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Experiencing Salvation in Africa

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY
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Introduction

The Africa Society of Evangelical Theology (ASET) is an academic society with pan-African (both from across the continent and from the Diaspora) and international membership. The best papers presented at the annual ASET conferences, after the usual peer review process, are subsequently published in an edited volume in the ASET Series.[1] *Salvation In African Christianity* explores understandings and expectations of salvation in general and in the African context specifically, as an effort to answer the age-long question, "What must I do to be saved?" The contributors and editors are to be commended for the strength of the presented data, critical assessment of that information, clarity of arguments, and presentation of ideas.

Review and Analysis

This book warrants a short review of each chapter, based on its content, style, clarity, and effectiveness, as well as the continuity and coherence of the chapters in relation to the book's objective. All twenty chapters in this book are

[1] The ASET Series so far includes: 1. *Christianity and Suffering: African Perspectives* (2017), 2. *African Contextual Realities* (2018), 3. *Governance and Christian Higher Education in the African Context* (2019), 4. *God and Creation* (2019), 5. *Forgiveness, Peacemaking, and Reconciliation* (2020), 6. *Who Do You Say That I Am? Christology in Africa* (2021), 7. *The Holy Spirit in African Christianity* (2022), and 8. *Salvation in African Christianity* (2023).

Editors' note: vol. 6 in the ASET Series is reviewed in this issue of this journal and vol. 7 in the ASET Series was reviewed in vol. 1, no. 1. ASET vol. 9, on ecclesiology in Africa, is due to be published in late 2024.

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valuable, but seven especially captured my attention.

Stand-out chapters

Chapter 18

"Salvation and the Problem of Negative Ethnicity and Schism in the Church in Kenya: Towards an *Ubuntu* Salvation Theology" by **Jackline Makena Mutuma** & **John M. Kiboi** — both at St Paul's University (Limuru, Kenya) — is exceptional! This is especially so in the light of their use of Ubuntu Salvation Theology as a template for understanding of salvation in African Christianity. In spite of 80% of Kenyans identifying as Christian (as of 2019), it is baffling to note that there is a significant presence of negative ethnicity in the Church in Kenya. Individualism, negative ethnicity, and denominationalism undermine the very values that both Christianity and African *ubuntu* espouse. The authors deem negative ethnicity and schism as twin dangers to the effective impact of Christianity in Africa. Negative ethnicity is the manipulation of ethnic identities for personal gains and interests. It injures, frustrates, ridicules, and demeans people and groups. Effects of negative ethnicity and schism include animosity, tyranny of numbers, oppression of minorities, discrimination, ethnic violence, and exclusion by members of the dominant community. This is also present in the Church. Ecumenism attempts to curtail this menace and bring peace and unity to the Church but has failed to foster the needed ecclesial unity and peace. A lasting panacea may be Ubuntu Salvation. Ubuntu represents a sense of humanity and togetherness, emphasizing the eminence of being human, ethical theory, and relational cosmology. These are reflected in African communitarian philosophy, human dignity and interrelatedness, commonality, and vital force. Salvation in the light of *ubuntu* includes wholeness in the physical, social, and psychological aspects of the human being, thereby offering healing for the negative ethnicity and schism that have caused division and pain in the African society and Church.

Chapter 11

"Critical Analysis of the Doctrine of Adoption through the Honor and Shame Paradigm" by **Kenosi Molato**, a researcher at SHINE Africa Project (Gaborone, Botswana), is an exciting and insightful read. The treatment of the concepts of adoption and the honour/shame dynamic concerning salvation is beautiful. He takes a dynamic step in reconstructing a doctrine of adoption from the Western perspective to look at it through the lens of the African honour and shame paradigm, arguing that *adoption* was a different conception in the OT than it is today. Traditional western interpretations understand adoption as the means whereby a believer is transferred from a status of alienation from God to a position of acceptance and favour with God or as the process of the redeemed becoming sons and daughters of God. Alternatively,

the concept of honour and shame is more about preserving the honour and integrity of a person, family or community.

Adoption is not a new idea. In the first century, the practice of adoption was common. In Greco-Roman culture, the family encompassed the more than the 'nuclear family' but included the wife and husband, unmarried children, slaves, freedmen, and foster children. If a man did not have a male child to carry the family name, a male child might be adopted. The adoptee would have the full rights of a natural born heir. The term Paul uses for adoption, *huiothesia,* is an honour term, emphasising the state of honour believers have in Christ. It is a place of dignity, a position in which believers are dignified to appropriate their privileges in Christ. Rather than being a place of maturing to sonship, believers are placed in this position because of their allegiance to Christ. In this way, the shame orientation that believers in African societies experience is dealt with. So, there is a sharp distinction between the understanding and practice and the process of adoption as practised in the early Greco-Roman world and Paul's use of the concept of adoption of believers in Christ.

Chapter 16

"Emerging Soteriological Issues in African Christianity in the Light of Resurgent African Cultures: The Practice of Ancestral Debts" by **Kamau Thairu** was quite exciting and a bit ridiculous; ridiculous not in a negative way, but I was just wondering how people can have such belief of ancestors causing havoc because they are allegedly owed debts by their living family members. So, the chapter is insightful and worth reading. **Kamau** notes that "recently among the Agĩkũyũ community of Kenya, there has been a campaign to abandon Christianity and return to 'culture'" (308). In response to this, he argues that there have been practices in the Kenyan community which demand revisiting concepts of salvation and the extent of its impact in ordinary lives of people. More importantly, it has stirred apathy towards missionary Christianity. This apathy, built on the premise that missionary Christianity is a tool for colonisation and the demolition of African culture, is a bane to African Christianity.

A prevalent concept among the teachings among Christians in Central Kenya is the practice of *thiiri wa ngomi,* meaning, the payment of ancestral debts. Oppositions to these teachings assert that Christ's redemptive work has satisfactorily paid all debts including those of the ancestors. Proponents of ancestral debts argue that because of these debts, the ancestors visit the living with calamities such as *mirimu* (e.g., malaria, typhoid, cholera), *ndwari* (e.g., cancer, diabetes, arthritis), or failed businesses as a punishment. If a man fails to pay the dowry of his wife and his parent-in-law dies without receiving the payment of the dowry, they can come back for the man and his family. It is even

argued that the prevalence of alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, divorce, and the like are attributed to debts owed by the ancestors. In response to this practice, understanding the scope of Christ's redemptive work in revelaton, ruling, and reconciliation is important. Jesus Christ revealed the Father, a ruler who sits on God's glorious throne, and he reconciles humanity to God. In Agĩkũyũ understanding of sin, sin is ontological and social. Communal calamities are considered as results of sin. The Agĩkũyũ believe that the dead can see the living because they live among the living even though they are not seen. However, the Bible teaches that the dead cannot see the living, and hence they cannot demand for any payment for any debt. Also, since they do not need the things of the physical world to survive in the world of the spirit, paying physical debts becomes irrelevant. While some may see "the claim by Christians that Christ's work at the cross has paid ancestor debts" as appropriate contextualization, **Kamau** argues that this "is misinformed and a misappropriation of Christ's work" (322).

Chapter 5

"Household Conversions in Acts and Their Significance for House-to-House Evangelism in Africa" by **Isaac Ampong**, a Ghanian serving as Pastor for Youth and Families at St. Paul's Anglican Church, Tervuren, Belgium, is also an excellent chapter. **Ampong** begins his chapter with a beautiful story of his experience of his conversation with a woman who said that she would ask her husband first whether they should place their trust in Jesus Christ and accept the message of salvation, and that if her husband decided to convert to Christianity, she would follow and if he refused, then she would not. **Ampong** argues in the chapter that the conversion of the head of the household functions as a catalyst in the conversion of others in the household. He also posits that the Greco-Roman cultures share some similar values with African culture and and thus Christians in Africa can employ similar strategies for household conversions. **Ampong** borrows Nock's now-classic definition: "conversion is the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from" what is wrong to what is right.[2] In the NT, conversion, repentance, penitence, and faith are strongly connected. Matthew Michael, the Nigerian biblical scholar and theologian, sees conversion as "repentance from sin and exercising of faith in Christ Jesus" (76).[3] This is the view of most Christians. **Ampong** lists several key examples from Acts, including the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his household (16:25–34), Cornelius and his household (10:1–11:18), Lydia and

[2] Citing Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 7.

[3] Citing Matthew Michael, *Christian Theology and African Traditions* (Eugene, Oregon, USA: Resource Publications, 2013), 178.

her household (16:11–15); Crispus and his household (18:8). He argues that within a household, in the ancient Roman context families typically shared a single religious adherence. In this context, conversion may not be genuine for every member of the family. However, the biblical witness of conversion narratives demonstrates "that the other members of the household were not compelled . . . to follow the *paterfamilias* in his conversion" (87). Some catalysts for conversion as identified by **Ampong** include preaching, miracles, crisis points and the conversion of the *paterfamilias* (head of the family). Because of similaries of culture and of conversion catalysts in the New Testament era and in contemporary Africa, the significance of the conversion of the head of the family for the conversion of the family as a whole is a strategy that African Christianity should adopt for effective result is house-to-house evangelism.

Chapter 19

"An All-Embracing, Contextual, Challenging, Now and Not Yet Salvation for Ugandan Rural Communities" by **Timothy J. Monger** is a classic! You could feel the author in the work. His application of the survey and reports from the survey give readers a sense of nearness to the rural communities of Uganda, and what they understand to be their expectation of salvation. His chapter is situated in the context of some rural communities in Uganda, communities that have been ravaged by colonialism, civil war, HIV/AIDS, poverty, climate change, food insecurity, social breakdown, and domestic violence. What type of salvation message can be preached to these kinds of people? These people witnessed internal displacement, and when they returned to their land, they were destitute their land remained untended, and farming skills had been lost. Children becoming orphans due to HIV/AIDS and civil war. In the midst of all these, what type of salvation message do they need?

The author seeks to discover how local churches can offer an authentic, vibrant, and powerful salvation for Ugandan rural communities. Rural communities of Gulu, Kitgum, Lira, and Masindi were used in the research. The result from this research in these rural communities shows that war, famine, diseases, death, hopelessness, struggle for education, low literacy, lack of basic needs, land grabbing, laziness, alcoholism, lack of knowledge, witchcraft, injustice and lack of infrastructure are some of the challenges of these rural communities. The respondents feel that becoming God-fearing, ability to support family, having business opportunities, good local ecosystem, purposeful life, good relationship with God and neighbours, having personal freedom, and joy and wholeness in the community will go a long way to restoring life in the community and engendering the salvation that is needed in the community. What true and relevant salvation then can the Ugandan Church offer these rural communities? They are to offer a salvation that reflects the following, among others:

1. Living God's story — understanding God's purpose in creation, vision of the new creation, the role of God's people in participating in his story.
2. That God reigns here — the vibrant connection between salvation and the kingdom of God. This salvation reminds the people of God's presence in their midst.
3. Holistic salvation — a salvation that embraces the spiritual and the physical, the personal and the communal, and the creational and the economic, affecting the whole life of a person.
4. Salvation for the downtrodden and marginalised — a salvation that reaches the most disadvantaged.
5. Embracing the Cross and leading sacrificially — salvation that recognises the Cross and places it at the centre of salvation and the work of Christ on the Cross, admonishing people to lead sacrificially.
6. Salvation for those different from us — salvation that breaks down tribal, ethnic, social, religious, economic, and other barriers.
7. Salvation is the beginning of a new chapter and the hope of all things made new — the salvation of new beginnings, instilling an unbreakable hope for the best which is yet to come is undeniably a powerful salvation.

Monger clearly demonstrates that the Church in Uganda can do something for the restoration of the rural communities mentioned in the chapter.

Chapter 17

"Finding New 'Alphabets' for Proclaiming Salvific Faith in Africa" by **Julius Kithinji**, who teaches at St Paul's University (Limuru, Kenya) and **Pauline K. Mwaura**, a minister in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. stands out for me because of the catchy nature of the topic of the chapter. I was intriqued by what the authors mean by "alphabets." They use the image as a metaphor for effective proclamation of the gospel, arguing that a search for "new 'alphabets'" is necessary because many African Christians have remained at the level of confession of faith without corresponding practice of that faith, demonstrating that the contemporary African Church's alphabet is tired and worn out, and thus ineffective in the proclamation of the gospel of salvation — there were no sufficient "alphabets" for the proclamation of the gospel in Africa.

The call for a new and contemporary alphabet for the proclamation of the gospel is necessitated by the lack of depth in the state of growth of Christianity in Africa. The rise of secularism also calls for an alternative hermeneutics of proclamation in the African Church. There is a need to also look at the prevailing agitation for the ordination of gay priests, solemnisation of gay marriages, and perversion of sexual orientations. The issue of *mburi cia kiama* among Agĩkũyũ and *njuri nceke* among the Ameru advocates for oathing that undermines the gains of Christianity in Africa are other concerns. (The gĩGĩkũyũ and Meru phrases refer to traditional rituals which many Christians consider to be tied to idolatrous practice.) There is also a rapid increase in

deliberate single motherhood, believed to be occasioned by *Mipango ya kando* ("side and unofficial marriages and secret marriages," 331), which is another area of concern related to relaxed sexual morals which lead to untold challenges in the family. There are consequences of sticking to worn-out alphabets. Giving preference to elders at the expense of the youth had led to the young people disengaging from the Church. This is especially sad for Africa which is regarded as a youthful continent. A continuation of this trend means that the future of youthful activeness in the Church is bleak. The alphabet of coziness is another worn-out alphabet that needs to be changed. This alphabet gave rise to the relaxed teaching of the scriptures. The proposed new alphabet includes the creation of a Pentecost community. For the authors, *Pentecost* is different from *Pentecostalism*. Pentecost is the fusion between the Holy Spirit and humanity, "producing a new dimension of living and Christian witness" (335). Pentecostalism "raises the danger of circularity" (335), whereby it contests against other Pentecostal communities, instead of winning souls to God. Another alphabet of note is that that speaks directly to religio-ethnicism. Africa of today is challenged with religio-ethnic issues, even within the Church. This has to be arrested. In current African Christianity, the alphabet of intentional scriptural and contextual discipleship is imperative for the Church to have any impact on the African continent.

Chapter 15

"The Logical Implication of Trinitarian Exclusivism" by **Joseph B. Onyango Okello**, a Kenyan teaching at Asbury Theological Seminary (Orlando, Florida, USA), is the most difficult to understand due to the philosophical nature of his approach to the treatment of the topic. The author's style of writing is quite clear, but philosophy is philosophy! He examines a major exclusive claim in Christianity — that Jesus is the only salvific way to God the Father.

Within contemporary African contexts, this has generated a key challenge to the evangelistic enterprise: What is the fate of the unevangelised? There are three primary positions: exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism. Exclusivism holds that the only way to the Father and eternal life is through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour; there is no other way to God. Religious pluralism maintains that all religions are salvifically valid, and hence, all adherents of all religions will be saved, indeed. Inclusivism maintains the centrality of Christ but asserts that anonymous Christians exist in other religions. **Okello** discusses the implications of Trinitarian exclusivism, drawing on the logic of Thomas Aquinas and thus ultimately of Aristotle. He offers a view that "humans who reject Jesus Christ will be condemned because a rejection of God is a rejection of Jesus Christ and a rejection of Jesus Christ is also a rejection of God" (305). He concludes with a call to the evangelistic enterprise.

Other chapters

Chapter 1

Jamie Viands is a scholar in Biblical Studies at Africa International University (Nairobi, Kenya). In **"Jeremiah 29:11: Rightly Applying an Old Testament 'Salvation' Text**," he brings expertise in Biblical exegesis and knowledge of Hebrew to bear in his analysis of Jeremiah 29:11 — "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (NIV-1984) —positing that Jeremiah 29:4–23 was a letter to the Jews in exile. The major thrust of the chapter is his concept of "Hopeful Future." He argues that the text was for a future hope, a kind of eschatological expectation, and not for the present nor those experiencing challenges in their lives. Even though the author argues that the text is not directly for individual Christians today, he admonishes that the text is "profitable" and applicable in various ways, hence, he identified six different ways of understanding the text. These are:

1. God has promised a hopeful future — but this is a long-term hope that is beyond our lifetime.
2. God's good plan for us is primarily focused on spiritual realities, not material things.
3. The promise of a hopeful future is only for those who call upon the Lord.
4. God's plans are for his collective people, not our individualistic plans for ourselves
5. God's plans point to the gracious character that believers experience in Christ.
6. The letter and text serve as a warning to false prophets of imminent prosperity.

Though this is a good chapter, Viands should have looked for a better way of applying this popular text in contemporary African Christianity. The exegesis of the text is sound, but the application and affirmation of its relevance for contemporary African Christianity is lacking.

Chapter 2

Daniel M. Mwailu examines **"Concepts of Righteousness and Salvation in African Perspectives: An Assessment of Biblical and African Understandings of Salvation in African Christianity."** Mwailu is a Senior Lecturer in Theology and Biblical Studies at Africa Nazarene University (Ong'ata Rongai, Kenya). He posits that the biblical idea of salvation depicts three aspects: rescue from danger, rescue from harm, and rescue from death. From the perspectives of African Traditional Religions (ATRs), he argues that salvation is ritualistic and utilitarian in nature, which he said is similar to that of

Hinduism. In Islam, salvation is obtained in submission to Allah. He notes Tokunboh Adeyemo's claim that "in the three major monotheistic religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam — salvation is achieved by submission" (25).[4] According to the Mwailu, salvation is from sin and evil through repentance by purification and rituals. In all of the efforts at achieving salvation, it is only God who can give salvation. An interesting part of the chapter is his treatment of what evil or sin is in some African contexts. For example, for the Nuer people (South Sudan, western Ethiopia), an evil act is not evil if it is not punished. For example, if a man sleeps with another man's wife, it is not evil if they are not found out by the society that forbids it. So, this means that if an evil is not discovered, it is not evil. This is quite different from the views of the New Testament and of African Christianity. Another interesting perspective of evil is that it is hierarchical. It is believed that those who are at the top of the hierarchy cannot commit sin or do evil. God and leaders in the community are seen in this light. The chapter is an interesting one. However, the author should have engaged more with the concept of righteousness and salvation rather than focusing on the concepts of sin and evil in an African context.

Chapter 3

Micah Onserio Moenga, a lecturer at Pan Africa Christian University (Nairobi, Kenya), discusses **"Salvation — Prosperity or Poverty? An Assessment of African Pentecostal Christianity."** Themes of prosperity and poverty are ubiquitous in African Christianity today. **Moenga** argues these are central to the theologies and preaching of Pentecostal Christianity in Africa, with special emphasis on poverty, diseases, prosperity, and victory. Reviewing "scholarly concepts of salvation and prosperity" (32), he highlights Ghanaian scholar J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu's understanding of salvation as transformation and empowerment, healing and deliverance, and prosperity and success; a transformation of our human situation to that which is in sync with reality. According to Sandra Barnes, **Moenga** reports, for many black megachurches, salvation is godly living that results in both economic and non-economic benefits. **Moenga**'s treatment of the biblical concept of salvation reveals that salvation is basically deliverance — emancipation from the oppression inflicted on one by enemies, as was the case with the Israelites. So salvation is deliverance from danger or harm. This was the case of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. In the NT, in the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus, salvation is found with the imparting of pardon. In **Moenga**'s treatment of

[4] Mwailu cites Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition* (Nairobi: Evangel, 1979; revised edition, 1997); and Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Ideas of Salvation," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 16, no. 1 (1997): 67–75.

Psalm 51 in the story of the confession of David, it is repentance and forgiveness that ensure the joy of salvation. In Pauline soteriology, **Moenga** emphasizes the place of transformation as a sign of salvation in one's life. In summary, salvation is holistic, involving physical, spiritual, and social dimensions. Therefore, it is imperative to consider these three dimensions in the treatment of soteriology. On the whole, **Moenga** presents a simple and lucid concept of salvation for the understanding of the average reader.

Chapter 4

Kyama Mugambi, at the time of publication a researcher at the Centre for World Christianity, Africa International University (Nairobi, Kenya) but currently at Yale Divinity School (New Haven, Connecticut, USA), explores **"'Jesus Is My Personal Saviour': Engaging Evangelical Themes of Individual Salvation in African Communal Contexts."** For Mugambi, evangelical theology has prioritized individualistic interpretations of salvation. This individualistic interpretation of salvation implies that soteriology is predicated on the individual's conversion experience. This individualistic approach to conversion by Africans arose from their contact with Western missionaries through preaching and discipleship. According to Mugambi, conversion is central to salvation. This conversion is hinged on God's love as expressed in Jesus Christ. A justification for the individualistic approach to conversion is the personal contextual nature of its experience. Conversion differs from one person to the other, and so, many see it as personal as it is always different from that of the next person. However, in some African communities, salvation is more or less seen from a communal perspective rather than from a personal one.

Chapter 6

"A Pauline Theology of Justification and Its Implications for Ecclesiology in Kenya amid Ethnic Divisions: An Exegesis of Galatians 2:11–21" — by **Danson Ottawa Wafula** of the Africa Centre for Apologetics Research (Kenya) and **Edwin Mwangi Macharia** of African International University (Nairobi, Kenya) — identifies some of the challenges the African Church faces. These include the proliferation of false teaching, divisions over ethnicity, and syncretism. Circumcision, as understood by the Jews, was a sign of the covenant between God and the children of Abraham. A closer look at this covenant relationship reveals the traditional conflict between the children of Abraham and those that were not. In Paul's polemic on the issue of justification, however, he argued that for those who believed in Christ through faith, the demarcation between them and the Gentiles was removed. There was no longer any distinction. **Ottawa Wafula** and **Macharia** discuss the relationship between faith in Christ and the works of the law; being dead to the law and being alive in God (Gal 2:19). Being dead to the law means not being under the restrictions of

the law because he is crucified with Christ so that he may live to God. In Galatians 2:20–21, a key result of justification is the dying to self which produces life. It is the new life that one gets when he is dead to self and the law. So, in ensuring justification, the ground for justification is ultimately the work of Christ and secondly the believer's union with Christ. What is learned in Galatians is applicable to the African context of the Church, especially as it relates to ethnic divisions. The writers insist that Paul's argument regarding the coming together of the Jews and Gentiles through the work of Christ be adopted to solve our own ethnic divisions and propose that the concept of *Ubuntu* be adopted by African Christians to stem the tide of ethnic divisions in the Church in Africa. Our understanding of justification should affect how we relate to people in the faith, seeing them as brothers and sisters.

Chapter 7

In **"Past, Present, and Future: Paul's View of Salvation in the Thessalonian Correspondence," Gift Mtukwa** — from Zimbabwe but teaching at Africa Nazarene University (Ong'ata Rongai, Kenya) — explores what salvation entails from the Shona (Zimbabwe) perspective through the lens of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians. The chapter uses African biblical hermeneutics to determine whether salvation is in the past, present, or future. For salvation to be fully understood in the African context, it must be relevant to the various realities that make up Africa such as disease, racism, poverty, ignorance, oppression, hatred, war, tribalism, insecurity, economic hardship, etc. In the Shona worldview, salvation is not only in the afterlife but also in the here and now. To them, salvation should be anthropocentric, affirming life. *Ruponeso* is the Shona word for salvation, and it can mean 'to give birth', 'to sustain life', 'to rescue', or 'to deliver a baby'. This is akin to the Akan soteriological concept which has to do with the protection and preservation of life, both physical and spiritual, from evil-doers like witches. Among the Shona, *chivi* is what salvation saves people from. *Chivi* is a sin — anything that threatens the life and general well-being of human beings and communities. Salvation in this sense results in harmonious relationships in the communities. Among the Shona, the idea of a saviour who died to save humanity is non-existent, even though the idea of sacrificing oneself for others is present. From the Thessalonian correspondence, salvation denotes 'healing from disease', 'safe travel', and 'protection in times of trouble' (1 Thess 1:9b–10). It is also used to denote deliverance from sin and ultimate deliverance when one is saved to enter eternal bliss with Christ at the end of life. In 1 Thessalonias 5:8–10, salvation is futuristic and eschatological. The use of 'the day of the Lord coming in a time no one knows' is a pointer to this, and so warns everyone to be on guard. 2 Thessalonians is also eschatological. In the soteriological synthesis, salvation as seen from the Shona perspective is mainly in the present. Thus, its futuristic

meaning is not as dominant as that in Paul's correspondence to the Thessalonians. True Christian salvation ought to be holistic because Jesus provided spiritual salvation and physical and emotional healing. Salvation in Shona and the general African perspective does not offer eternal salvation, but this can only be seen in the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 8

Moses Iliya Ogidis, a minister with Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) in Nigeria currently working on a PhD in New Testament at St Paul's University (Limuru, Kenya), addresses the challenge of infertility that confronts marriages in some African homes in **"How Can Women Be Saved? A Reinterpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15 within a Nigerian Context**." Even though the text is not directly about infertility, **Ogidis** cleverly weaves infertility into his interpretation. Infertility is seen as an involuntary childlessness that affects couples culturally, socially, religiously, and psychologically. This reality is said to affect couples in most African nations. While childlessness may not be a big issue in some other nations of the world, it is a big issue in Africa. Infertility can safely be classified as a pandemic that kills joy and peace in families. Most women with this challenge avoid social events and gatherings where children are present.

Situating the concept of infertility in the text, Moses notes that most scholars understand 'being saved through childbearing' as "the physical preservation of the [mother's] body during" the labor and delivery of childbirth (142). An alternative and christological interpretation suggests that it is through Mary's *teknogonías* ('childbearing') of Jesus — that is, through Jesus himself — that women will be saved. But **Ogidis** laments the exclusion of women who may not have the ability to give birth from this interpretation. Such women may be medically infertile or have an infertile husband or may have had reproductive organs removed due to health complications. The challenge for the Church in Africa is that reading this text in the context of infertility requires reading against the grain of historical interpretation. **Ogidis** admonishes that the text should be read in "its multidimensional context" (149) to include women's infertility. Some scholars share his opinion. In conclusion, the idea of "being saved through childbirth" needs to be interpreted through the "hermeneutics of life" (133, 135, 136, 149, 150) to enhance the lives of women who cannot conceive. This inclusive approach will be of great help to the church in Africa in incorporating women who cannot conceive into the mainstream of the life of the Church and society.

Chapter 9

Henry Marcus Garba, another ECWA (Nigeria) pastor and a PhD candidate (World Christianity) at Africa International University (Nairobi,

Kenya) considers the ongoing revelance of the African patristic era for African Christianity today in **"Understanding the Soteriological Conceptualization of the Early Church Fathers: An Exploration of the Legacy of Athanasius and Its Relevance to Africa Christianity."** The early Church had to grapple with many issues and heresies. The personality of Christ was among the thorniest of all. Additionally, the issue of salvation also confronted the Church. Athanasius, born around AD 293 in Egypt, was among the most important to tackle these challenges. He was probably ethnically Coptic (ancient Egyptian) rather than from the Greek upper class. **Garba** passes on the urban legend that Athanasius was referred to as "a black dwarf," suggesting that he was dark-complexioned (161).[5] He trained under Bishop Alexander while serving as a secretary to that patriarch. There are three categories of patristic and medieval soteriology – redemption, sanctification, and deification. The soteriology of Athanasius was founded on the theological meaning of deification and its implications. The soteriology of deification is about participation, which speaks of salvation as sharing God's incorruption and personal communion between the persons of the Trinity. Deification therefore means adoption, and not absorption. He posits that we are adopted by God, and not absorbed into Him. Athanasius argued that the nature of the fallen human race must be changed for salvation to be realized and that salvation is only possible through Christ. Athanasius also views salvation as restoring and recreating God's original intention for human existence. Athanasius argues strongly for the Incarnation as necessary for human salvation. This is where deification comes in. Salvation is inconceivable without deification which Athanasius sees as the personal encounter of the believer with God and His work of grace, whereby believers experience communion with God and are regarded as children of God. The soteriological contribution of Athanasius is also against the Arians' subordinationism which denied the Trinity and its soteriological implication for humanity. Athanasius

[5] Editors' note: the earliest known reference to Athanasius as a 'black dwarf' is in 1984: Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1: *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984), 199. This was retained in reprint edition (Peabody, Massachussets: Prince Press, 1999), 173–174. However, González did not provide any citation. Inumerable other historians, including one of this journal's editors, have searched fruitlessly to find any primary source reference to Athanasius as a 'black dwarf.' When this was brought to González's attention, he checked his notes but was unable to find any information. Thus in the revised and updated second edition (New York: HarperOne, 2010), González removed this error. Here, Garba cites Mark Ellingsen, *African Christian Mothers and Fathers: Why They Matter for the Church Today* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 130. Ellington, however, fails to provide any citation except to a blogpost that actually points out González's error.

argued that Christ is not *like* God, but rather *of the same essence and substance with* God. From the African perspective, Africans have always believed in God before the advent of Christianity, but when the missionaries came, they brought the concept of the Son of God who is also God, and who brings salvation. But misunderstandings of salvation abound. However, the practice of inculturation, indigenization, and contextualization have helped Africans to understand soteriology from African perspectives. For Athanasian soteriology to be understood properly in Africa, there is a need for a collaborative dialogical reflection on soteriology in the language of Athanasius's soteriology, in appropriate response to the contemporary needs of African Christianity.

Chapter 10

The place of sacrifice in the religious worldview of Africans cannot be overemphasised. In African Christianity, it holds a prime place in the hearts of adherents and the same holds for traditional religions. In Christianity, the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of humanity is significant. However, some critics have taken the sacrifice of Christ with a pinch of salt, arguing that it holds little or no value in explaining the meaning of atonement in Western contexts. **Samuel K. Bussey** addresses these issues in **"The Sacrifice of Christ in African Perspective: A Contribution to the Atonement Debate."** He notes that African scholars such as John Ekem, Edison Kalengo, and Mercy Oduyoye have challenged such western interpretations in five important ways:

	Western interpretation	vs	African interpretation
1.	Metaphorical approach		Dialogical Approach
2.	Focus on ritual sacrifice		Focus on both ritual sacrifice and self-sacrifice
3.	Reduction of sacrifice to moral self-giving		emphasis on multiple themes
4.	Association of sacrifice and death		Strong association of sacrifice with life
5.	Focus on understanding and articulation		deep concern for worship and everyday life

Some modern theological interpretations argue that the death of Christ, while effective for our atonement, was only an example of moral self-giving. This understanding diminishes the atoning work of Christ and renders it incapable of truly saving humanity from sin. In the Luo context (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania), sacrifice is seen as a means of removing a barrier or curse from the life of an individual or community, not just a practice of 'satisfaction' or 'penal substitution' as it is understood in many Western contexts.

In contrast to this, **Bussey** highlights contributions from the aforementioned African theologians, making use of several methods: dialogical

exegesis, intercultural/cross-cultural hermeneutics, intertextual dialogue, and applied hermeneutics. These scholars aregue that Christ's sacrifice should be understood in terms of gift, atonement, substitution, covenant, and communion. Oduyoye notes the sacrifice of women in the Church in Africa. She sees the story of sacrifice from within the narrative of liberation, making women's experiences the starting point for her dialogical typological account of sacrifice. In light of African theological contributions, **Bussey** argues that western reductions of sacrifice to mere moral self-giving should be discarded for the rich African dialogical concept of sacrifice, and finally, sacrifice should also be seen from a robust ecclesial perspective in liturgy and communion.

Chapter 12

Joseph Mavulu, a minister in the Africa Inland Church who teaches at International Leadership University (Nairobi, Kenya), attempts to proffer **"A Balanced Approach to Understanding the Concept of Salvation in Contemporary African Christianity."** For him, salvation is the deliverance of humankind by religious means from sin or evil, an attempt that strives towards restoring humans to their truest state which leads to eternal blessedness. Western theologians seem to classify grace into common grace and saving grace. Common grace is about good health, rain, children, prosperity, protection from danger and evil, provision of general well-being and the like by God. Saving grace is the salvation that brings people to spiritual salvation, the saving of their souls. By this approach, it seems the provisions of physical blessings are not part of holistic salvation for humanity.

In the Old Testament, the concept of salvation, associated with the Hebrew term *yesha* and its cognates, means to bring to a spacious environment where one is at ease, free to develop without hindrance. Metaphorically speaking, it conveys the sense of freedom from limitations and factors that constrain or confine. Within ATRs, salvation refers to physical wholeness, protection from dangers or anything that is in opposition to the general well-being of humanity. This is almost the same understanding as in African Christianity, as we see in the works of John Mbiti and Henry Mugabe. In African cosmology, salvation is not individualistic, but collective, communal, and corporate. Another important factor in varied African perspectives of salvation is the influence of the prosperity gospel, which sees salvation in very practical terms which must manifest in general well-being, good health, and material prosperity. According to some prosperity gospel proponents, one is not truly saved unless free from what prevents the enjoyment of physical and spiritual wholeness.

In achieving a balanced understanding of the concept of salvation, **Mavulu** finds a study of Mark 5:35 useful, where Jesus tells a woman that her faith has healed her and commands her to go in peace and be whole. **Mavulu** argues that

this statement is more than a dismissal formula. It means to go as one restored to a proper relationship with God. It can also mean wholeness. So, even though this woman was healed physically from her sickness, her healing also had a spiritual dimension. From this text, it is clear that Jesus was and is not only interested in the physical well-being of people but also in their spiritual well-being. So, a balanced salvation must focus on both the spiritual and the spiritual dimensions of the life of individuals.

Chapter 13

David K. Ngaruiya, an Associate Professor at International University (Nairobi, Kenya), offers an **"An Exploration of Understanding Seven Dimensions of Salvation in African Christianity."** He examines salvation from seven dimensions in African Christianity using two selected African churches:

1. Salvation from God's wrath
2. Eschatological Salvation
3. Salvation form sin
4. Salvation from being lost
5. Salvation from physical ailments
6. Salvation from life's pollution
7. Salvation from danger

Ngaruiya finds a point of convergence between salvation from the perspective of ATR and the Lukan expression of salvation. To the general view that salvation in ATR is primarily the physical well-being of people, this chapter adds a geographical dimension to the salvation in African understanding. People seek refuge in times of danger or challenges in sanctuaries such as sacred mountains, caves, shrines, or rocks. These can also be places for sacrifice. Two additionals aspect of salvation are its historicity and spirituality.

Building on traditional African concepts of salvation — such as the Annang (Nigeria) concept of *edinyanga* which encompasses movement from danger to a state of safety, being free from physical attack, safety from sources of harm, flourishing in a safe environment, harmonious relationships with others, and acting in ways which bring salvation — and the Gospel of Luke's concern that salvation necessarily includes the transformation of human life, forgiveness of sin, healing from diseases and release from any kind of bondage, with an added emphasis on the social issues of the poor, **Ngaruiya** recognizes that salvation is multidimensional. Insights from African cultures and religions can help African Christians recover or retain this holistic understanding of salvation. ATRs, however, are not the panacea that some claim — ATRs can be idolatrous and tend to minimize the perspective of the Kingdom of God.

From the case studies reviewed in this chapter, **Ngaruiya** offers three

proposals and one observation for African Christians. The African Church, while not neglecting the spiritual aspect of salvation, needs to be deliberate in teaching a holistic salvation. Evangelists (and pastors) in African churches need training in how to proclaim a holistic gospel while safeguarding themselves from prosperity gospel that is harmful. Discipleship needs to reflect that the gospel is holistic. Understanding the concept of salvation in ATR helps with contextualisation of the gospel. An understanding of these seven dimensions of salvation vis-à-vis the position of the scriptures on the same is imperative for a balanced African Church

Chapter 14

Philemon Ongole, Overseer of Deliverance Churches in Eastern Uganda, continues the theme of **"Holism in Salvation."** Holism in the context of salvation means the impact of salvation on the whole life of a human being. Justification and faith are key in the understanding of salvation in the context of this chapter. As has been seen from previous chapters, there is a tendency to impose an unbiblical dichotomy onto reality: secular or sacred, physical or spiritual, cultural/political or ecclesiastical, private or public, holy or unholy, what is for God or what is for the world, religious or not religious. Holism is important because God's restorative programme in the salvation of humanity does not leave out some aspects of human life. Salvation reaches all areas of human life. Holism also extends the view of the experience of God's kingdom values in Africa. This is the experience of the dynamic reign or kingly rule of God in the sphere in which the rule is experienced. Even though this understanding could be futuristic, it has been inaugurated by Jesus Christ. A challenge in the understanding of holism is that African have a strong attachment to their culture, values, and lifestyles. These can result in syncretism, whereby believers have Christian faith but also engage in traditional beliefs that are not supported by the Scriptures, Some of which lead to immorality, idolatry, or ancestor worship. Second, a great deal of influence comes from the West into Africa. Some of these lead to aspects of postmodernism which disregard the truth of God. African believers still need much of discipleship to help them navigate these tricky paths. In conclusion, holism is a profound Christian truth that should be taken with all seriousness because salvation is holistic biblically, theologically, and practically.

Chapter 20

Kevin Muriithi Nereba, another lecturer at St Paul's University (Limuru, Kenya), embarks on **"An Exploration of Pentecostal Theology and Praxis of Salvation in Kenya."** He identifies three key themes in Pentecostal theology: dominion (creation mandate), empowerment (charismata in the Christian life), and present wholeness (over-realized eschatology). Pentecostal theology in the

Kenya context has been identified with its belief in personal transformation, informal liturgy, fluidity, and dynamism. It utilises a holistic worldview approach which connects the doctrine of salvation to the doctrines of creation, pneumatology, sanctification, and eschatology. Avoiding a dualistic understanding of Christian life that can weaken Christian life, it sees salvation as the recovery of the mandate of humanity given at creation and the possibility of well-being in this life. From this perspective, it tries to mitigate African realities coloured by corruption, poverty, and inadequate public health care systems. Theology must maintain a dialogical engagement between local worldviews and biblical theology. In African contexts, Christian theology must not overemphasize African traditional worldviews through an overbearing focus on African cosmologies. Allowing biblical worldview and theology to inform its understanding and practices, pentecostal theology can be enriched by viewing salvation within the broader scope of the Spirit's work in creation, sanctification, and consummation. In all, Pentecostal theology, when properly harnessed, will do a lot for good for African Christianity and the African society at large.

Conclusion

My overall impression is that *Salvation In African Christianity* is a must-read for churches, seminaries and Departments of Theology in African Universities. Its key messages and its value to the intended audience are well communicated in the chapters. My rating for the book is an A+, and my recommendation is that this Book should be made accessible in both soft and hard copies to everyone. However, I admonish the editors that in subsequent series, they should endeavour to ensure that contributors are more representatively spread across Africa, covering the north, east, west and south. This particular volume concentrated more on East Africa, and particularly on Kenya.