



BOOK NOTE REVIEW

Kigame, Reuben. *Essays in African Christianity and Theology*. Eldoret, Kenya: Posterity Publishers, 2023.

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Reuben Kigame's ideas in this book were initially developed as submissions of his doctoral assignments on emergent issues in African Christianity and theology. Kigame addresses these emerging issues from multi-disciplinary perspectives in the thirteen chapters of this book. He ventures into areas including decolonizing African theology, African identity, and LGBTIQI controversy.

Decolonizing African Christianity is central in Kigame's book, discussed in nine out of the thirteen chapters. In Kigame's view, decolonization should interest theology and all disciplines. He shares the decolonization thoughts of Prof Ndlovu-Gatscheni Selebo and Kwasi Wiredu,¹ prioritizing three domains where colonization has most affected African thinking. These include *epistemicide*, which shuns indigenous knowledge, *linguicide*, where the colonizers' language replaced the local vernacular, and *culturecide*, which demotes the values and local way of life while promoting [foreign] 'civilization'. To decolonize African theology, Kigame proposes emancipating it from the empire's influence in literature, philosophy, education, architecture, music, medical science, and history. He deals with these in chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. For him, Christians are better off studying theology in African institutions, with contextualized theological instruction. The primary decolonization example in Kigame's essays is indigenized Christianity, as explained in chapters 7 and 8. He discusses indigenized African Christianity in Kenya in chapter 4, including the Africa Israel Nineveh Church in Vihiga County (western Kenya), the *Roho* churches among the Luhya and Luo peoples of western Kenya, and the *Akurinu*

¹ Kwasi Wiredu, "Toward decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion," *African Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1998): 17–46,
<https://asq.africa.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/168/Vol-1-Issue-4-Wiredu.pdf>

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(aka Holy Ghost Church of East Africa) in central Kenya among the Agĩkũyũ people.

True to the spirit of the interdisciplinary approach, Kigame acknowledges and analyses earlier African proponents of decolonization. He especially mentions Ngugi wa Thiong'o's concept of using vernacular rather than English,² and Okot P'Bitek's call to purge African Christian Christianity of Greek influences.³ Although Kigame rides on the African writers' conception of decolonization, their deriding of the Christian faith appalls him. He first, as a Christian apologist, protests the way post-colonial literature presented Christianity as colonial and un-African. He then defends Christianity from undue criticism by positioning Christianity as a universal faith.

By employing historical and hermeneutical responses, Kigame refutes claims that Christianity is not an African faith and disagrees with the categorization of Christianity as a Western religion. For Kigame, St Luke's writing attests that Christianity came into Africa in the first century and, therefore, was deemed an African faith. Kigame calls for an AFRICENTRIC interpretation of Christianity as a global faith, a departure from the misleading Eurocentric Christianity, and sees no reason to reject the rich Christian Heritage of Africa based on a distorted interpretation of historical facts.

Kigame's genius is his engagement of African identity through the African musical genre; this is only natural as Kigame himself is a well-known Kenyan musician. He takes the Congolese musician Verckys's number "*Nakomitunaka*" (Lingala for 'I ask myself') to set the identity dialogue.⁴ Verckys directs his questions to God, as his ultimate arbiter, and engages his *négritude* by questioning culture and colonization, both socio-political and theological. In his music, Verckys addresses the themes of *négritude* identity, the decolonization of Christian symbolism, and the place of *négritude* in biblical theology. Verckys questioned the portrayal of Adam and Eve and the angels and Saints of the Church as white, while our ancestors, Satan, and evil as portrayed as black. Kigame interprets Verckys's question as decolonizing skin colour, which gave notoriety to black negativity. In Kigame's analysis, Verckys was deconstructing the Christian missionary symbols that undermined African

² Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1981).

³ Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1971).

⁴ Georges Kiamuangana Mateta (1944–2022) performed under the *nom d'arte* "Verckys." "*Nakomitunaka*" was released on a 1973 album by Verckys and Orchestre Vévé.

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identity. Hence, Kigame calls for divesting Christian symbols of misleading excesses.

In Chapter 11, Kigame wades into the LGBTQI discourse. He opens it with an anecdote which exposes his bias: the story of a 20-year-old lady who, Kigame claims, made a moral decision to ditch a homosexual lifestyle for a heterosexual marriage. This revealed Kigame's persuasion that the conditions listed as LGBTQI were biological (bisexual and transgender), but the remaining were lifestyle and social alternatives. He claims long periods of isolation in one gender context allowed for the LGBTQI condition and that people discovered being gay during their imprisonment or unisex primary and high school. For Kigame, the concern for LGBTQI is to be seen in terms of whether its associated behaviors are sin or not. He considers the use of terms like 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' as a coverup for promoting sexual orientation ideology. While he opposes ostracization of gay people, at a personal level, and urges for their support in society as fully equal citizens, he does not extend this support to the church where his interest lies. For Kigame, the LGBTQI question presents the Church worldwide with a crisis, although he conceives a possibility of the church owning the crisis while staying faithful to the scriptures, hence the "Judean Solution" by loving homosexuals and not condoning their practices (328–329). He recommends a balance between obeying scriptures in denouncing homosexuality as a sin and extending mercy to those involved. The Anglican church can love homosexuals by leading them to abstain from perversions and nudging them to reform. He further recommends barring them from partaking in the Eucharist.

Kigame's postulation on decolonizing African Christianity is too blunt for failing to anchor his reasoning on a coherent definition. Lumping three key themes together — resistance to colonialism, indigenization, and neo-colonialism in decolonization — obscured aspects of theology needing attention. Nonetheless, through these essays, Kigame opens the door for scholars in African Christianity and theology, to probe further the notions of colonization and decolonization, of coloniality and decoloniality. These terms, claim Maldonado-Torres,⁵ are becoming key terms for movements that challenge the predominant racialized, religious, liberal, and neoliberal politics and religion of today.

⁵ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality, Caribbean Studies Association (2016), 2.
https://caribbeanstudiesassociation.org/docs/Maldonado-Torres_Outline_Ten_Theses-10.23.16.pdf