature of the church from its mission” (237). He refers to seven metaphors of the Church: the body of Christ, the fullness of Christ, new humanity, the household or family of God, a new nation, the temple and the bride of Christ (ref. Eph 1, 2, 4, and 5). He provides a detailed explanation of the complex system of kinship among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, using it to illustrate the church as a family. He criticises the lack of intentional mission in church planting, attributing it to the gathered church becoming an end in itself rather than a means of achieving the Great Commission.

**Akano** contends that the African religious worldview transcends religious activities in worship centres and embraces a holistic perspective that sees religion as an integral part of everyday life. As such, closing public worship places during the COVID-19 pandemic was perceived as religious persecution and anti-Christian. He also gives a detailed general account of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on ecclesiology in Africa. He discusses neo-paganism in which he says there is a revival of African traditional religious practices accompanied by “ethnic vigilante groups” (248). He commends Pentecostalism in African ecclesiology for its power to engage in spiritual warfare. He laments how COVID-19 decentralised ecclesiology from church centres to home or cell mode and online, which affected African values of fellowship, relationships, and kinship ties. He aptly points out that the pandemic hit the African Church harder because of its lack of widespread and insufficient IT to run church services online. He also highlights how COVID-19 positively affected the church by ushering in a household-based ecclesiology, boosting the Disciple Making Movement (DMM), and enhancing Discovery Bible Study (DBS). He cautions against overemphasis on diakonia ministry, which, although it resonates with African communalism, runs the danger of reductionism that reduces Christian Mission to mere social services, meeting people’s physiological and psychological needs. Although the author of this chapter addresses most issues pertinent to the Church in Africa, the presentation is difficult to follow, somewhat tenuous and incoherent. It, nevertheless, discusses and highlights crucial topics worthy of consideration in African ecclesiology.

***“The Church as the Family Writ Large”***

Chapter 13, similar to Chapter 11, continues the exploration of the theme of the church as a family, with a particular reference to Christ is The Answer Ministries (CITAM), focusing on its founding campus on Valley Road, Nairobi. Its central thesis is “the church . . . thrives when it adapts family characteristics

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and patterns that are founded on identity, belonging and purpose. . . . The church appears to be a magnification (writ large) of the family” (267–268). Its author, **Mwangi**, points to the uniqueness of how CITAM rose “above the character of the city and instead [became] a *shalom* community, revealing the dynamics of God’s kingdom within the present” (269). In this way, CITAM preserves the stereotypical African family kinship mantra of “we are not well unless all of us are well” which acknowledges that “we need each other for our wellbeing” (269). The chapter demonstrates how the dynamics and concepts of family are a handy tool for church growth, kinship and family welfare developed through belonging to “small ministry groups” (273). **Mwangi** observes that the cell groups are patterned after African family kinships with restrictions based on age and gender. The research data reveals how “looking at structures at CITAM Valley Road which enable persons to live together and cooperate with one another in an orderly social life similar to African kinship [and] how the web of deep-seated longings of fluctuating variability are fulfilled for the individual, family, group and congregation” (276).

In his assessment of the family services at CITAM, **Mwangi** observes “an intergenerational handing over of the faith” (278). He aptly points out that the theme of the family is found in both the Old and New Testaments and concludes, “As children of God, Christians are therefore members of one big family . . . [in which] the relationship is that of a covenant and not a contract” (280). His final evaluation is that “truthfulness to scripture and truthfulness to the African culture endear the language of the family to CITAM members” as “Scripture . . . plays a normative role in guiding the expression of community” (280–281). The qualitative research and its interpretation by the author of this chapter have more than illustrated CITAM through its activities and strategies of targeting the basic social unit in society; it demonstrates the church as a magnification of the family (Family writ large). Additionally, intentional biblical Christian discipleship is capable of perpetuating intergenerational ecclesiology rooted in African cultural values and social institutions. Although this chapter overlaps with the material presented in chapter eleven on kinship ecclesiology, it supersedes it by concretizing it with superior qualitative research and data analysis. It provides prime crucial examples of ecclesial urbanization in an African context.

***“Paucity of Meditation in Christian Worship”***

In Chapter 14, **Bartram** examines the role of meditation — specifically on the word of God — in African ecclesial worship services. He laments its paucity and warns that the overshadowing of such meditation by noisy if joyful music “might threaten African evangelical ecclesiology, where the centrality of the word in worship is an enviable heritage” (284). Bartram does not dismiss music

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in worship but shares concern when “worship activity through music and praise songs eclipses hearing the word of God and could be termed ‘noisy,’ as good as it may appear” (284). The chapter examines the experience of religious worship, citing various definitions of religion and its correlation with the worship experience. It argues that spiritual experience in worship must necessarily entail “the meditation process when the adherent” — that is, the worshipper — “through the written word, encounters the person of God and experiences a positive change in life . . . . Meditation involves keeping human lives in perspective for a greater awareness of the mind of the object of worship” (287). The chapter provides a comprehensive appraisal of Christian worship in relation to church music, highlighting the dichotomy that emerged during the Reformation, where Roman Catholicism and Zwinglians adopted a more meditative approach in worship. At the same time, Lutherans and Anabaptists were more accommodating in their approach to music while “Calvin insisted that music was welcomed as long as the words were scriptural”<sup>16</sup> (291). The chapter provides an assessment of the theology of meditation on Scripture, drawing on both the Old and New Testaments and highlighting key passages. Bartram attempts to link African ecclesiology with evangelical ecclesiology. Still, his arguments are somewhat glib and unconvincing, as African ecclesiology is too broad to be limited to evangelical ecclesiology alone. Bartram recommends that “African ecclesiology should endeavour to produce a word-based community of Christians in Africa whose faith and practice exhibit the scriptural ecclesiological mandate of worship and praise, mission, evangelism, fellowship, edification, and good works to the glory of God” (299). Although this recommendation is praiseworthy, the chapter does not adequately demonstrate how such a recommendation could be achieved. Its author, however, does a good job of highlighting the paucity of meditation in worship and the excessive noise, as if in Africa, God were deaf.

***“Cash, Cleaning, and Cooking”: Contributions of Women’s Fellowships***

Chapter 15 revisits the place of women in African ecclesiology and its author, **Blok-Sijtsma**, conducts an empirical qualitative study on Women’s Guild or Women’s Fellowship (WF). She points out the marginalization, discrimination and patriarchy in African societies based on gender. Although the chapter focuses on WF in the Reformed Church in Zambia (RCZ), its findings resonate in most mainline Protestant churches in Africa. WF organises church activities for women, including prayer meetings, literacy classes, and sewing. The leadership of RCZ is male-dominated, with some women delegates

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<sup>16</sup> Quoting James White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Abingdon Press, 1993), 137.

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representing the WF. Although the ordination of women began around 2000 in the RCZ, “women are hardly represented in the formal decision-making structures of the Church” (305), suggesting that women have little influence in church leadership. Such is alarming, given that RCZ has approximately 950,000 members, of whom 45,000 are from WF who raise funds and provide substantial services to the church. Despite blatant marginalization and exclusion in decision-making in church hierarchies, women in WF “believe that the sacrifices they make, not only give them status and respect in the church but will also be rewarded in the life to come” (306). Joining the WF is voluntary and “is conceived as coming from the heart, and one must be ready ‘to work for God’”<sup>17</sup> (310). The chapter documents how the WF contributes to the church in the form of money and time to keep the church running. The chapter presents qualitative data that demonstrates that most of the financial contributions made by WF are coerced or mandatory, as one member sighed, “sections need money, money, choirs need money, money, congregation, *cigwirizano* requires money. So, we women have many cards? 3 or 4?”<sup>18</sup> . . . constant demand for money gave rise to debate during meetings and Focus Group discussions” (312). The constant financial demand has an adverse effect: “some women are not able to meet all these financial obligations and have stopped coming to the WF or do not even enter because of it” — one cannot be a member when one is not financially viable (312–313). Data also indicates that the WF considers the financial burden and obligations as “a sign of the level of commitment to the Christian faith by the women,” believing that “giving is an important part of a Christian lifestyle and members are encouraged to give joyfully because ‘you do not pay people but God’”<sup>19</sup> (315). Secondly, besides financial support, the WF sustains the church through the offering of time and skills in various tasks, including cleaning, decorating, beautifying the church, washing toilets, and cooking during church functions and funerals. The women accept such tasks as cultural dictates and accept them without complaint, attributing them to African culture; they feel it is their responsibility to ensure the cleanliness and well-being of their homes, their children, their husbands, and by extension, their church family “we are playing a mother’s role in the church, and we are happy”<sup>20</sup> (316). The chapter exposes the unfairness in the financial demands of WF, which adversely affect them. Specifically, those who cannot afford the costs are excluded and women are not included in the decision-making process when levies are imposed and made mandatory. The chapter highlights hierarchical

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<sup>17</sup> Quoting an interviewed focus group.

<sup>18</sup> Quoting an interviewed focus group.

<sup>19</sup> Quoting a WF regional meeting.

<sup>20</sup> Quoting an interviewed focus group.

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ecclesial leadership as “a common feature in Zambian society, including the church”<sup>21</sup> (317).

On reading **Blok-Sijtsma**’s chapter, one wonders what role men play in the life of the church in Africa, given that the women in the African church seem to shoulder the bulk of the work. It is laudable that the WF reinforces

the respected status of motherhood. Being a mother is not perceived as an inferior role within the private sphere but as an acknowledged and respected social identity; hence motherhood is a central theme in African churches. A mother is someone who takes responsibility not only for her children but for all children in the community. The role and the acknowledgement of a person as a mother, gives, within the hierarchical and patriarchal structures of power, pride and dignity. (318).

The WF and other similar women groups provide for the church in Africa not only prayer but “a sense of identity and a reason to live”<sup>22</sup> (318). The chapter concludes by observing that despite playing a minor role in decision making, The WF’s engagement and commitment to the church “is first and foremost social and spiritual in nature: it gives them dignity and respect and a chance to serve God through serving the church” (321).

Overall, the chapter reveals that although the WF formal influence seems to be limited, informally, the women exercise a significant impact in the church, albeit this is overshadowed by the male chauvinism and patriarchal hegemony that controls African social culture. It highlights injustices, discrimination, and marginalization of women that African ecclesiology cannot ignore if it wishes to be faithful to Scripture, particularly Galatians 3:28, as “there is neither male nor female for all are one in Christ Jesus.” Second, African ecclesiology, although it is mainly hierarchical and patriarchal, must reflect and take seriously the role and contributions of women, who are the majority in the life of the church. It must also reevaluate its cultural biases in light of Scripture, include women in church leadership, and eradicate the injustice of women whose current treatment is tantamount to taxation without representation.

***“The Necessity of Balanced Church Growth Strategies in Africa”***

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<sup>21</sup> Quoting Jackson Phiri, “Church and Culture: Exploring the Reception of Women’s Ministries in the Reformed Church in Zambia in View of 1 Corinthians 14:26–40,” PhD diss. (Stellenbosch, South Africa: Stellenbosch University, 2017), 74.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/101336>

<sup>22</sup> Quoting Lyn Holness, “Women’s Piety and Empowerment: An Observer’s Understanding of the Methodist Manyano’s Movement,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 98 (1998): 21–31; page number not provided.

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In Chapter 16, **Umaru** discusses Church growth from a biblical perspective in African ecclesiology. He observes that although the church in Africa is growing, more is needed because its growth “is only expanding by tens of hundreds while population growth is increasing by the tens of thousands” (326). He suggests a dual mission for the church as “the reconciliation of humanity to God in Christ and one another, or uniting humanity with God and men with one another” (327). The chapter adapts Donald McGavran’s definition of church growth “as an activity devoted to spreading the gospel and convincing people to follow Jesus and be accountable members of his church” (328) and adds three essential characteristics of church growth: “adult-focused . . . Christ-centred . . . church oriented” (327). Although the chapter attempts no exegesis of the book of Acts, it nevertheless derives its church growth theory from the narrative of Acts: Jerusalem (Acts 1:1–6:7); Palestine and Samaria (Acts 6:8–9:31); Gentile lands (Acts 9:32–12:24); Missionary movement (Acts 12:25–16:5); Urban centres (Acts 16:6–19:20); and finally the centre of the Roman Empire (Acts 19:21–28:31). It points to “a very significant association between developing churches and growing Christians. . . . The development of people and the body of Christ are inextricably linked” (331). The chapter, however, does not discuss *how*, other than citing the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16–20, the evidence implies the imperative of the church to make disciples.

The chapter identifies two strategies from the book of Acts for effective church growth. The first is prayer (Acts 1:14, 2:42, 4:18, and 12:5), observing that “Satan has always opposed God-favoured church growth plans throughout history” (332) but in response Christians should pray in the Spirit and engage in spiritual warfare (Eph 6:18). The second strategy is “power evangelism” (333) that invokes signs and wonders as confrontation with the forces of evil that oppose God’s work according to (Acts 4:29–30, 5:12–14). In its evaluation, the chapter identifies a lack of holiness and spirituality in the pursuit of numerical development as a significant concern for African ecclesiology, which lacks balance between numerical growth and holy spiritual formation in preparing people for the second coming. This is a valid critique in light of the biblical teaching, “pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14, NRSV).

The chapter aptly calls for a balance between “quantity and far higher quality. The church must boost its quality growth in addition to its quantity growth. Both must be held in a permanent state of tension in the church” (334). This is a pertinent distinction in African ecclesiology, represented by a higher Christian population, yet languishing in the social evils of corruption, injustice, and poverty, in a continent whose traditional values are rooted in ubuntu. The chapter spells out the distinction as follows: Quality or “spiritual growth occurs when people genuinely know the Lord, are committed to him, disciple, and

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mature into strong, active Christians who can serve others. When the church has a procedure to convert sinners to saints, attendees to Christians, Christians to ministers, and leaders to missionaries,” this will serve of proof of such growth (334). The chapter points out a critical cancerous trend inflicting the African Church, addressing “the people’s perceived wants” (like prosperity), yet “scarcely addressing their actual requirements” (piety, repentance, and daily conduct) as the pastors “manage their churches as both business and private estate” (335). Besides what the chapter unveils, another thing plaguing the Church in Africa is the pastors’ limited biblical training and suffering from historical amnesia, through which they lack the perspective of world Church history. This result in some churches that sometimes behave like cults and sects, controlling their members’ daily schedules and behaviours and other churches filled with immature, carnal baby Christians proliferating nominal Christianity, unable to challenge and change society.

For ecclesiology in Africa to get a balanced equilibrium between numerical growth (quantity) and spiritual holiness formation (quality), the chapter concludes by suggesting seven measures. First, due to a strong belief in spiritual powers and demonology in Africa, it must teach and emphasise miracles and wonders as in the New Testament times. Second, it must engage in powerful biblical preaching and challenging, engaging sermons, and, third, prophetic prayers accompanied by miracles. Fourth, a strong children’s ministry is needed, focused on developing children in the church. Fifth, churches need appropriately appealing and alluring places of worship with a conducive atmosphere. Sixth, dynamic leadership must be developed, bearing in mind that “leaders define a congregation’s destiny more than its physical structures”<sup>23</sup> [because] leadership is what makes things happen” (339). Seventh, he suggests well-planned worship — “having a fantastic planned worship service is a solid strategy for expanding the church and increasing attendance” (340) — that involves the internet. Although IT and the means to acquire and sustain it are constant challenges for most churches in Africa, it is the inevitable way to go, especially if African ecclesiology intends to reach out to children and youth whose worldview is interwoven in IT. The investment in IT for church services is necessary because its dividends are out of this world. A single YouTube sermon can instantly reach large numbers of youth.

Overall, the chapter addresses pertinent issues facing African ecclesiology. Its conclusion aptly sums up: Because it is the characteristic of all living things to grow, “as healthy bodies grow, so too should healthy churches”(341). The Church in Africa needs to heed the adage “swelling is not growing” and invest

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<sup>23</sup> Quoting Odunaya Oke, *Leadership for Building a Prevailing Church* (Lagos: Charis Ventures Publication, 2015), 29.

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heavily in quality growth, biblical teaching, the pursuit of holiness, and spiritual formation rooted in the Bible. The gravity of Christianity has indeed shifted to the Global South. The question is what kind of Christians is it producing? The Church in Africa is indeed growing, but what growth is it: quality or mere quantity growth? These are the questions that African ecclesiology needs to engage in prayerfully.

**“A Woman Teaches With Heart’: The Mama Voice in Tanzanian Women’s Preaching”**

In Chapter 17, **Davis** appraises women’s teaching and preaching ministries in Africa, emphasizing a noticeable niche characterised by femininity. Women’s preaching in the African church “presents evidence for a recognisable cadence, embodiment and content, a mama voice” (347). It fuses the word of God and femininity in a deeply dignifying way with a mama voice that navigates women’s authority in a predominantly patriarchal society. The chapter acknowledges that “men are typically the formally ordained religious leaders and theologians”<sup>24</sup> in the African church. Nevertheless, women “carve out spaces for themselves, especially in neo-Pentecostal settings” (348), using their femininity. Although some women emulate and imitate “the authoritarianism and neo-patrimonialism of “big man” politics and male charismatic leadership’ the ‘big woman’”<sup>25</sup> (349), this contrasts with the mama voice, particularly from Tanzanian women, which has a persuasive maternal tone. The mama voice draws from personal illustrations, making sermons inclusive of the speaker, often with a “heightened display of emotions and emotional language,” projecting confidence and assertiveness but not aggression, and decorum, all in the context of what the local cultures recognize as femininity (352). As a result, “a woman hugs you with her preaching . . . you feel loved . . . like a chicken cares for her chicks”<sup>26</sup> (352). However, these attributes “are not exclusive to the mama voice but descriptive of it” (353). The chapter credits the mama voice in preaching as having “a nurturing tone rather than one of aggression: her knowledge and competence are expressed with compassion” (355). The chapter further argues that the mama voice is boosted by the role of motherhood in African cultures in “the enhancement” and nurturing of life, in “acting as

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<sup>24</sup> Quoting Dana L. Robert, “World Christianity as a Women’s Movement,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30, no. 4 (2006): 180–188, p. 180.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/239693930603000403>

<sup>25</sup> Misquoting Jane E. Soothill, *Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power: Charismatic Christianity in Ghana*, Studies of Religion in Africa 30 (Leiden: Brill, 2007) and citing p. 93 but apparently drawing from pp. 164–179.

<sup>26</sup> Quoting “human rights lawyer and lay preacher Fiba;” ellipses original.

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go-between and peacemaker in conflict,” and in exercising both “societal leadership and domestic care” (354–356). These aspects of the mama voice are intrinsically Christian virtues that are second nature in women. They are shaped by women’s experiences and born out of the hardships that African women endure and tolerate. When women enact their maternal role in preaching, they bring life to the fusion of the Word of God and their personal experience.

This chapter draws attention to women’s ministry in the patriarchal African context “where the woman is omni-competent yet her husband has the authority as head” (360). The mama voice in preaching exploits the woman’s God given full potential as a valuable cultural tool for the African ecclesiology. In a male-dominated society, the Mama’s voice needs to be exploited to the full to occupy pulpits in an effort to balance the power-play in the African cultural worldview. That way, women’s ministry will grow in seniority and personal attributes in building the church in Africa. As the chapter has more than established, the mama voice in women’s preaching “compels its listeners to ‘be ‘submissive to the voice because [the audience take the place of a child] and you follow what the mother is doing [or saying].’<sup>27</sup> Whether listeners are male or female, then, they are placed in a subordinate role to the woman preaching, at least for that time” (360). The chapter concludes that in “drawing on African values, the mama voice is both authoritative and non-threatening; it maintains the broader social fabric while bringing challenge to individuals in the congregation, including men. . . . The mama voice in preaching in Tanzania gives women access to congregants and authority over them” (361). Although the chapter does not provide a panacea for marginalization and discrimination against women in the African church, it provides a crucial contribution to the role of women in African ecclesiology and church life.

***“The Camel Has Four Legs”***

In the final chapter 18, **Barron** uses the imagery of the camel having four legs to evaluate practical contextual African ecclesiology. The chapter’s central thesis seems to hinge on the phrase, “all churches are culture churches, including our own”<sup>28</sup> (366). It discusses how the camel utilises its four legs to move and function; then it projects a similar argument to the church. Each of the four legs represents a vital role in the life of the church, similar to a camel’s legs. The four legs of the church are: leadership, vision, scripture, and prayer. He argues that for the church to survive and thrive, it needs local ecclesial leadership, which

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<sup>27</sup> Quoting an anonymized interviewee.

<sup>28</sup> Quoting Andrew F. Walls, “The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture,” chapter 1 in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith* (Maryknoll : Orbis Books, 1996), 8.

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must be culturally conditioned. He further observes that true ecclesiology “is contingent upon the culture and society in which it is developed. All ecclesiology is culturally contingent and contextual” (367). He supports this argument by careful examination of various epochs of the history of the Church, which supports the thesis that “church polity could even be regarded as a “practical ecclesiology””<sup>29</sup> (368); it is always *ecclesia semper reformanda*, meaning it is always reforming, and as such, “we should expect different ecclesiologies to arise from African contexts” (369) because, “as Andrew Walls reminds us, ‘Christ takes all the cultures in the world to build his church’”<sup>30</sup> (370). He surveys the various enumerations of the marks of the Church, starting with the “Jerusalem Quadrilateral” in Acts 2:42): “apostolic doctrine/teaching, fellowship [*koinonia*], the breaking of bread [the Eucharist], and prayer” (372). he then acknowledges John Samuel Pobee’s “fivefold ‘koinonia’” of “the earliest Christian community”<sup>31</sup> (372), the four marks of traditional Roman Catholic polity, and those of the Reformation and of the African Independent/Initiated/Indigenous) churches or AICs. In each case, he shows the varying emphases necessitated by the various contexts that the Church encountered.

Expounding on the four-legged model, he emphasizes prayer and Scripture translated into the vernacular as of prime importance and necessary for finding the third leg of vision for mission, which is sparked and sustained by local leadership. Drawing from his parable, Barron argues that Christianity has always been polycentric and, as such, a local church should not depend on outside sources or places for leadership. In addition, he argues that such an ecclesial approach resonates with the principles of sound ecclesiology promulgated by the pioneering veteran missionary Henry Venn: self-supporting, self-governing, and self-extending. He points out that these principles were later developed as key elements of an acceptable missionary strategy, also known as “the Three Selves.” Recent missiologists (notably Paul Hiebert) added a fourth principle, self-theologizing, as a necessary characteristic for ecclesial maturity.

The chapter provides examples of the consequences that result from foreign missionaries ignoring the importance of local leadership in ecclesial life. It cites

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<sup>29</sup> Quoting Wim A. Dreyer, “The priesthood of believers: The forgotten legacy of the reformation,” *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 76, no. 4 (2020): Article 6021, 7 pages, p. 1. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.6021>

<sup>30</sup> Andrew F. Walls, “Rethinking Mission: New Direction for a New Century,” Keynote Lecture 1 in *World Mission in the 21st Century: Rethinking Mission: New Direction for a New Century*, ed. Kwang Soon Lee, 70–80 (Seoul: Center for World Mission, Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary, 2005), 77.

<sup>31</sup> Quoting John Samuel Pobee, *Giving Account of Faith and Hope in Africa* (Eugene, Oregon, USA: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 51.

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the Roman Catholic Church in China and Japan that resulted in “the absence of indigenous priests”<sup>32</sup> (377). Similarly, the British missionaries’ control over the churches in West Africa resulted in the secession of the Aladura church and the eventual proliferation of AICs from the Western Mission Churches, “who to this day, . . . ‘emphasize the Africanness of the church’ . . . to stress ‘the autonomy or independence of the church from external ecclesial control and its indigenization in Africa’”<sup>33</sup> (377).

The chapter underscores the need and the necessity of local ecclesiology as follows: “a local church that continuously relies on foreign aid and charity for its existence and essential services will always remain an unhealthy church that has not been fully established as truly local and viable”<sup>34</sup> (378). I also underscore the nexus of vision and church mission and share the author’s argument that “missiology and ecclesiology are necessarily entwined” (378) and that there is “an instinctive conjunction between ecclesiology and missiology”<sup>35</sup> (378). To illustrate the point, it cites how the East African Revival Movement “ultimately . . . fizzl[ed] out” due to adopting an isolationist ecclesiology that “turn[ed] inward, developing a focus on internal and personal spiritual self-improvement and failing to maintain an outward vision for missions and discipleship” (378). Although personal spirituality is important, it must always be balanced with mission because, as the chapter aptly points out, “mission is the very ‘core of ecclesiastical vocation’” (379).<sup>36</sup>

As regards the other two legs, accessibility to scripture in the vernacular language and a “culture of prayer” (366, 374, 380, 382, 384), the chapter draws from church history to validate their importance as foundational and *sine qua non* in church life. Regarding the importance of scripture in vernacular languages, **Barron** notes examples from North Africa, where the failure to translate Scripture into the native Berber and Punic dialects led to the imperial Roman Catholic Church controlling local church life to the detriment of local ecclesiology. The same failure contributed to the eventual collapse of Christianity in North Africa following the Islamic Conquest.

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<sup>32</sup> Quoting Valentine Ugochukwu Iheanacho, *Historical Trajectories of Catholicism in Africa* (Eugene, Oregon, USA: Resource Publications, 2021), 89.

<sup>33</sup> Incorporating quotes from James N. Amanze, *African Christianity in Botswana: The Case of African Independent Churches* (Gweru, Malawi: Mambo Press, 1998), 128.

<sup>34</sup> Quoting Iheanacho, *Historical Trajectories of Catholicism in Africa*, 57.

<sup>35</sup> Quoting Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 189.

<sup>36</sup> Quoting Jesse N. K. Mugambi, *The Biblical Basis for Evangelization: Theological Reflections Based on an African Experience* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 61.

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In contrast, the Coptic Christians in Egypt had translated the Bible into the local dialects. Consequently, “Christianity entered the Egyptian culture so deeply that the ‘Coptic’ and ‘Christian’ came to be synonymous” (382) and “Coptic speakers [were] caught up in a wave of mass conversion in the African countryside”<sup>37</sup> (382). Similarly, translation of Scripture into local dialects preserved Christianity in Ethiopia and Nubia for a substantial period and in most of Ethiopia for nearly two millennia. Although Christianity hobbled in some areas and eras, it still retained its vestigial witness. Christianity in Nubia illustrates the importance of the leg symbolizing local leadership in which, “although many Nubians still recalled that they used to be Christian[,] with no indigenous local leadership, Nubian Christianity’s dependence upon foreign resources ultimately resulted in its ‘being “starved” to death’<sup>38</sup> when it was separated from its mother church of Egypt” (385). The chapter contrasts the Nubian church with the church in Ethiopia. In both, Scripture was translated into the local languages, Old Nubian and Ge’ez. In Ethiopia, like Egypt but unlike Nubia, the monastic life flourished, and monasteries served as centres of both prayer and mission. As a result, although “Ethiopian Christianity was sometimes hobbled and unhealthy,” it “ultimately survived” (386). The Ethiopian Orthodox *Tāwāḥādo* Church (EOTC) discussed earlier (in Samuelson’s “Communal *Theosis*”) was eventually granted autocephaly, providing local leadership, and continues autonomously to this day.

In Kenya, **Barron** shows the importance of local autonomy as illustrated by the ecclesiology of the church among two African tribes, the Maasai and the Turkana, both of which have shown prolonged resistance to Western cultural imperialism vis-à-vis Christianity. A unique African ecclesiology developed in a mission church among these tribes that registered themselves as an AIC, the Community Christian Church (CCC), and crafted its constitution to allow participation of expatriate missionaries as partners in ministry but limited in leadership roles. This group of churches attest to an African ecclesial example in dispute resolution by harnessing African cultural dynamics as “a pattern of living Christian community in Africa that pays close attention to African

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<sup>37</sup> Quoting Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 7; “[were]” added by Barron.

<sup>38</sup> Quoting Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, New York, USA: Orbis Books, 1986), 27; and additionally citing Calvin E. Shenk, “The Demise of the Church in North Africa and Nubia and Its Survival in Egypt and Ethiopia: A Question of Contextualization?,” *Missiology: An International Review* 21, no. 2 (April 1993): 131–154, p. 140, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182969302100201>

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sociopolitical and religious resources as well as to the Christian tradition”<sup>39</sup> (388). The CCC perceives the church, to borrow the language of John Mary Waliggo, as “a people of God in which every member has both rights and duties and is entitled to full respect and involvement in what goes on in the church”<sup>40</sup> (388); **Barron** further notes that “what Waliggo prescribes as a necessary change in his Roman Catholic context, the CCC has realized” (388n111). Such an ethos resonates with the New Testament teaching of the church as the body of Christ, where every member contributes to the life of the church with their God given gifts and talents. The chapter is well-illustrated and lucidly substantiated, arguing that African ecclesiology must prioritise local leadership, the translation of scripture into regional dialects, backed up by prayer and a vision for mission, to build a vibrant and viable ecclesiology in African Christianity. The author of the chapter gave personal examples and experiences to validate that historical and cultural circumstances have always shaped ecclesiology. Overall, by choosing the imagery of the four legs of a camel or a four-legged African stool, the chapter vivified the pathway that African ecclesiology must chart to remain relevant and practical in African Christianity.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this book entails heavy reading but is invaluable for anyone seeking to understand the cultural intricacies of ecclesiology in African Christianity and its heritage hegemony from Western Christianity. For anyone seeking to understand practical ways of incorporating African ecclesiology, the last chapter by **Joshua Robert Barron** is a must-read; it is well-researched and illustrated with practical, personal examples. For those still debating the place of women in African ecclesiology, the seventeenth chapter by **Tamie Davis** provides the answer in “‘A Woman Teaches With Heart’: The Mama Voice in Tanzanian Women’s Preaching.” Overall, I highly recommend the entire book for any person wishing to take African ecclesiology seriously.

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<sup>39</sup> Quoting Elochukwu Eugene Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Eugene, Oregon, USA: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 7.

<sup>40</sup> Quoting John Mary Waliggo, “‘The Synod of Hope’ at a time of crisis in Africa,” chapter 4 in *African Theology on the Way*, ed. Diane B. Stinton, 35–45, International Study Guides (London: SPCK, 2010; reprint, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA: Fortress Press, 2015), 36–37.