



EDITORIAL

# Applying Ubuntu

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*“To have Ubuntu is to be one who recognizes the humanity of others,  
for it is inextricably linked to my own.”<sup>1</sup>*

This issue of *African Christian Theology* was not designed to be a themed issue, but the articles are linked by the quintessential African concerns of *ubuntu*. Perhaps the best-known proponent of *ubuntu* is Desmond Tutu (1931–2021; Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg, 1985–1986, and Archbishop of Cape Town, 1986–1996), who drew on “the proverbial Xhosa expression ‘*ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu*,’ which, translated roughly, means ‘each individual’s humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others’ or ‘a person depends on other people to be a person.’”<sup>2</sup> Yet often mission practitioners fail to embody humility and *ubuntu* in their interactions with those among whom they serve. In the second article, “Ubuntu as a Corrective in Mission,” Stephanie A. Lowery explores how a robust application of Tutu’s *ubuntu* theology can provide a needed realignment to the practice of Christian mission. While it is necessary to address the ‘lostness’ of those who are outside of Christ, mission practitioners must also recognize their shared humanity with the lost, who nonetheless were created as the image and according to the likeness of God, and they must embody a willingness to learn from those with whom they are sharing the good news.

“Adam and Eve *together* reflect God,” as Lowery notes in her article. However, many Christians still effectually deny that women are equally image-

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<sup>1</sup> Miki Kasongo, *Trois Philosophies pour un Monde Non-Violent: François d’Assise, René Girard et Ubuntu*, Ouverture Philosophique (Paris: Éditions L’Harmattan, 2023), 97; my translation.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, Ohio, USA: Pilgrim Press, 1997), 9; citing Augustine Shuute, *Philosophy for Africa*, unpublished manuscript, n.d. (University of Cape Town, South Africa), 5.

bearers of God, no less than men. For that reason, the journal is happy to republish an important paper from John Samuel Pobe (1937–2020), “In His Own Image . . . Male and Female He Created Them.” Pobe explores the complementarity and mutual reciprocity of male and female, stressing “the community dimension of the *imago Dei*” and insisting that “women and men are partners whose nature is the same essentially: they are fellow creatures, body, soul and spirit and equally in the image and likeness of God.” Consequently, men and women alike “are created for love, dignity, rationality, and community” and any and all “marginalization of woman by man, which our cultures are full of,” are to be lamented and corrected.

These two articles lay a suitable foundation for the contribution of Alfred Sebahene and Ruth Barron, “Without Exceptions: Envisioning Ubuntu Churches Confronting Abuse in Africa.” It is widely recognized that “ubuntu conveys the idea of putting one’s strength at the service of one’s neighbor, especially the weak, the poor and the sick, without taking advantage of anyone, and of treating others as one would like to be treated oneself.”<sup>3</sup> Christians, then, should recognize that when we obey the two greatest commandments, we are in fact practicing a Christward ubuntu. Human flourishing is fostered by ubuntu, but humans cannot flourish in the context of abuse. We must recognize that abuse is always an attack on human flourishing and marks a gap in our practice of ubuntu. Abuse is the antithesis of love. Just as Lowery challenges the Church to apply ubuntu to its theology and practice of mission, Sebahene and Barron challenge the Church to apply ubuntu *without exceptions* to victims of abuse.

*African Christian Theology* is passionate about theological education and formation. The journal and its publisher, ACTEA, are committed to academic scholarship and research. But we editors recognize that many of the theological institutions on the continent lack sufficient access to resources. Students, and sometimes even teaching faculty, struggle to know works are available on a given topic. Therefore, ACTEA is happy to collaborate with projects such as African Theology Worldwide,<sup>4</sup> which directs researchers to the best available scholarship. In addition, this journal will occasionally publish bibliographies for this purpose. This issue features a bibliography on “The Prosperity Gospel in African Christianity.” Just as it is increasingly necessary “to know something about Africa” in order to successfully “undertake serious study of Christianity,”<sup>5</sup> it is also necessary to understand the impact of the prosperity gospel to fully understand contemporary expressions of Christian faith on the continent.

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<sup>3</sup> Kasongo, *Trois Philosophies pour un Monde Non-Violent*, 97; my translation.

<sup>4</sup> Available online at <https://african.theologyworldwide.com/>

<sup>5</sup> Andrew F. Walls, “Eusebius Tries Again: Reconceiving the Study of Christian History,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24, no. 3 (2000): 105–111, p. 106.

Four books are evaluated with full-length review essays. Stephanie A. Lowery and Beatrice Mutua examine the first volume published by the Theological Society of Malawi, *Decolonizing the Theological Curricula in an Online Age*. This edited volume addresses many issues pertinent to theological institutions here in Africa. Okuchukwu Venatus Akpe reviews *Can a Christian Be Cursed? An Evangelical Response to the Problem of Curses*, a book that address a set of concerns keenly felt by many Christians in Africa. The next two books reviewed represent some of the best new scholarship in New Testament studies. *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically*, an edited volume which includes contributors who are from or who have lived in four different African nations, is reviewed by Benjamin Marx. This is followed by Nebeyou A. Terefe's review of *Intercession of Jesus in Hebrews*.

Finally, we have four 'Book Note' short reviews. Writing from Zambia, Willem-Henri den Hartog reviews the edited volume, *Evangelism: Perspectives from an African Context*, and Ryan L. Faber reviews *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education*. Next, Emmanuel A. S. Egbunu provides a Nigerian perspective of the edited volume, *Africans in Diaspora and Diasporas in Africa*. Finally, Leita Ngoy provides an emic review of a book studying her home region in DR Congo, *Religious Entanglements: Central African Pentecostalism, the Creation of Cultural Knowledge, and the Making of the Luba Katanga*.

This issue offers voices representing fourteen countries in Africa — Cameroon, DR Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia (this includes authors of reviewed books). If your country is not represented, then we encourage you to consider submitting something for a future issue. But for now — *tolle lege*, 'take and read.'