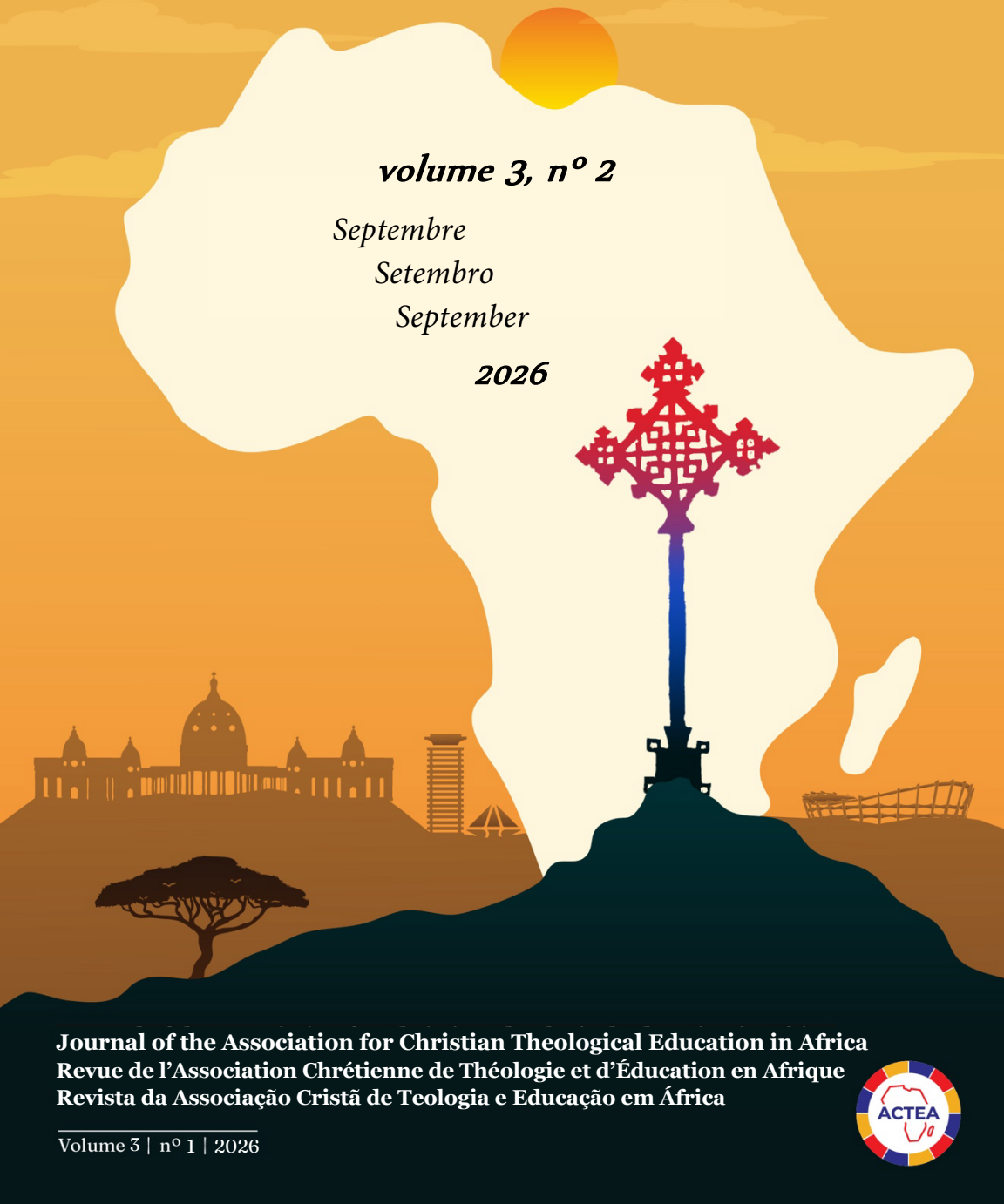
THÉOLOGIE CHRÉTIENNE AFRICAINE
TEOLOGIA CRISTÃ AFRICANA
AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY



volume 3, nº 2

Septembre
Setembro
September

2026

Journal of the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa
Revue de l'Association Chrétienne de Théologie et d'Éducation en Afrique
Revista da Associação Cristã de Teologia e Educação em África

Volume 3 | nº 1 | 2026

African Christian Theology

Journal of the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa

VOLUME 3, Nº 2
(September 2026)



ACTEA

NAIROBI | ABIDJAN

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Volume 3 • Nº 2
September / Septembre / Setembro 2026

Published by / Publié par / Publicado por



Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa
Association Chrétienne de Théologie et d'Éducation en Afrique
Associação Cristã de Teologia e Educação em África

Continental Office / Bureau Continental / Gabinete Continental

6th Floor, AEA Plaza
Valley Road
Nairobi, Kenya

P.O. Box 49332-00100
Nairobi, Kenya

Bureau Francophone

Conseil des Instituions Théologiques d'Afrique Francophone (CITAF)
25 BP 684
Abidjan 25
Côte d'Ivoire

ISSN: 3006-1768
e-ISSN: 3007-1771

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ACTEA et *Théologie Chrétienne Africaine* remercient avec gratitute les services rendus par les universitaires suivants en tant que membres fondateurs du comité de rédaction (2023–2025)

A ACTEA e *Teologia Cristã Africana* agradecem com apreço os serviços prestados pelos seguintes académicos como membros fundadores do comité editorial (2023–2025):

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The articles in *African Christian Theology (ACT)* reflect the opinions of the authors and reviewers and do not necessarily represent those of the Editors or of ACTEA.

All submissions are subject to double-blind peer review. Unsolicited submissions are welcome, though not guaranteed of publication in the journal. Manuscripts and reviews may be sent to submissions@AfricanChristianTheology.org. Queries and other communications may be addressed to the managing editors at Editors@AfricanChristianTheology.org

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Les articles de *Théologie Chrétienne Africaine (TCA)* reflètent les opinions des auteurs et des évaluateurs et ne représentent pas nécessairement celles des rédacteurs ou d'ACTEA.

Toutes les soumissions font l'objet d'un examen par les pairs en double aveugle. Les soumissions spontanées sont les bienvenues, mais leur publication dans la revue n'est pas garantie. Les manuscrits et les critiques peuvent être envoyés à submissions@AfricanChristianTheology.org. Les questions et autres communications peuvent être adressés aux Directeurs-Éditeurs à l'adresse suivante :
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African Christian Theology is the academic journal of the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA). The mission of ACTEA is to strengthen theological education through accreditation, scholarship, and support services to serve the church and transform society. The journal is one way in which ACTEA engages theological educators and church leaders in addressing relevant issues facing the church and society in Africa. *African Christian Theology* serves the whole of Africa and provides a venue for conversations between different regions of Africa, as well as an organ through which African voices can address World Christianity at large. Following in the footsteps of Kwame Bediako, Byang Kato, Kä Mana, Lamin Sanneh, Andrew F. Walls, and Isaac Zokoué, the journal promotes World Christianity perspectives through deep engagement with African contextual realities. Articles are published in English, French, and Portuguese; each article has a trilingual abstract in those languages.

ACTEA was founded in 1976 by the Theological and Christian Education Commission of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA). Under its continued sponsorship, ACTEA operates with internal autonomy in the accreditation of programmes of theological education throughout Africa, in order to stimulate the improvement and standardization of such programmes, and in order to secure academic recognition for such programmes wherever possible, especially among the constituencies of these institutions in Africa and among similar institutions and their constituencies overseas. ACTEA is a founding and constituent member of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE). ACTEA maintains offices in Nairobi and Kinshasa and can be found online at acteaweb.org. For further information on any aspect of ACTEA, please email the Executive Administrator at admin@acteaweb.org and copy the Executive Director at director@acteaweb.org.

The colours of ACTEA's logo are blue, red, and gold. Blue signifies royalty and speaks to ACTEA's efforts in raising a royal priesthood of God's servants throughout Africa. Red is the colour of blood and symbolises the redemptive act of Christ on the cross. Gold represents the preciousness of God's Word and the work which God's people do. Gold also reflects ACTEA's mission of prophetic proclamation of glorious hope in Christ, to African peoples first and then to the world, through theological education.

https://africanchristiantheology.org/

Théologie Chrétienne Africaine est la revue scientifique de l'Association Chrétienne de Théologie et d'Éducation en Afrique (ACTEA). La mission d'ACTEA est de renforcer l'éducation théologique par l'accréditation, la recherche et les services de soutien afin de servir l'église et de transformer la société. La revue est l'un des moyens par lesquels ACTEA stimule et implique les enseignants en théologie et les responsables d'église à aborder les questions pertinentes auxquelles sont confrontées l'église et la société en Afrique. *Théologie Chrétienne Africaine* est au service de l'ensemble de l'Afrique et constitue un lieu de dialogue entre les différentes régions d'Afrique. Elle sert ainsi d'organe par lequel les voix africaines peuvent s'adresser au christianisme mondial (« World Christianity ») dans son ensemble. Suivant les traces de Kwame Bediako, Byang Kato, Kä Mana, Lamin Sanneh, Andrew F. Walls, et Isaac Zokoué, la revue promeut les perspectives du christianisme mondial à travers un engagement profond avec les réalités contextuelles africaines. Les articles sont publiés en anglais, en français, et en portugais ; chaque article est accompagné d'un résumé trilingue dans ces langues.

ACTEA a été fondée en 1976 par la Commission d'Éducation Théologique et Chrétienne de l'Association des Évangéliques en Afrique (AEA). Sous le parrainage continu de l'AEA, ACTEA opère avec une autonomie interne dans l'accréditation des programmes d'éducation théologique à travers l'Afrique, afin de stimuler l'amélioration et la normalisation de ces programmes, et d'assurer la reconnaissance académique de ces programmes partout où cela est possible, notamment parmi les circonscriptions de ces institutions en Afrique et parmi les institutions similaires et leurs circonscriptions à l'étranger. ACTEA est un membre fondateur et constitutif du Conseil International pour l'Éducation Théologique Évangélique (en anglais, International Council for Evangelical Theological Education ou ICETE). ACTEA a des bureaux à Nairobi et à Kinshasa et peut être contactée en ligne à l'adresse suivante : acteaweb.org. Pour plus d'informations sur n'importe quel aspect d'ACTEA, veuillez envoyer un courriel au Directeur Francophone à directeur.francophone@acteaweb.org et une copie au Directeur Exécutif à director@acteaweb.org.

Les couleurs du logo d'ACTEA sont le bleu, le rouge, et l'or. Le bleu signifie la royauté et évoque les efforts d'ACTEA pour élever un sacerdoce royal de serviteurs de Dieu à travers l'Afrique. Le rouge est la couleur du sang et symbolise l'acte rédempteur du Christ sur la croix. L'or représente la valeur de la Parole de Dieu et le travail accompli par le peuple de Dieu. L'or reflète également la mission d'ACTEA, celle de la proclamation prophétique de l'espérance glorieuse en Christ, aux peuples africains d'abord et au monde ensuite, par le biais de l'éducation théologique.

https://africanchristiantheology.org/

Teologia Cristã Africana é a revista académica da Associação Cristã de Teologia e Educação em África (ACTEA). A missão da ACTEA é reforçar a educação teológica através de acreditação, pesquisa e serviços de apoio para servir a igreja e transformar a sociedade. A revista é uma das formas através das quais a ACTEA envolve educadores teológicos e líderes da igreja na abordagem de questões relevantes que a igreja e a sociedade em África enfrentam. A *Teologia Cristã Africana* serve toda a África e proporciona um local para conversas entre diferentes regiões de África, bem como um órgão através do qual as vozes africanas podem participar no diálogo de assuntos do cristianismo mundial ("World Christianity"). Seguindo os passos de Kwame Bediako, Byang Kato, Kä Mana, Lamin Sanneh, Andrew F. Walls, e Isaac Zokoué, a revista promove as perspectivas do cristianismo mundial através de um profundo envolvimento com as realidades contextuais africanas. Os artigos são publicados em inglês, francês e português; cada artigo tem um resumo trilingue nessas línguas.

A ACTEA foi estabelecida em 1976 pela Comissão de Educação Teológica e Cristã da Associação de Evangélicos em África (AEA). Sob o seu patrocínio contínuo, a ACTEA opera com autonomia interna na acreditação de programas de educação teológica em toda a África, a fim de estimular a melhoria e a padronização de tais programas, e a fim de assegurar o reconhecimento académico de tais programas sempre que possível, especialmente entre os stakeholders destas instituições em África e entre instituições semelhantes e os seus stakeholders no estrangeiro. A ACTEA é um membro fundador e constituinte do Conselho Internacional para a Educação Teológica Evangélica (ICETE). A ACTEA tem escritórios em Nairobi e Kinshasa e pode ser encontrada online em acteaweb.org. Para mais informações sobre qualquer aspeto da ACTEA, envie um e-mail para o Administrador Executivo em admin@acteaweb.org com cópia para o Diretor Executivo em director@acteaweb.org.

As cores do logótipo da ACTEA são o azul, o vermelho e o dourado. O azul significa realeza e fala dos esforços da ACTEA para erguer um sacerdócio real dos servos de Deus em toda a África. O vermelho é a cor do sangue e simboliza o ato redentor de Cristo na cruz. O ouro representa a preciosidade da Palavra de Deus e o trabalho que o povo de Deus realiza. O ouro também reflete a missão da ACTEA de proclamação profética da gloriosa esperança em Cristo, primeiro aos povos africanos e depois ao mundo, através da educação teológica.

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(AICs refers to African Indigenous Churches, African Initiated Churches, and/or African Independent Churches.)

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(EICs est un anacronyme anglais qui désigne Églises indépendantes africaines, églises indigènes africaines, églises initiées africaines, et/ou églises indépendantes africaines.)

Arte da capa criada por Wexer Creative, Nairobi e Mombasa, Quénia e © 2024–2026 pela ACTEA. As silhuetas dos edifícios são da Basílica de Nossa Senhora da Paz em Yamoussoukro, na Côte d'Ivoire, a maior edifício da igreja do mundo, e o Centro Internacional de Convenções Kenyatta em Nairobi, Quénia, e do Teatro Nacional da Nigéria, em Lagos. Os símbolos, incluindo a acácia e a cruz etíope, representam o compromisso da revista para com todas as regiões de África, urbanas e rurais, anglófonas, francófonas e lusófonas (bem como arabófonas), e para com todas as tradições cristãs africanas, protestantes, católicas romanas, ortodoxas, pentecostais e IIAs. A cruz no centro de África, concebida a partir de uma fotografia de uma cruz etíope exposta na casa de um dos nossos redactores-gerais, transmite tanto o compromisso evangélico central da revista como o seu compromisso com a africanidade.

(IIAs é um anacrónimo que se refere a igrejas indígenas africanas, igrejas iniciadas em África e/ou igrejas independentes africanas.)

The specialist review journal, *BookNotes for Africa*, published from 1996–2019, offered short academic reviews of recent Africa-related publications relevant for informed Christian reflection in Africa. Because of its importance, ACTEA was happy to promote *BookNotes for Africa* to its constituent schools. In 2018, the over 1,200 reviews published in issues 1–30 were published by Langham Global Library in a permanent reference collection, *Christian Reflection in Africa: Review and Engagement*, edited by Paul Bowers. A second enlarged edition including reviews from issues 31–40 together with a number of more recent reviews is forthcoming.

Inspired by the legacy of *BookNotes for Africa*, the editors hope that the book review section of *African Christian Theology* will be as robust and as helpful. This section of the journal includes both critical review essays and short book note style reviews. While the majority of books reviewed have been published recently, as is customary, we will sometimes publish retrospective reviews of older texts.

La revue spécialisée, *BookNotes for Africa*, ('Notes de Livres pour l'Afrique'), publiée de 1996 à 2019, proposait courtes critiques académiques de publications récentes liées à l'Afrique et pertinentes pour une réflexion chrétienne éclairée en Afrique. En raison de son importance, ACTEA a été heureux de promouvoir *BookNotes for Africa* auprès de ses écoles constitutives. En 2018, les plus de 1 200 comptes rendus publiés dans les numéros 1 à 30 ont été publiés par Langham Global Library dans une collection de référence permanente, *Christian Reflection in Africa : Review and Engagement*, sous la direction de Paul Bowers. Une deuxième édition révisée comprenant les comptes rendus des numéros 31 à 40 ainsi qu'un certain nombre de comptes rendus plus récents est à venir.

Inspirés par l'héritage de *BookNotes for Africa*, les éditeurs espèrent que la section des critiques de livres de *Théologie Chrétienne Africaine* sera aussi solide et utile. Cette section de la revue comprend à la fois des essais critiques et de courts comptes-rendus sous forme de notes de lecture. Bien que la majorité des livres analysés aient été publiés récemment, nous publierons parfois des analyses rétrospectives de textes plus anciens.

A revista especializada, *BookNotes for Africa* ('Notas de Livro para África'), publicada de 1996 a 2019, oferecia pequenas recensões académicas de publicações recentes relacionadas com África, relevantes para uma reflexão cristã informada em África. Devido à sua importância, a ACTEA teve o prazer de promover a BookNotes for Africa junto das escolas que a constituem. Em 2018, as mais de 1.200 recensões publicadas nos números 1–30 foram publicadas pela Langham Global Library numa coleção de referência permanente, *Christian Reflection in Africa: Review and Engagement* ('Reflexão Cristã em África: Recensão e Engajamento'), editada por Paul Bowers. Está a ser preparada uma segunda edição alargada que inclui as recensões dos números 31–40, bem como algumas recensões mais recentes.

Inspirados pelo legado da *BookNotes for Africa*, os editores esperam que a secção de recensões de livros da *Teologia Cristã Africana* seja tão robusta e útil. Esta secção da revista inclui ensaios de recensão crítica e pequenas recensões de livros. Embora a maioria dos livros recenseados tenha sido publicada recentemente, como é habitual, publicaremos por vezes recensões retrospectivas de textos mais antigos.

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EDITORIAL

From Ethiopia to Ghana, DR Congo to Malawi

Joshua Robert BARRON

ORCID: 0000-0002-9503-6799
ACTEA, Enoomatasiani, Kenya
Joshua.Barron@ACTEAweb.org

This sixth issue of *African Christian Theology* is eclectic rather than themed, but it has a regional focus on ancient and contemporary Christianity in Ethiopia and Eritrea with the first three articles. **Ralph Lee** examines the centrality of Nicene theological orthodoxy in the life and faith of the Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwaḥədo* Church (EOTC) in "**The Council of the 318: The Defining Epoch for the Ethiopian Täwaḥədo Church?**," pointing a way past the familiar polemic between 'Chalcedonian' and 'non-Chalcedonian'. He draws extensively from the Ethiopian national epic, *ክብረ ነገሥት (Kəbrä Nägäśt)*, and thus introduces our readers from outside of Ethiopia and Eritrea to that important African theological tradition. We then move forward in time while remaining rooted in the past with two articles from members of the journal's editorial board. First, **Youdit Tariku Feyessa** (**የ·ዲት ታሪኩ ፈይሳ** in Amharic script) draws deeply from traditional Ethiopian culture in her offering, "**The 'Other' as '*Yene-Bitte*': Reimagining an Ethiopian Ethics of Moral Responsibility**." Engaging with yet moving beyond European philosophers Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) and Emanuel Lévinas (1906–1995), she proposes a contextualized ethics that is thoroughly Christian and thoroughly Ethiopian. Then Ethiopian New Testament scholar **Abeneazer G. Urga** (**አቤንኤዘር ገዛኸኝ ኡርጋ** in Amharic script) exegetically explores the theme of "**The Victory of the Blood of Christ in the New Testament and in Ethiopia**" with the help of vernacular grassroots theologians, including Ethiopian gospel singers. This is an important contribution to studies of African ethnodoxology.

Next we travel west and south for an article in French from the RDC, **Trésor Khonde Ndele**'s "**Entrée et sortie du christianisme: L'État actuel de l'Église protestante dans certains milieux ruraux de la République Démocratique du Congo** ['Entrance and Exit from Christianity: The Current State of the Protestant Church in Certain Rural Areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo']." After a careful study, Khonde Ndele "proposes a missionary model that combines a dynamic moving from the village to the city and another moving from a city to the villages and cities of the world."

Published with license by ACTEA | DOI: https://doi.org/10.69683/05t8qn76
© Joshua Robert Barron, 2026 | ISSN: 3006-1768 (print); 3007-1771 (online)
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Then we journey northwest to visit Ghana as **Leopold Gadagoe** leads us through the process of "**Liberation Through Contextualization: African Women's Theology and the *Trokosi* System within the Ewe Culture of Ghana**." The *trokosi* practice is an ethnoreligious practice that scapegoats young females, frequently subjecting them to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. But rightly understood and properly practiced, the gospel is inherently liberating, "fostering human flourishing and societal transformation."

Finally, we travel back to East Africa, and back in time a few decades, as **Grant LeMarquand** invites us to join in "**Reading the Eschatology of 1 Peter with African Help: John S. Mbiti's Contribution**." The author is a biblical scholar, a theological educator with experience teaching in Mbiti's Kenya, and the former Anglican bishop (retired) of the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, and Somaliland). Along the way, he joins Mbiti in correcting certain problematic aspects of missionary (and therefore Western) eschatology, which can have "dire ethical implications." But where Mbiti fails to take the reality of bodily resurrection seriously, LeMarquand gently corrects his failure. Yet LeMarquand demonstrates that Mbiti can help us see that for the Apostle Peter, "the resurrection does not wipe away diversity; the resurrection redeems the wonderful diversity of God's creation."

This issue's review section is robust. One book is evaluated with an article-length review, as Kenyan professor **Daniel Mwailu** treats the ninth volume in the ASET Series — ASET is the Africa Society of Evangelical Theology — *Ecclesiology in Africa*, co-edited by David K. Ngaruiya and Rodney L. Reed (2024).

Nine books are evaluated with full-length review essays. *The African Church and COVID-19: Human Security, the Church, and Society in Kenya* (2022), co-edited by *African Christian Theology* editorial team member Martin Munyao, is reviewed by **Phillip A. Cantrell II**. Next **Chammah J. Kaunda**, another one of the journal's editors, offers a treatment of *Intra-African Pentecostalism and the Dynamics of Power: The Nigerian Winners' Chapel in Cameroon* (2024) by Amos B. Chewachong. Writing from the Ethiopian Diaspora in North America, **Melesse K. Woldetsadik** offers a careful evaluation of *Reading James Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message, and Methods of James* (2025), co-edited by Abeneazer G. Urga. Then **Nathan Scott**, a scholar of St Augustine, reviews Catherine Conybeare's *Augustine the African* (2025). Conybeare and Scott remind us that Augustine was, in fact, African. As these pages have previously reminded our readers, Augustine was a man who referred to himself and his fellow bishops as "us Africans."

Next we have two contributions from Ethiopia. **Nebeyou A. Terefe** (ኑብዩ አለሙ ተረፉ in Amharic script), another one of our editorial board members, reviews a recent work by Kenyan biblical scholar Humphrey Mwangi Waweru, *The Apocalypse of John and Liberation Theology in Africa* (2024). Then **Bruk**

Ayele Asale (ብሩክ አየለ አሰሌ in Amharic script) reviews *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (2025) by Ethiopian theologian Yacob Godebo.

We then travel southward to Kenya, as Bishop **Francis Omondi** offers an evaluation of fellow Kenyan theologian Simon E. Chiwanga's *Muhudumu: The Episcopacy in Africa Reconsidered* (2011). The kiSwahili term *muhudumu* (sometimes spelled *mhudumu*) means 'servant' or 'minister'. Omondi himself exhibits a model of servant leadership as a bishop of the Anglican Church of Kenya, an antithesis of the *bwana kubwa* ('big man') model of leadership. Chiwanga's book promotes "a leadership model that seeks to empower all church members to participate in God's mission." As he trains others to truly *serve* as church leaders in true diaconia, he has found Chiwanga's book so valuable that he convinced us editors that it was deserving of a retrospective review. Looking further south, and maintaining a focus on Christian ministry, from Zambia comes a review by Willem-Henri den Hartog which explores the grassroots ministries explored in *Diaconia: Acts, Understandings, and Stories of Service in a Pluralistic Southern Africa* (2025), edited by Johannes Knoetze and Jacques W. Beukes. Next, Donald Stanley Meador, formerly a theological educator in Brazil, reviews *Towards a Malawian Theology of Laity* (2020), edited by Volker Glissman.

Finally, we have four 'Book Note' short reviews, evaluating *Crashed Realities? Gender Dynamics in Nigerian Pentecostalism* (2024), *Spirit-Empowered Witness: A Lukan Theology of Preaching* (2022), *Spectacular Atonement: Envisioning the Cross of Christ in an African Perspective* (2023), and *Kwame Bediako: African Theology for a World Christianity* (2021).

In our first three years, the journal has offered voices representing sixteen countries in Africa — Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, DR Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia (this includes authors of reviewed books). Also represented are Jamaica and Barbados in the Black Caribbean, as well as Australia, Canada, Germany, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

If your country has not yet been represented, then we encourage you to consider submitting something for a future issue.

As always — *tolle lege*, 'take and read.'[1]

[1] According to his *Confessions*, in 386 Augustine of Hippo heard the singsong voice of a child nearby chanting *Tolle lege, tolle lege* (Latin: 'Take and read, take and read'; *tolle* can also be translated 'take up'). Augustine picked up a copy of Paul's Letter to the Romans which happened to be nearby and began to read. This marked the beginning of his conversion to Christ. He relates this in *Confessionum libri XIII* 8.29.

THÉOLOGIE CHRÉTIENNE AFRICAINE
vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 155–158

ÉDITORIAL

De l'Éthiopie au Ghana, de la RD Congo au Malawi

Joshua Robert BARRON

ORCID: 0000-0002-9503-6799
ACTEA, Enoomatasiani, Kenya
Joshua.Barron@ACTEAweb.org

Ce sixième numéro de *Théologie Chrétienne Africaine* est éclectique plutôt que thématique, mais il met l'accent, à travers ses trois premiers articles, sur le christianisme ancien et contemporain en Éthiopie et en Érythrée. Dans « "**The Council of the 318 : The Defining Epoch for the Ethiopian Täwaḥədo Church ?** [Le Concile des 318 : Une époque déterminante pour l'Église Orthodoxe Éthiopienne *Täwaḥədo* ?] », **Ralph LEE** examine la place centrale occupée par l'orthodoxie théologique nicéenne dans la vie et la foi de l'Église Orthodoxe Éthiopienne *Täwaḥədo* (EOTC en anglais), en proposant une voie pour dépasser la polémique bien connue entre « chalcédoniens » et « non-chalcédoniens ». Il s'appuye fortement dans l'épopée nationale éthiopienne, *ክብረ ነገሥት* (*Kəbrä Nägäśt*), et fait ainsi découvrir à nos lecteurs, en dehors de l'Éthiopie et de l'Érythrée, cette importante tradition théologique africaine. Nous faisons ensuite un bond dans le temps tout en restant ancrés dans le passé, grâce à deux articles rédigés par des membres du comité de rédaction de la revue. Tout d'abord, **Youdit Tariku FEYESSA** (ዮዲት ታሪኩ ፈይሳ en écriture amharique) s'inspire largement de la culture traditionnelle éthiopienne dans son article intitulé « **The 'Other' as 'Yene-Bitte' : Reimagining an Ethiopian Ethics of Moral Responsibility** ["L'Autre" en tant que "*Yene-Bitte*" : repenser une éthique éthiopienne de la responsabilité morale] ». S'inscrire dans le sillage des philosophes européens Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) et Emmanuel Lévinas (1906–1995) tout en les dépassant, elle propose une éthique contextualisée, à la fois profondément chrétienne et profondément éthiopienne. Ensuite, **Abeneazer G. URGA** (አቤንኤዘር ገዛኽኝ ኡርጋ en écriture amharique), spécialiste éthiopien du Nouveau Testament, explore de manière exégétique le thème de « **The Victory of the Blood of Christ in the New Testament and in Ethiopia** [La victoire du sang du Christ dans le Nouveau Testament et en Éthiopie] » avec l'aide de théologiens populaires de base, notamment des chanteurs de gospel éthiopiens.

Publié avec licence par ACTEA | DOI: https://doi.org/10.69683/q274pg98
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ISSN: 3006-1768 (print); 3007-1771 (online)
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Il s'agit là d'une contribution importante aux études sur l'ethnodoxologie africaine.

Nous nous dirigeons ensuite vers l'ouest et le sud pour un article en français provenant de la RDC, intitulé « **L'ascension et le déclin du christianisme : la situation actuelle de l'Église protestante dans certaines zones rurales de la République démocratique du Congo** », signé **Trésor KHONDE NDELE**. Après une étude approfondie, Khonde Ndele « propose un modèle missionnaire articulant une dynamique allant du village à la ville et une autre allant d'une ville vers les villages et villes du monde ».

Nous nous dirigerons ensuite vers le nord-ouest pour découvrir le Ghana, tandis que **Léopold Gadagoe** nous guidera à travers le processus intitulé « **Liberation Through Contextualization : African Women's Theology and the *Trokosi* System within the Ewe Culture of Ghana** [La libération par la contextualisation : La théologie des femmes africaines et le système des *trokosi* au sein de la culture éwé du Ghana] ». La pratique du « *trokosi* » est une coutume ethnoreligieuse qui fait des filles et jeunes femmes des boucs émissaires, les exposant souvent à des violences physiques, émotionnelles, psychologiques, et sexuelles. Mais lorsqu'il est bien compris et correctement mis en œuvre, l'Évangile est intrinsèquement libérateur, « favorisant l'épanouissement humain et la transformation de la société » (ma traduction).

Pour finir, nous retournons en Afrique de l'Est et remontons quelques décennies en arrière, alors que **Grant LEMARQUAND** nous invite à découvrir « **Reading the Eschatology of 1 Peter with African Help : John S. Mbiti's Contribution** [La lecture de l'eschatologie de la première épître de Pierre à la lumière de la pensée africaine : La contribution de John S. Mbiti ». L'auteur est un spécialiste de la Bible, un enseignant en théologie ayant enseigné dans Kenya, la pays de Mbiti, et l'ancien évêque anglican (à la retraite) de la Corne de l'Afrique (Éthiopie, Érythrée, Djibouti, Somalie, et Somaliland). Chemin faisant, il se joint à Mbiti pour corriger certains aspects problématiques de l'eschatologie missionnaire (et donc occidentale), qui peuvent avoir des « implications éthiques délétères et néfastes » (ma traduction). Mais là où Mbiti ne prend pas au sérieux la réalité de la résurrection corporelle, LeMarquand corrige avec douceur cette lacune. Pourtant, LeMarquand démontre que Mbiti peut nous aider à comprendre que, pour l'Apôtre Pierre, « la résurrection n'efface pas la diversité ; la résurrection rachète la merveilleuse diversité de la création de Dieu » (ma traduction).

La section recensions littéraires de ce numéro est particulièrement étoffée, même si elle ne présente que des ouvrages rédigés en anglais. (La revue espère que certains d'entre vous, chers lecteurs, nous soumettront à l'avenir des essais critiques consacrés à des ouvrages écrits en français.) Un livre est évalué sous la forme d'une note critique ; le professeur kenyan **Daniel MWAILU** se penche en effet sur le neuvième volume de la collection ASET — ASET étant l'acronyme

de Société Africaine de Théologie Évangélique (Africa Society of Evangelical Theology dans anglais) — intitulé *Ecclesiology in Africa* [L'Ecclésiologie en Afrique] (2024), coédité par David K. Ngaruiya et Rodney L. Reed.

Neuf ouvrages font l'objet d'une analyse approfondie sous forme d'essais critiques complets. L'ouvrage *The African Church and COVID-19: Human Security, the Church, and Society in Kenya* [L'Église africaine et la COVID-19 : sécurité humaine, Église et société au Kenya] (2022), coédité par Martin Munyao, membre de l'équipe éditoriale de *Théologie Chrétienne Africaine*, fait l'objet d'une critique de **Phillip A. Cantrell** II. **Chammah J. Kaunda**, autre membre de l'équipe éditoriale de la revue, propose ensuite une analyse de l'ouvrage d'Amos B. Chewachong intitulé *Intra-African Pentecostalism and the Dynamics of Power: The Nigerian Winners' Chapel in Cameroon* [Le pentecôtisme intra-africain et les dynamiques du pouvoir : La Winners' Chapel nigériane au Cameroun] (2024). Depuis la diaspora éthiopienne en Amérique du Nord, **Melesse K. Woldetsadik** propose une analyse approfondie de l'ouvrage *Reading James Missiologically : The Missionary Motive, Message, and Methods of James* [Une lecture missiologique de l'Épître de Jacques : La motivation, le message et les méthodes missionnaires de Jacques] (2025), sous la direction d'Abeneazer G. Urga et d'autres. **Nathan Scott**, spécialiste de Saint Augustin, propose ensuite une critique de l'ouvrage de Catherine Conybeare intitulé *Augustine the African* [Augustin l'Africain] (2025). Conybeare et Scott nous rappellent qu'Augustin était, en réalité, africain. Comme nous l'avons déjà rappelé à nos lecteurs dans ces pages, Augustin était un homme qui désignait ses pairs évêques et lui-même sous par l'expression « nous, les Africains ».

Nous avons ensuite deux contributions en provenance d'Éthiopie. **Nebeyou A. Terefe** (ኑበዩ አለሙ ተረፈ, en écriture amharique), un autre membre de notre comité de rédaction, présente un ouvrage récent de l'exégète biblique kenyan Humphrey Mwangi Waweru, intitulé *The Apocalypse of John and Liberation Theology in Africa* [L'Apocalypse de Jean et la théologie de la libération en Afrique] (2024). **Bruk Ayele Asale** (ብሩክ አየለ አሰሌ en écriture amharique) présente ensuite l'ouvrage *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* [La doctrine du Saint-Esprit] (2025) du théologien éthiopien Yacob Godebo.

Nous nous dirigeons ensuite vers le sud, au Kenya, où l'évêque **Francis Omondi** propose une évaluation de l'ouvrage de de son confrère, le théologien kényan Simon E. Chiwanga, *Muhudumu : The Episcopacy in Africa Reconsidered* [*Muhudumu :* L'Épiscopat en Afrique reconsidéré] (2011). Le terme swahili « *muhudumu* » (parfois orthographié « *mhudumu* ») signifie « serviteur » ou « ministre ». Omondi incarne lui-même un modèle de leadership serviteur en tant qu'évêque de l'Église anglicane du Kenya, à l'opposé du modèle de leadership dit « *bwana kubwa* » (kiSwahili : « le grand homme »). Ce livre promeut « un modèle de leadership qui cherche à autonomiser l'ensemble des membres de l'Église afin qu'ils participent à la mission de Dieu »

(ma traduction). Formant lui-même d'autres personnes à exercer un véritable ministère de direction dans l'esprit d'une authentique *diaconia*, Omondi a jugé cet ouvrage de Chiwanga si précieux qu'il a convaincu nous les rédacteurs de lui consacrer une note critique rétrospective.

En se tournant plus au sud, sans quitter le domaine du ministère chrétien, depuis la Zambie, **Willem-Henri DEN HARTOG** propose un compte rendu de l'ouvrage *Diaconia: Acts, Understandings, and Stories of Service in a Pluralistic Southern Africa* [Diaconia : Actes, conceptions et récits du service dans une Afrique australe pluraliste] (2025), dirigé par Johannes Knoetze et Jacques W. Beukes, afin d'en explorer les ministères de terrain. Ensuite, **Donald Stanley MEADOR**, ancien formateur en théologie au Brésil, propose un compte rendu de l'ouvrage *Towards a Malawian Theology of Laity* [Vers une théologie malawienne du laïcat] (2020), dirigé par Volker Glissman.

Pour finir, nous avons quatre brèves critiques du livre. Ces critiques évaluent *Crashed Realities? Gender Dynamics in Nigerian Pentecostalism* [Réalités fracassées ? Les dynamiques de genre dans le pentecôtisme nigérian] (2024) ; *Spirit-Empowered Witness : A Lukan Theology of Preaching* [Témoignage dans la puissance de l'Esprit : Une théologie lucanienne de la prédication] (2022) ; *Spectacular Atonement : Envisioning the Cross of Christ in an African Perspective* [L'Expiation spectaculaire : Envisager la croix du Christ dans une perspective africaine] (2023) ; et *Kwame Bediako : African Theology for a World Christianity* [Kwame Bediako : Une théologie africaine pour un christianisme global] (2021).

Au cours de ses trois premières années d'existence, la revue a donné les voix représentant seize pays d'Afrique : le Cameroun, la Côte d'Ivoire, la République Démocratique du Congo, l'Égypte, l'Éthiopie, le Ghana, le Kenya, le Malawi, le Mozambique, le Nigeria, le Rwanda, la Sierra Leone, l'Afrique du Sud, la Tanzanie, l'Ouganda et la Zambie (ce chiffre inclut les auteurs des ouvrages évalués). Sont égalemen,t représentés la Jamaïque et la Barbade dans la région des Caraïbes Noires, ainsi que l'Australie, le Canada, l'Allemagne, le Royaume des Pays-Bas, le Royaume-Uni, et les États-Unis.

Si votre pays n'est pas encore représenté, nous vous encourageons à envisager de nous proposer une contribution pour un avenir numéro.

Comme toujours — *tolle lege*, « prends et lis ». [1]

[1] Selon ses *Confessions*, en 386, Augustin d'Hippone a entendu la voix chantante d'un enfant qui se trouvait à proximité et qui chantait « *Tolle lege, tolle lege* » (Latin: 'Prends et lis, prends et lis'). Augustin prit un exemplaire de la Lettre de Paul aux Romains qui se trouvait à proximité et commença à la lire. C'est le début de sa conversion au Christ. Il raconte cela dans *Confessionum libri XIII* 8.29.

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vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 159–162

EDITORIAL

Da Etiópia ao Gana, da RD do Congo ao Maláui

Joshua Robert BARRON

ORCID: 0000-0002-9503-6799
ACTEA, Enoomatasiani, Quénia
Joshua.Barron@ACTEAweb.org

Esta sexta edição da revista *Teologia Cristã Africana* é mais eclética do que temática, mas, através dos seus três primeiros artigos, centra-se no cristianismo antigo e contemporâneo na Etiópia e na Eritreia. Em "**The Council of the 318: The Defining Epoch for the Ethiopian *Täwaḥədo* Church?** [O Concílio dos 318: Uma época determinante para a Igreja Ortodoxa Etíope *Täwaḥədo*?]," **Ralph Lee** analisa o papel central que a ortodoxia teológica nicena ocupa na vida e na fé da Igreja Ortodoxa Etíope Täwaḥədo (EOTC em inglês), propondo uma via para ultrapassar a bem conhecida polémica entre "calcedonianos" e "não-calcedonianos." Baseia-se fortemente na epopeia nacional etíope, *ክብረ ነገሥት (Kəbrä Nägäśt)*, e permite assim aos nossos leitores, fora da Etiópia e da Eritreia, descobrir esta importante tradição teológica africana. Em seguida, damos um salto no tempo, mantendo-nos, no entanto, ligados ao passado, graças a dois artigos redigidos por membros do conselho editorial da revista. Em primeiro lugar, **Youdit Tariku Feyessa** (የዲት ታሪኩ ፈይሳ na escrita amárica) inspira-se amplamente na cultura tradicional etíope no seu artigo intitulado "**The 'Other' as *'Yene-Bitte'*: Reimagining an Ethiopian Ethics of Moral Responsibility** [O "Outro" como *"Yene-Bitte"*: repensar uma ética etíope da responsabilidade moral]." Seguindo as pegadas dos filósofos europeus Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) e Emmanuel Lévinas (1906–1995), mas indo além deles, propõe uma ética contextualizada, simultaneamente profundamente cristã e profundamente etíope. De seguida, **Abeneazer G. Urga** (አቤንኤዘር ገዛኸኝ ኡርጋ na escrita amárica), um estudioso etíope do Novo Testamento, explora exegeticamente o tema "**The Victory of the Blood of Christ in the New Testament and in Ethiopia** [A Vitória do Sangue de Cristo no Novo Testamento e na Etiópia]" com a ajuda de teólogos populares de base, incluindo cantores gospel etíopes. Esta é uma importante contribuição para os estudos sobre a etnodoxologia africana.

Publicado com licença pela ACTEA | DOI: https://doi.org/10.69683/24khcm08
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Seguimos depois para oeste e sul para um artigo em francês da RDC, intitulado "**L'ascension et le déclin du christianisme : la situation actuelle de l'Église protestante dans certaines zones rurales de la République démocratique du Congo** [A ascensão e o declínio do Cristianismo: a situação actual da Igreja Protestante em algumas zonas rurais da República Democrática do Congo]", da autoria de **Trésor Khonde Ndele**. Depois de um estudo aprofundado, Khonde Ndele "propõe um modelo missionário articulando uma dinâmica que vai da aldeia à cidade e outra que vai da cidade às aldeias e vilas do mundo" (minha tradução).

Seguiremos depois para noroeste para explorar o Gana, enquanto **Léopold Gadagoe** nos guia através do processo intitulado "**Liberation Through Contextualization: African Women's Theology and the Trokosi System within the Ewe Culture of Ghana** [Libertação através da Contextualização: Teologia das Mulheres Africanas e o Sistema Trokosi dentro da Cultura Ewe do Gana]." A prática de *trokosi* é um costume etnorreligioso que transforma as raparigas e jovens mulheres em bodes expiatórios, expondo-as frequentemente à violência física, emocional, psicológica, e sexual. Mas quando devidamente compreendido e implementado corretamente, o Evangelho é intrinsecamente libertador, "promovendo o florescimento humano e a transformação da sociedade" (tradução minha).

Finalmente, regressamos à África Oriental e recuamos algumas décadas, quando **Grant LeMarquand** nos convida a descobrir "**Reading the Eschatology of 1 Peter with African Help: John S. Mbiti's Contribution** [Ler a Escatologia de 1 Pedro com a Ajuda Africana: A Contribuição de John S. Mbiti]." O autor é um estudioso bíblico, professor de teologia que lecionou no Quénia, país natal de Mbiti, e antigo bispo anglicano (aposentado) do Corno de África (Etiópia, Eritreia, Djibuti, Somália, e Somalilândia). Ao longo do livro, junta-se a Mbiti na correção de certos aspetos problemáticos da escatologia missionária (e, portanto, ocidental), que podem ter "implicações éticas deletérias e prejudiciais" (tradução minha). Mas onde Mbiti não leva a sério a realidade da ressurreição corporal, LeMarquand corrige essa lacuna com delicadeza. Contudo, LeMarquand demonstra que Mbiti pode ajudar-nos a compreender que, para o Apóstolo Pedro, "a ressurreição não apaga a diversidade; a ressurreição redime a maravilhosa diversidade da criação de Deus" (tradução minha).

A secção de recensões literárias deste número é particularmente extensa, ainda que apresente apenas obras escritas em inglês. (A revista espera que alguns de vós, caros leitores, nos enviem no futuro ensaios críticos dedicados a obras escritas em português.) Um livro é avaliado sob a forma de uma nota crítica; O professor queniano **Daniel Mwailu** analisa o nono volume da coleção ASET - sendo ASET o acrónimo de Sociedade Africana de Teologia Evangélica

- intitulada *Ecclesiology in Africa* [Eclesiologia em África] (2024), coeditada por David K. Ngaruiya e Rodney L. Reed.

Nove obras são objecto de análise aprofundada sob a forma de ensaios críticos completos. O livro *The African Church and COVID-19: Human Security, the Church, and Society in Kenya* [A Igreja Africana e a COVID-19: Segurança Humana, a Igreja e a Sociedade em Quénia] (2022), coeditado por Martin Munyao, membro da equipa editorial da *Teologia Cristã Africana*, é recenseado por **Phillip A. Cantrell II**. **Chammah J. Kaunda**, outro membro da equipa editorial da revista, oferece, de seguida, uma análise do livro de Amos B. Chewachong intitulado *Intra-African Pentecostalism and the Dynamics of Power: The Nigerian Winners' Chapel in Cameroon* [O Pentecostalismo Intra-Africano e as Dinâmicas de Poder: A Capela dos Vencedores Nigeriana nos Camarões] (2024). Da diáspora etíope na América do Norte, **Melesse K. Woldetsadik** oferece uma análise aprofundada do livro *Reading James Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message, and Methods of James* [Ler Tiago Missiologicamente: O Motivo, a Mensagem e os Métodos Missionários de Tiago] (2025), editado por Abeneazer G. Urga e outros. **Nathan Scott**, um estudioso de Santo Agostinho, oferece, de seguida, uma crítica ao livro de Catherine Conybeare, *Augustine the African* [Agostinho, o Africano] (2025). Conybeare e Scott recordam-nos que Agostinho era, de facto, africano. Como já observámos nestas páginas, Agostinho era um homem que se referia a si próprio e aos seus colegas bispos como "nós, africanos."

Seguem-se duas contribuições provenientes da Etiópia. **Nebeyou A. Terefe** (ኑበዩ አለሙ ተረፈ na escrita amárica), outro membro do nosso conselho editorial, apresenta uma obra recente do exegeta bíblico queniano Humphrey Mwangi Waweru, intitulada *The Apocalypse of John and Liberation Theology in Africa* [O [Apocalipse de João e a Teologia da Libertação em África] (2024). **Bruk Ayele Asale** (ብሩክ አየለ አሰሌ em escrita amárica) apresenta, em seguida, a obra *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* [A Doutrina do Espírito Santo] (2025), do teólogo etíope Yacob Godebo.

Seguimos depois para sul, para o Quénia, onde o bispo **Francis Omondi** apresenta uma avaliação da obra do seu colega, o teólogo queniano Simon E. Chiwanga, intitulada *Muhudumu: The Episcopacy in Africa Reconsidered* [*Muhudumu:* O Episcopado em África Reconsiderado] (2011). O termo em suaíli *"muhudumu"* (por vezes escrito *"mhudumu"*) significa 'servo' ou 'ministro'. O próprio Omondi encarna um modelo de liderança servil enquanto bispo da Igreja Anglicana do Quénia, em oposição ao modelo de liderança denominado *bwana kubwa* (em suaíli: "o grande homem"). Este livro "promove um modelo de liderança que procura capacitar todos os membros da Igreja para que participem na missão de Deus" (tradução minha). Ao formar

ele próprio outras pessoas para exercerem um verdadeiro ministério de liderança no espírito de uma autêntica *diaconia*, Omondi considerou esta obra de Chiwanga tão valiosa que convenceu-nos, os editores, a dedicar-lhe uma nota crítica retrospectiva. Dirigindo o olhar mais para sul, sem sair do âmbito do ministério cristão, a partir da Zâmbia, **Willem-Henri den Hartog** apresenta uma resenha da obra *Diaconia: Acts, Understandings, and Stories of Service in a Pluralistic Southern Africa* [Diaconia: Atos, conceções, e narrativas do serviço numa África Austral pluralista] (2025), editado por Johannes Knoetze e Jacques W. Beukes, com o objetivo de explorar os ministérios no terreno. Em seguida, **Donald Stanley Meador**, antigo formador em teologia no Brasil, apresenta uma resenha da obra *Towards a Malawian Theology of Laity* [Rumo a uma teologia malauiana do laicato] (2020), editada por Volker Glissman.

Para terminar, apresentamos quatro breves críticas ao livro. Estas críticas analisam *Crashed Realities? Gender Dynamics in Nigerian Pentecostalism* [Realidades Destruídas? As dinâmicas de género no pentecostalismo nigeriano] (2024); *Spirit-Empowered Witness: A Lukan Theology of Preaching* [Testemunho no poder do Espírito: Uma teologia lucaniana da pregação] (2022); *Spectacular Atonement: Envisioning the Cross of Christ in an African Perspective* [A Expiação Espetacular: Encarar a Cruz de Cristo numa Perspetiva Africana] (2023); e *Kwame Bediako: African Theology for a World Christianity* [Kwame Bediako: Uma Teologia Africana para um Cristianismo Global] (2021).

Ao longo dos seus primeiros três anos de existência, a revista deu voz a autores de dezasseis países africanos: Camarões, Costa do Marfim, República Democrática do Congo, Egito, Etiópia, Gana, Quénia, Maláui, Moçambique, Nigéria, Ruanda, Serra Leoa, África do Sul, Tanzânia, Uganda e Zâmbia (este número inclui os autores das obras avaliadas). Estão igualmente representados a Jamaica e Barbados, na região das Caraíbas Negras, bem como a Austrália, o Canadá, a Alemanha, o Reino dos Países Baixos, o Reino Unido e os Estados Unidos.

Se o seu país ainda não estiver representado, encorajamo-lo a considerar a possibilidade de nos propor uma contribuição para uma edição futura.

Como sempre — *tolle lege*, 'tome e lê.' [1]

[1] De acordo com as suas *Confissões*, em 386, Agostinho de Hipona ouviu a voz cantada de uma criança que estava por perto a cantar *Tolle lege, tolle lege* (Latin: 'Tome e lê, tome e lê"). Agostinho pegou num exemplar da Carta de Paulo aos Romanos que estava por perto e começou a ler. Este facto marcou o início da sua conversão a Cristo. Ele relata o facto na *Confessionum libri XIII* 8.29.

AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 163–186

The Council of the 318

The Defining Epoch for the Ethiopian Täwaḥədo *Church ?* [1]

Ralph LEE

ORCID: 0000-0002-9698-810X
Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford, United Kingdom
rlee@ocms.ac.uk

Abstract

Although the Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwaḥədo* Church (EOTC) does not always reproduce the Nicaean Creed in its formal, dogmatic language, Nicaean thought is strongly influential in the formulation of her incarnational and Christological thought. In three key areas — liturgy, the interpretation of Enoch, and in the Ethiopian national epic, ክብረ ነገሥት, *Kəbrä Nägäśt* (KN) — an indigenous incarnational theology is affirmed, indicating the Nicaean basis of Christology in the *Täwaḥədo* churches. Despite the EOTC contemporary miaphysite Christology, her counter-Chalcedon position is rarely referenced in literature before Jesuit presence in Ethiopia. However, the "Council of the 318" becomes the primary description of the age after the establishment of the Church, justifying the description of EOTC Christology "pre-Chalcedonian" or even "achalcedonian." The EOTC, however, chooses rather to define her Christology positively in a way that opens opportunities for inter-orthodox ecumenical dialogue, and which could also be explored in developing indigenous African theological approaches. Taken together, these three sources show that the primacy of Nicaea in the EOTC is expressed precisely through the Nicene tradition's shaping of its Christology: Nicaea is "primary" because the Creed is normative, the 318 define the epoch of Church establishment, and the anaphoras embed Nicene faith; and Nicene Christology is "central" because the Church articulates the incarnation through Nicene categories of pre-existence, divine unity, and the Son's consubstantiality with the Father.

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the *International Orthodox Theological Association* (IOTA) International Conference: "Nicaea and the Church of the Third Millenium: Towards Catholic-Orthodox Unity" held at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum) in Rome, Italy, 6 June 2025, with participation sponsored by the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative.

Published with license by ACTEA | DOI: https://doi.org/10.69683/6fh7jh03
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Ralph Lee

The Council of the 318:
The Defining Epoch for the Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwaḥədo* Church ?

Résumé

Bien que l'Église Orthodoxe Éthiopienne *Täwaḥədo* (en anglais : EOTC) ne reprenne pas toujours le Credo de Nicée dans son langage formel et dogmatique, la pensée nicéenne exerce une forte influence sur la formulation de sa théologie incarnationnelle et christologique. Dans trois domaines clés — la liturgie, l'interprétation d'Hénoch et l'épopée nationale éthiopienne, ክብረ ነገሥት, *Kəbrä Nägäśt* (KN) — une théologie incarnationnelle indigène est affirmée, ce qui témoigne du fondement nicéen de la christologie dans les Églises *Täwaḥədo*. Malgré la christologie miaphysite contemporaine d'EOTC, sa position anti-Chalcédoine est rarement mentionnée dans la littérature antérieure à la présence des jésuites en Éthiopie. Cependant, le « Concile des 318 » devient la principale référence pour décrire l'époque qui a suivi la fondation de l'Église, justifiant ainsi la qualification de la christologie de l'EOTC comme « pré-chalcédonienne », voire « achalcédonienne ». Toutefois, l'EOTC choisit toutefois de définir sa christologie de manière positive, de façon à ouvrir des perspectives de dialogue œcuménique interorthodoxe, et qui pourrait également être explorée dans le cadre de l'élaboration d'approches théologiques africaines autochtones. Prises ensemble, ces trois sources montrent que la primauté de Nicée au sein de l'EOTC s'exprime précisément à travers la manière dont la tradition nicéenne a façonné sa christologie : Nicée est « primaire » et « essentiel » parce que le Credo est normatif, les 318 définissent l'époque de la fondation de l'Église et que les anaphores incarnent la foi nicéenne ; et la christologie nicéenne est « centrale » parce que l'Église articule l'incarnation à travers les catégories nicéennes de la préexistence, de l'unité divine et de la consubstantialité du Fils avec le Père.

Resumo

Embora a Igreja Ortodoxa Etíope *Täwaḥədo* (em inglês: EOTC) nem sempre reproduz o Credo de Nicéia na sua linguagem formal e dogmática, o pensamento niceno exerce uma forte influência na formulação da sua teologia encarnacional e cristológica. Em três domínios-chave — a liturgia, a interpretação de Enoque e a epopeia nacional etíope, ክብረ ነገሥት, *Kəbrä Nägäśt* (KN) — é afirmada uma teologia encarnacional indígena, o que atesta o fundamento niceno da cristologia nas Igrejas Täwaḥədo. Apesar da cristologia miafisita contemporânea da EOTC, a sua posição anti-Calcedoniana raramente é mencionada na literatura anterior à presença dos jesuítas na Etiópia. No entanto, o "Concílio dos 318" torna-se a principal referência para descrever o período que se seguiu à fundação da Igreja, justificando assim a qualificação da cristologia da EOTC como "pré-calcedoniana," ou mesmo "acalcedoniana." No entanto, a EOTC opta por definir a sua

cristologia de forma positiva, de modo a abrir perspectivas de diálogo ecuménico interortodoxo, o que poderia também ser explorado no âmbito da elaboração de abordagens teológicas africanas e indígenas. Consideradas em conjunto, estas três fontes mostram que a primazia de Nicéia no seio da EOTC se expressa precisamente através da forma como a tradição nicena moldou a sua cristologia: Nicéia é «primária» porque o Credo é normativo, porque os 318 definem a época da fundação da Igreja e porque as anáforas encarnam a fé nicena; e a cristologia nicena é "central" porque a Igreja articula a encarnação através das categorias nicenas da pré-existência, da unidade divina e da consubstancialidade do Filho com o Pai.

Keywords

Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwaḥədo* Church (EOTC), Council of Nicaea, *Kəbrä Nägäśt*, *Kebra Nagast*, christology, Nicene orthodoxy, indigenous incarnational theology, *Tawahedo, Täwahedo*, *Tewahedo*

Mots-clés

Église Orthodoxe Éthiopienne *Täwaḥədo*, Concile de Nicée, *Kəbrä Nägäśt*, *Kebra Nagast*, christologie, orthodoxie nicéenne, théologie incarnationnelle autochtone, *Tawahedo, Täwahedo*, *Tewahedo*

Palavras-chave

Igreja Ortodoxa Etíope de *Täwaḥədo*, Concílio de Niceia, *Kəbrä Nägäśt*, *Kebra Nagast*, cristologia, ortodoxia nicena, teologia encarnacional indígena, *Tawahedo, Täwahedo*, *Tewahedo*

Introduction

This article explores the creative ways in which the Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwaḥədo* Church (EOTC) expresses her incarnational and Christological reflections, seeking to demonstrate the primary importance of Nicaean thinking. In the EOTC, the primacy of Nicaea and the Nicene Christology are not separate claims but two aspects of a single theological reality: Nicaea is "primary" because Creed, its bishops, and its epoch define the Church's doctrinal and liturgical identity, and Nicene Christology is "central" because the Church expresses the incarnation through Nicene categories of pre-existence, divine unity, and the Son's having the same nature as the Father. The EOTC is part of the Oriental family of churches, also often referred to as 'non-Chalcedonian' because they did not accept the 'two natures' formula of the Council of Chalcedon for describing the union of humanity and divinity in the person of Jesus Christ. The reception of Chalcedon was in fact a very complex matter, as it was primarily the churches in Egypt and Syria that took issue with

Pope Leo's Tome and its Christology that was agreed upon on at the council.[2] Other churches that ended up in the Oriental group took much longer to decide. The Armenian Apostolic Church, for instance, did not make a clear decision against Chalcedon until the Synod of Dvin in 506 CE, opposing it because of suspicions of its Nestorian leanings.[3]

Since the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOTC[4]) was governed by the Patriarchate of Alexandria until autocephaly[5] in AD 1959 it adopted a "non-Chalcedonian" position through that connection, as there were no Ethiopians present at the council. It was finally at the Council of Boru Meda in AD 1878 that the Ethiopian Church articulated its eponymous "*Täwaḥədo"* Christology.[6] Otherwise, it is not until the fifteenth century that Ethiopian writers specifically attack Chalcedon, and their stance on Chalcedon seems to have been strengthened following engagement with Portuguese Jesuits in the sixteenth century.[7] Before this, many EOTC texts make no reference to Chalcedon or deal with it only briefly. Most notably, the *Summa* of EOTC Christology, Giyorgis of Gaśśecha's *Book of Mystery*,[8] makes only brief reference to Chalcedon, and then primarily associating it with "Nestorian" ideas.[9]

The magisterial work of Aloys Grillmeier surveys a wide range of important manuscripts, as well as the anaphoras and other texts of the Ethiopian tradition and her Christology.[10] As with much Ethiopian material, no clear description of Ethiopian Christology is found in this work, because of the EOTC's eschewing of systematic approaches to theology.[11] Nevertheless, Grillmeier correctly notes

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[2] Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 15–16.

[3] Gillman and Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 99.

[4] Since the autocephaly of the Eritrean Orthodox *Täwaḥədo* Church following Eritrean independence in 1993, the Eritrean and Ethiopian church still share the same tradition, and literature. I restrict reference here to the Ethiopian Church because the key text for this paper, *Kəbrä Nägäśt,* 'Glory of Kings,' holds a special place particularly within the nation of Ethiopia, as it narrates the Sheba Legend that tells how the Ark of the Covenant came to Ethiopia. Tradition affirms that following this account the Ark of the Covenant is now kept in a chapel in Ethiopia's ancient capital city, Aksum. This tradition holds less significance for the Eritrean Church.

[5] "Autocephaly" refers to a church being autocephalous, literally 'having its own head,' the term used when an Orthodox Church becomes independent and so has its own patriarch.

[6] See Eloi Ficquet, "Boru Meda."

[7] See Witold Witakowski, "Chalcedon, Council of."

[8] Ermias Hiruie, *The Book of Mystery: Mäṣḥafä Məśṭir of Abba Giyorgis of Gasəčča, 1364–1425. Ethiopia's Most Iconic Theological, Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Treatise*.

[9] Hiruie, *Book of Mystery*, 5, 67, 109, 220, 27.

[10] Aloys Grillmeier and Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition,* Volume 2: *From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590-604*), Part 4*: The Church of Alexandria with Nubia and Ethiopia after 451*, 294–392.

[11] Grillmeier and Hainthaler reference three important documents relating to the expedition of King Caleb of Ethiopia to Najran early in the sixth century AD. In particular they refer

the importance of works known as *Qerellos*, that is, a major body of literature attributed to Cyril of Alexandria (412-444 CE) that were translated into Gəʿəz along with the books of the Bible around the mid fifth century CE.[12] Cyril of Alexandria's christology features strongly throughout the Ethiopic literature,[13] and significant for this study is that the texts in the *Qerellos* have been described by Bernd Manuel Weischer as "anti-Nestorian and achalcedonian,"[14] consistent with Grillmeier's analysis.[15] Throughout EOTC literature references to Nicaea are often veiled using "The 318" or "The 300" referring to the 318 bishops traditionally understood to have attended the First Council.[16] The significance of "The 318" is expressed in liturgical commemoration, addressed partially by Grillmeier, and in two further texts where they feature strongly: in the interpretation of Ethiopic Enoch, and in much more detail in KN.

Liturgical Reception of Nicaea

There is regular liturgical commemoration of Nicaea. The 318 bishops, sometimes abbreviated to ሠለስቱ ምእት *(śälastu mə'ət*, 'the Three Hundred'), are

to a letter by Simeon of Bēth-Aršām (500s), that uses what he considers to be strong anti-Chalcedonian language; *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 305–312. This letter is published and discussed in Irfan Shahid, *The Martyrs of Najran: New Documents*. Whilst this is important, the documents are not from within EOTC tradition and so are not relevant to this paper.

[12] See these works by or edited and translated by Bernd Manuel Weischer:
"Der Dialog « Dass Christus Einer Ist » des Cyrill von Alexandrien. Nach Handschriften in Berlin, Cambridge, London, Paris und Tübingen zum ersten Mal in Äthiopischen Text herausgegeben und mit deutscher Übersetzung Versehen von Bernd Manuel Weischer."
"Die äthiopischen Psalmen- und Qerlosfragmente in Erevan /Armenien."
Qērellos I: Der Prosphonetikos « Uber den rechten Glauben » des Kyrillos von Alexandrien und Theodosios II.
Qērellos II: Der Prosphonetikos « Uber den rechten Glauben » des Kyrillos von Alexandrien an Arkadia und Marina.
Qērellos III: Der Dialog « Dass Christus Einer Ist » des Kyrillos von Alexandrien.
Qērellos IV 1: Homilien und Briefe zum Konzil von Ephesos.
Qērellos IV 2: Traktate des Epiphanios von Zypern und des Proklos von Kyzikos.
Qērellos IV 3: Traktate des Severianos von Gabala, Gregorios Thaumaturgos und Kyrillos von Alexandrien.

[13] See Alessandro Bausi, "Qerrəllos."

[14] Bernd Manuel Weischer, "Historical and Philological Problems of the Axumitic Literature (Especially in the Qerellos)," 93.

[15] Although with relatively limited resources available at the time, this account is an extremely important analysis of EOTC outlooks. See Grillmeier and Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian tradition*, 294–392.

[16] The reference to 318 is clearly to the number of bishops that Athanasius stated as attending the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, with a further allusion to the 318 men that Abraham raised as an army in Genesis 14:14. For further information on the attendees at Nicaea see R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318–381*, 155–156.

commemorated on the ninth day of each Ethiopian month. It is striking that this is the only regular commemoration of Fathers connected with a council in the EOTC calendar.[17]

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 is used in thirteen of the fourteen anaphora currently used in the EOTC, with The Apostles Creed used only in the Anaphora of the Apostles, which is celebrated only on the memorial day of any of the Apostles.[18] The development of the anaphoras is not fully understood. Two anaphoras, those of the Apostles and of Our Lord Jesus Christ were, in some form, possibly used from the early centuries of the Ethiopian Church. They would have originally been translated from Greek, although their content has been embellished since then, and the inclusion of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed in the Anaphora of Our Lord Jesus Christ therefore cannot be dated to this early period. Most of the remaining anaphoras are almost certainly original Gəʿəz compositions dating from the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, but undoubtedly with some limited influence from Arabic sources from the Coptic Church.[19] Furthermore, one of the EOTC's many eucharistic anaphoras has the epithet, "The Three Hundred;" this text most probably being composed in Gəʿəz in the fifteenth century by the important EOTC theologian, Giyorgis of Gaśśecha (c. 1365 – 1425).[20] All this seems to indicate that Nicaean Christology is the primary focus of the EOTC, as there was ample opportunity to address the issues of Chalcedon during their composition. These texts are composed around the inception of the first Jesuit presence in Ethiopia, although there is no clear connection between this presence and the inclusion of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed in the anaphora.

Even by fifteenth century, Chalcedon does not appear to feature significantly in the liturgy, with the clearest albeit implicit reference being the Anaphora of Dioscorus, who was banished following the Council of Chalcedon because of his rejection of the "two natures" formula.[21] Indeed, Grillmeier found that "in the anaphoras the Chalcedonian controversy plays hardly a role in

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[17] Unusually this celebration is not shared with the Coptic Church calendar. See Emmanuel Fritsch and Ugo Zanetti, "Calendar."

[18] Marcos Daoud, trans., *The Liturgy of the Ethiopian Church*, 40n1, 86, 173.

[19] See Habtemichael Kidane, "Anaphoras."

[20] See Habtemichael, "Anaphoras;" Getachew Haile, "On the Authorship of Ethiopian Anaphoras;" and Gerard Colin, "Giyorgis of Sägla." For a more detailed discussion of the origin of the Anaphora of Our Lady Mary, see Getachew Haile, "On the Identity of Silondis and the Composition of the Anaphora of Mary Ascribed to Həryaqos of Bəhənsa."

[21] Volker L Menze, *Patriarch Dioscorus of Alexandria: the Last Pharaoh and Ecclesiastical Politics in the Later Roman Empire*, 151–185. The Anaphora of Dioscorus has no polemic against Chalcedon, although it does affirm a 'one nature' Christology, for instance, ". . . as His divinity became one with His humanity unto the ages of ages." Daoud, trans., *The Liturgy of the Ethiopian Church*, #53, 162.

regard to 'one' or 'two' natures,"[22] and this brief analysis points rather to Nicaea as the guide.

Salvation History and the *Apocalypse of Weeks*

Since the fifth century translation of the Scriptures from Greek into Gəʿəz, the EOTC has developed an indigenous approach to hermeneutics,[23] and 1 Enoch, uniquely still considered sacred, has an important hermeneutical role.[24] An extensive survey of the interpretation of Enoch shows that one of its primary functions is to give an overview of salvation history, and the brief *Apocalypse of Weeks* (AW), the section of Enoch with most frequent commentary, serves this purpose.[25] AW follows Second Temple Jewish interpretations to divide salvation history into ten "weeks" representing epochs from creation through to final judgement, which is then followed by "many weeks."[26] EOTC interpretations, like the Second Temple ones are "highly selective choosing from a number of larger pools of possibilities,"[27] and EOTC interpretations largely mapping onto those from the Second Temple literature, with later "weeks" identified with the advent and return of Christ.

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[22] Grillmeier and Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 384.

[23] For a comprehensive appraisal of this tradition see the seminal studies of Roger W. Cowley, esp. his *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation: A Study in Exegetical Tradition and Hermeneutics* and *The Traditional Interpretation of the Apocalypse of John in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church*.

[24] There is, of course, a strong connection between Ethiopic Enoch and 1 Enoch. Only the *Gəʿəz* text is complete but the textual developments since its translation, probably in the fifth century AD, and the fact that the earliest extant manuscripts are nearly 1000 years later than this translation date means that they cannot be understood as identical texts. For a detailed discussion of this see Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "The Book of Enoch: Its Reception in Second Temple Jewish and in Christian Tradition." Enoch is usually included in the 'canon' of scripture. The term 'canon' must be used loosely in reference to the EOTC. There are normally 81 books listed as biblical texts, and Enoch features in some lists of books and not in others. For further information on this see Bruk Ayele Asale, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Canon of the Scriptures: Neither Open nor Closed."

[25] It is significant that much of the text of Enoch is ignored in Gəʿəz commentary, making the inclusion of Apocalypse of Weeks very significant. See Ralph Lee, "The Reception and Function of 1 Enoch in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tradition."

[26] Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *1 Enoch 91–108*, pp. 2, 57–59.

[27] Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "The Apocalypse of Weeks: Periodization and Tradition-Historical Context," 84. This article points to other schemas for dividing history in a similar way, but with the presence of 1 Enoch within the EOTC tradition there is little need to look further than this to explain the periodization.

There are several different EOTC interpretations of the "weeks,"[28] but two commentaries highlight the Council of Nicaea. The slightly later sixteenth century commentary from the important Gunda Gunde monastery in Tigray (GG) expresses this most succinctly, with "weeks" 1–10 interpreted as: Adam to Enoch; the deluge until Abraham; Abraham, the plant of righteousness, until the giving of the Law; the giving of the Law, the precepts, until the age of Solomon; the age of Solomon, the building of the "house of glory"; the captivity, in which the "house" is burned; from the captivity until the birth of Christ; the age of the birth of Christ and the establishment of the Church; the age of the 318; and the day of judgement followed by "many weeks, the never-ending Kingdom of Heaven, in which sin no longer exists is not mentioned."[29] The earliest known commentary, the fifteenth century *Book of the Mysteries of Heaven and Earth* (MHE), identifies week eight rather than nine as "The Age of the 318 Orthodox Faithful, the sword is the Word of God," adding that "the place signifies the churches built in the age of King Constantine."[30] The difference is minor, and arises from MHE allowing an extra "week" for the advent of heretics, which are implicit in the ninth "week" of GG. In both cases the "week" associated with Nicaea corresponds to the establishment of the Church, and the articulation of the substance of Christian faith that was formally started at the First Council.[31] The choice is striking, given the "pools of possibilities."[32] It could be that "The Age of the 318" is shorthand for something like the "age of the councils," but another EOTC text, ክብረ ነገሥት *(Kəbrä Nägäśt,* 'Glory of Kings'), suggests that Nicaea is crucial.

ክብረ ነገሥት, *Kəbrä Nägäśt* [33]

The Ethiopian national epic, ክብረ ነገሥት *(Kəbrä Nägäśt,* 'Glory of Kings,' KN) is a complex text with the Sheba Legend at its core, narrating the encounter between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (ref. 1 Ki 10:1–10, 13). In this

[28] For a discussion of all the known commentary, see Lee, "The Reception and Function of 1 Enoch"; and Ralph Lee, "Gəʿəz Commentary on 1 Enoch."

[29] Lee, "The Reception and Function of 1 Enoch," 317–318.

[30] Lee, "The Reception and Function of 1 Enoch," 316. The text reads, "91:12 And after this there will be another week, the eight, that of righteousness, and a sword will be given to it that the righteous judgement may be executed on those who do wrong, and the sinners will be handed over into the hands of the righteous." Michael A Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch: A New Edition in the Light of the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments*, vol. 2: *Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, 219.

[31] Lee, "The Reception and Function of 1 Enoch," 316–317. The two texts are the fifteenth century *Book of the Mysteries of Heaven and Earth* and a sixteenth century commentary produced at the important Gunda Gunde monastery in Tigray.

[32] Stuckenbruck, "Apocalypse of Weeks," 84.

[33] In English translation this is generally transliterated as *Kebra Nagast*; e.g., see E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Kebra Nagast*.

embellished version, the Queen bears a son through Solomon, ምኒልክ *(Mənilək),* who returns to Israel and takes the Ark of the Covenant to Aksum.[34] Although there has been some disagreement about the date of this text, there is good agreement that it was compiled (and parts composed) no later than AD 1321.[35] This date fits with one of its primary intentions: giving narrative and theological support to what was the newly established Solomonic dynasty ruling Ethiopia. Although in western scholarship focus has been on KN's assertion that the Ark of the Covenant came to Ethiopia, it is a complex collection of theological-political texts for which we have very few sources. Although the theological components have received little attention, Witold Witakowsky suggested that KN shows, more than any other text, EOTC reflections on the Nicene Creed,[36] with several references made to the Nicene bishops. It is to this text that this paper now turns as a rich source of reflection influenced by Nicaean thought. The portions quoted in this paper all come from material composed close to the time of its compilation.[37]

A short introduction to KN opens with a Trinitarian statement of faith that is clearly drawn from the Creed of Nicaea:[38]

> በአኰቴቱ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር፡ አብ፡ አኃዜ፡ ኵሉ፤ ወበወልዱ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ዘቦቱ፡ ኵሉ፡ ኮነ፡ ወዘእንበሌሁ፡ አልቦ፡ ዘኮነ፤ ወበመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ጳራቅሊጦስ፡ ዘይወፅእ፡ እምአብ፡ ወይነሥእ፡ እምወልድ፡ ፩አምላክ፡ አብ፡ ወወልድ፡ ወመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ነአምን፡ ወንገኒ፡ ለሥሉስ።።[39]

[34] The Sheba legend, known in many forms circulated around the Middle East, in its Ethiopian form narrates the story of the encounter between the Queen of Sheba and Solomon and how their son *Mənilək* (typically transliterated as 'Menelik' in English) conceived a plan to take the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia. For more information see Carl Bezold, *Kebra Nagast: Die Herrlichkeit der Könige nach den Handschriften in Berlin, London, Oxford und Paris zum ersten mal im Äthiopischen Urtext herausgegeben und mit deutsche Übersetzung versehen*; and E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and her only son Menyelek (I): Being the 'Book of the Glory of Kings' (Kebra Nagast) a Work Which Is Aike the Traditional History of the Establishment of the Religion of the Hebrews in Ethiopia, and the Patent of Sovereignty Which Is Now Universally Accepted in Abyssinia as the Symbol of the Divine Authority to Rule Which the Kings of the Solomonic Line Claimed to Have Received through their Descent from the House of David.* Much of KN lengthy content is devoted to the understanding of the significance of the *Tabot,* that is the Gəʿəz word used for the Ark of the Covenant and its connection to the incarnation. The political significance is derived from Ethiopia's possession of the Ark, and the implied blessing on the nation and its leadership. For a detailed discussion of the incarnational symbolism connected to the Ark see Ralph Lee, *Symbolic Interpretations in Ethiopic and Early Syriac Literature*, 53–68.

[35] Paolo Marrassini, "Kebra Nagast," 365–366.

[36] Witold Witakowski, "Nicea, Council of," 1176.

[37] See David A. Hubbard, "The Literary Sources of the Kebra Nagast."

[38] All translations of KN are this author's own from the critical edition Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*. Where Bezold uses Gəʿəz reference numbers in his critical text instead of Arabic numbers, I have retained his usage.

[39] Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, ፩.

bäʾakʷätetu läʾəgaziʾabəḥer ab aḫaze kʷəllu, wäbäwäldu iyäsus krsətos zäbotu kʷəllu konä wäzäʾənbälehusä albo zäkonä, wäbämänfäs qədus paraqliṭos zäyəwäḏʾə emʾab wäyyənäśʾəʾ emwäld aḥadu amlak ab wäwäld wämänfäs qəddus näʾaman wänəgäni läśəlus

> With the praise of God, Lord of All,[40] and of His Son, Jesus Christ, by whom all things came into being, and without whom nothing came into being, and of the Holy Spirit, Paraclete, who proceeds from the Father, and who takes from the Son, One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We believe in and give thanks to the Trinity.

Immediately following this, at the very beginning of the first chapter "Concerning the Glory of Kings," the 318 Fathers are invoked to affirm the idea of what KN terms the "heavenly Zion":

፩፡ በእንተ፡ ክብረ፡ ነገሥት።

ፍካሬ፡ ወዜና፡ ዘ[ፀ]ወጽ፡ ርቱዓነ፡ ሃይ ማኖት፡ በእንተ፡ ክብር፡ ወዕበይ፡ ውተድላ፡ ዘከመ፡ ወህበ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ለደቂቀ፡ አዳም፤ ወፈድፋደሰ፡ ዘበእንተ፡ ዕቢያ፡ ወክብራ፡ ለጽዮን፡ ታቦተ፡ ሕጉ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር፡ እንተ፡ ገባሪሃ፡ ወኬንያሃ፡ ለሊሁ፡ በውስተ፡ ጽርሐ፡ መቅደሱ፡ እምቅድመ፡ ኵሉ፡ ፍጥረት፡ መላእክት፡ ወሰብእ። እስመ፡ በኀብረት፡ ወበሥምረት፡ ወበዕሪና፡ ኀብርዋ፡ አብ፡ ወወልድ፡ ወመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ለጽዮን፡ ሰማያዊት፡ ለማኅደረ፡ ስብሐቲሆሙ።[41]

1 bäʾentä kebrä Nägäśt.

fəkare wäzena zä318 rətuʿanä hay manot bäʾəntä kbr wäʿebäy wätädəla zäkämä wähabä əgəziʾabəḥer lädäqiqä adam, wäfädfadäsä zäbäʾrrnətä abäya wäkəbra läṣəyon tabotä ḥəgu läʾegəziʾabəḥer enətä gäbariha wäkenyaha lälihu bäwəstä ṣərəḥa mäqdäsu əmqədəmä kʷəllu fəṭərät mälaʾəkt wäsäbʾə. əsmä bäḫəbrät wäbäśəmrät wäbäʿərina gäbrəwwa ab wäwewäld wämänfäs qəddus läṣəyon sämayawit lämaḫdärä sebəḥatihomu.

> 1: Concerning the Glory of Kings:
>
> The interpretation and announcement of the 318 Orthodox in Faith, concerning the glory and greatness, and dignity that God gave to the children of Adam, and especially concerning the greatness and glory of Zion, the *Tabot* of the Law of God, which He made and fashioned for Himself and in which he made in the chamber of his holiness, before all creation, [whether] angels or humankind. Because with unity and good will, and agreement the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit made the Heavenly Zion as a dwelling place for their glory.

The theology of the "heavenly Zion" or *Tabot* is central to KN, and the term refers to the Ark that Moses was commanded to construct, and the "heavenly chamber" on which it is understood to be modelled. Mary is further symbolically connected through her bearing of God without being destroyed,

[40] **አኃዜ፡ ኵሉ** *(ʾaḫaze kʷəllu)* is often translated as "Almighty."
[41] Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, ፩.

seen as analogous to the Ark in which God dwelled without it being destroyed. It is not immediately apparent why KN appeals to the Fathers of Nicaea, but the text continues with an imagined conversation between the members of the Trinity in language drawing further on the Creed, that strongly affirms the pre-existence of the Son and the Spirit, with the Father before the creation:

> ወእምዝ፡ ይቤ፡ አብ፡ ለወልድ። ወለመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ንግባር፡ ሰብአ፡ በአርአያነ፡ ወበአምሳሌነ፤ ወኀብሩ፡ ወሥምሩ፡ በዝ፡ ምክር። ወይቤ፡ ወልድ፡ አነ፡ እለብስ፡ ሥጋሁ፡ ለአዳም፤ ወይቤ፡ መንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ አነ፡ አኅድር፡ ውስተ፡ ልቡ፡ ነቢያት፡ ወጻድቃን። ወዛቲ፡ ኅብረት፡ ወኪዳን፡ ተገብረት፡ በውስተ፡ ጽዮን፡ ማኅደረ፡ ሰብሐቲሆሙ። ወዳዊትኒ፡ ይቤ፡ ተዘከር፡ ማኅበረከ፡ ዘአቅደምከ፡ ፈጢረ፡ ለመድኀኒተ፡ በትረ፡ ርስትከ። በደብረ፡ ጽዮን፡ ዘኀደርከ፡ ውስቴታ።

> ወገብሮ፡ ለአዳም፡ በዘዚአሁ፡ አርአያ፡ ወአምሳል፡ ከመ፡ ይንሥቶ፡ ለሰይጣን፡ በእንተ፡ ትዕቢቱ፡ ምስለ፡ ሰራዊቱ፤ ወያቅሞ፡ ለአዳም፡ ተክለ፡ ዚአሁ፡ ምስለ፡ ኄራን፡ ደቂቁ፡ ለሰብሐቲሁ። እስመ፡ ኅሊቅ፡ ወሙቱር፡ ምክረ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ እንተ፡ ይቤ፡ እከውን፡ ሰብአ፡ ወአስተርኢ፡ ለኵሉ፡ ዘፈጠርኩ፡ በሥጋ፡ እትገሰስ፤ ወበደኃሪ፡ መዋዕል፡ በሥምረቱ፡ ተወልደ፡ በሥጋ፡ እምዳግማዊት፡ ጽዮን፡ ዳግማዊ፡ አዳም፡ ዝውእቱ፡ መድኀኒነ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ዛቲ፡ ይእቲ፡ ምክሕነ፡ ወሃይማኖትነ፡ ተስፋነ፡ ወሕይወትነ፡ ጽዮን፡ ሰማያዊት።[42]

1 bäʾentä kebrä Nägäśt.

wäʾəmzə yəbe ab läwäld wälämänəfäs qəddus nəgəbar säbəʾa bäʾarəʾayanä wäbäʾamsalenä, wäḫəbru wäśäməru bäzə məkr. wäyəbe wäld anä əläbəs śəgahu läʾadam, wäyəbe mänəfäs qəddus anä aḫadər wəstä ləbä näbiyat wäṣadəqan. wäzati ḫəbərät wäkidan tägäbrät bäwəsätä ṣəyon maḫdärä säbəḥatihomu. wädawitäni yəbe täzäkär maḫbäräkä zäʾaqdämäkä fäṭirä lämädaḫanitä bäträ rəstäkä። bädäbrä ṣəyon zäḫadärkä wəsteta. wägäbəro läʾadam bäzäziʾahu arəʾaya wäʾamsal kämä yənśto läsäyṭan bäʾenätä təʾəbitu məsälä särawitu, wäyaqəmo läʾadam täklä ziʾahu məsälä ḫeran däqiqu läsəbəḥatihu። esmä ḫəluq wämətur məkrä əgəziʾabəḥer enätä yəbe əkäwn säbəʾa wäʾastärəʾi läkʷəllu zäfäṭärku bäśəga ətəgäsäs, wäbädäḫari mäwaʿəl bäśmrätu täwäldä bäśəga emdagmawit ṣəyon dagmawi adam zeweʾetu mädəḫaninä krəstos zati yeʾeti mekḫənä wähaymanotənä täsfanä wäḫeywätənä ṣəyon sämayawit.

> And after this the Father said to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, "let us make humankind in our likeness and in our image," and they were united and delighted with this matter. And the Son said, "I will clothe myself with the flesh of Adam," and the Holy Spirit said, "I will dwell in the heart of the prophets and the righteous," and this agreement and covenant was made in Zion, the dwelling place of their glory. And David said, "remember your congregation which you made before creation for the salvation of the rod of your inheritance, on Mount Zion, in which you dwell."[43] And he made Adam in his own likeness

[42] Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, ፩–፪.

[43] Ps. 73/74:2 «ተዘከር ማኅበረከ ዘአቅደምከ ፈጢረ፡ ወአድኀንከ በትረ ርስትከ፡ደብረ ጽዮን ዘኀደርከ ውስቴታ።» *(täzäkär maḫbäräke zäʾaqdämäkä fäṭärä wäʾadḫənäkä bäträ rəstäkä däbrä ṣəyon*

> and image, so that he might take Satan and his army away, because of his pride, and might establish Adam as his shoot, with his excellent children, for his praise. Because God's plan was accomplished and decided which said, 'I will become a man, and I will show myself to all that I have created, and in flesh I will become tangible.' And in the last days with his good pleasure he was born in flesh, from the Second Zion,[44] the second Adam, which is our Saviour, Christ, who is our boasting and our faith, our hope and our life, the Second Zion.

Rather than reproducing the rigid, formulaic language of the Nicene Creed, *Kəbrä Nägäśt* adopts a narrative-symbolic approach that embeds Nicaean theology within imaginative dialogue. It portrays conversations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit prior to creation, affirming their eternal coexistence and unity. It is not immediately apparent why the author of KN adopts this approach. It is worth noting that symbolic language is frequently employed in EOTC theology,[45] developed most expressively in *Qəne* poetry which eschews definitions and instead prefers rather creative imagery and imagined conversations.[46] In these exchanges, the Son declares, "I will clothe myself with the flesh of Adam," and "I will become tangible," while the Spirit promises to dwell within the hearts of the righteous. This unusual language implicitly affirms Nicaean thought. The phrase «እትገለጽ» *(ətəgäsäs,* 'I will become tangible') is a very expressive statement about the incarnation — implicity the Son talks as co-equal with the Father in nature, and indicates his plan to become human. This imagined conversation might be a place to expect a Gəʿəz equivalent of ὁμοούσιος (*homoousios*). It turns out that there is no consistent translation of this term. The most logical wording, perhaps, would be from the dogmatic language found in the early (fifth century) *Qerrələs,* ʻነቡረ ህላዌ (*ḫəburä həlawe*, 'of the same nature'), used to translate the Greek ὁμοούσιος in these works, but this is not found anywhere in KN.[47] Even this dogmatic formulation

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zeḫadärkä wəsteta, "remember your gathering which you caused before creating, and you saved the rod of your inheritance, Mount Zion, in which you dwelt", from the text known as the 'New Gəʿəz Bible': Scholars of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, መጽሐፍ ቅዱስ ዘብሉይ ወዘሐዲስ ዘልሳነ ግእዝ [*mäṣḥaf qəddus zäbəluy wäzeḥadis zäləsanä gəʿəz*, 'The Holy Books of the Old and of the New Testament in Gəʿəz'], 886.

[44] The 'second Zion' is Mary, and Christ the second Adam. Zion is the place where God has chosen to dwell, in heaven, in the Ark of Moses, and realized in the incarnation through Mary. For an extended discussion of this see Lee, *Symbolic Interpretations*, 81–88.

[45] For an extensive discussion of this see Lee, *Symbolic Interpretations*, 79–157.

[46] This tradition is the subject of a research project at Sankt Ignatios College Sweden led by the author. So far there is little literature in English on this tradition. One short article that gives good insight is Daniel Assefa and Tekletsadik Belachew, "Ethiopian Qene (Traditional and Living Oral Poetry) as a Medium for Biblical Hermeneutics,"

[47] See, for instance, Weischer, ed. and trans., "Der Dialog « Dass Christus Einer Ist » des Cyrill von Alexandrien," 36.19; 92.13; 102.13; 222.7.

is not used consistently elsewhere. In the liturgy another term is used: «ዘዕሩይ ምስለ አብ በመለኮቱ» (*zäʿaruy məslä ab bämäläkotu*, 'in divinity equal with the Father').[48] Neither *ḫəburä həlawe* nor *zäʿaruy məslä ab bämäläkotu* is found in KN, but instead, KN imagines a conversation which indirectly affirms both equality in divine nature and a physical incarnation in language akin to ὁμοούσιος, but without resorting to technical terminology. By framing doctrine through story and symbol, particularly the imagery of the Heavenly Zion and the Ark of the Covenant, the text reflects the EOTC tradition's preference for biblical typology and narrative theology over systematic formulations, making Nicene faith both accessible and culturally resonant.

These brief statements are oblique references to the Nicene statement of faith, but they creatively imagine a conversation between the Father and the Son about the incarnation that implicitly affirms that the Son was before the creation, and that he became human for salvation.

Later, similar affirmations are made attributed to the 318 Fathers of Nicaea:

፲፪፡ ኀበ፡ ኍብሩ፡ ፫፻፲ወ፰ርቱዓን፡ ሃይማኖት።

ወአውሥእዎ፡ ወይቤሉ፡ እወ፡ አማን፡ ቀደመት፡ ተፈጥሮ፡ ታቦተ፡ ኪዳን፡ ወአልቦ፡ ሐሰት፡ ውስተ፡ ቃልከ፡ እሙን፡ ወርቱዕ፡ ወጽድቅ፡ ውእቱ፡ ወአልቦ፡ ተውላጥ፤ አቅዲሙሰ፡ ለጽዮን፡ ፈጠራ፡ ለማኅደረ፡ ስብሐቲሁ፡ ወምኩረ፡ ኪዳኑሰ፡ ዘይቤ፡ እለብሰ፡ ሥጋ፡ አዳም፡ መፈታዊተ፡ ወአስተርኢ፡ ለኵሉ፡ ዘፈጠርኩ፡ በእዴየ፡ ወበቃልየ። ወሶበሰ፡ ኢወረደት፡ ጽዮን፡ ሰማያዊት፡ ወሶበኒ፡ ኢለብሰ፡ ሥጋ፡ አዳም፡ እመ፡ ኢተርእየ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ቃል፡ ወእመ፡ ኢኮነ፡ መድኀኒተነ፤ ስምዐ፡ በእምላልፄ፤ ጽዮንሰ፡ ሰማያዊት፡ ተመሰለታ፡ ለወላዲተ፡ መድኀን፡ ማርያም፤ እስመ፡ ሕንጽት፡ ጽዮን፡ ወንቡር፡ ውስቴታ፡ ፲ቃላት፡ ዘሕግ፡ እለ፡ ጽሑፋት፡ በእደዊሁ፡ ወውስተ፡ ከርሠ፡ ማርያም፡ ኀደረ፡ ለሊሁ፡ ፈጣሪ፡ ዘበእንቲአሁ፡ ኵሉ፡ ኮነ።[49]

12: ḫabä ḫabru 318 rətuʿanä haymanot.

wäʾawśəʾwwo wäyəbelu ewä aman qädämät täfäṭəro tabotä kidan wäʾaləbo ḥasät wəsətä qaləkä emun wärətuʿə wäṣedq weʾetu wäʾaləbo täwlaṭ, aqdimusä läṣəyon fäṭära lämaḫdärä sebəḥatihu wäməkrä kidanusä zäyəbe əläbsä śəga adam märetawitä wäʾastärəʾi läkʷəllu zäfäṭärku bäʾədeyä wäbäqaləyä. wäsobäsä iwärädät ṣəyon sämayawit wäsobäni iläbsä śəga adam emä itärʾəyä əgəziʾabəḫer qal wäʾəmä ikonä mädəḫanitänä, səməʿu bäʾamsal, ṣəyonəsä sämayawit tämäsäläta läwäladitä mädḫən Maryam, esmä ḥənṣət ṣəyon wänəbur westeta 10 qalat zäḫəg əllä ṣəḥufat bäʾədäwihu wäwəstä kärśä maryam ḫadärä lälihu fäṭari zäbäʾənətiʾahu kʷəllu konä.

12: Concerning the unity of the 318 Orthodox of Faith:

And they answered, 'Yes, truly the first created thing was the Ark of the Covenant, . . . First of all, he made Zion as a dwelling place for his glory,

[48] Täsfa Gabrä Śəllase, ed., መጽሐፈ ቅዳሴ በልሳነ ግዕዝ (*Mäṣəḥafä qəddase bëlesanä gəʿəz*) [the book of the Liturgy in the Gəʿəz Language], 91.

[49] Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, ፷–፸.

> and the plan of his covenant which said, 'I will clothe myself with the flesh of earthly Adam and I will reveal myself to all that I created with my hand and my word.' And if the Heavenly Zion had not come down, and if he had not clothed himself with the flesh of Adam, then the Word of God would not have been revealed, and our salvation would not have been. His witness is in the likeness, the Heavenly Zion is the likeness of the bearer of Salvation, Mary, because Zion was constructed, and inside her are 10 Words of the Law, which are written by his hand, and he dwelt in Mary's womb, the creator of all things, and through whom all things came into being.

Here, the 318 Nicaean fathers affirm together a conversation that expresses more the language of Ephesus in 431, expressing Θεοτόκος *(Theotókos)* as resembling the heavenly Ark in the same kind of imagined conversation as was used of incarnation. This language is important for the message of KN, which affirms that the Ark of the Covenant was made as the dwelling place for God on earth, and that this Ark resides in Ethiopia.[50]

> ፲፰ ኀበ፡ ኀበሩ፡ አበው፡ ጳጳሳት።
>
> ካዕበ፡ አውሥኡ፡ ማኅበረ ፫፻፲ወ፰፡፡ወ ይቤሉ፡ አሜን፤ ዛቲኬ፡ ይእቲ፡ መድኀኒቶሙ፡ ለደቂቀ፡ አዳም፡ ታቦተ ሕጉ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር፡ እምከመ፡ ወረደት፡ ትሰምዩ፡ ሰብአ፡ ቤቱ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር፤ በከመ፡ ይቤ፡ ዳዊት፡ ወማኅደሮሂ፡ ውስተ፡ ጽዮን፤ ወካዕበ፡ ይቤ፡ በአፈ፡ መንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ወማኅደርየ፡ ዝየ፡ እስመ፡ ኀረይኩሙ፡ ለካህናቲሃ፡ ወአስተፈሥሖሙ፡ ለነዳያኒሃ፤ ወለዳዊትኒ፡ እሁቦ፡ ዘርአ፡ በውስቴታ፡ በዲበ፡ ምድርኒ፡ ዘይከውን፡ ንጉሠ፡ ወበሰማያትኒ፡ ይነግስ፡ እምዘርኡ፡ በሥጋ፡ ዲበ፡ መንበረ፡ መለኮት፤ ወጸላእቱኒ፡ ይጉበኡ፡ ታሕተ፡ መኪይዶ፡ እገሪሁ፡ ወይትኀተሙ፡ በማኅተመ፡ ዚአሁ።።[51]
>
> *18: ḫabä ḫabru abäw pappasat.*
>
> *kaʿəbä awśəʾu maḫbärä 318 wä yəbelu amen, zatike yəʾəti mädḫənitomu lädäqiqä adam tabotä ḫəgu läʾəgziʾabəḥer əmkämä wärädät təsäməyi säbəʾa betu läʾəgziʾabəḥer, bäkämä yəbe dawit wämaḫdärohi wəsətä ṣəyon, wäkaʿəbä yəbe bäʾafä mänəfäs qəddus wämaḫdärəyä zəyä əsmä ḫaräykəwwa wäʾəbarkomu läkahənatiha wäʾastäfäśəḥomu länädayaniha, wälädawitəni əhubo zärəʾa bäwəsteta bädibä mədrəni zäyəkäwən nəguśä wäbäsämayatəni yənägäs əmzärəʾu bäśəga dibä mänbärä mäläkot, wäṣälaʾtuni yəgäbəʾu taḥtä mäkäyədä əgärihu wäytəḫatämu bämaḫətämä ziʾahu.*
>
> 18: When the Fathers and Bishops Agreed
>
> Again, the Council of the 318 answered and said, "Amen. This is the salvation of the children of Adam. Since the Ark of the Law of God came down, they shall be called, "People of the House of God" as David said, "and his dwelling place is in Zion." Again, he says through the

[50] A full discussion of this thinking is beyond the scope of this paper, but for a more comprehensive discussion see Lee, *Symbolic Interpretations*, 24.

[51] Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, ፲፰.

> mouth of the Holy Spirit, "and my dwelling place is here, because I chose her, and I will bless her priests, and I will make her poor ones rejoice. I will give to David a seed in inside her on the earth, who will become king, and in the heavens [One] will rule from his seed in the flesh upon the throne of the Godhead. As for his enemies, they will gather under his footstool, and they will be sealed with his seal."

The Nicaean fathers again affirm the incarnation. A further reference is made to "The 318" in chapter 29 broadly affirming the Nicene statement of faith and 'that which we should teach and how we should fashion the faith.'

> ፳፱፡ በእንተ፡ ፫፻፲ወ፰

> ወንሕነኒ፡ ሠራዕነ፡ ምስሌሆሙ፡ ጠዪቀነ፡ ዘነበቡ፡ እለ፡ እምቅድሜነ፡ ሐዋርያት፤ ንሕነ፡ ፫፻፲ወ፰፡ አርታዕነ፡ ወአስተራኅዕነ፡ ሃይማኖተ፡ እንዘ፡ እግዚእነ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ምስሌነ፤ ወውእቱ፡ ሠርዐ፡ ለነ፡ ዘከመ፡ ንሜህር፡ ወዘከመ፡ ንጥበር፡ ሃይማኖተ።።[52]

> *29: bäʾəntä 318.*

> *wänəḥnäni śäraʿənä məslehomu ṭäyiqänä zänäbäbu ələ əmqədmenä ḥawarəyat, nəḥnä 318 arətaʿnä wäʾastärataʿənä haymanotä ənzä əgziʾənä iyäsus krəstos məslenä, wäwəʾətu śärəʿa länä zäkämä nəmehər wäzäkämä nəgäbər hayəmanotä.*

> 29: Concerning the 318

> And we establish together with them. We know well what they spoke, those who went before us, the Apostles. We the 318 establish and uphold the faith, while Our Lord Jesus Christ is with us, and he established for us that which we should teach and how we should fashion the faith.

This is the final explicit reference to the Fathers of Nicaea but much later, in chapter 93, there is another statement that resonates strongly with Nicaea in condemning Arius, and explicitly affirming that Christ's humanity is present on the "throne of divinity," possibly in implicit reference to Chalcedon as a refutation of Eutyches.

> ፺፫ በእንተ ዘአማሰኑ ሃይማኖተ ሮም

> ወተንሥአ ሰይጣን ዘእምትካት ዕድዉ ለሰብእ ወአስሐቶሙ ለሰብእ ብሔረ ሮሜ ወአሕሠምዋ ለሃይማኖተ ክርስቶስ ወአምጽኡ ኑፋቄ ላዕለ ቤተ ክርስቲያን ዘእግዚአብሔር በአፉ. ንስጥሮስ፤ ወንስጥሮስ ወአርዮስ ወይባሶ እለ ወደየ ውስተ ልቦሙ ዘወደየ ቅንአተ ውስተ ልቡ ለቀየን... ...ወይፀርፉ ላዕለ ስብሐቲሁ እንዘ አምላክ ውእቱ ቃለ እግዚአብሔር፤ ወረደ እመንበረ መለኮቱ ወለብሰ ሥጋ አዳም ወእግዚአብሔር ውእቱ ቃል ወበይእቲ ሥጋ ተሰቀለ ከመ ይቤዝዎ ለአዳም በእልወቱ ወዓረገ ውስተ ሰማይ ወነበረ ዲበ መንበረ መለኮቱ በይእቲ ሥጋ እንተ ነሥአ ወካዕበ ይመጽእ በስብሐት ይኴንን ሕያዋነ ወሙታን . . . .[53]

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[52] Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, ፳፱.
[53] Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, ፻፺፯.

93: bäʾəntä zäʾamasänu hayəmanotä rom.

wätänśəʾa säyṭan zäʾemtəkat edəwu läsäbʾə wäʾasḥatomu läsäbʾə bəḥerä rome wäʾaḥśämawwa lähaymanotä krestos wäʾamṣəʾu nufaqe laʿälä betä krəstiyan zäʾəgziʾabəḥer bäʾafä nəsṭəros, wänesṭəros wäʾarəyos wäyəbaso əllä wädäyä wəstä ləbomu zäwädäyä qənəʾatä wəsətä ləbu läqäyän... …wäyəḍärfu laʿälä səbḥatihu ənəzä aməlak wəʾətu qalä əgziʾabəḥer, wärädä əmänəbärä mäläkotu wäläbsä śəga adam wäʾəgziʾabəḥer wəʾətu qal wäbäyəʾəti śəga täsäqälä kämä yəbezəwo läʾadam bäʾəlwätu wäʿarägä wəstä sämay wänäbärä dibä mänbärä mäläkotu bäyəʾəti śəga ənətä näśəʾa wäkaʿəbä yəmäṣʾə bäsəbḥat yəkʷennən ḥəyawanä wämutan . . . .

93: Concerning those who Destroyed the Faith of Rome

> . . . Satan rose up, who from ancient times had been the enemy of humankind, and led the people of the nation of Rome astray and they twisted the faith of Christ and brought division in the Church of God through the mouth of Nestorius — and he put into the hearts of Nestorius, Arius, and *Yəbaso* the jealousy that he put into the heart of Cain . . . and they blaspheme his glory, while he is God, the Word of God. He came down from the throne of his divinity and clothed himself with the flesh of Adam, and he is God the Word of God, and in that flesh he was crucified to redeem Adam in his iniquity, and he ascended into heaven and was seated on the throne of divinity in that flesh which he took on, and again he will come in glory and he will judge the living and the dead . . . .

This is the only explicit mention of Nestorius in KN. This shows some awareness of the fifth century controversies, but this brief mention does not, however, make any specific reference to Chalcedon or Ephesus or to the Christological issues that were debated at those councils. Indeed, the passage looks back to the time before Chalcedon and the close relationship between Ethiopia and Rome, «ይትዐወቅ ክብረ ነገሥተ ኢትዮጵያ ወክብረ ነገሥተ ሮምያ እስመ፤ አኀው እሙንቱ» (*yətaʿawäq kəbrä nägäśtä ityopəya wäkebrä nägäśtä roməya əsmä, aḫaw emuntu*, '. . . the glory of the kings of Ethiopia and the glory of the kings of Rome might be known, as they are brothers'),[54] referring to the era of Constantine and his mother Helena.[55] According to this passage, the kings of Rome believed in an 'orthodox' manner for 130 years. This number is somewhat confusing. If it is taken to be an indication that the Roman kings went astray from the orthodox faith at Chalcedon in AD 451 — 130 years prior to Chalcedon would be AD 321. This lies between Constantine declaring Christianity legally

[54] Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, ፻፳፯.

[55] This perhaps hints at the reason for this reference. One theme of KN is that salvation is connected with wood, and Helena is honoured for her finding of the True Cross. For a discussion of this see Ralph Lee, *Symbolic Interpretations*, 148–157.

tolerated (313) and Nicaea (325), corresponding to Sunday being declared a day of rest in the Empire (321).

Conclusions

The evidence surveyed here demonstrates that Nicaea's primacy in the EOTC is inseparable from the Nicene tradition's shaping of its Christology: the Creed's normativity, the epochal role of the 318, and the embedding of Nicene faith in the anaphoras are precisely the means through which the Church articulates Christology in Nicene terms. The primary place of Nicaean theology in the EOTC may be seen in several ways, although no absolute discussion of Nicaea's "sufficiency" has been found. Liturgical commemoration is significant, especially with the fathers of Nicaea being the only fathers connected with a Council regularly commemorated in the EOTC calendar. Ethiopic Enoch also gives a special significance to Nicaea given the "pool of possibilities" that are available as possible labels for the ten "weeks" of salvation history. It is, however, KN that points most strongly to the significance of Nicaea as a defining epoch. KN creatively adapts Nicaean language to express the significance of the Incarnation, a central theme in the text. "The 318" are used as a stamp of authority on key matters of salvation that are addressed in KN. These observations have implications for our understanding of theological method and expression and for ecumenical relations. Although Witakowski considers that the Nicaean Creed "has no particular theological consequence for the Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwaḥədo* Church,"[56] the content of KN argues against this.

The fact that KN does not use more dogmatic language such as ኀቡረ ህላዌ *(ḫəburä həlawe*, 'of the same nature'), used to translate the Greek ὁμοούσιος,[57] or in the form of the Creed used in the liturgy where «ዘዕሩይ ምስለ አብ በመለኮቱ» *(zäʿəruy məslä ʾab bämäläkotu*, 'in divinity equal with the Father')[58] is used is notable. Instead, KN expresses Nicaean Christology through imagined narrative and symbolic interpretations. In imagined conversations among the members of the Trinity KN affirms the existence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as coequals before the Creation, demarcating the identity of Jesus Christ as fully divine and subsequently "clothed" in humanity, implicitly affirming the ὁμοούσιος. KN employs the unusual verb እትገሰስ *(ətəgäsäs*, 'I will become tangible' or 'touchable'), countering gnostic or docetic understandings of the Incarnation and again affirming full humanity and divinity in Jesus Christ. This approach reflects the EOTC general tendency to eschew systematic and cerebral

[56] Witakowski, "Nicea, Council of," 709.

[57] See, for instance, Weischer, ed. and trans., "Der Dialog « Dass Christus Einer Ist » des Cyrill von Alexandrien," 36.19; 92.13; 102.13; 222.7.

[58] ተስፋ ገብረ ሥላሴ, ed., መጽሐፈ ቅዳሴ በልሳነ ግዕዝ, 1989 EC), 91.

approaches to theologizing. There is no reference to Chalcedon, or Pope Leo, or a "two natures" christology of Chalcedon. The Nicaean language appears to be implicitly assimilated in the descriptions of conversations between members of the Trinity affirming their eternal coexistence before Creation.

Whilst Chalcedon is not in the purview of KN, chapter 93 addresses the key issue of Christ's full humanity and divinity. The phrase "and he ascended into heaven and was seated on the throne of divinity in that flesh which he took on" affirms the eternal nature of the union in Christ. This may serve as an oblique reference to the EOTC condemnation of Eutyches, whose teachings on the single divine nature of Christ were condemned at Constantinople in AD 448,[59] in debates that fed into the Council of Chalcedon and shaped its Christological formula.

The recognition that the EOTC is fundamentally Nicaean and "achalcedonian" has important implications for ecumenical relations, and for understanding EOTC identity formation. Joint statements from Oriental-Catholic dialogues show significant Christological agreement.[60] EOTC thought, developed along different lines by focusing on the roots of Christology at Nicaea rather than on the schism at Chalcedon, could provide fruitful ways of developing that dialogue further.

As well as being historically irrelevant to many African Christians, the "non-Chalcedonian" label carries colonialist undertones. Western missions used "non-Chalcedonian" to dismiss the EOTC as heretical or sub-Christian, a trend that continued with the nineteenth century advent of Protestant mission. The hardening of confessional boundaries in Ethiopia can be partly attributed to polemical encounters with Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Kwame Bediako acknowledged in his Frumentius Lectures in Addis Ababa in 2001 that there was perhaps a chapter missing from his seminal *Theology and Identity*[61] that would have explored Ethiopian christology, and the language of KN makes a further case for this. As African churches seek indigenous christological expressions, the reflections of the EOTC — coming from the only African nation not to be colonized — should surely be included in the conversations. The emphasis on the conciliar agreement, "The 318," also provides a path away from divisions over biblicism, pneumatology, and tradition. Protestant and Pentecostal Churches across Africa may not generally

[59] See Vasilije Vranić, "The Christology of Eutyches at the Council of Constantinople 448."
[60] E.g., see Catholic –Oriental Orthodox Regional Forum, *Joint Statements and Agreements between the Catholic and Oriental Orthodox Churches*.
[61] Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*.

pay close attention, at least at the grassroots level, to the issues of Chalcedon, but will be familiar with the Creed, aside from the relatively small number of Oneness Pentecostals.[62] Expressions of Christology that emphasize shared Nicaean foundations, rather than what was rejected at Chalcedon, help reveal common ground often obscured by the frequent use of "non-Chalcedonian" to describe the EOTC. This label obscures common ground by defining the EOTC negatively—by what it rejected—rather than positively by its Nicaean foundation. Moreover, the label can misleadingly suggest heterodoxy. Furthermore, God's materiality and tangible presence emphasized by African Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity harmonizes with the embodied spirituality of KN in which Christ declares "I will become tangible." The way KN expresses Nicaean doctrine through imagined conversations between the members of the Trinity reflects broader African affinity with narrative theology and storytelling. This narrative-symbolic approach would be a fruitful avenue for dialogue with other African Christian expressions.

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NB: In these titles, *Qerlos*, *Qerrəllos*, and *Qērellos* each refer to the body of literature attributed to Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376 – 444).

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[62] From data in the *World Christian Database*, ed. Gina A. Zurlo, it may be inferred that Oneness Pentecostals are less than 1% of the Christian population of Africa.

[63] Also available at https://translation.bible/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/asale-2016-the-ethiopian-orthodox-tewahedo-church-canon-of-the-scriptures-neither-open-nor-closed.pdf

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AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 187–207

The 'Other' as '*Yene-Bitte*'

Reimagining an Ethiopian Ethics of Moral Responsibility

Youdit Tariku FEYESSA / ዮዲት ታሪኩ ፈይሳ

ORCID: 0000-0001-9709-7870
Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
youdittariku@egst.edu.et

Abstract

In today's world otherness has been a source of disruption of coexistence. Othering based on ethnicity, race, color, sex, and economic status have been a threat to human dignity and existence. In Ethiopia, ethnic-based otherness disrupts the solidarity of the country and has led millions of people to displacement, hunger, death, and unceasing conflicts. The notion of the 'other' is a central concept in ethical theories and moral philosophy. The other is the locus where ethics and politics overlap and materialize. In this article, I seek to construct a moral responsibility of the other using the common Ethiopic term *Yene-Bitte*, a term used to identify beggars. *Yene-bitte* is a blended Ethiopic word from *yene* or *ye'ene* meaning 'mine', 'myself', 'someone or something that belongs to oneself or the I' — it indicates both *selfhood* and *belongingness* or *possessions*. *Bitte* also has the meaning of 'the one that is like me', or 'my identical' or 'my twin', a 'close acquaintance'. Thus, *yene-bitte* means the *one that is like myself* or the *one that is like me*. Drawing from Emmanuel Lévinas and Paul Riceour, the article rehearses some of the theoretical considerations on the notion of the *other* vis-à-vis moral responsibility, thereby situating the notion of the *yene-bitte* as an Ethiopian ethics of moral responsibility that seeks moral responsibility through recognition of the other and also reveals its embodiment in a profound theological anthropology. Revitalizing such social practice is indispensable in construing otherness and in harnessing moral responsibility in a disrupted state like Ethiopia.

Résumé

Dans le monde actuel, l'altérité est une source de perturbation de la coexistence. L'altérisation fondée sur l'appartenance ethnique, la race, la couleur de peau, le sexe, et la situation économique constitue une menace pour la dignité et l'existence humaines. En Éthiopie, l'altérité fondée sur l'appartenance ethnique perturbe la solidarité du pays et a

Published with license by ACTEA | DOI: https://doi.org/10.69683/ncy8za42
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conduit des millions de personnes au déplacement, à la famine, à la mort et à des conflits incessants. La notion d'« autre » est un concept central dans les théories éthiques et la philosophie morale. *Yene-bitte* est un mot éthiopien composé dérivé de *yene* ou *ye'ene*, qui signifie « le mien », « moi-même », « quelqu'un ou quelque chose qui appartient à soi-même ou au moiz » — il désigne à la fois l'identité propre et le sentiment d'appartenance ou la possession. *Bitte* a également le sens de « celui qui est comme moi », ou « mon double », ou encore « mon jumeau », une « connaissance proche ». Ainsi, *yene-bitte* désigne celui qui est comme moi-même ou celui qui me ressemble. S'inspirant d'Emmanuel Lévinas et de Paul Ricoeur, cet article passe en revue certaines réflexions théoriques sur la notion de l'autre face à la responsabilité morale, situant ainsi la notion de *yene-bitte* comme une éthique éthiopienne de la responsabilité morale qui recherche cette responsabilité à travers la reconnaissance de l'autre et révèle également son incarnation dans une anthropologie théologique profonde. Il est indispensable de redynamiser cette pratique sociale pour appréhender l'altérité et assumer la responsabilité morale dans un pays en crise comme l'Éthiopie.

Resumo

No mundo atual, a alteridade é uma fonte de perturbação da coexistência. A alterização baseada na etnia, na raça, na cor da pele, no sexo e na situação económica constitui uma ameaça à dignidade e à existência humanas. Na Etiópia, a alteridade baseada na etnia perturba a solidariedade do país e levou milhões de pessoas ao deslocamento, à fome, à morte e a conflitos incessantes. A noção de "outro" é um conceito central nas teorias éticas e na filosofia moral. *Yene-bitte* é uma palavra etíope composta, derivada de *yene* ou *ye'ene*, que significa 'o meu', 'eu próprio', 'alguém ou algo que pertence a si próprio ou a mim' — designa tanto a identidade própria como o sentimento de pertença ou posse. *Bitte* também significa 'aquele que é como eu', ou 'o meu duplo', ou ainda 'o meu gémeo', um 'conhecido próximo'. Assim, *yene-bitte* designa aquele que é como eu próprio ou aquele que se parece comigo. Inspirando-se em Emmanuel Lévinas e Paul Ricoeur, este artigo analisa algumas reflexões teóricas sobre a noção do outro face à responsabilidade moral, situando assim a noção de *yene-bitte* como uma ética etíope da responsabilidade moral que procura essa responsabilidade através do reconhecimento do outro e revela também a sua encarnação numa antropologia teológica profunda. É indispensável revitalizar esta prática social para compreender a alteridade e assumir a responsabilidade moral num país em crise como a Etiópia.

Youdit Tariku Feyessa

The 'Other' as 'Yene-Bitte':
Reimagining an Ethiopian Ethics of Moral Responsibility

Keywords

otherness; *yene-bitte;* moral responsibility; the face*;* the other*; imago Dei*; *theosis*

Mots-clés

altérité ; *yene-bitte ;* responsabilité morale ; le visage ; l'autre *; imago Dei* ; *théosis*

Palavras-chave

alteridade; *yene-bitte*; responsabilidade moral; o rosto; o outro; *imago Dei*; *theosis*

Introduction

For a person who lives and works in Africa, particularly in Ethiopia, the poorest of the poor countries where hunger and famine are marks of uniqueness, violence and atrocities looms in everyday life, the mushrooming of internal displacement incapacitated many millions, and the place where ethnic based atrocities and killings normalized,[1] talking about the ethico-moral principle of the notion of the other, otherness, and moral responsibility is critically fundamental.[2] In world history, Otherness, both individual and communal, is a source of disruption of coexistence.[3] Othering based on ethnicity, race, color, sex, gender, and economy have been, and continue to be, a threat to human dignity and existence. The war between Ukraine and Russia, the ethnic-based conflict in Ethiopia, the violence and religious fundamentalism in Syria, the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, the Israel-Palestine war — these are just a few examples. A wide range of conflicts, insecurity, violence, and human right violations in the African continent has led millions of people to experience displacement, hunger, diseases, gender-based violence, unceasing conflicts, and death, serving to continue the vicious cycle of poverty.[4]

A 2022 report on conflict trends revealed even though the number of state-based conflicts in Africa declined slightly in 2021, it remains "higher than a

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[1] See Theodros A. Teklu, "Politics as Hatred of the Ethnic Other," 9–24; and Youdit Tariku Feyessa, "The 'Ethnic Other' as the 'Neighbor': A Perichoretic Imagination of Moral Responsibility," 137–154.

[2] Teklu, "Introduction," 1–2.

[3] E.g., the Rwandan genocide (and broader Hutu-Tutsi conflict) and Jewish Holocaust (in which 6 million Jews were massacred) are classic, and horrible, twentieth century examples of othering and its consequence of disruption of life and existence.

[4] United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), *Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Causes, impact and implications for the Greater Lakes Region*, 1–3; UNECA, *Socioeconomic Impact of Conflict in Africa*, 1–5.

decade ago."[5] According to the report, non-state conflicts are currently increasing compared to state-based conflicts in Africa.[6] In the informally organized identity groups conflicts are mainly "communal, where incompatibilities are based on communal identity."[7] Thus conflict mainly arise around common identity such as "religious, ethnic national, tribal or clan identity."[8] The identity based conflicts, like religious, ethnic, racial, gender incompatibilities are the main reasons of the death since it sets apart the I and the other in a contesting relationship. This is also prominently evident in contemporary Ethiopia, which is stirred by chaos and conflicts based on identity. Ethnic based conflict led over 5.1 million citizens to be internally displace only in a single year 2021.[9] Othering based on ethnicity is becoming a threat to existence and peaceful cohabitation in Ethiopia currently. The recent war between the Ethiopian government and the Tigrians' opposition party left the country in a devastated state: many were displaced, raped, lost their lives or their beloveds — people suffered from poverty and instability.[10]

Thus, I argue for the importance of reclaiming contextually embedded moral responsibility to enhance "peaceful coexistence" and harnessing the "bond of togetherness" in Ethiopia,[11] therefore reclaiming the notion of the *other* from common Ethiopian day-to-day language — *yene-bitte,* which is used to identify beggars as a source of moral responsibility to the other. Rehearsing some of the theoretical considerations by engaging with Emmanuel Lévinas and Paul Ricoeur in construing the notion of the other vis-à-vis moral responsibility, I position the notion of the *yene-bitte* as an Ethiopian ethics of moral responsibility that not only seeks moral responsibility through the recognition of the other but also resurfaces its embodiment in a profound theological anthropology.

The Other as the Locus of Moral Responsibility

[5] Siri Aas Rustad, "Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2023," PRIO Paper 2024, 9.

[6] Non-state conflicts could be of three types: formally organized groups, informally organized groups, or informally organized identity groups. Both the formally and informally organized groups, though they differ in using announced name for their group or not organized groups but not necessarily organized based on identity. Rustad, "Conflict Trends," PRIO Paper 2024, 16.

[7] Júlia Palik, Siri Aas Rustad, and Fredrik Methi, "Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2019," 28.

[8] Rustad, "Conflict Trends," PRIO Paper 2024, 16.

[9] Council of Foreign Relations, "Conflict in Ethiopia."

[10] UNECA, *Socioeconomic Impact of Conflict in Africa*, 1–5.

[11] Teklu, "Introduction," 1–2.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) claims that "Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought," noting that "the category of the *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself."[12] Usually otherness is in a contesting relationship of either competition or/and domination. Being critical of her philosophical predecessors, de Beauvoir avers philosophy and tradition, including the Abrahamic Religions, are reasons for the assignation of otherness to women. Using a feminist approach, de Beauvoir argues that most world religions' view of women is patriarchal, especially for Islam and Christianity, and laments that "Christian ideology has contributed no little to the oppression of women."[13] According to de Beauvoir, the Jewish culture and early Christian teachings, especially those of Saint Paul (as portrayed in the interpreters), promoted a form of inequality of women that is subordination in a vivid sense.[14]

The notion of the other is vital in the discussion of inter-subjectivity; interpersonal encounters and relationships. Generally, scholars categorize the Self-Other relationship discourse into two major broad categories. The first is the Cartesian tradition that views the self or the subject as an autonomous entity in and of itself, both in epistemology and in practice. Such traditions consider the self as "a sealed entity, locked away as it were in its own mind, fully present, unified, and self-certain,"[15] or *being–in–itself* and *being–for–itself* in Heideggerian terms. The relationship between the self and the other is in a reciprocal relationship. The second approach understands the self within relationship, inter–subjectivity that acknowledges "the existence of others."[16] It is with the latter tradition that this paper situates the notion of the other, the *yene–bitte* in Ethiopian case, as the ethical and moral foundation for the self–other relationship.

The notion of the other is a central concept in ethical theories and moral philosophy, and it is the locus where both ethics and politics juxtaposes and materializes.[17] Otherness often construes recognition, belongingness, inclusion, and exclusion simultaneously. It is in this tradition that Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) and Emanuel Lévinas (1906–1995) situate their discussions, despite heterogeneity in argument as well as presuppositions. Drawing from their work, I explore theoretical considerations on the notion of the other vis-à-vis moral

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[12] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 16.

[13] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 120.

[14] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 120–121.

[15] Owen Ware, "Ontology, Otherness, and Self-Alterity: Intersubjectivity in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty," 503–504.

[16] Ware, "Ontology, Otherness, and Self-Alterity," 504.

[17] Dana Hollander, "Is the Other My Neighbor? Reading Levinas alongside Hermann Cohen," 90–91.

responsibility to pave ways of formulating the ethics of the other in the notion of the *yene-bitte* as an Ethiopian Ethics of moral responsibility.

The Other as the Face: Emmanuel Lévinas

Emmanuel Lévinas, a French philosopher with a Jewish background his contribution towards philosophy and ethics is immense.[18] The self-other relationship discourse in philosophy and ethics developed a step further with Lévinas's great contribution to the subject matter. Unlike Martin Buber (1878–1965), Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), and others, who situate the self-other relationship in a reciprocal, symmetrical relationship, Lévinas introduced the asymmetrical relationship between the self-other relationship in an ethical response of responsibility. Most of his ethical and philosophical writings hang on his prominent concept called the 'other' or the 'face'.[19] Understanding Lévinasian ethics of alterity,[20] the view of the other, and the extent and proximity of relationship between the self and the other is based on his notion of the 'face'.

According to Lévinas the other — or *otherness* or *alterity* —is the basis for ethics and morality.[21] Lévinas describes otherness as "the face;" the face of the other.[22] He ascribes the ideas of proximity and encounter to the face in a relationship geared by an ethics of responsibility, which is usually asymmetrical. One has responsibility to the face because the face utters language that says "Thou shalt not kill" and orders rather it take responsibility.[23] The responsibility to the other, the face, is a primordial order and command. To elaborate this, Lévinas brings three components whenever one encounters the face. First, there is a fundamental lack, destituteness, poverty in the face. Second, the face is exposed to nuisance that invites towards an act of violence and at the same time forbids you from doing it. Lastly, in his ethics, the face and discourse are

[18] Emmanuel Lévinas was a native Lithuanian who emigrated to France. Studying philosophy at the University of Strasbourg, he was interested in existential philosophy which put ontology before epistemology. Both his Jewish background and his interest in German phenomenology shaped and influenced his ethical sensibilities as well as the directives of his philosophical writings. Stuart Sim, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 304-305.

[19] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 69.

[20] Alterity, according to Lévinas, is the insistence that others always remain irreducible to representation. He maintains that both engage other beings in the mode of knowing them, thus reducing them to our experience or representation of them Lévinas also insists that inter-subjectivity is asymmetrical; the other calls me, commanding me. Otherness for Lévinas located not on the self rather on the face.

[21] Lévinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 103-104.

[22] Lévinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 170-172.

[23] Lévinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 104.

subsumed in each other giving automatic response and responsibility.[24] Therefore, the responsibility to the other is a necessity; as it is a major and fundamental structure of subjectivity since subjectivity is subsumed within responsibility.

Subjectivity, according to Lévinas, is not relegated for its own self but rather for the other.[25] Because, as Lévinas avers, in the face there is the highest authority that always commands, which is the word of God; hence the face is the locus of the word of God in the other.[26] God speaks through the other person that is the real transcendence that encounter as a stranger, widow and the orphan. Thus, the encounter and the relationship with the face is related with God, hence knowledge of God is impossible without such an encounter. Also, the encounter with the face is indispensable for the relationship with God (but not as a mediator rather as the manifestation of the height of God revealed through).[27] Therefore, Lévinas understands the other as the face which always commands and demands our responsibility to take care of them and not to kill. Any encounter with the face, the other, is geared with ethics of responsibility expecting nothing in return. In simple language, for Lévinas when one sees a hungry person, destitute, rejected person, the face orders and commands us with the responsibility of feeding them, clothing, and restoring their humanity via recognition.

The Demand of the Other: Paul Ricouer

The contribution of Paul Ricoeur, another French philosopher and ethicist, towards the self-other relationship is significant. In one of his notable works, *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur reveals three converging philosophical intentions: "the first intention was to indicate the primacy of reflective meditation over the immediate positing of the subject, as this is expressed in the first-person singular: 'I think,' 'I am'."[28] Such intention posits the dialectic of the "self" and the "I" drawing from various semantic studies in usage of the terms. "The second . . . intention, implicitly present in the title in the word 'self,' is to distinguish two major meanings of 'identity' (the relationship between this 'identity' and the term 'self' . . .)."[29] The third philosophical intention of writing oneself as another is, for Ricoeur, explicating the "the dialectic of self and the other than self."[30]

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[24] Lévinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 104-105

[25] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 221.

[26] Lévinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 104.

[27] Lévinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 104–106.

[28] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 1.

[29] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 2.

[30] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 3.

According to Ricoeur, "Oneself as another suggests from the outset that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other, as we might say in Hegelian terms."[31] Ricoeur stresses in *oneself as another* that the "as" connotes "not only . . . a comparison" but also "an implication." By "implication," Ricoeur argues the implication of "oneself inasmuch as being other."[32] Thus, otherness construed the self and its demands of the other. Selfhood is construed through the genuine response to the other, in the way of responding to the other.[33] Ricoeur implied that selfhood of oneself always entails otherness with which the self is understood, oneself in the dialectics of otherness, and the ethical responsibility and relationship geared with it.[34] Though the self and the other are in a dialectic relationship, however, "the autonomy of the self will appear then to be tightly bound up with solicitude for one's neighbor and with justice for each individual."[35] Such self-other relationship implies ethical imperatives for the responsibility towards others.[36]

In the ethical perspective of the demand of the other, the demand implies one's responsibility for the other, mutual vulnerability to each other, our being indebted to the other, and our being dependent on each other. Responsibility for Ricoeur is the concept of responsibility in relation to obligation has two faces one is violation and compensation, but it is not enough. The concept of responsibility goes beyond the legal obligatory act: "it is an obligation that overflows the framework of compensation and punishment."[37] Responsibility for Ricoeur inculcates the inter-relationship of the idea of "imputability, solidarity and shared risks."[38]

While discussing the ethics of our lives, Ricoeur introduces a concept of "imputation" which expresses the core of his ethical reflection. The responsibility for my actions involves an imputation of my deeds. My actions can be imputed to me, and as a result my character can be valued according to the ethical value of my actions. The response to the other which ensues from the demand of the other possesses an irreducible quality. It is the primordial character of the demand of the Other, which so much permeates our lives, that it is a voluntary act of our choosing to perform an activity of benevolence, care,

[31] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 3.

[32] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 3.

[33] Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 169–173.

[34] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 3.

[35] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 18.

[36] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 171–173.

[37] Paul Ricoeur, *The Just*, 12.

[38] Ricoeur, *The Jus*t, 34–35.

love, or, on the contrary: hostility, indifference, violence with all the minute shades of meanings and underpinnings.[39]

According to Paul Ricoeur, both the self's subjection to moral norms and those moral norms themselves arise from respecting others. The self-respect gained as a result of obedience to moral norms turns out to be respect for oneself as another. This involves empathy and kindness. The demands of the other, the demand of right treatment, and the call for just conduct are constitutive of one's moral identity.[40]

The Notion of the *Ye'ne-Bitte*

Thus far, the previous section generally outlined the notion of the other in the self-other relationship and denoted the indispensability of the demand and responsibility to other. Now, we turn to the notion of the *ye'ne- bitte* as an ethical category.

Ye'ne-Bitte (**የኔ-ቢጤ**) is a common Amharic[41] term, which is used daily by the society to identify beggars. *Yene-bitte* is a blended Amharic word from *yene* or *ye'ene* and *Bitte.* According to the renowned Ethiopic elite Aleqa Kidane Wold Kifle (c. 1862 – 1944), y*ene* or *ye'ene* means 'mine', 'myself', 'someone or something that belongs to oneself or the I'; it indicates both selfhood and belongingness or possessions simultaneously.[42] *Bitte* means 'the one that is like me', or 'my identical' or 'my twin', or 'the one that just looks like me'. It has the connotation of 'showing closest adherence', 'having similarity in status' or 'the one that just looks like me'. Thus, *yene-bitte* means the one that is of mine, like myself or the one that is like me or the one that is like mine/myself. In Amharic there are different terminologies used to identify beggars such as **ነድያን፤ለማኝ፤ምንዱባን፤ ምፅዋተኛ፤** (*nedayan, lemagn, minduban, mitsiwategna:* 'those in need, the poor', 'beggar', 'those who have nothing, those in need and distressed seeking a way out', 'a person who lives on alms or receives alms'). *Yene-bitte* and the other similar terminologies connote, according to Desta Tekle Wold, the one who waits for another hands to be fed, who has nothing, who is poor, who is below

[39] John Wall, "Ricoeur, Poetics, and Religious Ethics," 52–53.

[40] Ricoeur, *The Just,* 11–12.

[41] Amharic is one of the Ethio-Semitic Afroasiatic languages spoken in Ethiopia; it is related to Gəʿəz, the ancient ecclesial language of Ethiopian and Eritrean Christianity. Note that transliteration from Amharic is tricky: depending upon context this term can be written *ye'ene* or *yene* or *ye'en*.

[42] ኪዳነ ወልድ ክፍሌ፣ *መፅሀፍ፤ ሰዋስው፤ ወግስ፤ ወመዝገበ ቃላት፤* ሐዲስ (ዐዲስ አበባ፣ ኢትዮጵያ፡ አርቲስቲክ ማተሚያ፣ 1948) ፣ 230:: Kidane Wolde Kifle, *Metsihafe, sewasew, wmzegebe qalate*; *hadis* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Artistic press, 1948), 230.

others, who is alone and does not have anyone or anything, a kind of stranger.[43] The semantic range shows complete destituteness, poverty, and otherness.

Furthermore, *Yene-bitte* terminology is often used in religious circles and in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church tradition; it can be used to identify those who beg for their daily bread. However, such beggars could be of different types: youths who left their family to study church liturgy, *qenē*('improvised oral poetry'),[44] or *zēmā* ('[religious] melody, song, or chant') usually beg for their food by carrying a small basket or bag;[45] others wander from place to place to get something from their audience; there are also "professional beggars — the maimed, the diseased, and the poverty stricken;" and the *lālibalā* who sings door to door as a seeking any contributions.[46] Most commonly, beggars beg by uttering stock phrases: ስለ-እግዚያብሄር (*sile Egziabher*) or ወይም በእግዚያብሄር (*be-egziabher:* both phrases mean 'for God's sake') or ስለ-ማሪያም (*sile Mariyam,* 'for the sake of Mary'). Such begging strategy urges people to give whatever they have out of reverence and love for God, or any of the Saints and angels.

Almsgiving is a common experience in Ethiopia, especially in the Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwaḥədo* Church (EOTC) tradition.[47] Beggars often beg based on the date of saints' or angels' days on the church calendar. In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, all the days of the months are specifically designated for commemoration of either Mary, God, Jesus, the Trinity, or a particular angel or a saint. On each day a commemoration, liturgy and celebration, is performed by the church for the designated honoree. On those days beggars beg either in the name of God, Mary, or a saints: *sile-mariam, sile-Giorgis, sile Gebriel* ('for Mary's sake, for Saint George's sake, for the angel Gabriel's sake'). If a person has something — perhaps a penny or some food — they will give it as alms to the beggar. A person who doesn't have anything to give in their pocket will reply, bowing their head, እግዚአብሄር ይስጥልኝ፣ *(Egziabher Yistelign* 'May God give to you' or 'May God provide for you').

According to Aleqa Kidane Wolde Kifle *Egziabher* (Amharic: 'God') is blended *Egzi* and *Beher* — *Egzi* means 'the Lord' or 'sole administrator' and *Beher* means 'the cosmos'.[48] Thus God, *Egziabher*, is Lord of the Cosmos, the

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[43] ደስታ ተክለ ወልድ ዘሀገረ ወግዳ ፤ *ዐዲስ፡ ያማርኛ፤ መዝገበ ቃላት፤ በካህናትና በሀገረ ሰብ ቋንቋ፤* (ዐዲስ አበባ፡ አርቲስቲክ ማተሚያ ፤ 1970 ዓ.ም.)፤ 183. Desta Teklewold Zehagere Wegida, *Addis Ye-amarigna Mezgebe Qalat: Be-kahinat bhgere sebe quanqa* (Addis Ababa፡ Artistic Press, 1977), 183.

[44] Also transliterated as *qenē* or *qinē*.

[45] Donald N. Levine, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture*, 255–256.

[46] Levine, *Wax and Gold,* 256.

[47] Levine, *Wax and Gold,* 255.

[48] ኪዳነ ወልድ ክፍሌ፤ *መጽሐፈ ሰዋሰው፤ ወግስ፤ ወመዝግብ፤ ቃላት ሐዲስ፡ ንባቡ፤ በግዕዝ ፍቺው በአማርኛ* (ኢትዮጵያ፡ አርቲስቲክ ማተሚያ ቤት 1948 ዓመተ ምህረት)፤ 200. Kidane Wolde Kifle, *Metsihafe Sewasew; We-gis; We-mezgebe Qalat Haddis: Nibabu, be-Geeze Fichiew, Be-Amarigna* (Ethiopia: Artistic

visible and the non-visible. The phrase *Egziabher yistelign* means 'May the Lord of all provide for you." The sense of this is "I don't have but since God is the owner of everything, God is the one who has everything to give." Those with empty pockets redirect requests to God himself who is the giver of all. What is surprising here is that the one bestowing this blessing bows or prostates towards the *yene-bitte* people when they say *Egziabher yistelign*. This symbolizes giving respect and dignity for the image of God present in the *yene-bitte* person. There are two types of bowings in the church tradition; one is exclusively given to God and the other is bowing out of respect or reverence to another person.[49] Here it is the latter form of bowing. In EOTC teaching, humanity is created in the image likeness of God, which means the Image of the Triune God. Humanity is referred as *Araya Silassie* meaning image of the Trinity. *Araya silassie* is a relational concept describing imitation of the life of the Triune God, specifically in love and mutuality. The image and likeness of God is understood in two ways: *image* is related to identity but *likeness* is achieved through daily striving to imitate Christ in action, through worship and performing moral and ethical endeavors.[50] Thus, caring for the *yene-bitte* is an ethico-moral obligation and duty of being and becoming the *araya silassie*.

Theology of Almsgiving and *Yene-bitte* in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tradition

Almsgiving in the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition has long been prominent in church teaching and practice. Articles 16 and 17 in the *Fetha Nagast*[51] are

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Matemia Bet, 1948 Amete Miheret), 200.

[49] The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, *Faith, Order of Worship and Ecumenical Relations*, 85–86.

[50] ቄስ መዝገቡ ካሳ ፈለቀ፤ *በትረ ሃይማኖት፡ ተዋህዶ ነገረ መለኮታዊ አስተምህሮና የምዕራባውያን ፍልሰፍና በሚንፀባረቅባቸው ክርስትያናዊ አመለካከቶች ላይ የሚሰነዘረው ትችታዊ ዕይታ* (ዐዲስ አበባ፣ ኢትዮጵያ፡ ብራና ማተሚያ፣ 1918)፣ 268–279. Transliterated as Qesis Mezigebu Kassa Feleke, *Betre Haymanot: Yetewahido negere melekot astemihirona yemirabawian filsifina yemintsebarekibachew kiristianawi amelekaketoch lay yemisenezerew tichit eyita* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Brana printing, 2018), 268–279.

[51] The Arabic document مجموع القوانين (*Majmu al-qawanin:* 'Collection of Canons' or 'Compendium of Laws') was composed by Abul'l-Fada'il ibn al-Assal, a Coptic (Egyptian) Christian writer, c. 1240, and compiled from biblical texts, patristic writings, and the canons of various church Councils, including the First Council of Nicaea (325). In the 1400s, this was translated into Gəʿəz as ፍትሐ ነገሥት (*fəṭḥa nägäśt:* 'Law of Kings' or 'Justice of Kings'). The *Fetha Negast* became a standard ecclesiastical text in Ethiopia, containing customary and other laws through which king and society establish order, including ordering the practice of almsgiving. An Amharic translation was published in 1958: ፍትሐ ነገሥት ንባብና ትርጓሜው፣ በቀዳማዊ ኃይለ ሥላሴ ንጉሠ ነገሥት ዘኢትዮጵያ መልካም ፍቃድና ትዕዛዝ ተተርጉሞ (ዐዲስ አበባ፤ ብርሃንና ማተሚያ ቤት)፣ 1958 ዓ.ም; Fetha Negast nebabina tirugamew; be-qdamawi Haileselassie Niguse Negest ZEthiopia melkam fiqadina tiezaz teterigumo (Addis Ababam

about almsgiving.[52] Especially, article 16 is dedicated about "በእንተ ምጽዋታት" *(be'ente mitsiwatat;* 'about alms giving'). Alms are given for the *yene-bitte*, those who are needy. The *Fetha Nagast* instructs people to give and share from what they have for all needy ones irrespective of who or what they are.[53] The *Fetah Nagast* instructs the adherents of faith to purposefully take alms to the church on Sundays and on other holidays in order to give it to the poor and the needy, the beggars. That is why it is common to see the *yene-bittewoch* (the plural of *yene-bitte*) usually sitting around church compounds on Sundays and other holidays. People get ready and prepare what they would give for the poor on Sunday and holidays and will distribute what they have on those days.

The writer of *Fetha Nagast* instructs Christians to give to the poor every day, but especially on Sundays it is a tradition and faith obligation to carry something to give to the poor or beggars or any sort of needy persons.[54] Almsgiving on Sundays is considered as bringing sacrifice to God, a beautiful and worthy sacrifice.[55] It is doxological at the same time theological. Furthermore, almsgiving is associated with God's commandment to be generous with the promise of divine blessings or benefits in return. According to the *Fetha Nagast*, almsgiving should be practiced in secret as the Lord of all rewards for the good deeds that are not limited to earthly rewards that extends to eschatological judgment day of being found righteous due to the good deeds done for the poor and the needy.[56] From my experience, even though I am from the tradition of Evangelical Christianity, I usually collect pennies for my old grandmother in a *muday* (a beautiful handmade small basket used to collect precious things like expensive jewelries, money, or anything precious) every day when I get back from work. During weekends, my granny will collect those pennies and will distribute them to the beggars at the church gates.

Based on the *Fetha Negast*, giving alms to the poor is a way of purity, holiness of deeds; it is also a pleasing to God and one of the ways through which believers imitate Christ.[57] Further, almsgiving is associated with the sacrament and pure sacrifice given to the Lord. The *Fetha Nagast* defines almsgiving as compassion and an act of mercy. In common practice, alms are given for people in poverty, hunger, thirst, nakedness, sickness, imprisonment, and

Berhan ena Matemia Bet), 1958. Henceforth abbreviated as *Fetha Negast*.

[52] *Fetha Negast*, 227–241.

[53] *Fetha Negast*, 233.

[54] *Fetha Negast*, 234.

[55] *Fetha Negast*, 237.

[56] *Fetha Negast*, 230.

[57] *Fetha Negast*, 228.

persecution.[58] However, it is not only limited to these group of people but extends to the beggars, the orphans, the widows, the needy, and students at the *qenē* school.[59] The *Fetah Nagast* instructs alms to be given to all people irrespective of race, religious affiliations (including atheists and the areligious), political view, and so on[60] (cp. Jas 2:1–9)— the *yene-bitte* is anyone who is in need.

More interestingly, the *Fetha Nagast* records that spiritual perfection, or *theosis*, is achieved through the act of almsgiving to the poor, beggars, and the needy: ፍፁም ሊሆን የወደደ ሰው መላ ገንዘቡን መመጽወት ገባዋል። …. ፍፁም ልትሆን ከወደድህ ገንዘብህን ሁሉ ሽጠህ ለነድያን ስጥ ብሎ ጌታ ስለተናገረ ነው (*fitsum lihon yewededе sew mela genzebun memetsiwet yigebawal. . . . Fitsum litihon kewededih genzebihin hulu sheteh lenedayan sit bilo geta siletenagere nehw:* 'If anyone wants to be perfect or righteous that person must give alms of what he possesses; because Jesus Christ said if you want to be righteous sell everything what you have and give it to the poor;' ref. Matt 19:21; Mark 10:2; Luke 18:22.)[61] Thus, righteousness/ perfection is associated with giving what one has to the poor. This builds on the EOTC teaching of the interrelationship of faith and work. In her teaching, the church stresses that "faith should be practiced along with deeds"[62] and faith without work does not count (ref. Jas 2:14–26; cp. Eph 2:10, Tit 3:8, and Gal 5:6). Almsgiving is the order of the church and counted as "good deeds." According to the church's teaching "almsgiving cleanses sins, brings about blessings,"[63] and many more things.

The theology of alms giving in the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition is part of spirituality, one of the very important ways of loving God through loving the neighbor (Lev 19:18; Matt 22:37–40; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27–28; John 13:34–35; Rom 13:9–10; Gal 5:18; Jas 2:8; 1 Jn 3:11–20; 2 Jn 1:5–6). By giving to the beggar, people often think God returns salvation and eternity, usually associated with Matthew 25:40 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (ESV). This may be is a way of *theosis*, for, according to John Chrysostom, helping the poor and lowly is a way of "nourishing Christ in poverty" that has great reward in later life.[64] In this way giving to beggars is

[58] *Fetha Negast*, 230, 330.

[59] *Fetha Negast*, 331.

[60] *Fetha Negast*, 233

[61] *Fetha Negast*, 237.

[62] The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Faith, *Order of Worship and Ecumenical Relations*, 69.

[63] The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Faith, *Order of Worship and Ecumenical Relations*, 90.

[64] John Chrysostom, "Second Sermon on Lazarus and the Rich Man," in *On Wealth and Poverty*, 55.

considered as part of spirituality and a way of *theosis,* becoming like God in Christ, in Ethiopian Orthodox Church belief and practice — "*if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?* (1 Jn 3:17, ESV). These commandments of social responsibility are to be obeyed with "devotion and inner simplicity."[65] The one who is obedient to the teaching and commandment of God will be blessed not only in eternity with God but also will live a fulfilled life while on earth.[66]

The practice of almsgiving as a commandment of social responsibility and the notion of the *yene-bitte* in the EOTC have strong theocentric foundation. According to church teaching, the doctrine of God as Triune is "directly associated" with believers' worship and ethico-moral life.[67] Since the Trinity is about perfect relationality and unity, it symbolizes the archetype for human relationship. Since human beings are created in the image and likeness of the Trinity, that image and likeness are understood in two ways: *image* is related to identity but *likeness* is achieved through daily striving to imitate Christ in action, through worship and performing moral and ethical endeavors.[68] Thus, caring for the *yene-bitte* is an ethico-moral obligation and duty of being and becoming the *araya silassie*. Encountering the *yene-bitte* is encountering the image of the Trinity, *araya Silase,* and responding to that image, is the crucial part of contemplative life and social responsibility. The response might be giving for those in need or saying *Egziabher Yistelign*.

Reclaiming *Yene-Bitte* as an Ethiopian Ethics of Moral Responsibility

The renowned historian Bahiru Zewdie once said "Ethiopia's conversion to Christianity in the fourth century AD determined the course of the country's history in more ways than one."[69] The Ethiopian Orthodox Church — characterized by Ullendorff as "monophysite Christianity" (though *miaphysite* is a more accurate term) — was the official religion and it is "also the most profound expression of national existence of the Ethiopians." Ullendorff further noted that this form of Christianity had long become "the store-house of the

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[65] Ephraim Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahïdo Church*,168.

[66] Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahïdo Church*, 169.

[67] ቄስ መዝገቡ ካሳ ፈለቀ፤ በትረ ሃይማኖት፡ ተዋህዶ ነገረ መለኮታዊ አስተምህሮና የምዕራባውያን ፍልስፍና በሚንፀባረቅባቸው ክርስትያናዊ አመለካከቶች ላይ የሚሰነዘረው ትችታዊ ዕይታ (ዐዲስ አበባ፣ ኢትዮጵያ፡ ብራና ማተሚያ፣ 1918) ፣ 268–279. Transliterated as Qesis Mezigebu Kassa Feleke, *Betre Haymanot: Yetewahido negere melekot astemihirona yemirabawian filsifina yemintsebarekibachew kiristianawi amelekaketoch lay yemisenezerew tichit eyita* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Brana printing, 2018), 268-279.

[68] ቄስ መዝገቡ ካሳ ፈለቀ፤ በትረ ሃይማኖት፣ 266–271.

[69] Bahru Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century*, 13.

cultural, political, and social life of the people."[70] The long history and the way of contextualizing Christian theology had a determinant influence on the country socio-cultural realities. Ephraim Isaac argues that in Ethiopia, ideals of "religious ethics determine the sociological characteristics and basis of the Ethiopian church" and society.[71] As Isaac elaborates, the Ethiopian church has contributed towards formulating a community that gives due emphasis to keep "the law of God, justice, and social responsibility in the here and now."[72] He further argues that

> The Ethiopian church explicitly teaches that man is saved by his merits and good deeds, such by keeping the ten commandments of the Old Testament and the six of the New Testament ('feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, invite the stranger to your house, clothe the naked, visit the sick, visit the prisoner', . . . by fasting and by fulfilling his moral obligations, rather than by faith in Jesus alone."[73]

These commandments of social responsibility are to be obeyed with "devotion and inner simplicity."[74] The one who is obedient to the teaching and commandment of God will be blessed not only in eternity in God's eye but also will live a fulfilled life while on earth.[75] Thus giving alms to the needy is part and parcel of keeping God's commandment to perform good deeds.

Furthermore, Isaac avers that "the Ethiopian church does put more emphasis on good works, including almsgiving, than on faith . . . and obedience to the moral law is regarded to be of the utmost importance in the sight of God, a quality the church itself can hardly achieve."[76] But putting faith and good work does not do justice to the Ethiopian church who gives not more emphasis to good work than faith rather good work and faith are twinned together, good work, almsgiving is an expression and practice of faith. Isaac argues that almsgiving is part of the moral law in Ethiopia which is not only religious (biblical law) but also state law as well as both has no distinction, both contains provides legal tradition for the nation.[77] Since "the one who is obedient to the church attains spiritual value in the sight of God, as well as happiness on earth."[78]

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[70] Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People*, 97.

[71] Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahïdo Church*, 169.

[72] Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahïdo Church*, 168.

[73] Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahïdo Church,* 168.

[74] Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahïdo Church*,168.

[75] Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahïdo Church*, 169.

[76] Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahïdo Church*, 169.

[77] Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahïdo Church*, 169.

[78] Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahïdo Church*, 169.

Thus in the Ethiopian culture and context, the ethico-moral principles are in one way or another taken, shaped, and influences by the religious, Judeo-Christian, values and principles.

The notion of the *yene-bitte* signifies the beggar as the other, who embodies responsibility and the ethical demand of care. As in Lévinasian ethics, the face, which commands and obliges to take moral responsibility, the *yene-bitte* also calls for such an endeavor. Whenever an Ethiopian encounters the *yene-bitte*, they are obliged to give whatever they have regardless of who they are. In the same vein, most profoundly, the *yene-bitte* is the other-as-oneself, as Paul Ricoeur argues, that demands moral responsibility not only for the sake of the other but as a way of achievement of selfhood. Here, selfhood construed with a *telos*, achieving the authentic self which only attained via caring for the other, the *yene-bitte*. Thereby, the relationship between the self and other is profoundly theological and ethical. As for Riceour, essentially, selfhood is constituted in the dialectics of the self and other without shadowing the autonomy of the self rather by bringing it towards authenticity.[79] Such a selfhood is also noticeable in the ethics of *yene-bitte*; people give to the *yene-bitte* as part of their spirituality, a journey towards perfection or holiness that is the authentic self.

Moreover, in the notion of the *yene-bitte* not only do we encounter the other but also the Trinity; in Ethiopian Orthodox theological tradition there is a strong belief that people hold the image of the Trinity, *araya Silase,* and responding to that image is the crucial part of contemplative life. The response is twofold: either giving to those in need or, if one cannot (or will not), saying *Egziabher Yistelign* ('May God give you'). However, this is not evident in Lévinasian ethics. Claire Katz beautifully captures the missing link in the Lévinas's account of the face of the other,

> Emmanuel Lévinas's conception of ethical subjectivity emphasizes an obligation that is not chosen and from which we cannot recuse ourselves. It emphasizes our obligation and response to the Other, which cannot be discussed in terms of failure — we are already obligated. But in spite of this claim, certainly it is the case that this obligation to others is violated, betrayed, and ignored. Not only do we often fail in our response to the Other, it is also unclear how this response occurs or why it fails.[80]

Perhaps surprisingly, the Ethiopian ethics of the *yene-bitte* admits such impossibilities. In failing to respond and act out responsibility to the *yene-bitte*

[79] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 171–173.

[80] Claire Elise Katz, "The Presence of the Other Is a Presence That Teaches': Lévinas, Pragmatism, and Pedagogy," 92.

poor, one says "*egziabher yistelign"* ('May God give you') —*I don't have any, I failed you, but God has everything and may he give you what you wished and begged for*. In case of lack, it would be automatically referred to God who is all able, the omnipotent and benevolent God, the ruler, creator and the provider of all.

In addition, while the people give to the *yene-bitte* especially on holidays and Sundays when they come to church services with honor and contemplation and prayer, taking moral responsibility for the *yene-bitte* is considered a daily part of contemplative life, which is always founded in *theosis* . . . the active securing of salvation, enjoying the eschaton in the already-but-not-yet future, so that Jesus will not say "truly, I do not know you" on the final day (Matt 25:12; see also Matt 7:21–23 and Luke 13:22–27). Instead, those who care for the *yene-bitte* will be known by Christ on that day. Therefore, the Ethiopian notion of *yene-bitte* is a space of not only entering the Trinitarian life with contemplation and prayer but also a space of Christian hope and eschatology. As Jurgen Moltmann beautifully captures such moments as,

> Eschatology means the doctrine of the Christian hope, which embraces both the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it. From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue**,** Christianity *is* eschatology, *is* hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day[81]

That is where the notion of *yene-bitte* as an Ethiopian ethics of responsibility leads towards eschatology, not as something that will happen one day soon but rather bringing the *not-yet* into the *already*, dictating how Christians should live *now*. Thus the here and now is lived well, ethically and morally, considering the future that God promises. Thus, the *yene-bitte* is a category of moral and ethical principle with a strong theocentric foundation as an Ethiopian ethics of moral responsibility.

Conclusion

The renowned African ethicist Bénézet Bujo (1940–2023) argues that although African ethics emphasizes the anthropocentric approach, the theocentric approach is also evident — it is impossible to talk about the anthropocentric foundation of morality without implicitly mentioning the

[81] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, 16.

theocentric.[82] According to Bujo, for Africans God is the Creator and "the source of life" who answers prayer and punishes wrongdoings. Thus God remains central in the ethico-moral thought of Africans.[83] The notion of *yene-bitte* as an Ethiopian African ethics fulfills both the theocentric and anthropocentric sentiment. On the one hand it is anthropocentric, in a sense of not merely caring for the *yene-bitte* rather it has strong theological foundation. On the other hand, it is theocentric, Trinitarian at the same time eschatologically grounded.

In the world where otherness is a threat, reclaiming the notion of *yene-bitte* brings a new light towards moral responsibility by positioning the other as a locus of not only ethical obligation and demand but also of a space of securing Christian hope while living in the already-but-not-yet eschatological age through active contemplation and prayer towards the *telos, theosis*, by loving God through loving other.

The *yene-bitte* as an ethical category creates such a contemplative space grounded in a practical life of social responsibility. Therefore, revitalizing such social practice has massive importance in construing the view of otherness and in harnessing moral responsibility to the other in a disrupted state like Ethiopia. Therefore, the notion of the *yene-bitte* as an Ethiopian ethics of moral responsibility not only seeks moral responsibility through the recognition of the other but also it resurfaces the profound embodiment in theological anthropology that guides the self towards its perfection, *thesois*, participation in God.

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ቄስ *መዝገቡ* ካሳ ፈለቀ (Qesis ['Reverend'] Mezigebu Kassa FELEKE)፤ *በትረ ሃይማኖት፡ ተዋህዶ ነገረ መለኮታዊ አስተምህሮና የምዕራባውያን ፍልስፍና በሚንፀባረቅባቸው ክርስትያናዊ አመለካከቶች ላይ የሚሰነዘረው ትችታዊ ዕይታ* (*Betre Haymanot: Yetewahido negere melekot astemihirona yemirabawian filsifina yemintsebarekibachew*

[82] Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 32–37.

[83] Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 32-33.

[84] 1948 on the Ethiopian Calendar corresponds to AD 12 September 1955 – 10 September 1956 on the Gregorian calendar.

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AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 208–225

The Victory of the Blood of Christ in the New Testament and in Ethiopia

Abeneazer G. URGA / አቤንኤዘር ገዛኸኝ ኡርጋ

ORCID: 0000-0002-8277-2674
Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology;
SIL Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Abeneazer.Urga@ciu.edu

Abstract

Western evangelical theology has rightly pointed out that the blood of Christ purifies from sins and mends our broken relationship with the Triune God through the penal substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. However, western evangelical theology rarely articulates or emphasizes the *Christus Victor* aspect of the blood of Christ in its theological formulations. On the other hand, Ethiopian grassroots theologians — while agreeing with the western understanding and articulation of Christ's blood — emphasize the fact that the blood of Christ not only purifies and reconciles but is also a powerful element in the struggle against malevolent spirits and the fear of death. In this article, I will trace the motif of the blood of Christ in the NT with the help of Ethiopian gospel singers who affirm the purifying function of Christ's blood but also employ Christ's blood in their struggle against the devil.

Résumé

La théologie évangélique occidentale a souligné à juste titre que le sang du Christ purifie des péchés et rétablit notre relation brisée avec le Dieu trinitaire grâce au sacrifice substitutif et expiatoire du Christ. Cependant, la théologie évangélique occidentale exprime ou met rarement l'accent sur l'aspect *Christus Victor* du sang du Christ dans ses formulations théologiques. En revanche, les théologiens populaires éthiopiens — tout en adhérant à la conception et à l'expression occidentales du sang du Christ — soulignent le fait que le sang du Christ non seulement purifie et réconcilie, mais constitue également un élément puissant dans la lutte contre les esprits malveillants et la peur de la mort. Dans cet article, je retracerai le thème du sang du Christ dans le Nouveau Testament à l'aide de chanteurs de gospel éthiopiens qui affirment la

Published with license by ACTEA | DOI:
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fonction purificatrice du sang du Christ, mais qui l'utilisent également dans leur lutte contre le diable.

Resumo

A teologia evangélica ocidental tem sublinhado, com razão, que o sangue de Cristo purifica dos pecados e restabelece a nossa relação rompida com o Deus trinitário, graças ao sacrifício substitutivo e expiatório de Cristo. No entanto, a teologia evangélica ocidental raramente expressa ou enfatiza o aspecto *Christus Victor* do sangue de Cristo nas suas formulações teológicas. Em contrapartida, os teólogos populares etíopes — embora adiram à conceção e à expressão ocidentais do sangue de Cristo — sublinham o facto de que o sangue de Cristo não só purifica e reconcilia, como também constitui um elemento poderoso na luta contra os espíritos maléficos e o medo da morte. Neste artigo, irei traçar o tema do sangue de Cristo no Novo Testamento com a ajuda de cantores de gospel etíopes que afirmam a função purificadora do sangue de Cristo, mas que também o utilizam na sua luta contra o diabo.

Keywords

αἷμα, blood, blood of Christ, death, life, atonement, purification, Christus Victor, Ethiopia, oral theology, grassroots theology, songs, ethnodoxology

Mots-clés

αἷμα, sang, sang du Christ, mort, vie, expiation, purification, Christus Victor, Éthiopie, théologie orale, théologie de base, chants, ethnodoxologie

Palavras-chave

αἷμα, sangue, sangue de Cristo, morte, vida, expiação, purificação, Christus Victor, Etiópia, teologia oral, teologia básica, cânticos, etnodoxologia

Introduction

In his recent work, Stephen Pardue makes a clarion call to evangelical churches and theologians of North America and Europe to engage with and be influenced by Majority World churches, their theologies and their theologians. Pardue contends that evangelical theology will benefit from the diverse contextual theologies the Majority World churches are offering.[1] My aim in this paper is to demonstrate, standing on the shoulders of Pardue, that Western evangelical theology could benefit from Majority World theological output. As an example, I will discuss how the blood of Christ is depicted in the New Testament and demonstrate how Ethiopian grassroots theologians (non-

[1] Stephen T. Pardue, *Why Evangelical Theology Needs the Global Church*, 32, quoting William Dyrness, *Learning about Theology from the Third World*, 185–88.

academic theologians, particularly gospel singers) understand the blood of Christ in their task of theology and in their everyday life. Western evangelical theology has rightly pointed out that the blood of Christ purifies from sins and mends our broken relationship with the Triune God through the penal substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.[2] However, western evangelical theology rarely articulates or emphasizes the *Christus Victor* aspect of the blood of Christ in its theological formulations. On the other hand, Ethiopian grassroots theologians — while agreeing with the western understanding and articulation of Christ's blood — emphasize the fact that the blood of Christ not only purifies and reconciles; it is also a powerful element in the struggle against malevolent spirits and the fear of death. I will trace the motif of the blood of Christ in the NT with the help of Ethiopian gospel singers who affirm the purifying function of Christ's blood but also employ Christ's blood in their struggle against the devil. The incorporation of the grassroots theologians in this article is to showcase that in many non-western contexts the prevalent theological output is done by non-academic theologians, who appeal to the Scriptures in their everyday contextual realities. As such, genuine confessional and contextual theology is found among grassroots theologians. In fact, grassroots theologians are often closer to explicating the meaning of blood than the academic theologians who confine its meaning. As such, academic theologians, particularly western evangelical theologians, will do well to engage grassroots theologians.

Stephen Pardue rightly contends that we do not "see things whole."[3] The theological emphasis of theologians depends on their social locations and the issues that they grapple with in their respective contexts. As such, they articulate a certain aspect of the truth while being unaware of or indifferent or uninterested to the other aspects of the truth. The perception of the blood of Christ and what it achieves is one example where we see a difference between Western evangelicals and the Global Church. Before we delve into the discussion of the understanding of the blood of Christ in the West and in the Majority World, it is appropriate to define what the term "blood" means.

The Meaning of *Blood*

When we think about "blood" what comes to mind is the animal sacrifices conducted in the old cultus and the application of the blood of the lamb on the lintel and doorposts in the land of Egypt. For Ethiopians — in addition to the biblical image — "blood" also brings to mind a vivid picture of cows, sheep, and

[2] For instance, see Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*, 456–457.

[3] Pardue, *Why Evangelical Theology Needs the Global Church*, 32; quoting William A. Dyrness, *Learning about Theology from the Third World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, 1990), 185–188.

goats slaughtered during Christian (Christmas, Easter/Passover) or Muslim (*Qurbani*) holidays.

The term "blood" refers to the ending of life: indeed, scholars have debated vigorously whether the lexeme "blood" denotes the idea of life or death. Those who favor life utilize Leviticus 17:11 as a proof that blood means life: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life."[4] Others who contend that blood does not literally mean life but death marshal their argument using the numerous OT passages whereby דָּם (*dam*, 'blood'; αἷμα / *haîma* in LXX) appears to indicate the termination of life through violent death.[5]

Without getting into the debate in detail, suffice to state here that I concur with Morris that "blood" (αἷμα) stands for "life yielded up in death."[6] Behm rightly states: "To shed blood is to destroy the bearer of life and therefore life itself. Hence αἷμα signifies 'outpoured blood,' 'violently destroyed life,' 'death,' or 'murder'."[7] Stibbs also asserts a similar notion when he writes: "Bloodshed stands, therefore, not for the release of life from the burden of the flesh, but for the bringing to an end of life in the flesh. It is a witness to physical death, not an evidence of spiritual survival."[8]

The Blood of Christ in the New Testament

In the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA[28]) the term αἷμα (blood) appears more than ninety times and close to half of them refer to the blood of Christ: some of them declare the innocence of Jesus in the face of betrayal (Matt 27:4, 6, 24), his agony in the Garden (Luke 22:44),[9] the New Covenant/Eucharist (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; John 6:53–56; 1 Cor 11:24–25), and the sacrificing and justifying sacrificial death of Christ (Acts 20:28; Rom 5:9; Eph 1:7; Heb 10:19; 1 Pet 1:2).

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[4] E.g., Vincent Taylor, *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching*; Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions*; David M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*; and Tammy Wiese, "The Blood of Christ: Sacrificial Death or Moral Authority?," 369–377. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

[5] E.g., Leon Morris, "The Biblical Use of the Term 'Blood'," 217–218.

[6] Morris, "The Biblical Use of the Term 'Blood'," 219. See also George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 190.

[7] Johannes Behm, "αἷμα," 1:173.

[8] A. M. Stibbs, The Meaning of the World 'Blood' in Scripture (London: Tyndale Press, 1953), 12; quoted in Morris, "The Biblical Use of the Term 'Blood'," 220.

[9] *Novum Testamentum Graece* (2012). I am aware of the textual variance concerning this passage.

The New Testament use of the blood of Christ denotes his sacrificial-victorious work on behalf of sinners.[10] George Hunsinger rightly observes: "the motif of Christ's blood actually embraces the entire sweep of Christian soteriology."[11] Although the expression "the blood of Christ" was later used metaphorically in the Scriptures, it indeed refers to the historical fact that Jesus shed his blood and died a substitutionary and vicarious death. John declares "But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and at once there came out blood and water" (John 19:34).

John, prior to Christ's substitutionary death, has exclaimed that the Logos of God, the unique Son of God, is the sacrificial Lamb who will "take away" (αἴρω, *aírō*) the sins of the universe: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).[12] The statement evinces the fact that blood obtained through sacrificial death is the only way to deal with sin. Anyone who consumes Christ's flesh and drinks the shed blood will receive the promised eternal life and experience the resurrection (John 6:54). Christ's church is birthed through Christ's blood (Acts 20:28) because God purified, sanctified, justified the church from her sins and inequities (Rom 3:25; 5:9; Heb 10:29). The church of God experienced divine forgiveness and redemption "through his [Christ's] blood" (Eph 1:7). As such, the enmity between God and sinners was removed and those purified by the power of the blood are able to draw near to God (Eph 2:13) and enter his holy presence (Heb 10:19). The blood on the cross was the means by which Christ secured believers' eternal redemption (Heb 9:12).[13]

The New Testament presents Christ's blood as a sacrificing, purifying, redeeming and justifying blood that deals with the problem of sin.[14] In addition to what has been highlighted above a few other passages reveal this fact:

> Hebrews 13:12: "Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood."
>
> 1 Peter 1:18–19: "you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ."
>
> 1 John 1:7: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have

[10] See Victor Babajide Cole, "Blood," in *Africa Bible Commentary* (2006), 139; and David K. Ngaruiya, "Blood," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, second edition (2025), 151.

[11] George Hunsinger, "Meditation on the Blood of Christ," 134.

[12] Samuel M. Ngewa, *The Gospel of John: For Pastors and Teachers*, 26–27; Isaac Boaheng, "A Soteriological Reflection on Priestly Christology from an Akan Perspective," 14.

[13] Abeneazer G. Urga, *Intercession of Jesus in Hebrews: The Background and Nature of Jesus' Heavenly Intercession in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 216.

[14] Lyman Abbott, "The Blood of Jesus Christ: The New Testament Doctrine," 507; Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, 128; and Cornelius Olowola, "Sacrifice in African Tradition and in Biblical Perspective," 5–7.

> fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."
>
> Revelation 1:5: "and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood."
>
> Revelation 5:9: "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."

The New Testament also indicates that the blood of Christ not only purifies, justifies and sanctifies, but Christ's blood also functions to destroy the works of the devil. Colossians 1:20 states that "by the blood of his cross," God is reconciling everything to himself. This blood is also the blood by which God "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him" (Col 2:15). The exact term "blood" is wanting in Colossians 2:15. However, in 2:14, the term cross (σταυρός, *staurós*) — I contend — hearkens back to 1:20 where Paul argues that peace and reconciliation occurs "by the blood of his cross." Hence Colossians underlines the fact that reconciliation and victory over the cosmic powers occurred through the blood of Christ.

Hebrews 2:14 is another text that indicates the "blood and flesh" of Christ is the agent in the disempowerment of the devil and the defeat of death through death. The term "blood" is given an emphatic position, as in Ephesians 6:12, by inverting the common New Testament expression "flesh and blood" (σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα) to "blood and flesh" (αἷμα καὶ σάρξ).[15] Although some Western evangelical scholars downplay the inverted order, I believe that the inversion has two major functions.[16] First, it gives importance to blood. Second, both in Hebrews 2:14 and Ephesians 6:12 the inversion occurs in relation to the malevolent cosmic powers. According to Hebrews 2:14, the blood of Christ is a decisive element in dealing with the dark spiritual forces. Jesus, the sanctifier, not only purifies sin but also disempowers the devil and deals with death by his "blood and flesh."[17] Revelation 12:11 also reveals that the blood of Christ enables the saints to overcome the accuser: "And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives unto death." Despite these clear passages, our evangelical brothers and sisters in the Global North usually tend to only emphasize the sanctifying, justifying,

[15] Abeneazer G. Urga, "The Victorious High Priest in Africa: Christ and the Logic of Atonement in Hebrews 2:14–18," 13.

[16] Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on* Hebrews, 110n101.

[17] Urga, "The Victorious High Priest in Africa," 12–17; Olowola, "Sacrifice in African Tradition and in Biblical Perspective," 7.

cleansing, and reconciling functions of the blood of Christ.[18] How do Ethiopians, particularly grassroots theologians, understand and do theology of the blood of Christ?

The Blood of Christ in Ethiopian Christianity

Blood sacrifice is not just an ancient phenomenon in Ethiopia. Animal sacrifices are still common practices in various parts of the country, be it for initiation, appeasing the gods or the ancestors during calamity or disasters, or religious rites. During *Eid-al-Adha* (a "Festival of Sacrifice"), sacrificial animals, usually cows, sheep, goats, and, in certain regions, camels, are slaughtered to remember Ibrahim's obedience to sacrifice his son Ishmael and to thank Allah for his intervention and provision of a ram in place of Ishmael. Ethiopian Christians are also seen slaughtering animals during Christmas and Passover/Easter (*Fasika*). The point here is bloodshed (whether sacrificial or celebratory) is not foreign to Ethiopians.

The Blood of Christ Purifies, Washes and Justifies

Ethiopian grassroots theologians understand that the blood of Christ has power to purify and cleanse from every sort of sin. The prominent text utilized in the purification of believers' and unbelievers' sin is 1 John 1:7, 9: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have a fellowship with one another, and the blood of his Son cleanses us from all sin . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Throughout all expressions of Ethiopian Protestant Christianity, most worship services and prayer meetings begin in a formulaic manner, giving thanks to God for his provision, mercy, grace and protection. This is usually followed by a confession of sins while seated or kneeling. The confession includes an appeal to God using 1 John 1:7, 9 to recall to God that his Son's blood is potent to wash sin and unrighteousness: "Oh Lord, let my sin and transgression be washed away by the blood of your Son Jesus Christ." The person leading the worship service will restate this in concluding of the confession. "Oh Lord, let our sins and transgressions be washed away by the blood of your Son Jesus Christ!" He or she might add the Scriptural assurance from Isaiah 1:18 in tandem with 1 John 1:7, 9: "though your sins are like scarlet,

[18] This does not mean whatsoever that there are no Western theologians who discuss the victorious aspect of Christ's atonement. See, for instance, Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, and Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition*, 181–201, who discuss the *Christus Victor* atonement theory. The point here is about the general proclivity of Western theologians and their theology of the blood of Christ.

they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."

The potency of the blood to purify is also acknowledged in numerous songs. Ethiopian gospel singers recognize that the blood functions as an element that sanctifies, purifies and speaks as a mediator.

Asrat Mulachew sings[19]

> Your blood has power
> It cleanses from sin
> Your blood has power
> It brings closer to the Father
>
> Your blood washed my sin
> I have become a new creation
> It took away my rebellious evil
> I have put on your righteousness
>
> What [good] works do I have
> that drew me to you
> and made me your friend?
> It is you who finished it on the cross
> Who reconciled me with the Father by your blood.

Another singer — Tigist Ejigu — stresses that the blood of Christ is instrumental for her reconciliation with and justification by God:[20]

> It is your blood that reconciled me
> It is your blood that sanctified me
> It is your blood that made me closer
> It is your blood that justified me.

Other singers have highlighted that the blood is the only mediator and speaker on their behalf. Zerfe Kebede, a former Ethiopian Orthodox Church member who is now an evangelical, asserts:[21]

> It is your blood
> with which I am reconciled with God
> with which I entered the Holy of Holies

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[19] Asrat Mulachew, "ኃይል አለው ደምህ [*hayl alew demih* / 'Your Blood Has Power'];" my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUQuM10wqP0

[20] Tigist Ejigu, "ደምህ ነው [*demih nehw*] / 'It is your Blood'];" my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAh40CHzM6I

[21] Zerfe Kebede, "ደሙ ነው ደሙ ነው [*demu nehw, demu nehw*] / 'It Is His Blood, It Is His Blood');" my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kdsFDuoTg4

that which cries out on my behalf.

It is obvious that Zerfe Kebede is alluding to Hebrews 12:24 where it states "and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." The shed blood of Christ functions as the active mediator on her behalf. Zerfe Kebede is not alone in highlighting the blood of Christ as an advocate or intercessor. Bereket Tesfaye also denotes:[22]

> The blood of Jesus is still fresh today — it is my intercessor
> The blood of Jesus is still fresh today — it is my intercessor
> . . .
> If the blood of Jesus did not reconcile me,
> whose prayer could reconcile me?
> If the blood of Jesus did not purify me,
> whose prayer could purify me?
> If the blood of Jesus did not reconcile me,
> whose intercession could reconcile me?
> If the blood of Jesus did not wash me,
> whose intercession could wash me?

The expected answer to this string of questions is "no one." It is only the blood of Jesus that has effected reconciliation through washing and intercession. Indeed, Bereket Tesfaye and others are declaring the superior mediation of Christ and his blood vis-à-vis the mediation of the saints, angels and Mary, which is propounded by a certain segment of the Ethiopian society that puts other mediators in the limelight. These singers are attempting to address a burning theological issue in the Ethiopian theological landscape.

Bereket Tesfaye continues:

> the one that reconciled me
> the one who became a mediator for me
> the one who has stood before the Father for my sin
>
> For me who was judged to die
> the only one at the right hand of the Father
> because of my transgression he is the one to bail me out
> who stands in on my behalf
> . . .
> His precious blood is a mediator
> with which the heaven made peace with me
> It is only through the blood of Jesus.

The uniqueness, superiority and effectualness of the blood of Christ is also reflected in a number of songs. Many have sung that the blood of Christ is better than the blood sacrifices of the old cultus. In a country where the sacrifices of

[22] Bereket Tesfaye, "አማላጄ [*amalaje* / 'My Intercessor'];" my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDouF71O24w

animals' blood plays a significant role, the theology of the superiority of the blood of Christ is more relevant.

Selam Desta — after underlining the purifying power of the blood of Christ based on 1 John 1:7, 9)—exclaims:[23]

> It's not according to the priesthood of the sons of Aaron
> nor according to the order of the tribe of Levi
> My dear one's [his priesthood] is not like that
> My dear one's [his priesthood] is not like that
> to justify me He did not enter [into the Holy of Holies]
> with the blood of bulls and pigeons
> He offered his body once and was beautiful forever
> His blood was shed and my sin was forgiven
> He died at Calvary, and I was born again
> I called the Father, my Father, and I was told that I was his daughter

Another prominent singer Azeb Hailu also points out the better high priest shed his blood because of her sin:[24]

> My priest, the one at the right hand of the Father
> My priest, who is the advocate of my soul
> My priest, so that my suffering stops
> My priest, so that my sorrow ends
> My priest, you broke down,
> My priest, the wall of hostility
> My priest, you shed your blood
> My priest, as a sacrifice for my guilt.

This cursory overview of the blood of Christ resonates with many of the theological formulations and assertions of western evangelical theologians. The blood of Christ purifies, justifies, reconciles and draws sinners closer to God the Father. Many Ethiopian singers agree with our western evangelical brothers and sisters that Jesus Christ shed his blood as a substitute sacrifice "who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). However, Ethiopian grassroots theologians recognize another significance of the blood of Christ: they acknowledge the fact that the blood of Christ is a decisive element in their struggle against the dark cosmic powers.

The Victorious Blood of Christ

To the chagrin of those like Rudolf Bultmann, Ethiopian grassroots theologians believe that the spirit world exists. The spirit world is far from being

[23] Selam Desta, "ደሙ [*demu* / 'His Blood'];" my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZq2tjgSS4E

[24] Azeb Hailu, "ካህኔ [*kahne* / 'My Priest'];" my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFD85JleeXs

mythical and superstitious. For Bultmann, such a theological position is tantamount to unscientific, pointless, and impossible thought and as such it needs to be demythologized.[25]

Africans in general, here Ethiopian grassroots theologians, are not disillusioned by such an assertion. The devil and his compatriots exist. The dark spiritual forces are part of their everyday reality.[26] Although he is skeptical of the use of the blood of Christ, Samuel Waje Kunhiyop observes that Africans are accustomed to using blood ritual for "cleansing, purification, atonement, initiation and protection."[27] Ethiopian Christians are seen dealing with malevolent spirits through prayer, Scripture reading, songs and exorcism. This is where the blood of Christ is claimed and utilized in dealing with demonic forces and their active work in their surroundings.[28]

Ethiopian Christians use the blood of Christ in exorcising demons from individuals. Exorcists are heard commanding demons to "leave so and so by the power of the blood of Jesus Christ." Sometimes they use water as a symbol for the blood of Christ and sprinkle it on the possessed individual. The blood of Christ is also used as a protective element before a difficult journey, speaking engagements or evangelistic efforts. The prayer goes like this: "I cover myself or so and so in the blood of Jesus Christ."

The *Christus Victor* aspect of the blood is also seen in many Ethiopian songs. These vernacular theologies underline that the blood of Christ not only shields believers from God's just judgment by purifying sinners and making them anew, but the blood of Christ also protects Christians from malevolent powers, principalities and the fear of death. Here again we see grassroots theologians demonstrating their encompassing view of the blood of Christ in accordance with the NT texts in contrast to the traditional academic theologians' narrower focus on the blood of Jesus as a purifying and sanctifying element. Meheret Etefa, for instance, sings that the blood of Christ has shielded her from the Angel of Death:[29]

Because the blood was smeared on my doorposts

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[25] Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, 4.

[26] Robert Falconer, *Spectacular Atonement: Envisioning the Cross of Christ in an African Perspective*, 93–98, 105–11.

[27] Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, 125; see also Samuel Olarewaju, "The Efficacy of Prayer in the Blood of Christ in Contemporary African Christianity," 31–49.

[28] Edison M. Kalengyo, "The Sacrifice of Christ and Ganda Sacrifice: A Contextual Interpretation in Relation to the Eucharist," 310, 316; B. Moses Owojaiye, "'Pleading the Blood of Jesus' in Grassroots Pentecostal Practice: A Study of Kenyan Pentecostals Studying at AIU-NEGST, Nairobi," 150–151.

[29] Meheret Etefa, "ደሙ [*demu* / 'His Blood']," my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6iK1HdTp-4I&list=RD6iK1HdTp-4I&start_radio=1

Because the blood was smeared on my lintel
Death passed over, it went away from me
Seeing the blood of my Lord
Seeing the blood of my Jesus
Death passed over,
It went away from me.

The Angel of death doesn't scare me
I am covered, he won't find me
I am surrounded by the blood
How can he pass the hedge and enter?

It is a day of sadness for my enemy and a day of gladness for me
Death is entering my enemy's village
Although he prowls around me like a roaring lion
He won't succeed, he can't because of the blood.

For Meheret Etefa, the blood of Christ is like the blood of the Passover lamb that covered and protected God's people from the Angel of Death. Similarly, Temesgen Markos declares poetically that the blood of Christ both purifies and protects:[30]

It has forgiveness, healing
By removing the old, it makes new
It has absolute power to remove transgression
That is the precious blood of Jesus.

His blood, my power, my strength
His blood, my foundation
His blood, my qualification
His blood, my medicine

It is impossible to break a blood covenant
Nor the attempt to scratch off or erase
My enemy understood this so he swore with blood
To kill and destroy me, he sharpened his teeth.

When he [the enemy] came to me swearing by himself
My Lord Jesus taking my place
destroyed that [the enemy's] blood covenant with his blood
He became my life by covering my shame.

Temesgen Markos also denotes the fact that the devil made a blood covenant — which is common in a witchcraft dominated areas — to attack, kill and destroy,

[30] Temesgen Markos, "ደሙ [*demu* / 'His Blood');" my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsQnUNMglYs

but the powerful blood of Christ overpowered the demonic blood covenant. Hence, he has obtained life.

Bereket Tesfaye states that Jesus' death was a redeeming and life-giving death. She sings:[31]

> It is his blood that helped me escape
> It is his blood that gave me life
> It is his blood that broke my yoke,
> and lifted my head up.
>
> The Angel of Death is not afraid of anyone
> He enters into the king's house, kills whomever he wishes
> He goes out in search of another
> But when he gets to my house, he never comes close.

Bereket Tesfaye alludes to the Exodus story and claims that she is spared from the Angel of Death because of the protective blood of Christ on her abode.

An Ethiopian Lutheran Church choir also highlights the protective aspect of the blood of Christ by echoing the Exodus tradition:[32]

> His blood is on the doorposts
> The Angel of Death does not frighten me
> I am covered, he won't find me.
> I see from afar my enemy making a loud cry
> Glory to the Lamb, I rejoice
> Amen, I ululate.
>
> Let power and richness be to the slain Lamb
> He is worthy to receive strength, glory, praise and blessing.
>
> His blood is on the lintel
> Who could bypass the sign?
> Who could reach the fortress of the blood?
> It is the day of crying and death to the enemy
> And a day of joy and salvation for me
> I say "Amen," "Amen."
>
> Glory, glory to the Lamb
> Because he was slain to redeem me
> To free me from the slavery of death

[31] Bereket Tesfaye, "ደሙ· ነው· [*demu nehw* / 'It Is His Blood'];" my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sq7V7D7pVmI

[32] Lideta Mekane Eyesus Choir, "ደሙ· በመቃኑ· ላይ ነው· [*demu behmeqanu lay nehw* / 'His Blood Is on the Doorposts'];" my translation from Amharic. Recording available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zez6miffbOQ

> Behold he saved me by sprinkling his blood
> By defeating my enemy, Amen!
>
> Glory, glory to God
> To me who was far off
> Despised by people and [fallen] angels
> [But] today the veil is torn
> Behold [the way] is opened by Jesus
> Amen, I am able to enter.

It is clear that these oral theologians here appropriated the Exodus tradition where the story narrates God's redeeming, protective and freeing action in the land of slavery, death and exile. The Exodus story depicts two essential facts. First, it is God who delivers his people from slavery and death. Second, the means of the divine deliverance was through the blood of a slaughtered lamb put on the houses of the Israelites. The only way to escape the plague of the Destroyer is by means of the blood. The New Testament takes this redemptive event and applies it to Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 5:7b Paul states: "For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed." Here Paul links the Passover lamb of the Israelites to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. In so doing, he indicates that the adumbration of the Exodus story found its ultimate and eschatological fulfillment in Christ's sacrificial death. In the words of Dean O. Wenthe, "Paul sees Jesus as the antitype, of which the Old Testament Passover lamb was a type."[33]

Ethiopian singers have detected the link between the shadow and the body, and have rightly pointed out the centrality of the blood of Christ — the new Paschal Lamb — in the redemptive act of God. Jesus Christ is the Paschal Lamb who offers deliverance from death and the oppression and attack of the dark cosmic powers through his blood. The blood of Christ — according to their poetic contention — is put on their life, ministry, and house. As such, the Angel of Death does not have the slightest chance to inflict eternal death or put an obstruction from experiencing God's presence. They are no longer under the rulership of the devil or the fear of death.

The frequency of the appropriation of the blood of Christ in a manner of the Exodus tradition demonstrates the fact that Ethiopian grassroots theologians are very aware of the presence of malevolent spiritual beings in their day-to-day reality. They know — not merely cognitively but also practically and experientially — that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John

[33] Dean O. Wenthe, "An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 5:7b," 134–140; quotation from p. 138; also see J. K. Howard, "Christ Our Passover: A Study of the Passover-Exodus Theme in 1 Corinthians," 97–108.

5:19). However, they also know that the blood of Christ has the potency to shield them from their powerful enemy.

In their construction of theology, Ethiopian grassroots theologians give primacy to the biblical story that traces God's purifying and delivering act through the Scripture. Their theological task appeals to the authority of Scripture as they believe that the story of Exodus and the story of the substitute-victorious Lamb of God is also *their* story.[34] They are also sensitive to their contextual realities. The existence of demonic possessions, attacks, and activities nudge them to find a biblical and theological solution. And this biblical-theological solution is grounded in the rescuing act of God in the biblical narratives. These oral theologians do not just utilize Leviticus-Christ but they also employ Leviticus-Exodus-Christ in their construction of faithful and relevant biblical theology.

Conclusion

Western evangelical theologians have rightly explicated the blood of Christ as the element that deals with the problem of sin. The blood of Christ indeed purifies, justifies, and washes every kind of sin and unrighteousness. Ethiopian grassroots theologians wholeheartedly concur with this biblical and theological formulation, but their songs suggest that the blood of Christ, as the element to counter and disempower and overcome malevolent cosmic powers, is also vitally important — yet is not given due attention in typical Western evangelical theology. This gap in western evangelical theology can be rectified if western evangelical theologians are willing and humble enough to "eat theology with us."[35]

The conversation with Ethiopian oral theologians can help our western brothers and sisters "see things whole" and appreciate the other side of the theological landscape. The blood of Christ offers more benefit in addition to the purification of sins and the sanctification of sinners. If evangelicals from the Global North "eat theology with us," they will be able to appreciate what others in the Global South have been tasting and enjoying because of the substitutionary and victorious work of Christ. If western evangelicals are open to eat our theology — where Scripture is offered as the main dish, spiced with local ingredients and cooked in our own pots with the help of the Spirit and the community in Christ — they will be able to nurture themselves biblically and

[34] Contra Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, 128. In his zeal to critique the misuse of the blood of Christ, Kunhiyop overstates his case when he writes, "The idea that the blood of Christ is protective derives more from an African approach to blood sacrifices than it does from the scriptures." Kunhiyop, 128. In doing so, like many Western theologians he excises the biblical notion of the *Christus Victor* aspect of the blood of Jesus.

[35] John S. Mbiti, "Theological Impotence and the Universality of the Church," 17.

theologically in areas that may be deficient because of lack of variety of food. They will be able to expand their culinary experience outside of their confined cultural zones, so that they do not remain like the person in the Ugandan proverb "who has not traveled widely [and so] thinks his or her mother is the only cook (the best cook)."

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[36] See also Leon Morris's later work of the same title, "The Biblical Use of the Term 'Blood'," *Journal of Theological Studies* 6, no. 1 (1955): 77–82. https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/VI.1.77 and https://www.jstor.org/stable/23955979

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[37] Archived at https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/22-1_031.pdf

[38] Archived at https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/10-1_003.pdf

[39] There are two different Ethiopian singers named Bereket Tesfaye. The singer of "My Intercessor" is male and the singer of "It Is His Blood" is female.

THÉOLOGIE CHRÉTIENNE AFRICAINE
vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 226–250

Entrée et sortie du christianisme

L'État actuel de l'Église protestante dans certains milieux ruraux de la République Démocratique du Congo

Trésor KHONDE NDELE

ORCID: 0009-0003-4921-1159
Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de l'Université Shalom de Bunia ;
Centre Universitaire de Missiologie à Kinshasa,
République Démocratique du Congo
tresorndele@gmail.com

Résumé

Cet article dresse un état des lieux du protestantisme dans les milieux ruraux des provinces du Kwango, du Mai-Ndombe et du Kwilu, du Kongo Central et de l'Ituri, en mettant en lumière les principaux défis auxquels les Églises sont confrontées. L'étude repose sur une méthodologie qualitative combinant l'observation participante, des entretiens semi-structurés et l'analyse documentaire. Les résultats indiquent, d'abord, que l'évangélisation en milieu rural est un champ de recherche peu exploré. Ils montrent ensuite qu'il se développe dans certains milieux ruraux du Congo RDC un « protestantisme sans la Bible ». Il est fragile face aux mouvements religieux africains qui perçoivent le christianisme comme une religion imposée par les colonisateurs. Alors que l'influence du protestantisme est en déclin dans ces milieux ruraux étudiés, ces mouvements connaissent une expansion rapide. Les fondements bibliques et théologiques du ministère rural montrent que Jésus et ses disciples étaient impliqués dans le ministère urbain et rural (Mt 9.35 ; 10.11 ; 28.20 ; Lc 9.1-6 ; Ac 8.25). À partir de ces observations, l'article propose un modèle missionnaire articulant une dynamique allant du village à la ville et une autre allant d'une ville vers les villages et villes du monde.

Abstract

This article provides an overview of Protestantism in rural areas of the provinces of Kwango, Mai-Ndombe, Kwilu, Kongo Central, and Ituri, highlighting the main challenges facing the churches. The study is based on a qualitative methodology combining participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis. The results indicate, first, that evangelism in rural areas is a largely unexplored field of

Publié avec licence par ACTEA | DOI: https://doi.org/10.69683/hx7kkk44
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research. They further show that a form of "Protestantism without the Bible" is developing in certain rural areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This form of Protestantism is vulnerable to African religious movements that perceive Christianity as a religion imposed by colonizers. While the influence of Protestantism is in decline in the rural areas studied, these movements are experiencing rapid expansion. The biblical and theological foundations of rural ministry show that Jesus and his disciples were involved in both urban and rural ministry (Matt 9:35, 10:11, 28:20; Luke 9:1–6; Acts 8:25). Based on these observations, the article proposes a missionary model that combines a dynamic moving from the village to the city and another moving from a city to the villages and cities of the world.

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta um panorama do protestantismo nas zonas rurais das províncias de Kwango, Mai-Ndombe e Kwilu, do Kongo Central e do Ituri, destacando os principais desafios que as Igrejas enfrentam. O estudo baseia-se numa metodologia qualitativa que combina a observação participante, entrevistas semiestruturadas e análise documental. Os resultados indicam, em primeiro lugar, que a evangelização em meios rurais é um campo de investigação pouco explorado. Mostram, em seguida, que se está a desenvolver em certos meios rurais da República Democrática do Congo um «protestantismo sem a Bíblia». Este é frágil face aos movimentos religiosos africanos que encaram o cristianismo como uma religião imposta pelos colonizadores. Enquanto a influência do protestantismo está em declínio nestes meios rurais estudados, estes movimentos registam uma rápida expansão. Os fundamentos bíblicos e teológicos do ministério rural mostram que Jesus e os seus discípulos estavam envolvidos no ministério urbano e rural (Mt 9.35; 10.11; 28.20; Lc 9.1-6; At 8.25). Com base nestas observações, o artigo propõe um modelo missionário que articula uma dinâmica que vai da aldeia para a cidade e outra que vai de uma cidade para as aldeias e cidades do mundo.

Mots-clés

mission, évangélisation rurale, Église, protestantisme, RD Congo

Keywords

mission, rural evangelism, Church, Protestantism, DR Congo

Palavras-chave

missão, evangelização rural, Igreja, protestantismo, RD Congo

Intérêt et pertinence du sujet

De nombreux ouvrages et revues missiologiques qui traitent la pratique de la mission prennent rarement en compte les défis de l'évangélisation en milieu rural. Pour s'en rendre compte, on peut, par exemple, consulter le *Dictionnaire Œcuménique de Missiologie* édité par Ion Bria *et al.* (2001) ;[1] le *Dictionnaire de Théologie Pratique* édité par Christopher Paya et Bernard Huck (2011) ;[2] *Dictionary of Mission Theology : . Evangelical Foundations* édité par John Corrie (2007) ;[3] *Global Dictionary of Theology* édité par William A. Dyrness et Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (2008).[4] Toutefois, il faut signaler que l'équipe éditoriale de la *Revue Protestante de Missiologie* a consacré son numéro 79, pour traiter ledit sujet. Son titre est : « Monde rural, un nouveau lieu de mission ».[5] De leur part, Steve Swinburne et Glenn Daman perçoivent le monde rural comme un champ de mission oublié de l'Église.[6]

On compte également que peu d'articles et livres rédigés par des théologiens africains traitant de l'évangélisation en milieu rural. L'ouvrage *L'Afrique d'aujourd'hui et les Églises. Quels défis ?* édité par Hannes Wiher en collaboration avec Kalemba Mwambazambi (2017),[7] place cette thématique sur la liste des différents défis auxquels l'Église africaine est confrontée. Moussa Bongoyok, l'auteur du huitième chapitre intitulé « L'implantation d'Église dans chaque peuple et chaque village », perçoit la pratique de l'implantation d'Église en milieu rural comme une stratégie d'évangélisation. On notera que Bongoyok aborde ce sujet de façon déductive.[8] Nous utiliserons l'approche inductive pour analyser les défis d'évangélisation en milieu rural de la République Démocratique du Congo (RDC).

Nous avons également constaté l'absence du thème de l'évangélisation rurale dans les index et les tableaux des matières de certains ouvrages récents écrits par des missiologues africains de langue anglaise : *Africa Bears Witness : Mission Theology and Praxis in the 21st Century*, édité par Harvey Kwiyani

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1 Ion BRIA (sous dir.), *Dictionnaire œcuménique de missiologie. Cent mots pour la mission*.

2 Christophe PAYA et Bernard HUCK (sous dir.), *Dictionnaire de théologie pratique*.

3 John CORRIE, avec Samuel ESCOBAR et Wilbert SHENK (sous dir.), *Dictionary of Mission Theology : Evangelical Foundations*.

4 William A. DYRNESS et autres (sous dir.), *Global Dictionary of Theology. A Resource for the Worldwide Church*.

5 Jean-François ZORN et Gwenaël BOULET (coord.), « Monde rural : un nouveau lieu de mission », *Revue Protestante de Missiologie : Perspective Missionnaire*, n° 79 (2020).

6 Steve SWINBURNE, « A New Rural Missiology : Hope to Forgotten People in Forgotten Places » ; Glenn DAMAN, *The Forgotten Church : Why Rural Ministry Matters for Every Church in America*.

7 Hannes WIHER , avec Kalemba MWAMBAZAMBI (sous dir.), *L'Afrique d'aujourd'hui et les Églises, quels défis ?*

8 Moussa BONGOYOK, « L'implantation d'Église dans chaque peuple et chaque village ».

(2021),[9] *African Contextual Realities*, édité par Rodney L. Reed (2018),[10] et *Missiology : The Mission of God and God's Church*, édité par David K. Ngaruiya, Elizabeth W. Mburu, et Nathan H. Chiroma (2026).[11] Nous estimons que la question de l'évangélisation rurale exige une recherche supplémentaire pour examiner l'état de l'Église protestante dans certain milieu rural de la RDC. À cet effet, ces questions méritent d'être posées :

1. Quel est l'état actuel du protestantisme dans les zones rurales du Congo RDC ?
2. Quel est le fondement biblique de l'évangélisation en milieu rural ?
3. Comment les Églises urbaines, les facultés de théologie, et les organismes missionnaires peuvent-ils atteindre les zones rurales du Congo RDC ?

Le protestantisme en milieux ruraux du Congo RDC

Dans cette section, nous présenterons d'abord les milieux ruraux comme la porte d'entrée du protestantisme en RDC. Dans un second temps, nous décrirons l'état actuel du protestantisme dans certains milieux ruraux de ce pays.

Entrée du protestantisme

L'année 1878 marque l'entrée du protestantisme au Congo RDC. La plupart des missions protestantes commencent leur travail missionnaire dans des milieux ruraux de ce pays. Par exemple, la *Livingstone Inland Mission* (LIM) envoie des missionnaires à Matadi dès 1878. Elle s'établit d'abord à Palabala, un village près de Matadi, puis dans d'autres milieux ruraux, notamment Mukimvika, Mbanza Manteke, Lukunga, Bolenge, Mikimbungu, et Bemba-Manyanga, mais elle fonde aussi Stanley Pool (Kinshasa).[12] La BMS implante sa première œuvre en 1879 à San Salvador, un milieu urbain. La *Svenska Missionsförbundet* commence ses activités en 1883 à Mukimbungu, une ancienne station de LIM. L'ABFMS décide d'adopter six anciennes stations missionnaires de LIM : Palabala, Mukimvika, Mbanza-Manteke, Lukunga, Bolenge, et Kinshasa. En 1885, la *Christian and Missionary Alliance* entame ses activités et se concentre dans les milieux urbains et ruraux Kongo Central.

L'*Africa Inland Mission* (AIM) commence son œuvre missionnaire parmi le peuple Alur, dans le village de Kasengu. Son ministère s'étend ensuite dans le Nord-Est de la RDC et s'établit auprès de 11 principaux groupes ethniques : les

[9] Harvey KWIYANI (sous dir.), *Africa Bears Witness : Mission Theology and Praxis in the 21st Century*, 2021.
[10] Rodney L. REED (sous dir.), *African Contextual Realities*.
[11] David K. NGARUIYA et autres (sous dir.), *Missiology : The Mission of God and God's Church*.
[12] E. M. BRAEKMAN, *Histoire du protestantisme au Congo*, p. 90.

Alur (avec les stations missionnaires dans les villages de Kasengu et Ara), les Zande (principal groupe cible de l'AIM, avec les stations missionnaires dans la ville de Dungu et les villages de Napopo, Banda et Assa), les Lugbara (avec les stations missionnaires dans les villages d'Adja et Aru), les Ndo Ukebu (avec la station missionnaire dans le village d'Aungba), les Lese (avec les stations missionnaires dans les villages de Maitulu et Watsa), les Kakwa (avec la station missionnaire dans le village d'Adi), les Logo (avec les stations missionnaires dans les villages d'Aba, Todro et Faradge), les Lendu (avec les stations missionnaires dans les villages de Rethy et Linga), les Hema (avec les stations missionnaires dans les villages de Bogoro et Blukwa) et les Nande (avec les stations missionnaires dans les villages de Mwenda et Oicha). Enfin, les Bira, à travers la station missionnaire dans le village de Nyankunde.[13]

On notera qu'au cours de la première moitié du XX[e] siècle, le protestantisme en RDC se concentrait dans les zones rurales. À cette époque, si l'on voulait imaginer un chrétien "typique", il fallait penser à une personne vivant dans un village en RDC.

Du village à la ville

Les membres de certaines Églises protestantes en provenance de milieux ruraux ont grandement contribué à l'évangélisation dans les villes de la RDC. Plusieurs missions protestantes ne réalisent pas encore les besoins immenses des populations qui quittent les milieux ruraux pour la ville. Dans la plupart des cas, les chrétiens se déplacent pour les villes avant que leur dénomination ne s'y déplace. Peter Falk souligne que ces chrétiens s'organisent pour établir des lieux de culte le dimanche sans attendre l'aide de leur dénomination, qui finit par leur envoyer un pasteur pour servir la nouvelle communauté.[14] Anguandia explique :

> Au cas où un ou plusieurs étaient des dirigeants dans le groupe, ils demandaient alors d'être reconnus comme une congrégation. Le témoignage de ces chrétiens fervents a grandement contribué à l'établissement de la foi chrétienne dans les villes, mais il a été généralement insuffisant. Quand les gens arrivaient en ville, ils pouvaient chercher la communauté chrétienne et les relations communautaires qu'ils avaient dans les villages […] À Kinshasa, pendant la mutation, les Églises d'un certain nombre de provinces s'installaient dans la ville et œuvraient dans la langue tribale principale de leur zone rurale.[15]

[13] Enosh ANGUANDIA ADIA EDRE, « A Study into the Factors Inhibiting the Development of Missionary Vision in CECA 20, Democratic Republic of Congo », p. 2

[14] Peter FALK, *La croissance de l'Église en Afrique*, p. 424.

[15] ANGUANDIA ADIA EDRE, « A Study into the Factors Inhibiting the Development of Missionary Vision […] », p. 424–426.

Jusqu'à la deuxième moitié du XXe siècle, les chrétiens en provenance de zones rurales jouent un rôle clé dans l'implantation de plusieurs Églises protestantes en milieux urbains. Les missionnaires européens et américains se concentrent principalement sur le ministère rural, parce que la mission urbaine suscite peu d'intérêt de leur part.[16] L'expansion des flux migratoires ruraux vers les milieux urbains est l'un des facteurs facilitant l'implantation de ces Églises dans les villes de la RDC. Ces chrétiens n'abandonnent pas leur foi chrétienne dans leur village d'origine ; ils l'ont emportée avec eux en ville.

Décrivons maintenant la situation actuelle du protestantisme dans certains milieux ruraux de la RDC.

L'état actuel du protestantisme dans certains milieux ruraux

Nous avons adopté une méthodologie qualitative combinant l'observation participante, des entretiens semi-structurés et l'analyse documentaire. Pour commencer, nous avons interrogé des responsables d'organisations missionnaires et de départements de la mission engagés dans l'évangélisation en milieu rural[17]. Nous avons confronté leurs récits en menant des entretiens avec des étudiants originaires de milieux ruraux des provinces du Kwango, du Mai-Ndombe, du Kwilu, du Kongo Central et de l'Ituri.[18] Nous nous sommes appuyés aussi sur des articles, des mémoires de master et thèse de doctorat en théologie qui traitent quelques aspects de notre recherche.

Les pasteurs sans formation biblique et théologique formelle

De nombreuses Églises protestantes en milieu rural sont dirigées par des diacres dont la plupart n'ont suivi aucune formation biblique et théologique formelle. Certains étudiants en théologie en provenance de zones rurales ne

[16] Voir R. G METZGER, « Working together », p. 7.

[17] Interviewé l'un des responsables de l'évangélisation de l'Église du Christ au Congo, les responsables de l'organisme *River Ministries*, ainsi que le responsable du département de mission de la Communauté Évangélique au Cœur de l'Afrique (CECA 20).

[18] Un échantillon de 40 étudiants en théologie a été constitué en tenant compte des critères suivants : être étudiants en provenance de milieux ruraux du Congo, être impliqués dans l'évangélisation de ces milieux. Le guide d'interview était composé d'un ensemble de points sur l'état de l'Église dans les zones rurales. La grande majorité des entretiens ont duré 30 minutes. Parmi l'ensemble des entretiens réalisés, 5 ont été systématiquement retranscrits pour faire l'objet de l'analyse. Les 35 entretiens n'ont pas été retranscrits en raison de la répétition d'informations déjà reçues. Nous avons interviewé 10 des étudiants de l'Université Chrétienne de Kinshasa, extension de Kikwit, provenant de milieux ruraux des provinces de Kwango, Kwilu et Mai-Ndombe. Nous avons aussi interviewé 15 étudiants du Centre Universitaire de Missiologie (Kongo central, Kwango et Mai-Ndombe), ainsi que 20 étudiants de la faculté de théologie de l'Université Shalom de Bunia, provenant de milieux ruraux des provinces de l'Ituri, du Haut-Uélé, du Tshopo et du Bas-Uélé.

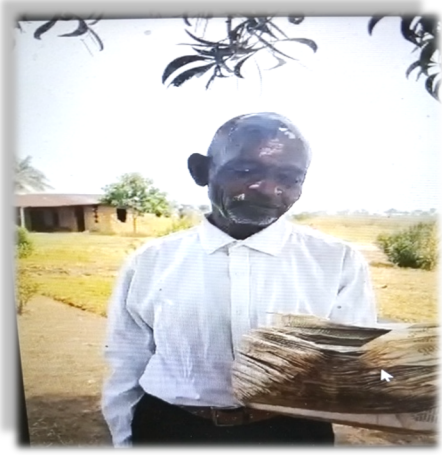
retournent pas dans ce milieu après leur formation théologique.[19] On constate également une augmentation du nombre de pasteurs, d'évangélistes et de membres d'Églises protestantes qui quittent les zones rurales pour s'installer dans des milieux urbains. Ce mouvement migratoire est lié à la pauvreté, aux conflits armés et ethniques.

Le manque de Bibles chez certains pasteurs et fidèles en milieu rural

Certains des pasteurs travaillant dans les zones rurales des provinces du Kwango, du Mai-Ndombe et du Kwilu ne possèdent pas de Bible et parcourent des kilomètres à pied pour copier les textes bibliques en vue de préparer la prédication. Ils se partagent même certaines des fractions de la Bible qu'ils découpent en morceaux. La plupart des membres de ces Églises ne possèdent pas de Bible traduite en langue maternelle.[20] Certains d'entre eux ont une forte conviction que la Bible est la parole de Dieu, on ne peut jamais la vendre. Sa vente est perçue comme un péché. Ils appuient cela en déclarant que vous avez reçu gratuitement, vous devez donner aussi gratuitement (réf. Matt. 10.8).

L'un des étudiants de la Faculté de Théologie de l'Université Shalom de Bunia, originaire d'un milieu rural de la province de Thsopo, m'a confié que, dans les villages, c'est rare de trouver un chrétien ordinaire qui possède sa Bible, parce qu'elle coûte un peu cher.[21]

L'image à droit montre la Bible d'un chrétien résidant dans le milieu rural de la province du Kwango.[22]



[19] Cette observation était l'objet d'un entretien avec un représentant Legal d'une communauté membre de l'Église du Christ au Congo. Cela a été confirmé par un autre responsable d'une Église protestante, pour plus d'information, voir cette video, « Sauvons nos villages en R D Congo avec Jésus », 8 decembre 2013, https://youtube.com/watch?v=nCuL_4jR_ME

[20] Interview accordée par Nzuzi Mukawa, responsable de River Ministries, le 04 juillet 2024 à Kinshasa. Cette information a été confirmée par les étudiants de la Faculté de Théologie de l'Université Chrétienne de Kinshasa, extension de Kikwit, que nous avons interrogé à Kikwit.

[21] Interview accordée par étudiant X, le 15 juillet 2026 à Bunia dans la province de l'Ituri.

[22] Nous avons reçu cette image de Nzuzi Mukawa, Doyen du Centre Universitaire de Missiologie et fondateur de River Ministries, une organisation missionnaire qui s'occupe de l'évangélisation de milieux ruraux des provinces du Kwango et Kwilu. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_q7vkjxHXB_D-NgJv7s40y2rCmqPNj-/view?usp=sharing

La résurgence des religions africaines

Alors que les religions africaines connaissent un renouveau, certains théologiens protestants congolais notent une diminution constante de l'influence du christianisme dans les milieux ruraux des provinces de l'Ituri et du Kongo central. Par exemple, Christine Mayani Kalume observe que la province du Kongo Central, qui avait autrefois servi de point d'entrée pour le christianisme, pourrait aujourd'hui en devenir sa porte de sortie.[23] Cette province se transforme progressivement en foyer des mouvements politico-religieux qui perçoivent le christianisme comme une religion réservée aux Blancs. Ils sont caractérisés par des tendances nationalistes et panafricanismes. Leurs adeptes se réclament de Kimpa Vita (1684–1706) et de Simon Kimbangu (1887–1951) au point de les déifier.

Georges Pirwoth Atido observe un mouvement de retour du peuple Alur du Congo RDC converti au christianisme vers la religion *Lam the Kwaru*, qui signifie « prière aux ancêtres ». Ce mouvement *Lam the Kwaru* se propage rapidement dans les milieux ruraux du territoire de Mahagi, cela se manifeste par la multiplication de leur lieu du culte.[24] Il s'agit d'une version modernisée et reconstruite de la religion indigène des Alur.[25] Dans la province de la Tshopo, le mouvement politico-religieux, appelé Nzambé Lumumba, gagne du terrain dans les milieux ruraux. Les adeptes de ce mouvement se réclament de Lumumba au point de le déifier.

Sumbuso Bamaraki Azalia[26] et Ndagijimana Batibuka Pontien[27] observent, parmi le peuple Lese-Karo de la RDC, un autre mouvement de retour aux valeurs culturelles et religieuses, parfois jugé non conforme à la confession chrétienne, même chez des personnes qui avaient déjà été évangélisées. Seth Mogokuru Tatsima remarque ce même phénomène au sein des Églises locales de la Communauté Évangélique au Centre de l'Afrique (CECA 20) implantées parmi le peuple Avokaya de la RDC.[28] De même, Atido constate, le phénomène

[23] Christine MAYANI KALUME, « Entrée et sortie du christianisme au Bas-Congo : évolution du kimbanguisme ».

[24] Mugisa UPENJMUNGU, « Église de Mahagi à la montée de la Religion Traditionnelle *Lam the kwaru* », p. 2.

[25] Georges Pirwoth ATIDO, « Toward a New Inculturation Model for the Alur in the Communauté Evangélique au Centre de l'Afrique, in the Democratic Republic of Congo », p. 17.

[26] Sumbuso BAMARAKI AZALIA, « Croyances et pratiques religieuses traditionnelles parmi les Lese-Karo dans le Territoire de Mambasa ».

[27] Pontien NDAGIJIMANA BATIBUKA, « Le retour massif des baptisés les Lese-Karo aux valeurs non chrétiennes : Une crise du baptême comme rite de passage ? ».

[28] Seth MOGOKURU TATSIMA, « Foi chrétienne du peuple avokaya de la Communauté Évangélique au Centre de l'Afrique (CECA 20) : Une analyse missiologique », p. 88–89.

de la résurgence des pratiques métaphysiques indigènes dans la société bila contemporaine.[29]

Dans cette veine, Robert Bungishabaku Katho écrit : « Un ancien étudiant de la Faculté de Théologie de l'Université Shalom de Bunia nous a témoigné que lors de son stage dans la région de Lolwa, il lui est arrivé des visiter des chapelles protestantes de la CE-39 qui sont restées fermées les dimanches, parce que les membres, y compris les pasteurs, n'ont pas senti le désir de s'y rendre pour prier ».[30]

On notera que ces mouvements religieux mettent l'accent sur une approche holistique et contextuelle du culte. La pratique de la délivrance, de la guérison, et de la consultation prophétique occupe une place importante dans leur culte et constitue parfois une solution concrète pour les malades qui n'ont pas les moyens de recourir à la médecine moderne ainsi que pour ceux qui souffrent et croient que leur souffrance est d'origine maléfique.

La disparition de certaines Églises locales

Autrefois, certains théologiens et observateurs du christianisme en contexte africain pensaient que les religions africaines seraient disparues sur notre continent. Par exemple, Mubabinge Bilolo a écrit :

> d'ici cent ans, nous risquons de ne plus parler de la religion africaine, mais plutôt d'un « christianisme africanisé et fécondé par la religion africaine ». Brutalement exprimé, le verdict « missionnaire » est très clair : la religion africaine doit disparaître de la face du monde et ce qu'elle avait de positif doit être intégré au christianisme et prolongé dans la « théologie chrétienne africaine ». Il n'y a pas encore de dialogue entre ces deux religions. Le projet de la mission coloniale est tout simplement adapté, avec la complicité des Africains, au contexte néocolonial.[31]

Même si la réflexion de Bilolo remonte à plus de quatre décennies, elle demeure pertinente, car elle montre les approches que certains théologiens utilisent lorsqu'il aborde la question des religions africaines : faire disparaître, remplacer et intégrer des éléments religieux et culturels. Aujourd'hui, on assiste plutôt à un phénomène contradictoire : dans certains milieux ruraux de la province de l'Ituri, ainsi que dans d'autres provinces de la RDC, les Églises protestantes disparaissent peu à peu en raison d'un mouvement de retour vers les religions traditionnelles africaines. Dans cette perspective, Jean Handikabo

[29] Georges Pirwoth ATIDO, « La résurgence des pratiques métaphysiques indigènes dans la société bilan contemporaine : Une analyse missiologique », p. 115-117.

[30] Robert BUNGISHABAKU KATHO et Luhinzo Romain BALOLEBWAMI, « Religion traditionnelle Bila et développement socioéconomique », p.138.

[31] Mubabinge BILOLO, « La religion africaine face au défi du christianisme et de la techno-science », p. 34.

Kimareki[32] et Josué Kabaku Dachabo[33] constatent la disparition de certaines Assemblées Évangéliques de la Communauté Emmanuel (CE-39) dans le district ecclésiastique d'Akokora, notamment celles fondées par des missionnaires américains. Dans la même veine, Mogokuru Tatsima Seth observe également ce phénomène de disparition de certaines Églises locales de la Communauté Évangélique au Centre de l'Afrique (CECA 20), qui sont implantées parmi le peuple Avokaya.[34]

Quelques témoignages

Il nous semble utile de présenter quelques témoignages recueillis auprès des pasteurs et des laïcs protestants qui exercent leur ministère en milieu rural. Le but est de permettre à ceux qui s'intéressent à l'activité missionnaire en milieu rural d'approfondir leur réflexion sur l'état de l'Église protestante dans l'arrière-pays.

Témoignage de Kwilu

Nous présentons en premier lieu le témoignage de Paul Kimbau, pasteur de la Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites au Congo (CEFMC) sur l'état du protestantisme en milieu rural dans le district de Lusemvu de la province de Kwilu. Nous le présentons en sa qualité d'ancien diacre devenu pasteur du district Kikwit sud. Ses propos se résument en ces termes :

> Ce district est composé de plus de sept paroisses dont la majorité est dirigée par des diacres pour la plupart sans aucune formation biblique et théologique formelle. Il s'agit des paroisses situées dans les localités de Potopoto, Kihambu, Yongo, Mulwa, Matshitshi, Kakobola et Mbondo, où je fus diacre responsable pendant quatre ans. Ils sont affectés dans ces paroisses par manque de pasteurs formés. Il n'y a qu'un théologien qui dirige le district et qui est logé au siège du district. La majorité des membres ne possèdent pas de Bible. Dans une paroisse de 200 membres, il n'est pas rare de ne trouver qu'une seule personne disposant d'une Bible en français ou en Kikongo *munukutuba*. De nombreux chrétiens résidant dans les milieux ruraux de la province de Kwilu, Kwango et Maindombe ont une forte conviction que la Bible est la parole de Dieu, on ne peut jamais la vendre. L'acte de la vendre est perçu comme un péché. Ils appuient cela en déclarant : *Beno bakaka*

[32] Jean HANDIKABO KIMAREKI, « Disparation de quelques Assemblées Évangéliques CE 39, dans le District Ecclésiastique d'Akokora ».

[33] Josué KABAKU DACHABO, « Vers un ministère pastoral efficace pour la croissance spirituelle de peuple Lese de la 39e Communauté Emmanuel d'AKokora dans la province de l'Ituri en RD Congo ».

[34] MOGOKURU TATSIMA, « Foi chrétienne du peuple avokaya de la Communauté Évangélique au Centre de l'Afrique (CECA 20) », p. 88–89.

> *ya mpamba, beno fwete pesa mpi ya mpamba*.. C'est-à-dire, "Vous avez reçu gratuitement, vous devez donner aussi gratuitement". Pour ce peuple on ne peut jamais vendre la Bible, qui est la Parole de Dieu, que Dieu a donnée gratuitement ».[35]

Témoignage de Mai-Ndombe

Voici le témoignage de Mboma Mudikasanzi Aimé, ancien diacre de la communauté des Églises Baptistes Indépendantes Évangéliques (CEBIE), sur l'état du protestantisme dans le territoire d'Oshwe du district de Nkole Nkema de la province de *Mai-Ndombe*.

> Dans l'ancien temps, les églises protestante, catholique et Kimbanguiste étaient implantées presque dans tous les villages. Actuellement, ces églises ont perdu beaucoup des membres suite à l'implantation des Églises d'initiative africaine, l'Islam, Témoin de Jéhovah, néo-apostolique. La majorité des églises protestantes dans les villages de Maindombe sont dirigées par des personnes qui n'ont suivi aucune formation théologique du niveau universitaire. Il y a trois types des pasteurs aux villages : 1) un diacre ou catéchiste expérimenté qui devient pasteur ; 2) un diplômé de l'école biblique, et 3) un théologien. Cependant les théologiens sont rares dans ces milieux. La coutume a beaucoup d'influence sur la population rurale de Mai-Ndombe. Même les chrétiens sont respectueux des coutumes traditionnelles contraires à l'évangile. Nombreux sont ceux qui sont attirés par des religions traditionnelles africaines qui se réclament de Kimpa Vita et de Simon Kimbangu. Ils considèrent le christianisme comme une religion importée. Ils sont attirés par ces religions, parce qu'elles intègrent des éléments culturels dans le service cultuel.[36]

Témoignage Kwilu et de Mai-Ndombe

Ci-bas est le témoignage de Théophile Musoko Takieme, pasteur de la Communauté Baptiste du Congo (CBCO), sur l'état du protestantisme dans les provinces du Kwilu et de *Mai-Ndombe*.

> La plupart des pasteurs travaillant dans les zones rurales ne sont pas qualifiés. Compte tenu des stratégies d'évangélisation actuelles, nous avons besoin de travailleurs ayant un bon bagage intellectuel pour faire face aux réalités des zones rurales dans les provinces du Kwilu et du Mai-Ndombe Nous mettons en place des écoles de formation théologique pour aider les responsables d'Église à élever le niveau des pasteurs travaillant dans les zones rurales. Dans ces zones, il y a trop

[35] Interview accordée par Paul Kimbau, pasteur de la CEFMC, le 24 juin 2024 à Kikwit dans la province du Kwilu.

[36] Interview accordée par Mboma Mudikasanzi, diacre de la CEFMC, le 24 juin 2024 à Kikwit dans la province du Kwilu.

peu de Bibles. Une seule Bible peut servir environ cinq à dix villages.[37]

En somme, nous constatons que le protestantisme est en train de disparaître dans certaines zones rurales de la RDC. Dans ces zones, un protestantisme sans Bible se développe, et nous semble très fragile face aux mouvements religieux africains, qui considèrent le christianisme comme une religion imposée par les colonisateurs. Cette situation ne permet pas aux chrétiens de ces régions d'évaluer les phénomènes culturels à la lumière de la Parole de Dieu, puisqu'ils ne possèdent pas de Bible.

Ceci dit, nous examinons maintenant le ministère rural de Jésus et de ses disciples, afin de tirer les implications missiologiques.

Jalons bibliques et théologiques pour le ministère rural

Jésus, membre d'une communauté rurale

Jésus a passé la majeure partie de sa vie et de son ministère dans le contexte rural. Il aurait été stratégiquement plus logique que Jésus naisse à Jérusalem ou à Rome, mais, au lieu de cela, « le Christ est né dans un petit village rural et les premiers visiteurs à lui rendre hommage ont été des bergers ruraux »[38](Lc 2.8–20). Le prophète Michée avait prédit que le Messie naîtrait dans la ville insignifiante de Bethléem (Mi 5.1–2). L'ironie que Michée met en avant est que celui qui dominera sur Israël viendra d'une ville considérée comme sans intérêt par la société dominante basée dans les grandes villes de Jérusalem ou Césarée, Bethléem étant la ville des bergers et des moutons.

L'échange entre Philippe et Nathanaël met en évidence ce manque de notoriété de Nazareth : « Quelque chose de bon peut-il venir de Nazareth ? » (Jn 1.46).[39] Dans la même optique, John McRay écrit :

> Jésus a passé sa jeunesse dans ce village, situé à l'extrémité sud des collines de la Basse-Galilée, à environ 1 200 pieds au-dessus du niveau de la mer. Les fouilles archéologiques menées à Nazareth au début du siècle, puis par Bellarmino Bagatti en 1955 lors de la construction de la nouvelle Église de l'Annonciation, ont fourni des informations sur ce village qui ne sont mentionnées ni dans l'Ancien Testament, ni dans les écrits de Josèphe, ni dans le Talmud.[40]

De plus, Jésus avait massivement choisi de jeunes hommes issus de villages. Philippe, André, Jean, Jacques, Pierre, et Nathanaël étaient originaires de Bethsaïda, un village juif qui, en dehors de l'industrie de la pêche, était un

[37] Interview accordée par Théophile Musoko Takieme Pasteur missionnaire de la CBCO, le 24 juillet 2024 à Kinshasa au Centre Universitaire de Missiologie (CUM).
[38] DAMAN, *The Forgotten Church*, p. 148 ; ma traduction.
[39] Toutes les citations bibliques sont tirées de la Nouvelle Bible Segond (NBS).
[40] John MCRAY, *Archaeology and the New Testament*, p . 157 ; ma traduction.

endroit sans importance (Jn 1.44). Leonard Sweet et Frank Viola écrivent :

> Ce sont les douze que Jésus a choisis pour être ses amis les plus proches et ses stagiaires : quatre pêcheurs, un collecteur d'impôts, deux combattants pour la liberté, et un nombre important de personnes qui se sont rencontrées pendant leur apprentissage auprès de Jean-Baptiste (André, Jean, Pierre, Jacques, et peut-être même deux autres, Philippe et Nathanaël), que Jésus a rassemblés sur la rive du Jourdain lorsqu'il séjournait chez Jean. Il a choisi des gens ordinaires, sans formation particulière dans les Écritures, dans les villages voisins de Galilée dont il était originaire. Il y a une exception singulière et une omission frappante. Judas était originaire d'Iscariot, un village de Judée situé au sud d'Israël.[41]

Cela dit, la question qui se pose est la suivante : que disent les quatre évangiles au sujet du ministère rural et urbain de Jésus ? Dans la prochaine section, nous aborderons ce sujet.

Le ministère urbain et rural de Jésus

Au début de son ministère, Jésus s'est installé à Capharnaüm, au centre de la Galilée. C'est à Capharnaüm que Jésus a accompli le plus grand nombre de miracles par rapport à tout autre endroit mentionné dans le Nouveau Testament. Capharnaüm était-elle une grande ville ? Selon Daniel W. Hill, « Capharnaüm ne serait pas considérée comme l'une des grandes villes et serait classée parmi les villages ayant une population moyenne de 500 personnes ».[42] Capharnaüm a servi de base à une grande partie du ministère de Jésus dans les villages de Galilée (Mt 4.13–17 ; 9.1 ; cf. Jn 2.12). Pourquoi Capharnaüm a-t-il servi de base à une grande partie du ministère de Jésus ? Son choix de s'établir à Capharnaüm est stratégique. Il est lié à l'évangélisation des non-Juifs, comme le souligne Craig S. Keene.[43] Matthieu anticipe l'évangélisation des non-Juifs en l'annonçant d'avance dans son récit (4.13–17). Il amène les lecteurs de son évangile à comprendre que cet acte de Jésus s'inscrit dans le plan de Dieu pour le salut de l'humanité, c'est l'accomplissement de la prophétie d'Ésaïe 9.1–2. La lumière dont il est question correspond au roi davidique promis (És 9.6–7). Le verset 17 du même chapitre souligne que le message de Jésus est résumé comme un appel à la repentance afin d'être prêt pour le royaume de Dieu.

Dans Luc 10.13–15, Jésus souligne l'incrédulité des gens de Capharnaüm et de Bethsaïda. Leur manque de repentance et de foi est comparé à celui de Tyr, de Sidon et même de Sodome. Leur plus grand péché fut de rejeter Jésus, malgré

[41] Leonard SWEET et Frank VIOLA, *Jesus. À Theography*, p. 136 ; ma traduction.
[42] Daniel W. HILL, *Capernaum. The City of Jesus*, 2 ; ma traduction.
[43] Craig S. KEENER, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*, p. 54.

la bonne nouvelle qu'il annonçait, les miracles qu'il accomplissait et les preuves messianiques qu'il présentait.

> Quel malheur pour toi, Bethsaïda ! Si les miracles qui ont été faits chez vous avaient été faits à Tyr et à Sidon, il y a longtemps que leurs habitants auraient changé radicalement, qu'ils se seraient vêtus de sacs et assis dans la cendre ! C'est pourquoi, lors du jugement, ce sera moins dur pour Tyr et Sidon que pour vous. Et toi, Capharnaüm, seras-tu élevée jusqu'au ciel ? Tu descendras jusqu'au séjour des morts !

L'évangile de Marc 1.39 rapporte que Jésus parcourait la Galilée, prêchant dans les synagogues et chassant les démons. Pour Sean Freyne, l'évangile de Marc « a réussi à donner une image très claire du caractère rural de la Galilée ».[44] Jésus a choisi la Galilée comme base de son ministère public. Il a choisi également le paysage rural pour la majeure partie de son ministère, et, lorsque lui et ses disciples étaient submergés par les foules, « il les emmenait avec lui en retraite dans quelque région montagneuse du pays où il était relativement inconnu, cherchant à éviter la publicité autant que possible ».[45] Les collines rurales étaient des lieux de retraite et de prière pour Jésus et ses disciples. De même, le désert était un lieu de préparation et de mise à l'épreuve pour Jésus (Mt 1.11 ; Mc 1.12–13 ; Lc 4.1–13).

Tout au long de son ministère en Galilée, Jésus a compris les préoccupations des Juifs ruraux à l'époque de l'expansion romaine. Selon John Harrison, de nombreux Juifs galiléens de l'époque de Jésus ont été témoins « d'un système d'oppression économique et de l'afflux de non-juifs dans les villes nouvellement créées par Hérode et Hérode Antipas ».[46]

Les ressources étant consacrées aux villes romaines nouvellement créées, de nombreux villages et villes essentiellement juifs ont souffert. Même dans les villages comme Capharnaüm, de nombreuses personnes étaient fidèles à Rome, ce qui créait « une atmosphère culturelle et politique romaine considérable ».[47] Jésus comprenait l'impact de l'urbanisation romaine et les réalités économiques de la vie rurale. À ce sujet, Culpepper écrit : « Jésus a puisé dans l'indépendance traditionnelle des villageois galiléens et dans leur hostilité à l'égard d'Antipas, de l'élite hérodienne des villes (Sepphoris et Tibériade) et des autorités de

[44] Sean FREYNE, *Galilee, Jesus and the Gospels : Literary Approaches and Historical Investigations*, p. 39-40 ; ma traduction.
[45] FREYNE, *Galilee, Jesus and the Gospels,* p. 40 ; ma traduction.
[46] John HARRISON, « Weeds. Jesus' Parable and Economic and Political Threats to the Poor in Roman Galilee », p. 86 ; ma traduction.
[47] Jonathan L. REED, « Instability in Jesus' Galilee : A Demographic Perspective », p. 343 ; ma traduction.

Jérusalem ».[48] Grâce à ses liens avec les populations rurales, le message de Jésus a souvent trouvé un public réceptif dans les villages.[49]

Jésus savait comment entrer en contact avec les habitants des villes et comment leur délivrer un message qu'ils pouvaient comprendre. Cependant, en parcourant les évangiles, on ne peut manquer de remarquer que Jésus a consacré une grande partie de son temps à sillonner les villes d'Israël, prêchant l'Évangile à leurs habitants : « Mais il leur dit : il faut aussi que j'annonce aux autres villes la bonne nouvelle du règne de Dieu ; car c'est pour cela que j'ai été envoyé » (Lc 4. 43). Dans la même veine, Culpepper déclare :

> Bien que la plupart de ceux qui ont suivi Jésus aient été des villageois ordinaires, les quatre évangiles rapportent également que Jésus a rencontré l'élite, a mangé dans leurs maisons, a débattu avec eux et a répondu à leurs demandes de guérison (Lc 5.17 ; 10. 38–40). Jésus n'a en aucun cas ignoré les habitants de la ville qui venaient chercher son aide. D'après l'évangile de Jean, Jésus se rendait souvent à Jérusalem pour les fêtes (Jn 5.1–2 ; 7.10-11) et pour visiter le temple (Jn 2.13–14).[50]

Néanmoins, même lorsqu'il se rendait à Jérusalem, il séjournait souvent à l'extérieur de la ville, dans le village de Béthanie, plutôt qu'en ville même. Son lieu de séjour préféré à Béthanie était la maison de ses amis Marie, Marthe, et Lazare (Jn 11.1). C'est dans ce village que Jésus passera les derniers jours avant sa crucifixion (Jn 12.1–11).

Jérusalem ne l'a pas accueilli aussi chaleureusement que Béthanie. Un jour, Jésus s'est exclamé : « Jérusalem, Jérusalem, toi qui tues les prophètes et qui lapides ceux qui te sont envoyés…! » (Lc 13.34). Il pleura sur Jérusalem à cause de son incrédulité (Lc 19.41–44). Il convient aussi de noter que la ville de Jérusalem est le lieu dans l'accomplissement du ministère public que Jésus. Il avait résolu de se rendre à Jérusalem » (Lc 9.51). Là, sa souffrance, sa mort et sa résurrection inaugurent le royaume de Dieu (Lc 9.22 ; 13. 33 ; 17.25 ; 18.32 ; 23.42–43).

Les textes de Matthieu 4.23 et 9.35 résument le ministère de Jésus dans les milieux urbains et ruraux d'Israël par une triade d'activités (enseignement, proclamation, et guérison), comme l'explique Walter T. Wilson.[51] Le fait que les malades en provenance des villes et des villages soient venus à Jésus dans les

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[48] Alan R. CULPEPPER, « The Galilee Quest : The Historical Jesus and the Historical Galilee », p. 216 ; ma traduction.

[49] CULPEPPER, « The Galilee Quest », p. 226.

[50] CULPEPPER, « The Galilee Quest », p. 227 ; ma traduction.

[51] Walter T. WILSON, *Healing in the Gospel of Matthew : Reflections on Method and Ministry*, p. 281 ; ma traduction.

versets précédents (Mt 8.1–4, 5–13 ; 9.1–7, 18–26, 27–29, 32–33) montre que l'expression « guérissait toute maladie et toute infirmité » (*therapeúōn pâsan nóson kaì pâsan malakían*) est liée à la dimension holistique de l'engagement missionnaire de Jésus. D'autre part, l'expression « Jésus parcourait toutes les villes et les villages » (*kaì periēgen ho Iēsous tàs póleis pásas kaì tàs kōmas*) souligne le ministère itinérant de Jésus. Dans la même veine, Wilson écrit :

> Alors qu'en Matthieu 4.23, Jésus traverse « toute la Galilée », en 9.35, il parcourt « toutes les villes et les villages », ce qui suggère subtilement que le champ de son ministère s'est élargi (cf. 9.26, 31, 33). La présentation intégrée du ministère de Jésus dans les chapitres 5 à 9 est importante pour les lecteurs, car elle fournit à la fois une base et un modèle pour le ministère que Jésus confiera à ses disciples au chapitre 10. Comme pour Jésus lui-même, il s'agira d'un ministère de parole et d'action, comprenant des guérisons et des exorcismes (10.7–8). Ce ministère, comme celui de Jésus, sera itinérant : notez en particulier la correspondance entre « villes et villages » en 9.35 et « ville ou village » en 10.11. Les disciples se concentreront sur les « brebis » perdues du peuple (10.6), à l'image de Jésus (9.36). À l'instar de Jésus, leur ministère devra faire face à l'opposition des chefs des synagogues (10.17 ; cf. 23.34).[52]

Le chapitre 28 de l'évangile de Matthieu élargit le champ de la mission des disciples en ouvrant les portes qui étaient fermées. Les disciples vont maintenant aller dans les villes et les villages de toutes les nations du monde pour enseigner aux non-juifs à obéir à tout ce que Jésus a prescrit.

Le ministère rural et urbain dans les Actes des Apôtres

Après l'ascension de Jésus, les disciples se sont réunis pour prier jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient baptisés du Saint-Esprit et de sa puissance. Jésus leur avait dit de rester à Jérusalem jusqu'à ce que cela se produise et d'être ensuite ses témoins dans le monde entier (Ac 1.4–8). Dans Actes 2, l'Esprit descend sur l'Église, mais les disciples restent à Jérusalem. Tout le monde semble rester dans la ville, ignorant l'ordre missionnaire de faire de toutes les nations des disciples de Jésus-Christ (Mt 28.19). L'Église se concentre sur la formation de disciples à Jérusalem. Elle réussit à Jérusalem, où la parole de Dieu se répandait de plus en plus ; le nombre de disciples augmentait beaucoup (Ac 6.7). Mais les disciples oublient la Judée et la Samarie et les extrémités de la terre de leur époque. Dieu réagit en les dispersant jusqu'aux extrémités de la terre. Luc rapporte qu'après la mort d'Étienne, « Ce jour-là, une grande persécution s'abattit sur l'Église qui était à Jérusalem. Tous excepté les apôtres se dispersèrent en Judée et en Samarie » (Ac

[52] WILSON, *Healing in the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 281 ; ma traduction.

8.1). Actes 8 rapporte que Philippe l'évangéliste se rend en Samarie et que, par la suite, les apôtres Pierre et Jean visitent également la Samarie (Ac 7.14-25), et retournent à Jérusalem en annonçant la Bonne Nouvelle dans plusieurs villages des Samaritains (Ac 8.25).[53] De ce point de vue, on peut affirmer que Luc veut faire comprendre à ses lecteurs que, même après l'ascension de Jésus, Pierre et Jean étaient toujours impliqués dans l'évangélisation des villes et des villages.

Paul se concentrait sur les grandes villes pour y mener ses activités missionnaires. Il choisissait des villes qui jouaient un rôle déterminant dans l'évangélisation de l'Empire romain. Ces villes constituaient de grands centres de population, des centres de communication et d'éducation. Il y créait de nouvelles communautés de disciples, dans l'espoir que l'Évangile rayonnerait à partir de ces centres stratégiques et aurait un impact sur les villages.

L'implication missiologique

L'étude du fondement biblique et théologique du ministère rural met en évidence une double dynamique missionnaire. D'une part, la mission part du village et s'étend vers les autres villes d'Israël, puis les nations. D'autre part, elle se déploie depuis Jérusalem vers les villages et villes du monde.

Dynamique missionnaire : du village à la ville et aux nations

Nous avons vu que les quatre évangiles racontent l'expansion missionnaire, qui a commencé en Galilée et s'est étendue aux autres villes d'Israël, puis aux nations. Jésus prend la Galilée comme base principale de son travail missionnaire et la plupart de ses disciples sont galiléens. Il commence sa mission en travaillant avec des personnes marginalisées vivant en périphérie (Ac 4.13–15). Cela montre que le milieu rural ne constitue pas une périphérie passive de la mission, mais un lieu d'envoi et d'engagement actif dans la mission de Dieu.

L'histoire de l'évangélisation des villes de la RDC met d'abord en évidence l'idée d'un mouvement partant de la périphérie vers le centre. Les chrétiens provenant de milieux ruraux ont contribué à l'implantation de nombreuses Églises protestantes en milieux urbains de la RDC. Ils n'abandonnent pas leur foi chrétienne dans leur village d'origine ; ils l'ont emportée avec eux en ville. Cette dynamique missionnaire met en lumière la vitalité spirituelle des Églises de la périphérie.

Dynamique missionnaire : de Jérusalem vers les villes et villages du monde

Les Actes des apôtres relatent l'histoire d'un mouvement missionnaire allant de Jérusalem vers les milieux urbains et ruraux de l'Empire romain. L'apôtre Paul, dans sa démarche missionnaire, privilégiait les métropoles

[53] KEENER, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p. 343 ; ma traduction.

comme terrains d'action privilégiés. Il choisissait des villes stratégiques pour l'expansion de l'Évangile dans l'Empire. Ces villes étaient des pôles de peuplement majeurs, des nœuds de communication et de savoir. Il fondait de nouvelles communautés de disciples, dans l'espoir que l'Évangile s'étendrait à partir de ces centres stratégiques et toucherait les villages. Cette dynamique missionnaire met en lumière la vitalité spirituelle des Églises du centre.

Les responsables des Églises implantées en milieux urbains et de faculté de théologie devraient s'inspirer de cette vitalité spirituelle pour revitaliser les milieux ruraux, qui se transforment progressivement en foyer des mouvements politico-religieux qui perçoivent le christianisme comme une religion de colonisateurs.

Vers une approche intégrée de la mission urbaine et rurale

Jésus et ses disciples ne négligent pas les milieux urbains et ruraux. Leur préoccupation majeure de communiquer l'évangile au citadin et à la communauté rurale (Mt 9.35 ; 10.11 ; Ac 8.25 ; 1 Co 2.1–2). Les déclarations issues des congrès pour l'évangélisation du monde emploient des termes qui incluent l'évangélisation en milieu urbain et rural. La Déclaration de Wheaton (1966) et celle de Lausanne (1974) contiennent des expressions telles que « L'évangélisation du monde, l'Église tout entière portant l'Évangile tout entier au monde tout entier »,[54] « l'Évangile doit être d'abord prêché dans toutes les nations ».[55] Le thème principal de la Déclaration de Lausanne souligne également cette orientation : que la Terre entende sa voix. Dans la même veine, le paragraphe 11 du Manifeste de Manille réserve une section pour encourager l'Église mondiale à s'impliquer dans l'évangélisation urbaine et rurale :

> les non évangélisés sont ceux qui n'ont qu'une connaissance très limitée de l'Évangile et n'ont jamais eu vraiment l'occasion de prendre position. Ils seraient sans doute faciles à atteindre si les chrétiens se donnaient la peine de se rendre dans la rue, sur la route, dans le village ou la ville d'à côté.[56]

L'Engagement du Cap comporte aussi des expressions qui mettent en évidence une approche qui combine l'évangélisation en milieu urbain et rural. On y lit : « nous sommes unis par notre expérience de la grâce de Dieu dans l'Évangile et par notre motivation à faire connaître l'Évangile de la grâce

[54] Premiere Congrès de Lausanne pour l'Évangélisation Mondiale, *La Déclaration de Lausanne*. Voir le paragraphe 6: « L'Église et l'évangélisation ». Disponible via ce lien, https://lausanne.org/fr/statement/la-declaration-de-lausanne

[55] Voir « Declaration de Wheaton 1966 », p. 248.

[56] Comité de Lausanne pour l'Évangélisation Mondiale, « Le Manifeste de Manille ».

jusqu'aux extrémités de la terre, par tous les moyens possibles » ;[57]; « Nous partageons la passion de Dieu pour son monde, nous aimons tout ce que Dieu a fait, nous nous réjouissons de la providence et de la justice de Dieu dans toute sa création, nous proclamons la bonne nouvelle à toute la création et à toutes les nations, et nous aspirons à voir se lever le jour où la terre sera remplie de la connaissance de la gloire de Dieu comme l'eau couvre le fond des mers ».[58]

À la lumière de ces affirmations, les responsables d'Églises devraient développer un modèle missionnaire articulant ces deux champs : la ville et le village. De leur côté, les facultés de théologie pourraient également envisager d'intégrer des cours sur la mission urbaine et la mission rurale dans leurs programmes. Ces cours prépareraient ainsi les étudiants en théologie à répondre aux enjeux et aux défis propres à l'évangélisation dans les contextes urbains comme ruraux.

Suggestions pratiques

Dans cette section nous ferons des suggestions pratiques qui pourront aider les responsables des Églises protestantes implantées dans les milieux ruraux de la RDC à améliorer la situation alarmante dans ces milieux.

Formation formelle et non formelle

Pour faciliter la formation formelle et non formelle des pasteurs et laïcs résidant dans les milieux ruraux, nous proposons à l'Église du Christ au Congo (ECC) et les organisations missionnaires locales :

- De multiplier les extensions de facultés de théologie basées dans les grandes villes de la RDC dans les milieux ruraux ;
- De former les pasteurs ruraux dans leur propre contexte. Pour ce faire, les instituts bibliques et les facultés de théologie de ces régions doivent être soutenus financièrement et matériellement par les agences missionnaires africaines, et les églises urbaines ;
- D'apporter un soutien financier aux pasteurs travaillant dans les zones rurales, car de nombreux pasteurs fuient les zones rurales à cause de la pauvreté.

La traduction et la diffusion de la Bible dans des langues africaines

Comme nous l'avons remarqué précédemment, il se développe un type de

[57] Troisième Congrès de Lausanne pour l'évangélisation mondiale, *L'Engagement du Cap : Une confession de foi et un appel à l'action*. Voir la première partie, section 8 : « nous aimons l'Évangile de Dieu ».

[58] Congrès de Lausanne, *L'Engagement du Cap*. Voir la première partie, section 7 : « nous aimons le monde de Dieu ».

protestantisme sans Bible dans les milieux ruraux des provinces du Kwilu, du Kwango et du Mai-Ndombe. Cela constitue un véritable obstacle à l'enracinement de la foi chrétienne et favorise le syncrétisme. De nombreux chrétiens n'ont donc pas accès à la parole de Dieu. Ils ont du mal à évaluer un phénomène culturel à la lumière de la parole divine. Comment pouvons-nous aider les chrétiens et les pasteurs de ces régions à méditer quotidiennement la parole de Dieu afin qu'ils trouvent la force et le réconfort dans les multiples épreuves auxquelles ils sont confrontés ? Comment pourraient-ils connaître la vérité de l'Évangile qui libère s'ils n'ont pas de Bible, surtout dans leur langue maternelle ?

L'un des éléments de réponse serait que les responsables influents des grandes Églises urbaines lancent un appel aux dons pour acheter des Bibles en kikongo, kiswahili, lingala, et kiluba, afin d'aider les chrétiens des zones rurales à avoir accès à la Parole de Dieu. Cela est une nécessité pressante pour mobiliser et encourager la mise en réseau des sociétés bibliques, des agences de traduction de la Bible, des médias, des facultés de théologie protestante et évangélique, des Églises et des sodalités engagées dans l'évangélisation et la formation des disciples, afin de faciliter la traduction et la diffusion de la littérature chrétienne dans les langues africaines, y compris la traduction de la Bible.

Conclusion

La vie de Jésus et de ses disciples fournit un modèle pour le ministère rural et urbain. Ce modèle démontre clairement l'amour de Dieu pour les personnes vivant dans ces deux milieux. Un chrétien qui ressemble à Jésus devrait aussi révéler son amour pour les populations rurales et urbaines. Les hommes et les femmes des milieux ruraux et urbains d'Afrique ont le potentiel de leadership pour transformer le monde par l'Évangile. Les responsables des Églises d'Afrique seraient bien avisés de ne pas les négliger lors de la sélection pour l'évangélisation dans leur propre contexte. L'Église du Christ du Congo (ECC) est appelée à mobiliser des personnes et des ressources pour atteindre les personnes oubliées dans les lieux oubliés.

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AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 251–270

Liberation Through Contextualization

African Women's Theology and the Trokosi *System within the Ewe Culture of Ghana*

Leopold GADAGOE

Global Theological Seminary, Accra, Ghana
leogagus@yahoo.com

Abstract

This article delves into African women's theologies, specifically analyzing the intersection of cultural practices and religious beliefs as exemplified by the *Trokosi* system among some Ewe people of Ghana, exploring how the *Trokosi* system reflects broader theological issues regarding creation and humanity within an African context, framed through biblical revelation. Recognizing African women's theologies as a dynamic and critical movement, this research advocates for a re-evaluation of both established church practices and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality. It posits African feminist cultural hermeneutic as a fundamental process through which the gospel can elevate and transform negative cultural phenomena, advocating for the promotion of cultural values that positively influence society while critically rejecting harmful narratives. However, it recognizes the importance of preserving certain cultural narratives integral to African and women's identities, resisting the notion of wholesale abandonment of cultural heritage. Drawing from the works of notable African women theologians, the study highlights the significance of women's experiences in shaping their theological perspectives and emphasizes the necessity of a partnership between men and women within the broader human community. Ultimately, the article calls for a renewed commitment to gendering contextualization, fostering inculturation that promotes justice, equality, and communal flourishing.

Résumé

Cet article se penche sur les théologies des femmes africaines, en analysant plus particulièrement l'intersection entre pratiques culturelles et croyances religieuses, illustrée par le système des « trokosi » pratiqué par une partie du peuple Éwé au Ghana. Il explore la manière dont ce système reflète des questions théologiques plus larges concernant la

Published with license by ACTEA | DOI: https://doi.org/10.69683/5gc8jt05
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création et l'humanité dans un contexte africain, et est cadré dans la perspective de la révélation biblique. Reconnaissant les théologies des femmes africaines comme un mouvement dynamique et critique, cette étude appelle à une réévaluation tant des pratiques ecclésiales établies que des normes culturelles qui perpétuent les inégalités entre les sexes. Il présente l'herméneutique culturelle féministe africaine comme un processus fondamental par lequel l'Évangile peut élever et transformer les phénomènes culturels négatifs, en plaidant pour la promotion de valeurs culturelles qui influencent positivement la société tout en rejetant de manière critique les récits nuisibles. Cependant, il reconnaît l'importance de préserver certains récits culturels indissociables des identités africaines et féminines, en s'opposant à l'idée d'un abandon total du patrimoine culturel. S'appuyant sur les travaux d'éminentes théologiennes africaines, l'étude met en lumière l'importance des expériences des femmes dans la construction de leurs perspectives théologiques et souligne la nécessité d'un partenariat entre hommes et femmes au sein de la communauté humaine au sens large. En fin de compte, l'article appelle à un engagement renouvelé en faveur d'une contextualisation genrée, afin de favoriser une inculturation qui promeuve la justice, l'égalité, et l'épanouissement de la communauté.

Resumo

Este artigo aborda as teologias das mulheres africanas, analisando, em particular, a interseção entre práticas culturais e crenças religiosas, ilustrada pelo sistema do *trokosi*, praticado por uma parte do povo Éwé no Gana. Explora a forma como este sistema reflete questões teológicas mais amplas relativas à criação e à humanidade num contexto africano, e é enquadrado na perspetiva da revelação bíblica. Reconhecendo as teologias das mulheres africanas como um movimento dinâmico e crítico, este estudo apela a uma reavaliação tanto das práticas eclesiais estabelecidas como das normas culturais que perpetuam as desigualdades de género. Apresenta a hermenêutica cultural feminista africana como um processo fundamental através do qual o Evangelho pode elevar e transformar fenómenos culturais negativos, defendendo a promoção de valores culturais que influenciam positivamente a sociedade, enquanto rejeita criticamente as narrativas prejudiciais. No entanto, reconhece a importância de preservar certas narrativas culturais indissociáveis das identidades africanas e femininas, opondo-se à ideia de um abandono total do património cultural. Baseando-se nos trabalhos de eminentes teólogas africanas, o estudo destaca a importância das experiências das mulheres na construção das suas perspetivas teológicas e sublinha a necessidade de uma parceria entre homens e mulheres no seio da comunidade humana em sentido lato. Em última análise, o artigo apela a um compromisso renovado a favor

de uma contextualização de género, a fim de favorecer uma inculturação que promova a justiça, a igualdade e o pleno desenvolvimento da comunidade.

Keywords

liberation, *Trokosi* system, contextualization, gender equality, inculturation, African women's theology, Ghana

Mots-clés

libération, système du *trokosi*, contextualisation, égalité entre les sexes, inculturation, théologie des femmes africaines, Ghana

Palavras-chave

libertação, sistema do *trokosi*, contextualização, igualdade de género, inculturação, teologia das mulheres africanas, Gana

Introduction

This study engages with the discourse of African women's theologies, focusing specifically on the cultural perceptions of women within the context of the *Trokosi* system practiced among certain Ewe communities in Ghana. *Trokosi* is a culturally rooted practice of gender-based servitude involving young girls in parts of the Volta Region of Ghana, perpetuated under the guise of atonement for family members' alleged crimes. *Trokosi*, meaning 'slave of the gods' in the Ewe language, is a traditional practice involving the involuntary servitude of virgin girls as atonement for relatives' sins. These girls, often prepubescent, are offered by their families to shrines to appease the gods' wrath and are subjected to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse by shrine officials.[1] This ritual predominantly affects young females, functioning under the guise of marriage to the gods.[2] This tradition perpetuates systemic gender inequality and social injustice. As a result, the study further seeks to critically analyze the intersection of indigenous religio-cultural practices and the role of women in these settings. Furthermore, the research delves into the theological implications of creation and humanity from an African perspective, contextualizing these themes within the framework of biblical revelation. Through this exploration, the work aims to contribute to a deeper

[1] D. Y. Dzansi and P. Biga, "Trokosi' - Slave of a Fetish: An Empirical Study," 2; G. K. Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana: An Introduction to Sociology*, 302–309.

[2] D. Y. Dzansi and P. Biga, "Trokosi' - Slave of a Fetish: An Empirical Study," 2; Victor Selorme Gedzi, Yunus Dumbe, and Gabriel Eshun, "Field of Power: A Religio-Cultural Analysis of Trokosi in Ghana," 125.

understanding of the complexities surrounding gender, culture, and theology in the African milieu.

As a dynamic, evolving, and diverse movement, African women's theologies represents a vital strand of African Christian theology, grounded in ongoing introspection and contextualization that spans both historical and prospective dimensions.[3] In recent years, there has been a growing call for theological perspectives that critically engage with the church and its established practices, fostering an environment in which the church can embody both prophetic witness and self-reflection. This emphasis on critical dialogue serves to illuminate the intersections of gender, culture, and faith, encouraging the church to confront its complexities and challenges while remaining responsive to the lived realities of women within African contexts.[4]

The objective of the gospel message should be to elevate, purify, and perfect cultural practices through the process of inculturation. Chibuko articulates that it is imperative that the gospel does not conform to negative cultural phenomena, but rather, these phenomena must be reframed in light of the gospel's transformative power.[5] In this context, African women are increasingly voicing their concerns regarding theological issues that directly impact their lives. Their multifaceted critique targets both patriarchal African theology and the entrenched patriarchal structures within African culture.[6] Within the framework of African women's theologies, Jesus is conceptualized as a Liberator who heralds a new era of favor — a transformative deliverance from subjugation, suffering, and human deprivation. This understanding positions the gospel as a catalyst for social and cultural renewal that honors the dignity of women and addresses the injustices they face.[7] In their engagement with inculturation, African women theologians are actively pursuing the concept of gender inculturation.[8] This process seeks to integrate women's cultural experiences and a commitment to their emancipation into the broader framework of inculturation. Gendering inculturation entails a strategic and sociocultural understanding of women as a distinct group, thereby

[3] Tinyiko Maluleke, "Half A Century of African Christian Theologies," 85.

[4] Maluleke, "Half A Century of African Christian Theologies," 89–91.

[5] Dieudonnë Ngona, "Inculturation as a Face of African Theology Today," 147; citing Patrick C. Chibuko, "Inculturation as a Method of Evangelization in the Light of the African Synod," *Journal of Inculturation Theology* 3, no.1 (1996): 34.

[6] Maluleke, "Half A Century of African Christian Theologies," 105-106.

[7] Laurenti Magesa, "Christ the Liberator and Africa Today," 47.

[8] Loreen Maseno. "Gendering Inculturation in Africa: A Discussion of three African women theologians' entry into the inculturation scene," 226

highlighting the importance of their unique perspectives and contributions within the theological discourse.[9]

African women's theologies underscore the essential unity of men and women within the human community, emphasizing the necessity of fostering healthy partnerships for achieving a fulfilled life. As articulated by Phiri and Nadar, women's lived experiences play a crucial role in shaping their theological perspectives; these experiences are profoundly influenced by the sociocultural contexts in which women operate. This focus highlights the community's cohesion as a collective of both male and female individuals. Furthermore, African women's theologies prioritize experience as a foundational element of their theological framework, acknowledging the significant impact of cultural, gender, ethnic, and class contexts on their understanding of God and faith.[10] This approach also recognizes that theology is fundamentally rooted in culture, thereby calling for a holistic appreciation of the interplay between culture and theological development.

Oduyoye, as referenced by Phiri and Nadar, posits that feminist cultural hermeneutics serves as a vital tool for African women theologians in the analysis of biblical practices alongside the diverse cultural landscapes that constitute Africa. African women are actively developing cultural hermeneutics to appropriate their religio-cultural heritage as a resource for articulating an understanding of God's will and the essence of women's humanity. This initiative emphasizes that cultural hermeneutics advocates for critique from within the cultural context rather than imposing external perspectives. Consequently, African women theologians have utilized cultural hermeneutics to engage critically with various African cultural issues, including sexuality, and prevailing cultural norms such as *Trokosi*, thereby fostering a theological discourse that is both contextually relevant and transformative.[11]

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, library-based approach complemented by the researcher's experiential engagement with Ewe culture, aiming to explore the intersection of African women's theologies, cultural perceptions of women, and the practice of *Trokosi*. Using a descriptive and analytical approach, the study examines gender discrimination and contextual theology to critique cultural practices affecting human dignity and social justice. Guided by a feminist framework, it seeks to document women's

[9] Maseno, "Gendering Inculturation in Africa," 226.

[10] See Isabel Apawu Phiri and Nadar, Sarojini, "African Women's Theologies," 90–91.

[11] See Phiri and Nadar, "African Women's Theologies," 94–95.

experiences and advocate for their liberation and human flourishing. The research critically analyzes indigenous religio-cultural practices like *Trokosi* through African women's theological perspectives, emphasizing liberation, inculturation, and gender justice. It challenges traditions that cause unnecessary suffering, promoting theological engagement aimed at transformative societal change. By integrating feminist and cultural hermeneutics, the study interprets biblical and cultural narratives from within the African context, fostering dialogue that affirms women's dignity and advocates for social justice and cultural renewal.

Transforming Cultural Discourse and Societal Relationships through African Women's Theologies

African women's theologies are actively reshaping the cultural discourse by emphasizing the liberative dimensions of their cultural heritage while rejecting oppressive elements. Their evaluations are grounded in the principle of abundant life, advocating for flourishing relationships that encompass both genders. African women's theologies seek societal transformation by prioritizing life-enhancing connections and social cohesion. Positioned within the broader context of liberation theologies, they aim to awaken communities to the realities of systemic oppression and inspire collective change.[12]

Restoring Dignity and Equality in Communities

The primary objective of African women's theologies is to rediscover and uphold the dignity and respect inherent in humanity. The African women's theological framework identifies that many women are marginalized within male-dominated structures and systems, which effectively strip them of their dignity, respect, and full participation in both religious and societal spheres. With a consciousness oriented toward liberation, these women critically examine and challenge established power structures. They strive for the creation of renewed communities and relationships wherein which men and women engage with one another in a spirit of mutual respect and dignity, thus realizing the liberating promise of God in their collective lives.[13]

Biblical Empowerment and Cultural Critique

African women's theologies engage deeply with the biblical text, frequently invoking Scripture in discussions that intersect with African cultures and religious practices, particularly given the notable parallels with

[12] See Phiri and Nadar, "African Women's Theologies," 95–96.

[13] Esther Mombo, "Doing Theology from the Perspective of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians," 93.

Old Testament societies. In this context, African women theologians critique the oversimplified and naive defenses of traditional customs such as menstruation, polygamy, inheritance, and notions of purity that are prevalent within their communities, juxtaposing these practices against biblical texts.[14] Consequently, they challenge the uncritical parallels that are commonly drawn between biblical culture and African cultural norms, particularly in relation to women's roles and status. A significant narrative in this discourse is the story of Jairus's daughter being raised from the dead, as recounted in the Gospel of Mark (5:21-42). This story serves as a powerful emblem for African women's aspirations for emancipation from oppression. Reflecting this theological engagement, the Talitha Qumi Centre in Legon, Ghana, stands as a vital institution within African women's theologies, named to honor the liberative message inherent in this biblical account and to promote the dignity and agency of women within both religious and cultural contexts.[15]

Christology: Liberation and Dignity for Women

African women's theologies adopt a nuanced understanding of Jesus Christ as the intimate friend and Savior of believers, in direct opposition to interpretations that associate Christ with the political, social, and cultural subjugation of women. African women theologians assert that Jesus desires to engage with them on a deeply personal level, recognizing and affirming their dignity as they are. They embrace Christ as the one who brings comfort to the lonely and provides healing for both physical and spiritual afflictions, asserting that his mission includes liberating them from all forms of oppression[16] — including cultural practices as *Trokosi*.

Moreover, another prominent representation of Christ within African women's theologies is that of Jesus as the source of the Spirit and the empowering force of God, who imparts this power to his followers. This portrayal resonates particularly within African Independent Churches, where women and other marginalized groups constitute a considerable demographic of believers. Within this framework of "pneumatic christology," Christ is conceptualized as the voice of the voiceless and the strength of the powerless, providing an essential resource for women who traditionally face marginalization and silencing in societal contexts. In this light, Jesus is also perceived as a revolutionary prophet who confronts the status quo, advocating for the dismantling of social injustices and the marginalization of individuals. For Christ to hold significance in the liberation struggles of women, he must

[14] Phiri and Nadar, "African Women's Theologies," 98.

[15] Phiri and Nadar, "African Women's Theologies," 98.

[16] Teresa M. Hinga, "Jesus Christ and the Liberation of Women in Africa," 190.

be understood as a tangible and relatable figure, one who advocates for the oppressed and provides them with hope, resilience, and the empowerment to assert their voices. Consequently, African women are called to critically examine and reject interpretations of christology that perpetuate gender inequality, thereby enabling them to advocate effectively for their liberation and to affirm Christ as their true liberator.[17]

Furthermore, an integrated holistic view of life, rooted in the African cosmological perspective, is essential for the construction of an African christology that reflects the totality of existence. In this context, Christ is perceived as the sustainer of life, particularly for vulnerable populations. Thus, the poor, weak, oppressed, and marginalized are seen as the recipients of Jesus's compassionate motherhood, manifesting through his provision of sustenance, safety, and care. In their christological reflections, African women experience Christ as an empathetic companion who supports them in their experiences of pain, loneliness, and suffering, rendering this understanding central to their theological discourse.[18]

Misinterpretations: Religion and Culture's Role in Oppression

Women's oppression is attributed to philosophical arguments, superstitious cultural myths, and man-made traditions lacking empirical evidence and exhibiting a lack of critical thought. The foundation of these behaviors is the historical respect and veneration of religious and theological "truths" as infallible and unquestionable. However, since humans are mortal, they are prone to mistakes in reasoning and beliefs. This explains why the late Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) was forced to issue a historic apology to women for the centuries of offensive and oppressive treatment they endured at the hands of the Church due to incorrect interpretations of biblical gender-related constructive texts that were motivated by dogma, particularly the "submission clause"[19] (Ephesians 5:22). In the same way that the Church has been prone to error and been guilty of using misinterpreted scriptures to support institutional and societal denials of women's rights, scholars and gender rights activists contend that certain African cultural practices, including *Trokosi*, perpetuate the oppression of women through exploitative customs and traditions rooted in traditional beliefs. Maduabuchi Dukor claims that male guardians of customs did not see fit to shield women from needless harm and gender-based oppression despite African theistic humanism's rich ontological

[17] Hinga, "Jesus Christ and the Liberation of Women in Africa," 191–192.

[18] Maseno, "Gendering Inculturation in Africa," 230–231.

[19] Ani Casimir, Matthew C. Chukwuelobe, and Collins Ugwu, "The Church and Gender Equality in Africa: Questioning Culture and the Theological Paradigm on Women Oppression," 166–167.

and cosmological system of values that has a healthy balance of respect and recognition of the mutual equality of the two sexes. [20] One can effectively blame misinterpretation of biblical and African cosmological values as a significant factor in centuries-long oppression and maltreatment against women in Africa.[21] It is worth noting that, the scriptural passages that are used to defend injustice and inequality are not divine decrees, but rather human interpretations of culture that fall short of theological laws and God's truths.[22] This raises the question of why women predominantly bear the brunt of cultural exploitation.

Women continue to be clients in churches, just as they were in traditional society's shrines, thanks to a predominately male ideology. Women are still marginalized and oppressed because patriarchal ideology defines them as inferior. Male domination and female subservience in the church and society are the results of the ensuing unequal gender relations.[23] In African societies, traditional gender roles are often governed by a patriarchal system, with men as the dominant and women as secondary, aiming to complement the roles of men. Men are often not seen as complementing women, leading to a problematic one-sided notion of complementarity, where women are seen as existing for men rather than as human beings in their own rights.[24]

Equity in Spirituality: Reinterpreting Gender Roles

Many Bible passages suppressing women are descriptive, not divine instructions. Therefore, reinterpreting them in line with Christ's life-giving good news is very essential. It is worth noting that the "submission" clause in Ephesians 5:21–33, which is often invoked to support a woman's submission and subordination to a man in marriage, should be interpreted as a reciprocal submission from both sexes to one another out of respect for Christ. The passage in Ephessians 5 highlights mutual submission as a reciprocal dynamic rooted in the Spirit, challenging traditional hierarchical interpretations of gender roles. Instead of dominance, the passage underscores shared willingness to serve and honor one another out of reverence for Christ. This biblical emphasis on cooperation and mutual care affirms the complementarity of male and female roles, emphasizing their equal dignity and distinct but harmonious functions within marriage and community life.[25] African cultural

[20] Casimir, Chukwuelobe, and Ugwu, "The Church and Gender Equality in Africa," 167.

[21] Casimir, Chukwuelobe, and Ugwu, "The Church and Gender Equality in Africa," 167.

[22] Casimir, Chukwuelobe, and Ugwu, "The Church and Gender Equality in Africa," 167.

[23] Philomena Njeri Mwaura, "Gender and Power In African Christianity," 412.

[24] Casimir, Chukwuelobe, and Ugwu, "The Church and Gender Equality in Africa," 170.

[25] Joshua Robert Barron, "Mutual Submission, Mutual Respect: Reciprocal *Enkanyit* in Ephesians 5 in the Maasai Context, " 13–15.

values encourage collaboration rather than confrontational behavior. However, patriarchal authority's misinterpretation of women's respect has led to gender gaps and distortions in African cosmology and ontology. Within the cultural patriarchy of power, gender injustice and inequality have taken the form of privileges and power structures in Africa.[26] Wifely 'submission' should be understood as a Spirit-led relational posture rooted in Christian love that takes place in the context of *mutual submisison* between husband and wife, not as justification for silence amid violence or abuse. The passage's ethical core demands prioritizing safety, truth, accountability, and justice over any interpretation that condones harmful control.[27] Owusu-Gyamfi asserts that a good understanding of Akan religion and culture demonstrates that women are equally capable of achieving spirituality as men, and in certain instances, even more so than men. He maintains that the degree to which a person is predisposed to the *sunsum* (the spirit) determines their level of spirituality among the Akan, which is not limited to any particular gender. *Sunsum* is a gift from God and gender is not determined by a person's *sunsum*; it lacks a gender identity in the Akan culture. Men act as conduits for transmission *sunsum* because, according to scientific observations, during sexual activity, women release the ovum while men release the sperm. Therefore, *sunsum* is not male; it is a spirit. By this logic, it's critical that Christian communities strive for a gender-neutral shared understanding of spirituality.[28]

A Critical Examination of the Cultural System among the Ewe People of the Volta Region of Ghana: Implications for Women's Rights

A cursory look at the *Trokosi* cultural system among some Ewe people of the Volta Region of Ghana as a case study of religious and cultural practices with negative implications for women. *Trokosi* is a religio-cultural practice which serves as reparation or redemption for crime. It is a system where virgins are sent to the shrine to atone for the crime/offence of a family members as a way of appeasing the wrath of the gods. The system is rooted in the Ewe traditional concept of *vordede da* (removal of sin or atonement), which involves the shedding of blood or sacrifice as an atonement for an offence. Among the communities that observe this practice, it is believed that severe sins provoke divine retribution, often manifesting as calamities affecting family members. To atone, the family may be instructed by shrine priests to offer a virgin to the deity, initiating her into the *Trokosi* system. The *Trokosi*

[26] Casimir, Chukwuelobe, and Ugwu, "The Church and Gender Equality in Africa," 172.

[27] Theodore U. Dickson et al., "Re-Reading 'Submit' in Ephesians 5:21–24: A Biblical-Theological and Afrocentric Exegetical Study of Hypotassō," 10–11.

[28] See Clifford Owusu-Gyamfi, "Cultural Exegesis of Female Spirituality among the Akan People of Ghana," 128–131.

serves at the shrine, often becoming a sexual partner to the priest, and remains in this servitude for years or lifelong. In extreme cases, successive replacements may be required even after the *Trokosi*'s death, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation.[29] This practice negatively impacts women's human rights, perpetuating gender inequality and abuse, and the autonomy and well-being of women within these communities.

The *Trokosi* System and Crime/Sin

In Ewe culture, acts such as theft or murder require atonement through ritual cleansing involving the sacrificial shedding of animal blood. The offender typically provides the sacrificial animal, and a priest or representative performs the sacrifice to expiate the offense, thereby restoring spiritual harmony and communal integrity. Conversely, the *Trokosi* system differs in its ritual practice; it involves dedicating a virgin girl to a deity's shrine as a form of atonement for crimes committed by her kin. Here, "virgin" generally denotes a female who has not engaged in penile-vaginal intercourse. In many African societies, female virginity symbolizes respect and honor, prompting ceremonies that celebrate adolescent girls who remain abstinent prior to marriage. This system underscores complex cultural notions of purity, atonement, and social virtue.[30] The sacrificial virgin is usually referred to as *Trokosi*. The term *Trokosi* is derived from two Ewe words: *tro* (a god/gods) and *kosi* (servant or slave). *Trokosi* literally means slave or servant of the gods. In some contexts it is interpreted to mean 'wife of the gods'. The word implies that the girl child who may usually not be above the age of puberty becomes a slave/servant of the gods.[31] These girls are effectively enslaved under the guise of preventing communal disasters allegedly resulting from the offenses committed by their family members.[32] In customary practice, victims of offenses seek justice by consulting a shrine believed to possess the power to reveal the offender's identity. Consequently, the accused's family may endure loss of family member through death until they are compelled to offer a female relative, typically a young virgin girl — as a servant (*kosi*) to the deity. This girl resides within the shrine and serves the deity for a duration determined by the priest, serving as atonement for the alleged offense.[33] The priest arbitrates the atonement period, which may be perpetual or fixed; some demand lifelong atonement for offenses, while others assign specific durations depending on

[29] Dzansi and Biga, "Trokosi' — Slave of a Fetish," 3.

[30] See Emmanuel Sarpong Owusu, "The Superstition That Enslaves Virgin Girls in Ghana: An Exploration of the Origins, Evolution, and Practice of Trokosi." 3.

[31] Gedzi, Dumbe, and Eshun, "Field of Power," 125.

[32] Owusu, "The Superstition That Enslaves Virgin Girls in Ghana," 2.

[33] Mawuli Nyador, "Christian Engagement with Ewe Culture in Ghana: A Dialogue," 172

the nature of the crime.[34] After her service ends, the *Trokosi* is reintegrated into her family but typically participates in annual cleansing festivals. Post-liberation, societal discrimination persists due to shrine associations, and having children often exacerbates social marginalization and hinders full societal integration.[35]

Dzansi and Biga, agreeing with Nukunya, characterize shrine life as arduous, marked by numerous taboos, restrictions, and directives. *Trokosi* individuals serve the priest without compensation, are restricted from leaving the shrine, and may only engage in sexual relations with the priest. Punishments, including denial of food and whipping, are imposed for offenses such as refusing sex, quarreling, unauthorized errands, absconding, or consuming farm produce without permission, reflecting the oppressive conditions and enforced confinement inherent in their service.[36] Dzansi, citing International Needs Ghana (2007), emphasizes that the *Trokosi* system infringes on fundamental human rights, manifesting in gender discrimination predominantly against women, physical and sexual abuse, forced sexual relations with priests, child neglect, and restrictions on education, thereby restricting religious freedom.[37] This practice subjects unwilling young girls to servitude for others' sins, undermining their self-worth and self-esteem, often resulting in suicidal ideation. It perpetuates marginalization and dehumanization, portraying young virgins as slaves dedicated to divine entities, reflecting severe human rights violations.[38]

Gedzi et al. note that the *Trokosi* institution is seen as a religio-cultural method of crime prevention[39] and explain that this practice seems to imply that because culture and religion are inherited conceptions of reality, they could be used as a weapon to exploit the weaker person if they are not properly understood.[40] Crimes that are considered repugnant by gods and subject to payment with a virgin girl include theft, adultery, murder, and having sex with a *Trokosi*.[41] However, according to Gedzi et al., adherents of *Trokosi* are led to

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[34] See Owusu, "The Superstition That Enslaves Virgin Girls in Ghana," 13.

[35] Nyador, "Christian Engagement with Ewe Culture in Ghana," 172.

[36] Dzansi and Biga, "Trokosi' — Slave of a Fetish," 3.

[37] Dzansi and Biga, "Trokosi' — Slave of a Fetish," 3; citing "International Needs Ghana (2007)."

[38] Dzansi and Biga, "Trokosi' — Slave of a Fetish,", 3–4.

[39] Gedzi, Dumbe, and Eshun, "Field of Power," 123; citing Chris Abotchie, *Social Control in Traditional Southern Eweland of Ghana: Relevance for Modern Crime Prevention* (Accra: University of Ghana Press, 1997), 123.

[40] Gedzi, Dumbe, and Eshun, "Field of Power," 123.

[41] Gedzi, Dumbe, and Eshun, "Field of Power," 123; citing Abayie B. Boaten, "The *Trokosi* System in Ghana: Discrimination Against Women and Children," chapter 5 in *African*

believe that having sex with a priest is akin to copulating with the gods themselves because the priest's genital organ has been dedicated to the deity. Thus, it is believed that sex with the priest is sacred as the *Trokosi* are in the shrine under the guise of serving the gods. This demonstrates how religious belief can be manipulated to justify the deeds and inactions of religious officials. As to why only girls are kept in the shrine as *Trokosi*, a priest indicated that "boys have the tendency to be stubborn and rebellious."[42]

It is worth noting that the girls are neither kidnapped nor abducted; rather, they are guilt-trapped by their family who believe that such a sacrifice is necessary to atone and avert further misfortune.[43] Gedzi et al. assert that the *Trokosi* system violates the fundamental human rights of women and girls, perpetuated by deeply rooted traditional, religious, and cultural beliefs. Historically, men have held dominant roles within the system, including that of the priest, reinforcing the intersection of religion and patriarchy as mechanisms of female subjugation. It can be argued that if religious constructs did not instill the belief that their circumstances were divinely ordained, women and girls might be less inclined to accept their enslaving conditions. Consequently, entrenched power dynamics within cultural and religious frameworks serve as primary drivers of the systemic enslavement and subjugation of females in the *Trokosi* system.[44]

Religio-Cultural Dimension of *Trokosi* and Power Dynamics

Given that *Trokosi* is an attempt by humans to explain the divine, it is possible for the concept to be interpreted incorrectly in order to achieve a number of goals.[45] The fundamental idea driving this practice is the idea that women are weaker than men. Therefore, male hegemony is created by taking advantage of this weakness. The religio-cultural ideology that views women's contributions in any way as inferior to those of men is responsible for this manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women in society. This perception appears to explain why parents or families would rather have their daughters serve as religious slaves in a shrine in order to atone for the crime of a family member who presumably is a male. In this way,

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Women and Children: Crisis and Responses, ed. Apollo Rwomire, 91–104 (Westport, Connecticut, USA: Praeger, 2001).

[42] Gedzi, Dumbe, and Eshun, "Field of Power," 130.

[43] Gedzi, Dumbe, and Eshun, "Field of Power," 125.

[44] See Gedzi, Dumbe, and Eshun, "Field of Power," 123–124; citing Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "'Home Life,' c. 1875," Document 10 in *The Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony Reader: Correspondence, Writings and Speeches*, revised edition, ed. Ellen Carol Dubois, 131–138 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 136

[45] Gedzi, Dumbe, and Eshun, "Field of Power," 130.

women are viewed as expendable and find fulfillment only through relationships with men, whereas men are socially protected to grow and realize their potential. This bias tends to both elevate maleness and devalue femaleness. This devaluation prevents women from serving as priestesses or other ritual functionaries to the *Trokosi* god, the force behind the *Trokosi* system and practice. However, by serving the institution that enslaves them through daily chores and other productive and reproductive activities at the shrine, girls and women paradoxically maintain the *Trokosi* system through submissiveness and toleration.[46] Fear keeps the *Trokosi* institution alive. Consequently, this inspires stories about what the gods have done and can do to people who disobey their commands. There are tales of *Trokosi* girls who fled from shrines to their parents' houses, only to be turned back for fear of the wrath of the gods.[47]

Implications for Theological and Doctrinal Development (Equality)

Biblical verses that affirm gender equity and African cultural values are comparable. Thus, the fundamental cause of the religio-cultural distortion of cultural and religious values is therefore the role of patriarchy and traditional authority that is driven by power.[48] African women theologians believe the women's struggles are largely influenced by religion and, therefore, they attempt to find solutions using religion, particularly by means of reinterpretation of scriptures and cultural values with religious undertones. Women believe that in the family, in society, and in the church, they are hidden, made invisible, imprisoned, exploited, neglected, and undervalued. Social structures are at the core of the predicament facing African women. The root of female subjugation is patriarchy. It describes women as lesser than men hence under the control of male authority. The female is subsumed by male force, which also establishes the roles that women should, and should, not play.[49] Therefore, the need to review the social structures to reflect the needs of women and social equality.

Creation, Gender Equity, and African Women's Theologies

As complementary and interdependent entities made in God's image and likeness, male and female are essential to the survival of humanity. That being said, God made both males and females in order for them to reflect God's

[46] See Gedzi, Dumbe, and Eshun, "Field of Power," 133.

[47] Gedzi, Dumbe, and Eshun, "Field of Power," 134.

[48] Casimir, Chukwuelobe, and Ugwu, "The Church and Gender Equality in Africa," 171.

[49] Ogbu Kalu, *Power, Poverty, and Prayer: The Challenges of Poverty and Pluralism in African Christianity, 1960-1996*, 8–10.

image throughout creation. Jesus Christ himself advocated for gender equality and emphasized that humans were created in both male and female genders from the beginning[50] (ref. Matt 19: 3–10 and Gen 1: 27–30).

It is critical to discuss equal opportunities for men and women in the socioeconomic, cultural, political, and religious spheres of human relationships and activities. The biblical basis for gender equality, according to Casimir et al., is the fact that men and women are created equally in God's image:[51]

> Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over . . . .' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen 1:26–27, ESV)

Interpretions of this translation of Genesis 1:26 as indicating that God designated man to rule over woman presume a predetermined hierarchical role, reinforcing female subservience. However, this interpretation overlooks the semantic scope of the noun (man), which can denote 'humanity' rather than a specifically masculine 'man.' This study proposes an alternative reading that correctly interprets *man* as 'humanity,'[52] thereby challenging traditional gendered implications and emphasizing a more inclusive understanding of the text. The biblical idea of "woman" as a helpmate for "man" comes from interpreting the second creation story badly:

> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." . . . And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. (Gen 2:18, 21–22, ESV)

The rib, which originally served as a symbol of unity, eventually turned into an instrument of oppression. The realization of gender equality in the church and in society will continue to be hampered as long as this idea of the "helper" is misunderstood. The idea is not just a "helper" but "helper fit for him" or "suitable for him".[53] The woman's creation from Adam's side signifies equality

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[50] Casimir, Chukwuelobe, and Ugwu, "The Church and Gender Equality in Africa," 172; citing Rose Uchem, *Gender Equity from a Christian Perspective* (Enugu, Nigeria: SNAAP Press, 2005).

[51] Casimir, Chukwuelobe, and Ugwu, "The Church and Gender Equality in Africa," 170; citing Uchem, *Gender Equity from a Christian Perspective,* 48–49.

[52] The Hebrew term *adam* properly means 'human person' or 'humanity'. Thus the NLT helpfully translates *adam* in this passage as "human beings" and the NET as "humankind."

[53] While the concept of a "suitable helper" denotes complementarity without implying inferiority, the common interpretation of "helper" in contemporary contexts often suggests subservience. Scripture, however, consistently refers to God as *helper* (e.g., Psalm 33:20; 115:9-11; Exodus 18:4), indicating that to be a helper embodies a divine attribute.

and shared being, not inferiority. Scripture emphasizes mutual dependence and relationship, with differentiation serving to address loneliness and foster completeness, love, companionship, and joy in human life.[54] The logical fallacies of translating symbol and allegory, which should communicate the equal sense of two companions meant to support each other in order to sustain God's creation on earth, lead to either male or female superiority.[55] Men's superiority and the power monopoly that allows them to perpetuate injustice and inequality must be challenged by both men and women in order to end gender inequality.[56] Religious and cultural equity allows women to experience the liberating power of Christ and reflect the originality of God's intentions for humanity. The African women theologians' agenda does, however, have three objectives. First, it encourages women to first pursue their right to serve in the church and in society. In response to oppressive acts, the second objective seeks a different kind of discourse that free women from their subjugation, and the third fosters a spirituality that fuels act of transformation and strives for justice and human liberation.[57]

Significance of the Trends to Global Theology

Africa has an obligation to address the growing gender inequality in Africa and around the world by applying this reconstructed gender philosophy under Africa women's theologies. Thereby, repositioning Church and culture to redraw their gender doctrines, drawing on the errors and mistakes of the past that disadvantage the female sex. This deprivation denies them of fully exercising their God-given talents and abilities, as well as depriving creation and humanity of reaping the benefits from their divine potentials. Consequently, theistic humanism, which creates new fundamental values that uphold women's equality in African gender consciousness and acknowledge their worth, honor, dignity, and capacity for self-determination, is the answer.[58]

There is a need to critically look at religious teaching and values in a way that reflects their true meaning rather than a lopsided translation that

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Consequently, men and women share the same divine qualities, affirming equality in divine nature. On the proper interpretation of the term *ēzer* ('helper') and the phrase *ēzer k'negdō* ('suitable helper' or 'corresponding helper') in the Creation account in Genesis, see Michael L. Rosenzweig, "A Helper Equal to Him."

[54] John Samuel Pobee, "In His Own Image . . . Male and Female He Created Them," 14–15.

[55] See Casimir, Chukwuelobe, and Ugwu, "The Church and Gender Equality in Africa," 170–171.

[56] See Casimir, Chukwuelobe, and Ugwu, "The Church and Gender Equality in Africa," 172.

[57] Kalu, *Power, Poverty, and Prayer*, 11.

[58] See Casimir, Chukwuelobe, and Ugwu, "The Church and Gender Equality in Africa," 169.

disadvantages one particular sex. What is good for one sex is equally good for the other. Therefore, equity and fairness should be the hallmarks of religio-cultural practices everywhere, including in Africa. Humanity can only thrive if all of God's gifts are harnessed. Every individual, irrespective of sex, must be allowed to develop and manifest their full potential. By so doing, there is variety and complementarity of ability and potential for human enhancement. At creation, God saw the need for complementary abilities and roles; therefore, God decided to create men and women as companions for each other so that they could complement each other and thus reach their full potential.

Conclusion

The correct translation and reconstruction of the theological and cultural errors present in various African religions and societies should be the first step toward the genuine empowerment of women in Africa, including marginalized groups such as *Trokosi*. Particularly, Christian interpretations of biblical verses historically invoked to justify the mistreatment of women and practices like *Trokosi* must be reevaluated through a new hermeneutical lens. A paradigm shift toward viewing the Bible as a theistically whole and beneficial message for all, men and women alike, should be guided by emerging gender theology. This approach aims to foster a contemporary African gender theology that advocates for feminine justice and equality, recognizing women and men as God's created companions working together to improve Africa and the wider world. To realize Africa's cultural and theological potential, men and women must unite their resources and energies based on equality and mutual respect. Women's vital role in African and global societies underscores the importance of understanding their spirituality within nation-building, the church, and societal development. Recognizing that culture is dynamic and subject to change, careful contextual analysis of cultural beliefs such as those underpinning practices like *Trokosi*, can help mitigate negative attitudes and promote positive transformation over time. The Church must further deepen its mission work by employing biblical theology as a liberating force for marginalized groups, such as the *Trokosi*. This approach seeks to empower individuals to realize their God-given potentials, fostering human flourishing and societal transformation.

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AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 271–285

Reading the Eschatology of 1 Peter with African Help

John S. Mbiti's Contribution [1]

Grant LeMARQUAND

Innisfail, Alberta, Canada;
Anglican Church of the Horn of Africa [2]
bishopgrant777@gmail.com

Abstract

After a brief review of modern African scholarship on 1 Peter, this essay turns to the work of African New Testament scholar John S. Mbiti whose seminal work engaging the issue of New Testament eschatology from an African perspective has had a wide influence on biblical interpretation in Africa. This essay does not attempt to analyze the entirety of Mbiti's work on eschatology, but only his thoughts on 1 Peter — especially that Christ is Lord of all (including the unseen world) and that salvation is a corporate, not merely an individual, reality. Sadly, Mbiti less helpful in his assertion that the resurrection is a non-physical reality.

Résumé

Après un bref examen de l'érudition africaine moderne sur 1 Pierre, cet essai se tourne vers l'œuvre du spécialiste africain du Nouveau Testament John S. Mbiti, dont le travail fondateur abordant la question de l'eschatologie du Nouveau Testament à partir d'une perspective africaine a eu une grande influence sur l'interprétation biblique en Afrique. Cet essai ne cherche pas à analyser l'ensemble de l'œuvre de Mbiti sur l'éschatologie, mais seulement ses réflexions sur 1 Pierre — en particulier, que Christ est le Seigneur de tout (y compris le monde

[1] Thanks go to Abeneazer Urga for suggesting this topic. Urga and his colleagues Ed Smither and Jessie Udall enlisted me to contribute an essay on "Eschatology and Mission in 1 Peter," now pages 79–96 in *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message, and Methods of 1 Peter*. Abeneazer suggested continuing my work on eschatology and 1 Peter by examining John Mbiti's contribution to the discussion.

[2] Editor's note: The author is Professor Emeritus at Trinity Anglican Seminary, Ambridge, Pennsylvania, USA, and retired Anglican Bishop of the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia), in which role he served from 2012–2018.

Published with license by ACTEA | DOI: https://doi.org/10.69683/csn67z87
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invisible) et que le salut est une réalité collective, et non pas seulement individuelle. Malheureusement, Mbiti est moins convaincant dans son affirmation que la résurrection est une réalité non physique.

Resumo

Após uma breve análise da investigação académica africana moderna sobre 1ª de Pedro, este ensaio centra-se na obra do especialista africano no Novo Testamento John S. Mbiti, cujo trabalho pioneiro — que aborda a questão da escatologia do Novo Testamento a partir de uma perspetiva africana — teve uma grande influência na interpretação bíblica em África. Este ensaio não pretende analisar a totalidade da obra de Mbiti sobre a escatologia, mas apenas as suas reflexões sobre 1ª de Pedro — em particular, que Cristo é o Senhor de tudo (incluindo o mundo invisível) e que a salvação é uma realidade coletiva, e não apenas individual. Infelizmente, Mbiti é menos convincente na sua afirmação de que a ressurreição é uma realidade não física.

Keywords

eschatology, 1 Peter, John S. Mbiti, African hermeneutics, New Testament

Mots-clés

eschatologie, 1 Pierre, John S. Mbiti, herméneutique africaine, Nouveau Testament

Palavras-chave

escatologia, 1ª de Pedro, John S. Mbiti, hermenêutica africana, Novo Testamento

Introduction

In the 1990s I began serious research on modern African readings of scripture. Having taught in Kenya for several years, the approach to the Bible taken by my African students impressed me in three ways. First, contrary to most of the historical-critical readers that I had studied under, these students had a trust in scripture. There was very little hermeneutic of suspicion.[3] Second, my students found that the story of the Bible had many cultural points of contact with their own African cultures. Third, they were less interested in the original context of a biblical passage (although they did find background information

[3] There are now, of course, many African biblical scholars who are suspicious, not only of Western interpretation, but of the text itself.

interesting), than they were in their own present context: they wanted to know how a passage could be useful in their African worlds.

Returning to Canada to do doctoral work in New Testament I discovered that although I had left Africa, Africa had not left me. In the end my doctoral thesis was a study comparing how African scholars and Western scholars approached the same biblical text.[4] In order to prepare for my thesis I needed to find a text that had been studied by a significant number of African readers. For the purposes of this essay, one important finding of my bibliographical search was the discovery that some parts of the canon were studied much more than some other parts. As far as the New Testament was concerned, the Synoptics Gospel, Acts, and Paul received the most attention. This is perhaps unsurprising. Up until the year 2000 1 Peter was not well represented.[5] Even in the Western world, 1 Peter has sometimes been neglected. In 1976, John H. Elliott called 1 Peter an "exegetical step-child."[6] That was some time ago, however. 1 Peter has received abundant attention by Western scholars in recent years.

In Africa, as well, 1 Peter has received sustained attention only in recent times. Of the works I have been able to uncover, the vast majority were penned after the turn of the present millennium. Interestingly, African writers have put Peter's first letter to a variety of uses. Grace Enemi, in 1985, uses the passage about the church as a new temple built with living stones to remind readers that women also are members of that new community.[7] In the late 1980s, Anglican bishop (later archbishop) David Gitari, at the time a rather fierce opponent of the Moi government in Kenya, expounded 1 Peter in order to remind parliament of their God-given responsibilities.[8] Since the year 2000, African publications on 1 Peter have increased substantially. Beginning in 2004 Stephen Ayodeji A. Fagbemi, now an Anglican bishop in Nigeria, has published several works using 1 Peter to encourage the Christian community of Nigeria to live their lives in ways that reflect their commitment to Christ.[9] In 2006 Sicily Mbura Muriithi contributed the notes on 1 Peter to the *Africa Bible Commentary*; these

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[4] Published as *An Issue of Relevance: A Comparative Study of the Story of the Bleeding Woman (Mk 5: 25–34; Mt 9:20–22; Lk 8:43–48) in North Atlantic and African Contexts*.

[5] See Grant LEMARQUAND, "Bibliography of the Bible in Africa."

[6] John H. ELLIOTT, "The Rehabilitation of an Exegetical Step-Child: 1 Peter in Recent Research."

[7] Grace ENEME, "Living Stones. Bible Study on 1 Peter 2:4–10;" reprinted as "Living Stones."

[8] David M. GITARI, "Duties of the State and Obligations of Citizens: 1 Peter 2:13–17," 91–96.

[9] Stephen Ayodeji A. FAGBEMI,"The Identity of the Elect in 1 Peter," 367–80; FAGBEMI, *Who Are the Elect in 1 Peter? A Study in Biblical Exegesis and Its Application to the Anglican Church of Nigeria*; and FAGBEMI, "Living for Christ in a Hostile World: the Christian Identity and its Present Challenges in 1 Peter."

notes were slightly revised in the second edition published in 2025.[10] In 2007, Andrew Mbuvi contributed a major study on the ecclesiology of 1 Peter.[11] Although this published doctoral thesis makes no mention of the implications that 1 Peter might have for Africa, Mbuvi makes up for this lacuna in a 2014 article.[12] Also in 2007, Jeremy Punt contributed a South African, postcolonial perspective on 1 Peter 3.[13] More recently, Christopher Naseri, a Nigerian Roman Catholic priest, has contributed two essays on 1 Peter both of which focus on issues of globalization and mission.[14] Michael Ufok Udoekpo, another Nigerian Roman Catholic scholar, has explored the implications of 1 Peter 2:5 for understanding ministry today.[15] A recent volume of essays from the majority world contains an essay by the Ethiopian scholar Yimenu Adimass Belay which explores the always relevant issue of suffering by reading 1 Peter through the lens of traditional scriptural interpretation of Ethiopian Orthodox Church.[16] Annang Asumang likewise reflects on the implications of 1 Peter's view of undeserved suffering.[17] Sofanit Abebe's impressive monograph which reads 1 Peter in the light of 1 Enoch has now appeared, as have some other studies by her on 1 Peter—and she is also working on a commentary on 1 Peter to be published by Langham Literature.[18]

The theological and practical depths of 1 Peter are beginning to attract more and more attention from African biblical scholars. This essay will examine a work which precedes all of the above. The study under consideration was not written specifically about 1 Peter, but rather about the entire New Testament canon and its eschatological message. Since 1 Peter is thoroughly eschatological in its perspective, it is not surprising that the seminal work of African biblical scholarship by John Mbiti makes frequent reference to Peter's first letter.

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[10] Sicily Mbura MURIITHI, "1 Peter" (2006); "1 Peter" (2025).

[11] Andrew MBUVI, *Temple, Exile and Identity in 1 Peter.*

[12] Andrew MBUVI, "Christology and Cultures in 1 Peter: An African (Kenyan) Appraisal."

[13] Jeremy PUNT, "Subverting Sarah in the New Testament: Galatians 4 and 1 Peter 3."

[14] Christopher NASERI, "Petrine Christians as Strangers and the Globalization of Christianity: A Study of 1 Peter 1:1; 1:17; 2:9 and 2:11;" NASERI, "The Mission of Jesus as Purposed by God in 1 Peter 1:18–20, and Its Resonance among African Christians."

[15] Michael Ufok UDOEKPO, "Ministry of the Royal Priesthood in Exodus 19:6 and Its Theological Expansion in 1 Peter 2:5."

[16] Yimenu Adimass BELAY, "Salvation through Suffering: An Ethiopic Reading of Selected Texts of 1 Peter."

[17] Annang ASUMANG, "'Resist him' (1 Peter 5:9): Holiness and Non-retaliatory Responses to Injustice Suffering as 'Holy War' in 1 Peter."

[18] Sofanit T. ABEBE, *Apocalyptic Spatiality in 1 Peter and Selected 1 Enoch Literature A Comparative Analysis*; ABEBE, "The Letters of Peter;" ABEBE, "Comparing Apples and Oranges? Eschatological Perspectives from 1 Enoch and 1 Peter."

John Mbiti and the Eschatology of 1 Peter

John S.Mbiti (1931–2019) is often called (at least in *east* Africa) the father of modern African theology. The 1971 published version of John Mbiti's doctoral thesis, *New Testament Eschatology in an Africa Background*,[19] has rightly received both positive and negative attention. Although evangelical scholars have been suspicious of Mbiti's work, he has secured some more positive reviews in recent times. Mbiti's book has as its starting point a critique of the Western missionary message as it was delivered by the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) and received by Mbiti's own ethnic group, the Akamba people of central Kenya. The version of missionary eschatology that Mbiti describes "is exclusively 'futuristic'," [20] which Mbiti argues is "a minor part of New Testament Eschatology."[21] Such a message led to disillusionment among the Akamba: "Having set their expectations on an immediate realization of this futurist eschatology, many are deeply disappointed and shaken when they begin to realize that early generations of Christians are passing away and the (immediate) end of the world does not come."[22]

Mbiti's answer is not to abandon New Testament eschatology, but (perhaps like the Bereans in Acts 17:11) to re-read the biblical text to see if the message received from the missionaries is actually what the scriptures teach. One strength of Mbiti's book is his thorough examination of the eschatological ideas of the New Testament, including 1 Peter. Here is a key passage:

> The author of 1 Peter is conscious that divine intervention in human history has occurred in Jesus Christ (1:3ff.). It is epitomized in the eschatological community which has been brought forth (2:9–10). These are, therefore, the eschatological times (1:20) into which the prophets had enquired (1:10–12). Two eschatological activities are at work as a result of the Life, Death-and-Resurrection of Jesus Christ: Salvation (1:5, 10, 18f.) and Judgement (4:5, 6, 17), and both have a universal application. Believers have only tasted their destiny (5:10) through Baptism, for there is abundant grace yet to be received at the revelation (ἀποκάλύψις) of Jesus Christ (1:13), the Chief Shepherd (5:4). Because He is already exalted (3:22), the Holy Spirit is among them (4:14; 1:12). But that is not the end: for they are still 'aliens and exiles' (2:11), living under the compulsion of great urgency because 'the end of all things is at hand,' (4:7). The Last Day will both unveil

[19] John S. MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology in an Africa Background: A Study of the Encounter between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts.*

[20] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 51.

[21] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 57.

[22] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 57.

> what is radically new and consummate what is already being appropriated now.[23]

This helpful summary of the eschatology of 1 Peter is put to use later in Mbiti's monograph.

Two key ideas that Mbiti discusses from and for his African background are, first: because Christ is exalted above all, he is Lord also of the unseen world; and, second: salvation is a corporate, not just an individual reality.

1 Peter and the Spirit World

Concerning the spirit world, Mbiti proceeds by describing the Akamba view of the unseen world. Mbiti describes the Akamba view of reality as consisting of a hierarchy of being with God, the Creator of all, at the apex, then the *Aimu* (spirits) and the living dead (ancestors), then human beings, and under humans animal and plant life, and finally non-living reality (rocks, etc).[24] The *Aimu* and the living dead play an active role in the visible world. They have both positive and negative characteristics ("People both dread them and paradoxically want them to exist"[25]). Akamba do not look forward to the afterlife, rather, they have a somewhat fatalistic perspective: "it is the inevitable lot of mankind."[26]

In contrast to the Akamba worldview, the AIM missionaries, according to Mbiti, taught that the spirits of the dead do not afflict human beings, but demons (a concept foreign to the Akamba) imitate the dead in order to deceive people. As was common among missionaries, AIM teaching also tended to conflate "medicine men" and "sorcerers" which caused confusion among the recipients of the missionary message.[27] Mbiti does commend the AIM catechism for advocating "'complete' faith in Jesus Christ" rather than participation in practices such as divination.[28]

Mbiti contrasts both the Akamba worldview and the missionary teaching with the New Testament view of the unseen world. We will examine here only what Mbiti derives from 1 Peter. Mbiti quotes 1 Peter 5:8–9 to assert that the New Testament does have a view of the spirit world which should lead believers to approach that spiritual reality with both caution and faith: "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion . . . Resist him."[29]

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[23] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 47.

[24] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 132.

[25] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 134.

[26] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 138.

[27] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 151–152.

[28] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 153.

[29] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 142.

Similarly, Mbiti quotes 1 Peter 3:19 and 22: "Christ preached to 'the spirits in prison', and is exalted 'at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.'"[30] Mbiti argues that, as in Paul's letters, Peter uses the terms 'powers' and 'authorities' to refer to both spiritual beings and to earthly authorities. Mbiti perhaps misses an opportunity to reflect on the political implications of using spiritual language to talk about political and social realities; his main point is that, like the Akamba, the New Testament is aware of the dangers of the unseen world.

Positively, Mbiti includes an important section in this chapter on what the Apostles Creed calls the "Communion of Saints." A bit of Mbiti's biography is important at this point. Although his area of Kenya was evangelized by the AIM, he eventually, perhaps because of his theological disappointment with the AIM, became an Anglican and was ordained as a presbyter in the Anglican Church. As an Anglican, the creeds would have played a regular role in his worship and prayer life. In reflecting on the "Communion of Saints" Mbiti does not move into a completely "Catholic" understanding here. He acknowledges that "saints" are not especially holy people, but all those who have faith in Christ. For the Christian, "fellowship" or "communion" begins with fellowship with God, but "He who is *in Christ* finds not only his own personality, but that of others who are similarly *in Christ*. In every sense he becomes a member of the Body of Christ."[31] The eschatological events of the Death and Resurrection of Christ have brought about not only a new relationship with God, but also a profound relationship with other believers. This fellowship in Christ cannot be disturbed even by death itself. Echoing 1 Peter 3:18-22, Mbiti concludes,

> Since our communion with God and with one another is grounded on Jesus Christ, it follows that death can neither dissolve it nor weaken it, The powers of death have been disarmed by Christ through His Death-and-Resurrection event. Therefore death cannot eclipse the relationship between members of the Body of Christ who have departed and those who survive. This is where we may properly speak of the *Communion of Saints*, and where fellowship between the living and departed Christians may rightly be encouraged and cultivated.[32]

Mbiti does not elucidate how fellowship between the living and the living dead is to be "encouraged and cultivated." Certainly many evangelicals, such as those evangelized by the AIM, might well raise their eyebrows at this point and wonder whether Mbiti is suggesting some form of veneration of Christian ancestors, or prayer for the dead, or requesting prayers from the dead. He does not make any of these suggestions. He does mention the obscure phrase of 1

[30] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 142.

[31] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 146.

[32] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 147; emphasis original.

Corinthians 15:29 concerning being baptized "on behalf of the dead," but calls this a "difficult problem."[33] He asserts that "The silence of the N.T. on the issue neither forbids nor enjoins communication between the saints on both sides of life, if it is done 'in Christ'."[34] And he acknowledges that prayer for the departed does not appear in Christian literature until the middle of the third century.[35]

Some years ago I attended a meeting of the Pan African Association of Catholic Exegetes, being held in Benin. An event during those days brought home to me something written many years ago by C. G. Baëta (1908–1994):[36] "Africans live with their dead."[37] One of the members of the Association, a citizen of that country, gave some of us a short tour around the city of Ouida. During our excursion we passed a cemetery. Our guide, a Roman Catholic priest and Old Testament scholar, mentioned that his father was buried there. He regretted this because the cemetery is kept locked at night. "If we had buried him at home," he said "I could have visited him easily whenever I was at the family house." Mbiti does not move strongly in this direction. But he does leave the door slightly ajar. As Mbiti puts it, referencing 1 Peter 2:9ff: "For the individual, the nearness of the spirit world means that he is begotten into a vast spiritual community."[38]

Evangelicals and other Protestants may shy away from some customs that more high church Christians practice such as praying for the dead or requesting prayers from the dead. Some parts of the New Testament do find ways to remember Christian ancestors with thanksgiving. Hebrews, for example, speaks of the Christian life on earth being lived in the light of a great cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1) of those who have gone before. Revelation 4 and 5 seems to suggest that Christians' worship on earth participates in the worship of those around the throne in heaven. The continent of Africa is rich in stories of martyrs, missionaries, theologians, and ordinary faithful people who have spent their lives for the glory of God. Time would fail us (the author of Hebrews might say — see Heb 11:32) to tell of Simon of Cyrene, St Mark, the Ethiopian Eunuch,[39] Apollos of Alexandria, Frumentius, Adesius, Yared, Athanasius, Origen,

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33 MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 149.

34 MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 149.

35 In the first epistle of Cyprian of Carthage.

36 Baëta was a Ghanaian church leader and theologian. See John S. Pobee, "Baëta, Christian Goncalves Kwami," Dictionary of African Christian Biography, n.d., https://dacb.org/stories/ghana/baeta-christian/

37 C. G. BAËTA, "The Challenge of African Culture to the Church and the Message of the Church to African Culture," 59.

38 MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 149.

39 The "Ethiopian eunuch" of Act 8 was a government official of the Nubian kingdom of Meroë (modern Sudan).

Anthony, Cyprian of Carthage, Cyril of Alexandria, Perpetua, Felicitas, Tertullian, Monica, Augustine, Mary of Egypt, Moses the Black, Francis of Assisi, Kenneth Cragg, Oswald Chambers, Ludwig Kraft, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, Festo Kivengere and so many more—"of whom the world was not worthy" (Heb 11:38). Christians need not fall into ancestor worship, when they remember these, the living dead, with thanksgiving.

1 Peter and the Resurrection as a Corporate Reality

Mbiti argues that the Akamba (and other African peoples) have a somewhat vague and undeveloped notion of resurrection. However, what Mbiti actually means by the word "resurrection" is unclear, since Mbiti does not seem to mean that bodies will come out of tombs. He seems to mean that individuals survive death in some kind of spiritual form, not that they rise from the dead in a similar way to Jesus coming out of the tomb, with memories intact, with his wounds still visible (John 20:20), able to eat fish (Luke 24:42–43). African survival after death, according to Mbiti, is backwards oriented. Mbiti famously argued that African time consists primarily of the present (kiSwahili: *sasa*) and the past (*tene*), with only a faint idea of the near future.[40] A person who dies enters the *tene* period: "Therefore, the death of the individual only removes him towards what in fact has been lost; it cannot offer hope, since there can be no hope in what is lost."[41]

In contrast, the biblical story offers hope for the future. This hope is based on the resurrection and exaltation Christ. Among other texts, Mbiti cites 1 Peter 3:22 ("Baptism . . . now saves you . . . through the resurrection of Jesus Christ") to assert that although death drove Jesus "in humiliation to the lowest stage of creation . . . . It is through His Resurrection that he is highly exalted . . . and granted Lordship . . . on the right hand of God."[42] The resurrection of Jesus "makes the entire existence of the faithful absolutely Christocentric,"[43] he says, citing 1 Peter 1:18ff: "you were ransomed . . . with the precious blood of Christ."

Citing 1 Peter 4:13 ("rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed"), and 3:18 and 3:21 ("For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, . . . And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you — not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience,

[40] Mbiti has been much criticized for his view, some arguing that he has generalized Akamba culture for all of Africa.

[41] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 159.

[42] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 162.

[43] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 164.

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ") in order to demonstrate that baptism is not just about individual conversion, but about "corporate solidarity."[44] Members of Christ's body suffer with him and rise in a resurrection like his.

It is this corporate nature of the resurrection life that sets New Testament eschatology apart from African views of life after death — and from the missionary message of the original AIM missionaries to Ukambani. Mbiti's sharpest criticism on this subject is saved for kiKamba hymns. Mbiti points out that these hymns are not merely futuristic but, most importantly, they are often individualistic. Examples are given from the kiKamba hymn book: "I'll be caused to sit down by Jesus at his home" (hymn 30); "And when I shall see Him always, yea, and will always rest" (hymn 166); "And when this night is over, my Lord, Thou wilt take me to come to Heaven thy home" (hymn 178).[45] To be fair, Mbiti also quotes hymns that speak not just of "I" but of "we", so the kiKamba hymnal was not completely individualistic.

Strangely, Mbiti's critique does not stretch to the questioning of the predominant eschatological idea in both the kiKamba hymns and in the catechism[46] that eschatology is all about "going to heaven." There seems to be little in the AIM teaching — or in Mbiti's discussion — about the New Heaven and the New Earth (Rev 21 and 22).[47] This lack of a truly earthy eschatology leaves Mbiti open to the charge that the Christian and the church need not worry about earthly realities such as ecological degradation, or social and political injustice. If heaven is the destination, and not a renewed earth, there are dire ethical implications — the Christian faith becomes "no earthly good" as the old saying goes.

Two aspects of Mbiti's idea of the resurrection seem to lead him in this overly spiritualized direction. First, for Mbiti the resurrection is not a truly bodily resurrection. A key problem passage reads:

> In spite of this long tradition [on the previous pages Mbiti has discussed the Old Testament, Judaism, and the Christian theological tradition from Irenaeus to Aquinas to Calvin, all of which he finds too "materialistic"] however, there is no explicit scriptural warrant to support a materialistic view of the Resurrection body. All that we are positive about is that it will be 'spiritual' and not 'physical', heavenly

[44] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 166.

[45] Quoted in MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 160.

[46] Sections are quoted in MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 159.

[47] For thorough critique of an exclusively "heaven-centred" eschatology see N. T. WRIGHT, *The Resurrection of the Son of God.*; N. T. WRIGHT, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*; and Richard MIDDLETON, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology*.

> and not of dust.[48]

In support of this "non-physical" idea of resurrection, Mbiti cites 1 Peter 5:4: "And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away." This passage actually disproves his point. If the crown of glory never fades, it is not less substantial than this world, it is even more substantial, more real, more physical. Mbiti even asserts that proof of this non-physical idea of resurrection is that the resurrection body will be like the Lord's in every way. Now it is true that the Lord's risen body was a transformed body — he was not always recognized, he could appear in rooms where the doors were locked, and so forth. The resurrection body was not "merely" resuscitated. But the risen Jesus was not a ghost (Luke 24:39); he ate (Luke 24:42–43); he could be touched (John 20:17, 27). The bones of Jesus, assert the New Testament writers, are not somewhere in Palestine. He physically rose. So shall those who believe in him.

A second problem with Mbiti's view of the afterlife is that it is neither the missionary view, nor the New Testament view, nor the African view. It seems to be, strangely enough, something akin to Buddhism. Misreading Ephesians 1:10 (which says that all things will be summed up in him) and 1 Corinthians 15:28 (which says that God will be "all in all"), Mbiti hypothesizes that,

> 'the many will be absorbed into the One'. That is they will give up their individual presence for the greater presence of God among them. The individual will relinquish his individuality but gain his perfect and corporate oneness. . . . It will be the life of true 'inter-existence', in which there are no barriers of individuality to mark off one person 'from' another.[49]

Mbiti is famous for his critique of Western (especially Cartesian) individualism in his phrase "I am because we are."[50] Mbiti published this in 1969, but by the time he published *New Testament Eschatology* in 1971 he seems to have forgotten that his own quotation continues "and since we are, therefore I am." The individual does not cease to exist, becoming absorbed into the One. Rather each individual contributes his or her own individual gifts to the whole. The people around the throne in Revelation 7:9 are from "every nation, from all tribes, and peoples and languages." Culture and language survive into the eschaton. The resurrection does not wipe away diversity; the resurrection redeems the wonderful diversity of God's creation.

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[48] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 172.

[49] MBITI, *New Testament Eschatology*, 176.

[50] John S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 106. Mbiti makes this statement five times.

Conclusion

We have much for which we can thank John Mbiti. He was a pioneer who forged paths for modern African biblical study. He tried to be a Christ-centred and a Bible-centred theologian. We have much to learn from him. Like all of us, however, he was fallible. As Paul reminds,

> *we see in a mirror dimly.*
> . . .
> *Now I know in part, [but] then*
> *[at the last day, at the resurrection]*
> *I shall understand fully,*
> *even as I have been fully understood.*
> (1 Cor 13:12)

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[52] CABAN has made an open access PDF version of this chapter available at https://www.cabanalive.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Acts-14-2-Udoekpo-on-Exod.pdf, though note that the pagination is different than in the published book.

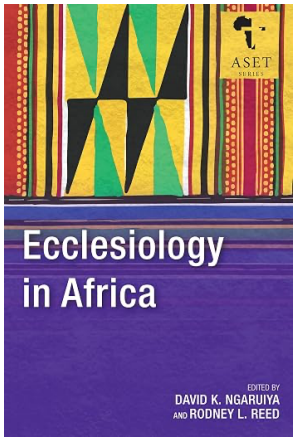
AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 286–310

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)

Daniel MWAILU

Africa Nazarene University, Ongata Rongai, Kenya
dmwailu@anu.ac.ke



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 Buertey**, 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 Cotelo 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**

Published with license by ACTEA | DOI: https://doi.org/10.69683/5488b464
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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).[1]

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

[1] 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

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"[2] 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

[2] 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/

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).[3] 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).[4] 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

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

[4] Quoting Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Aesthetics*, vol. 2 (Steubenville, Ohio, USA: Hildebrand Project, 2019), 56.

form, the chapter proposes considering the question, "What are you communicating with your building?" (81).[5] 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

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

"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).[6] 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'"[7] (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

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

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

it does not treat healing as a function of religion'"[8] (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

[8] 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.

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

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'"[9] 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).[10] 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* Täwaḥədo *Church"*

[9] 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.

[10] 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.

In chapter 10, **Samuelson** discusses the concept of communal *theosis* in African ecclesiology, with reference to the Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwaḥədo* 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'"[11] 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'[12] . . . 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 though 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'[13]" 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

[11] 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

[12] Quoting Geoffrey Parrinder, *Religion in Africa* (Hammondsworth, Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1969), 235

[13] 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.

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'"[14] (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

[14] Quoting Emmanuel Fritsch, "Qəddase," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 4*: O–X*, edited by Siegbert Uhlig, 271–275 (Wiesbaden, Germanyh: 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

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'"[15] (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"

[15] 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

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

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

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'"[16] (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 to 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

[16] Quoting James White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Abingdon Press, 1993), 137.

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'"[17] (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?'[18] . . . 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'"[19] (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'"[20] (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

[17] Quoting an interviewed focus group.

[18] Quoting an interviewed focus group.

[19] Quoting a WF regional meeting.

[20] Quoting an interviewed focus group.

ecclesial leadership as "'a common feature in Zambian society, including the church'"[21] (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'"[22] (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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[21] 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

[22] 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.

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 welfare (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

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'[23] [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

[23] Quoting Odunaya Oke, *Leadership for Building a Prevailing Church* (Lagos: Charis Ventures Publication, 2015), 29.

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'"[24] 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'"[25] (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'"[26] (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

[24] 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

[25] 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.

[26] Quoting "human rights lawyer and lay preacher Fiba;" ellipses original.

go-between and peacemaker in conflict," and in exercising both "societal leadership and domestic care" (354–356). T hese 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].'[27] 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"[28] (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

[27] Quoting an anonymized interviewee.

[28] 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.

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"'"[29] (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'"[30] (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'"[31] (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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[29] Quoting Wim A. Dreyer, "The priesthood of believers: The forgotten legacy of the reformation," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 76, no. 4 (2020): Article 6021, 7 pages, p. 1. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.6021

[30] 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.

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

the Roman Catholic Church in China and Japan that resulted in "'the absence of indigenous priests'"[32] (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'"[33] (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'"[34] (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'"[35] (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).[36]

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

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

[34] Quoting Iheanacho, *Historical Trajectories of Catholicism in Africa*, 57.

[35] Quoting Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham, UK : Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 189.

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

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'"[37] (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'[38] 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 Geʿez. 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 *Täwaḥədo* 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

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

[38] 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

sociopolitical and religious resources as well as to the Christian tradition'"[39] (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"[40] (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.

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

[40] 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.

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vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 311–318

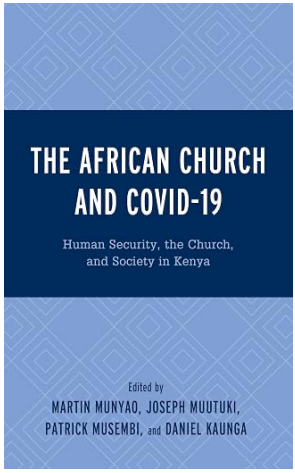
Caring for the Least of These in Heart, Mind, Soul, and Strength:

The Response of the Christian Church in Kenya to the COVID-19 Pandemic

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY
Munyao, Martin, Joseph Muutuki, Patrick Musembi, and Daniel Kaunga, eds. *The African Church and COVID-19: Human Security, the Church, and Society in Kenya*. Lanham, Maryland, USA: Lexington Books, 2022. Pp. xxii + 201. USD $160.95 (paperback), $144.85 (ebook)

Phillip A. CANTRELL II

ORCID: 0000-0002-8541-8232
Longwood University, Farmville, Virginia, USA
cantrellpa@longwood.edu



In numerous teachings throughout the Gospels, Jesus communicated clearly to those who followed Him that caring for the poor, downtrodden, and dispossessed was not an option. Rather, it appears as a prime directive. When the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on 11 January 2020, caring for the poor took on new urgency as mandatory lockdowns around the world deprived millions of their jobs, mobility, and food security. In every country where Christianity is present, the Christian churches were obliged to respond to the vast needs of its people and communities. In Kenya, already poor by global standards, with millions living beneath the World Bank's poverty line, the Church was challenged as never before when the country reported its first case in March 2020.

In 2021, in the very midst of the pandemic, a worthy collection of scholars was gathered to assess the response of the Church in Kenya; that is, to analyze where and how the church was succeeding at its mission and where and how it

Published with license by ACTEA | DOI: https://10.69683/n2y38r94
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often was falling short. Edited by **Martin Munyao**, **Joseph Muutuki**, **Patrick Musembi**, and **Daniel Kaunga**, the result was a collection of essays titled *The African Church and COVID-19: Human Security, the Church, and Society in Kenya*, published in 2022 by Lexington Books. As editor and contributor **Martin Munyao** wrote in the Introduction, "This book wrestles with the question of how the church in Kenya is to articulate the gospel" in a country where "the coronavirus pandemic has exposed the fragility of socioeconomic and political structures in Africa, particularly Kenya, which is the context of interest in this book" (xv).

Twelve chapters, either authored or co-authored by various scholars, address numerous topics to which the church was called to respond, ranging from food insecurity, environmental justice, mental health, and gender-based violence (GBV) to name a few. In general, the authors found much to criticize regarding the Church's response, and each chapter ended with a concluding section wherein recommendations for the future were made. For the purposes of this review, rather than analyzing each chapter in a piecemeal fashion, I have adopted an organizational framework around the words of Jesus himself. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus echoed the Hebrew *Shema* when he told his followers to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12: 30–31).

Taking love as an action-word, Jesus's injunction is a call to respond with deeds and not mere words. Interestingly, in this commandment Jesus addresses four key aspects of human health: emotional well-being (the heart), spiritual vitality (the soul), mental acuity (the mind), and physical health (strength). It is argued here that for the Church to best meet the needs of its people and communities, it must take a holistic approach to its calling by addressing each of the four human needs articulated above. In such fashion, the church can both answer its own call to love the Lord as Jesus expressed and heal and empower its people to have the vitality to do the same. Each of the twelve chapters fits into one of the four categories of heart, mind, soul, and strength, and it's on this basis and framework that the essays will be analyzed.

Taken in the order expressed by Jesus, **John Mudegu** addresses issues of the heart in chapter 8 by writing about the Church's handling of mental health cases during the pandemic. Throughout the world as well as Kenya, the WHO identified mental health and emotional trauma as a major public health crisis resulting from the effects of insecurities brought on by the COVID-19 experience. In Kenya's case, **Mudegu** found that the Church was "ill-prepared to deal with mental health management" (115). With Kenya itself lacking the infrastructure to address the emotional distress brought on the pandemic,

coupled with an ill-prepared church, depression and suicide rates increased markedly.

Mudegu attributes the Church's lack of preparedness to a propensity to blame mental and emotional ill-health on either demonic attack or on a lack of faith on the part of the sufferer. Observing that many Christians in Kenya "generally view believers who present with mental illness as living in sin, backslidden, or under the influence of demons," the result was a Church that too often limited its response to "prayer and exorcism" (117). Concomitantly, church members who showed signs of mental illness typically did not "seek professional help based on the view that the conditions arise because of their lack of enough faith in God" (122). Compounding their unwillingness to speak openly of their emotional trauma was a fear of being ostracized by fellow church members. In conclusion, **Mudegu** writes, "Mental illness represents bondage that denies victims the full enjoyment of abundant life promised by Christ" (126), robbing the believer of the ability to love the Lord with all of his or her heart. As such, the author calls for church leadership to move beyond a response based solely on prayer and exorcism and to develop policy guidelines on handling mental health issues based upon guidelines set forth by the WHO. Doing so will empower the church to love the Lord with their own hearts by healing and strengthening the hearts of its faithful in the event of a future crisis.

The importance of loving the Lord with all of one's mind was best expressed in Chapters 10 and 11. Both chapters address the paltry attention paid to education when school children were sent home during the lockdowns. Well-documented are the lingering effects on these children in Kenya and elsewhere. In a country already beset by low learning outcomes and regional disparities in terms of resource distribution, the pandemic had "damaging effects on the gains made since independence" (147). Recognizing that the disruptions offer a chance to rethink education delivery and provide the government with the chance to do the right thing, **Evelyn Jepkemei** and **Martin Munyao**, writing in chapter 10, challenge the church to "reimagine ways of pushing for education reforms that serve all the underprivileged children" (158). In chapter 11, **Wandia Njoya** sharply criticizes the Church for its history of *not* pushing for more equality and availability in education. **Njoya** calls for the Church to repent of its history of allowing "institutional considerations, rather than spiritual or social ones" to carry the day in its "position on education" (168). The two chapters illustrate that if the Church can meet **Njoya's** challenge of departing from its institutional-first mindset, and embrace the call of **Jepkemei** and **Munyao**, then perhaps beauty can be brought from the ashes of the pandemic by re-envisioning an educational approach that will free the minds of Kenya's children to love the Lord with their intellects and build-up the nation.

Chapters 2, 5, and 6 speak to the soul of the Church itself and call into question its willingness and ability to love the Lord in spirit. In such fashion, in chapter 2, **Chammah Kaunda** challenges the postcolonial church to liberate itself from "perpetuating a neocolonial story of injustice" (19). At the heart of **Kaunda**'s criticism is his observation that the Church, while remaining a trusted institution, has at times "given moral and religious sanction" to the state to "perpetuate significant injustices," making it a "dangerous liability on the continent" (19). After analyzing the myriad ways in which the church has safeguarded its own power, wealth, and status, the author calls for the church to undertake a "radical rethinking of the function of Christianity in Africa" by embracing "the Christ who sides with and empowers the margins and marginalized through the Holy Spirit," never more so than during the pandemic (26).

In chapter 6, **Sylvia Tuikong** likewise challenges the Church to greater boldness in the fulfillment of its calling. Her chapter takes a more global approach by analyzing the various ways in which the churches in other countries responded to the crisis, many with great success. The author makes clear that the severe and global nature of the resulting humanitarian crisis necessitated an urgent and coordinated response. Considering the severity of the crisis, one which taxed the resources of the church to its limits, **Tuikong**, in similar fashion to **Kaunda**, calls for the church to take sides with the marginalized by boldly urging "privileged individuals in society to help the less fortunate by donating essential commodities such as food clothing, and shelter" (92–93). For **Martin Munyao** and **Maureen Muturi**, writing in chapter 5, the calls of **Kaunda** and **Tuikong** can be made most effective by promoting interfaith unity across both diverse churches and national borders in the name of the Holy Spirit, a unity they found severely lacking during the pandemic. As they conclude, "The post-COVID-19 church must rise above religious prejudices and take its place in the ecumenical framework . . . the entry point is interfaith engagement" (79). Here, the Church would do well by remembering the words of the Apostle Paul that the Church is one body with many parts (1 Cor 12:12).

Often it has been said that one cannot worship the Lord on an empty stomach. While this is perhaps debatable, it serves as a reminder that human strength starts with a well-nourished body, and while one may pray and sing to the Lord in the midst of hunger, loving God with all of one's strength requires the church to address the physical needs of its people. Throughout the developing world, Kenya included, food scarcity was a severe problem when already under-employed people were faced with massive job losses.

In Chapter 3, **Joseph Muutuki** addresses the issue of food scarcity during the pandemic by challenging the Church to move toward "thinking of

alternative food security mechanisms . . . more so within organized spiritual contexts" (32). For **Muutuki**, this will require the Church to depart from what he sees as a lingering vestige of colonialism. Noting that the power structures within the African church were copied from the Western model during colonialism, the result is a paradigm wherein the Church has succumbed to a mindset of domination with leaders who either have power or want more power. Such an approach left church leaders more interested "in the growth of the church numerically and the infrastructure of buildings" and less interested in embracing new approaches to rapidly changing circumstances, especially in the face of extreme poverty and hunger (38). The author concludes by proposing that the "power structures of the church be changed in the post-COVID-19 era to address the marginalized poor of its members," perhaps by "providing seeds for agriculture . . . rather than giving food handouts as a form of evangelism" as was done by the Western missionary [colonial] approach (42).

While not specifically addressing food scarcity, **Natalia and Peter Gitu**, in chapter 1, and **Peter Durito**, in chapter 4, speak to other issues impacting the strength and health of the suffering. In the midst of considerable uncertainty about the nature of viruses, the **Gitus**, themselves doctors, begin the first chapter of the book by providing some basic information about COVID, or at least the best information available in 2021. The authors were also concerned with structural deficiencies in Kenya, which they feared would stymy an effective pandemic response. They cited, for example, a lack of hospital beds and ventilators, a shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for health care workers, and hesitancy about the initial round of vaccines. Regarding the role of the Church, the authors called upon its leaders to help combat the world-wide misinformation campaign about the virus, known as the "infodemic," which "causes confusion, mistrust of health advice, and risk-taking behaviors" (8). One of the more desultory effects of the infodemic was hesitancy to accept and receive the vaccine, which many believers considered the mark of the beast in Revelation. In all these matters, the authors implored the church to "remind their congregations science and religion do not contradict each other" and to "incorporate health science" into the church's educational curriculum (13).

In chapter 4, **Peter Durito** called upon the Church to address and mitigate environmental injustices. After documenting numerous incidents across Kenya of various communities suffering from abnormally high rates of sickness and chronic illness resulting from the dumping of toxins into their local environments, **Durito** urged church leaders to take the pandemic as an opportunity to support and promote environmental justice measures, especially as pollution and ecological degradation disproportionately affects the poor. By doing so, the Church can answer Christ's call to care for the "least of these" by

remembering that "human beings are cocreators with God and therefore should protect the environment" (61).

Finally, while millions in Kenya could be numbered among the "least of these," no group elicits greater sympathy than the thousands of young girls who were the victims of gender-based violence (GBV). As defined by the United Nation's Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, GBV is any act that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm to women, although males are also frequently subjected to this gross violation of human rights. Owing to the stay-at-home orders, lack of access to educational and church facilities, and desperation born of impoverishment, abundant evidence suggests the women "suffered Gender-Based violence more than ever during COVID-19" (183). Considering that rape and sexual trauma, the worst manifestations of GBV, crushes a person wholly in their heart, mind, soul, and strength, the Church must respond strongly to this issue for it to be an effective instrument of God's love and grace.

To this end, **Patrick Musembi**, **Joseph Muutuki**, and **Josephine Munyao**, in chapter 7, admit that COVID-19 did not create GBV. Rather, they argue, it was always present but was exacerbated during the pandemic, exposing the vulnerability of the family unit. For these authors, GBV is a "symptom of underlying gender inequalities, power imbalances, and if often condoned by traditional cultural and religious institutions" (100). They conclude by challenging the Church to reassess its role and renew its efforts to change the kind of gender imbalances in society which ultimately account for GBV.

In chapter 12, **Sylvia Muriuki** leveled some of the sharpest criticisms in the book at the Church for its disregard of GBV during the pandemic. She argues that in many communities across Africa, the prevalence of exclusive male leadership, the adherence to a rigid patriarchy, and the subordination of women "have nurtured an environment of gender-based violence" (182). She maintains that in the face of these cultural tendencies, worsened by the lockdowns, the Church failed to attend properly to the upsurge in gender-based violence. She notes, for example, that while the church preached "hope to Christians as evidenced by the content on social media and online platforms," programs on GBV "were conspicuously missing" (187). **Muriuki** boldly declares that the church cannot truly live up to its mission if it disregards GBV. As such, she advocates for the church to press the government for more stringent laws against GBV, to direct more funds towards community projects to protect the vulnerable, and to develop a comprehensive strategy for addressing violence in the family.

For this reviewer, *The African Church and COVID-19* was both heart-wrenching and inspiring. For those who lived through the pandemic in the

relative comfort of the West, the book was a window into the hard-ships and suffering endured by Kenya's most vulnerable, and of course across much of the developing world. None of this seeks to suggest that the Western world was left unscathed. Millions across all parts of the world saw their churches, schools, and businesses shuttered. Millions of others either lost their lives or lost loved ones. Even many of those who were relatively affluent by global standards needed financial aid or food assistance from their churches or governments to survive. But at its most basic level, the information and data provided by the authors was a sad and wrenching reminder of the consequences of under-development.

For tens of millions in Kenya and hundreds of millions around the world who live on the margins of survival, COVID-19 was a crushing experience. And while the worst of the pandemic is now in the world's rearview mirror, millions still live with the consequences and will continue to need assistance from their governments and faith-based institutions. The authors of this timely book have provided a worthy blueprint for how to best help those in need. Moreover, as the reminders that another global virus could erupt at any time come on a seemingly regular basis, humanity and Christian charity demand that more be done to promote global development, even in the midst of presently fraught times for the world, to equip and prepare developing societies to weather future storms.

In the face of such sadness and loss recounted by the tales of suffering and hardship in the book, this reviewer found it inspiring that a group of Kenyan scholars were able to collaborate honestly on the shortcomings of their own society. All of the contributors, as noted in their biographies in the final section of the book, are experts in their fields and were thus able to make trustworthy and keen insights into what the churches could have done better, and ought to do differently going forward. Self-examination is a vital tool for improvement and these scholars are to be commended for undertaking what must at times have been a disheartening series of realizations.

My main concern, however, is that such a book can lead one to think of the shortcomings elucidated by these authors as a uniquely Kenyan or African problem, especially as many of the contributors wrote openly about how some of the cultural and social mores in their own society worsened the pandemic's effects. I contend that much of what was recounted in the book is decidedly *not* unique to Kenya or Africa. In terms of providing food, financial aid, and medical assistance, most Western countries were of course better equipped to assist their people owing to their comparative wealth and development. This much is beyond argument, although even here societal efforts to address the mental and emotional ill effects of COVID have been lacking.

Yet, many of the issues highlighted by the authors have reflections in the West. Across America for example, the misinformation campaign engendered by the "infodemic" phenomena hindered a more effective national response. Millions who were goaded on by unverified social media posts distrusted the scientists and public health experts, refusing to comply with mask mandates and stay-at-home orders. False allegations swirled abundantly about the vaccines, leading millions to decline the shots. As in Kenya, many are the churches and pastors who should engage in their own self-reflection. Thousands of churches and millions of believers across America resisted the public health crusade to help lessen the virus's impact. Many chose to weather the pandemic through faith and prayer alone, as many did in Kenya, arguably exacerbating the spread of COVID. Numerous high-profile church leaders resisted moving their services to an online platform, or else refused to cease their in-person gatherings altogether.

In conclusion, I would encourage a similar project, written now in the aftermath of the pandemic, to assess what if any changes have been made by the churches. These same contributors or other scholars would contribute much to the dialogue by ascertaining the degree to which policy adjustments have been made by church leaders in anticipation of a similar event in the future. In the hopeful case that no such event occurs again, the policy changes advocated in *The African Church and COVID-19* could only serve to benefit Kenya if not the wider world.

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vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 319–322

Antiparallel Missional Dynamics

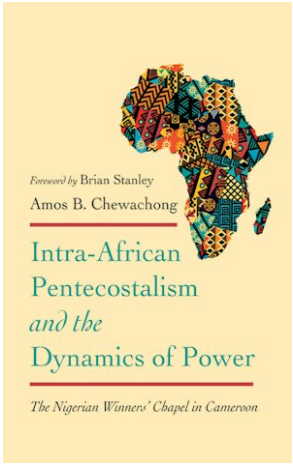
Spiritual Power from Nigeria, Financial Resources from the Rest

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Chewachong, Amos B. *Intra-African Pentecostalism and the Dynamics of Power: The Nigerian Winners' Chapel in Cameroon*. Foreword by Brian Stanley. Eugene, Oregon, USA: Wipf and Stock, 2024. Pp. xxv + 242. USD $35.00 (paperback and ebook), $50.00 (hardback)

Chammah J. KAUNDA

ORCID: 0000-0001-6879-6330
Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology,
University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa
pastorchammah@gmail.com



While the book still carries traces of "PhD-ness," with occasional repetition, Amos B. Chewachong's monograph — introduced with a foreword by Brian Stanley — is nevertheless well-written, tightly focused, and supported by a useful index. It offers readers an important window into the shifting contours of world Christianity, particularly the ways in which the material legacies of colonial mission are subconsciously reproduced and perpetuated. These legacies, though often resisted, continue to shape and re-emerge within intra-African Pentecostal relationships.

For instance, Chewachong himself, perhaps subconsciously, retains the colonial terminology of *"mother church"* to describe the relationship between Nigeria's Winners' Chapel and its Cameroonian counterpart. Moreover, he operates within the established framework of reverse mission, merely extending it slightly by introducing the notion of *"reverse mission in reverse."* He employs this notion to highlight how Nigerian missionaries increasingly direct their efforts toward other African regions that were themselves once missionized. This framework helps him trace the emergence of intra-African missionary activity and the ways

Published with license by ACTEA | DOI: https://doi.org/10.69683/f6de0163
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it is reshaping the continent's religious landscape. At the same time, he argues that intra-African Pentecostalism is marked by tensions, p articularly the uneasy relationship between founders and followers.

Following the introduction, the book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 sets the stage by exploring trajectories of power and cultural homogenization. Nigerian churches export their culture into other African contexts through "spiritual resources" — the circulation of Nigerian miracle testimonies and Bishop Oyedepo's weekly sermons, which are expected to be reproduced verbatim in all "daughter churches." In this process, cultural diversity is diminished as local spiritual imaginations are subordinated. Nigeria thus emerges as a kind of "spiritual empire," deploying miracles and universalizing promises of liberation, but always within a Nigerian Christian cultural framework. Chewachong contends that Nigerian Pentecostalism reproduces imperial theology, structured around hierarchies of power and domination. Ironically, while its leaders claim to resist Western theological imperialism, they replicate its dynamics through Nigerian categories of theology of power.

Chapter 2 turns to paradigm shifts in African Pentecostalism, charting its rapid expansion and embrace of prosperity theology. It emphasizes the "Nigerianization" of African Christianity, fuelled by the strategic use of social media, satellite television, and other digital platforms to export a distinctly Nigerian brand of Christianity. Chapter 3 develops a phenomenology of Pentecostal power, showing how Nigerian Pentecostalism operates less by coercion than by soft power. Through spirituality, anointing, finances, and policy, Nigerian churches impose hierarchical culture in ways that privilege top-down flows of authority. Spiritual power is conceived as emanating from Bishop Oyedepo, transmitted first through Nigerian pastors and then extended to pastors from other African countries. This transmission is regarded as "untainted and authentic" (75). The closer one is to Oyedepo, the greater the intensity of spiritual authority — a flow of power from the centre to the periphery or from 'Nigeria to the rest' reminiscent of colonial missions: "from the to the rest."

However, unlike Western missions, which involved financial resources flowing outward with significant control, this reverse flow of resources strengthens the "mother church" and consolidates its domination. Nigerian missionaries, sustained financially by local congregations rather than the headquarters, treat mission as a form of spiritual enterprise — constantly planting new churches in affluent areas and closing them if they prove unsustainable. Local pastors employed by Nigerian churches often find

themselves relegated to the bottom of what resembles a Social Darwinian hierarchy, occupying second-class status within the system.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how power and persuasion function in practice: even highly educated Cameroonian pastors are eclipsed by less educated Nigerian counterparts. Nigerian pastors are valorised as authentic custodians of Oyedepo's teaching and spiritual authority. Chapter 6 offers a more appreciative account, noting the positive economic and social contributions of Winners' Chapel through job creation, investment, humanitarian initiatives, and moral influence. Yet even these contributions are intertwined with Nigerian symbolism — community boreholes, for example, are marked by conspicuous portraits of Oyedepo. Such gestures, Chewachong argues, also serve as strategies to mask suspicion about the reverse flow of financial resources.

The final chapter examines mission dynamics and the politics of Pentecostal power under the theme of "reverse mission in reverse." Chewachong argues that Nigerian Pentecostalism's pursuit of control is not merely a matter of power but reflects a deeper failure of self-reflection — specifically, its inability to rethink the Nigerian worldview of spiritual power and its modes of transmission. Thus, even as it resists Western Christian dominance, Nigerian Pentecostalism reproduces and perpetuates it within Nigerian cultural categories, thereby undermining the incarnational nature of the gospel.

However, the concept of "reverse mission in reverse" lacks both creativity and nuance. By relying too heavily on Western categories, the book overlooks the reality of mission as a multidirectional phenomenon — "from everywhere to everywhere" — and interprets it instead through a framework of reversal rather than *transversal-networked mission*. African Christianity, with all its complexities and contradictions, has matured and must increasingly be interpreted on its own terms, rather than through perpetual reference to Western frameworks. Nonetheless, the book highlights a crucial model of Nigerian mission that could be described as an *antiparallel missional dynamic: spiritual power (intangible) flows outward from Nigeria, while financial resources (tangible) flow inward from other African churches to Nigeria*. This model exposes the unsettling reality that mission activities in world Christianity — particularly South-South and Africa-Africa missions — are not free from serious problems. Indeed, they may reproduce challenges more troubling than those associated with colonial missions. In this regard, the book opens a can of worms that should not be closed. The time has come for scholarship to move beyond critique of Western missions alone and to turn equal attention to intra-African

and South–South mission practices, particularly through the critical voices of scholars from the Global South.

There is also a clear reproduction of a theology of exceptionalism. Although Chewachong acknowledges this dynamic, he does not give sufficient attention to how Nigerian exceptionalism is not unique but rather part of a wider global problem within evangelical-shaped Christianity. Much like American evangelicalism, Nigerian Pentecostalism often presents itself as uniquely chosen and divinely mandated — a self-understanding that resonates across many evangelical-grounded nations in the Global South. Yet if every evangelical-shaped nation now claims exceptional status, then none can truly be regarded as exceptional. This persistent pursuit of exceptionalism constitutes one of the most problematic Christian worldviews in the contemporary world, as it underwrites forms of Christian nationalism that perpetuate structures of domination rather than fostering genuine mutuality.

Chewachong's book remains a welcome contribution to the evolving literature on African Pentecostalism and its role within world Christianity. It will be of particular value to scholars of religious studies, economics, mission studies, transnationalism, and intercultural studies, as well as to policymakers and political scientists seeking to understand the intersection of religion, culture, and power in contemporary Africa.

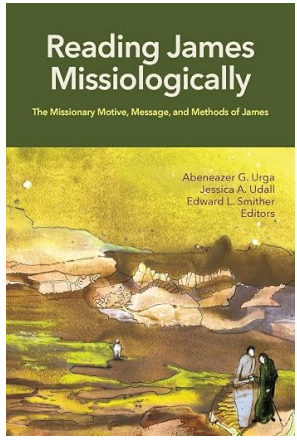
AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 323–326

Reading James Through the Lens of God's Mission

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY
Urga, Abeneazer G., Jessica A. Udall, and Edward L. Smither, eds. *Reading James Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message, and Methods of James*. Littleton, Colorado, USA: William Carey Publishing, 2025. Pp. x + 308 USD $26.99 (paperback)

Melesse K. WOLDETSADIK

Beta Selam Evangelical Church, Charlotte, North Carolina, USA
Melesse.Woldetsadik@ciu.edu



Reading James Missiologically is a comprehensive volume edited by **Abeneazer Urga**, **Jessica Udall**, and **Edward Smither**, all of whom serve as professors at Columbia International University; **Urga** and **Udall** also teach at Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology in Addis Ababa. This significant work features eighteen chapters authored by various contributors, each focusing on the Epistle of James through three primary missiological themes: motivation, message, and method. The book seeks to highlight the importance of the general epistles within the context of missions, presenting fresh insights that combine scholarly research with the authors' personal experiences. By faithfully interpreting the text's original intent, the contributors aim to inspire readers to adopt a mission-oriented perspective as they engage with Scripture in today's world.

The first part of the text includes seven chapters that examine different interpretations of the biblical book of James. **Allen Yeh** begins the discussion by addressing common misreadings of James and advocating for a comprehensive understanding that highlights the importance of a systematic approach to both evangelism and social justice. Following him, **James A. Roh** provides insights into how James's view of soteriology can serve as a framework for a missiological interpretation of the text. **Christopher Howles** discusses

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C. René Padilla's idea of integral mission, emphasizing how proclamation and social action support each other as key to James's message. **Benjamin A. Castenada** then offers an eschatological view, proposing that James interprets missiological ideas through the lens of Israel's restoration. This theme persists in **Jeffrey S. Krohn**'s contribution, which investigates the link between eschatology and mission, particularly focusing on insights from the majority world.

In his exploration of recent theological insights, **Nelson R. Morals Fredes** emphasizes the importance of social contexts in understanding God's mission for the impoverished. He highlights the need to pay attention to the poor to fulfill the *missio ecclesiae*. In this divine mission, he argues, the poor hold a significant place. Put simply, he notes that there should be an alignment between *Missio Dei* and *Missio Ecclesiae*. **Jessica Janvier** provides a thoughtful analysis of Rahab's story as presented in the book of James, emphasizing its importance to modern missiology. In her analysis, **Janvier** emphasizes the transformative story of Rahab, a prostitute, to highlight the limitations of traditional mission strategies that often center on confessionalism and sacramentalism. She argues that effective mission work must extend beyond simply planting churches; it should also demonstrate genuine respect for the communities being served. Without this respect, there is a risk that future generations may question the morality of mission efforts and the authority of Scripture itself. **Janvier** draws important lessons from Rahab's narrative, suggesting that they are highly relevant to contemporary missionary practices.

In the second part of the book, **Edward L. Smither** explores the holistic mission James presents, highlighting the importance of his teachings for the entire human experience. He shows how early church fathers embraced and adapted these teachings to their own contexts. Smither proposes that by engaging with James's message and incorporating historical church practices, the modern global church can strengthen its mission efforts. Additionally, **Vuyani S. Sindo** examines Christian identity through a covenant perspective, emphasizing James's insights into the relationship between the poor and the wealthy within the Christian community. He points out that indifference to the suffering of the poor contradicts the core message of Christianity. **Sindo** observes that discrimination against the poor is still widespread, especially in the majority world, making James's teachings particularly relevant and corrective today.

In his exploration of the book of James, **James E. Morrison** examines the importance of the "doers of the word" in understanding the Christian mission. By highlighting figures such as Abraham, Rahab, Job, and Elijah, **Morrison** argues that James shifts the gospel message to suit specific contexts, thereby

supporting the practical view of *conversion* in translation. **Leita Ngoy** adds to this discussion by connecting the theology of mission with prosperity, emphasizing that this idea is rooted in practical theology and focuses on the ethical behavior of believers. **Ngoy**'s perspective reflects James's holistic view of prosperity, suggesting that true wealth comes from spiritual growth and ethical living rather than simply material possessions, which should be used as resources for mission.

Part three delves into the theme of mission in the book of James, emphasizing mercy as a pivotal aspect. **John D. Harvey** asserts that James mirrors Jesus's teachings from the Sermon on the Mount, particularly the notion that God blesses the merciful, as seen in Matthew 5:7. **Harvey** notes that James reinforces this idea by indicating that those who show mercy can expect mercy from God during judgment (Jas 2:13). He argues that mercy reflects God's divine nature and is essential for fostering endurance in proclaiming the gospel, forming a critical part of the larger mission. **Joseph K. Pak** then explores the relationship between the poor and the rich within the framework of God's mission. He interprets James's message, advising that the poor should not condemn the rich but rather endure the injustices they face. **Pak** emphasizes the importance of seeking divine intervention and praying for the salvation of the rich as part of their Christian calling.

Sarah Lunsford also shares insights on how James offers wisdom for managerial missions, advocating reliance on faith rather than the scientific method often favored in modern practice. Focusing on James 4:13–17, she argues that such missions should be entirely dependent on God. Lunsford calls for a shift away from a double-minded, self-reliant attitude, urging believers to embrace wisdom rooted in sincere reliance on God's integrity, grounded in his goodness and mission. **Thomas W. Sekler** explores the teaching and missiological implications of James 3:1–2, emphasizing the significant responsibility of teachers to demonstrate mature character. He suggests that teachers should not only be learners themselves but also serve as disciples who guide others. This perspective highlights the importance of cross-cultural workers valuing local voices and adopting approaches that align with local customs and ideas. Moreover, **Sekler** emphasizes the necessity for these workers to teach with care, humility, and a focus on delivering messages that resonate with their audience.

Cindy M. Wu discusses James and refugees, challenging us to care for the vulnerable. She reminds us that the missiological reading of James highlights similarities between James's context and the modern refugee crisis. Wu then applies the epistle to the ministry of caring for refugees holistically and thoughtfully. She encourages readers to learn from refugees' experiences and to

welcome them into their neighborhoods. She concludes that we should avoid discrimination or favoritism and instead adopt a diaspora mindset that reminds us, too, that we were once strangers. **Jeanne Wu** emphasizes the importance of mission in addressing an unjust world, highlighting the role of God's persevering children. Through her study of James, she underscores the need for his exhortation and wisdom, which urge believers to stay steadfast amid conflicts and injustices. Rather than spreading fear, prejudice, or hatred, **Wu** advocates sharing genuine light and joy, reminding us to see trials as opportunities to grow in faith, especially as Jesus Christ's return nears. **Grant LeMarquand** emphasizes the connection between worship and holistic mission in the book of James. He argues that the teachings in James indicate that prayer and worship must have implications for mission, particularly in how the Christian community interacts with the poor, and that this should not involve preferential treatment. Additionally, he emphasizes that prayer requests should stem from pure intentions and lead to harmonious relationships among individuals. **LeMarquand** also notes that prayers for physical healing are intertwined with the themes of forgiveness of sins, underscoring that acts of prayer and worship inherently carry a missional significance.

This collection of essays offers a deep exploration of missional theology in the Epistle of James, drawing on a variety of approaches. By combining exegetical analysis with evangelistic proclamation, it improves our understanding of God's purposes for mission. The volume fills an important gap often overlooked in missiological interpretations of James, making it a valuable resource for those dedicated to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. It addresses suffering, social issues, justice, mercy, reliance on God through faith rather than solely on scientific methods, care for the poor, a holistic approach to mission, support for refugees, respect for the cultures and traditions of those served, and prayer for the sick, Israel, and eschatology, among others.

The book ultimately presents valuable insights and scholarly contributions of significant merit. However, its impact could be further strengthened by placing a greater emphasis on issues of justice, particularly within the church. Frequently, leaders are taken advantage of by those in positions of wealth and authority, undermining missionary efforts by marginalizing the poor. Additionally, a heightened focus on spiritual warfare, as advocated in the Book of James, would encourage believers to remain vigilant in their devotion to God. This emphasis could enhance their connection with Him and equip them to resist temptations and the attacks of Satan, thereby advancing the mission work. Overall, this book serves as an excellent resource for anyone seeking to live out and share the gospel message, and I highly recommend it.

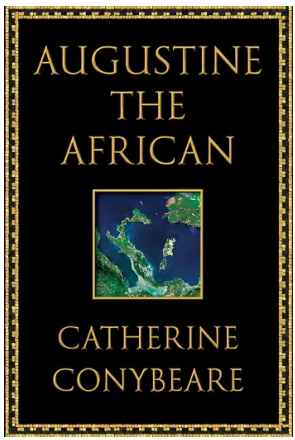
AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 327–331

Africa's Claim on a Western Church Father

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY
Conybeare, Catherine. *Augustine the African*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2025. Pp. xx+268. US $31.99 (paperback)

Nathan Alexander SCOTT

ORCID: 0009-0006-8271-7313
Wycliffe College at The Toronto School of Theology,
Toronto, Canada
nscott590@gmail.com



Among the plethora of discussions on Augustine, another biography might seem like white noise, but *Augustine the African* is far from that. Catherine Conybeare (Leslie Clark Professor in the Humanities at Bryn Mawr College) has shown that there is another side to Augustine that has been unrecognized, namely, Augustine was African. Conybeare notes that Augustine's reception has mostly been controlled by European Western interpreters, which has "made it easy to forget that Augustine was African" (xviii). Much of the interpretation of Augustine assumes a Roman/Euro-centric perspective, possibly due to the primacy of his *Confessions*, which admittedly focuses on his Italian sojourn. This approach misses the fact that Augustine only spent four painful years in Italy as an outsider; Augustine noted that the Romans "sneered at his African accent" (21; cf. *De Ordine* 2.17.45). Augustine's statement in *On Order* 2.17 was Conybeare's central influence for this book: "It was one thing to be secure in his art, quite another to be secure in his heritage" (215; cf. 252n13). In other words, Augustine's life was a battle between his Roman education and his African heritage. From his early eagerness for vocational renown, through his struggles with the African Church (Conybeare's title for the Donatists), and his later confrontations with entitled Roman elites, Augustine's African heritage was a continual presence that his readers have missed. Thus, Conybeare's new biography is a welcome contribution that

Published with license by ACTEA | DOI: https://10.69683/9339sq19
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showcases how Africa has a stronger claim on this massive, supposedly Western, figure than the Western world.

The aim of this book is to help the modern reader of Augustine appreciate and recognize the African context of his writings; i.e., to read Augustine as a Westerner/European is to divorce him from his homeland and thus to misread him. Conybeare structured her biography mostly chronologically, with a focus on the African aspects of Augustine's life. In part 1 ("Insider, Outsider") she traces his early life to his traumatic return to African and election to the bishopric in Hippo. Part 2 ("Wolves in Sheep's Clothing") focuses on the Donatist controversy with all its messiness. Part 3 ("A Language for Africa") highlights examples of Augustine's use of Punic and his patriotic stance with regard to his African/Punic heritage. Finally, part 4 ("From Africa to Immortality") looks at the *City of God* and the Pelagian controversy highlighting Augustine's African vantage point whereby he was uniquely qualified to challenge Roman arrogance.

Conybeare notes how the young Augustine showed signs of Africanness which explain the later struggles both in Italy and then returning to Africa. From Augustine's early education, reading Virgil's *Aeneid*, "Augustine was not interested in Aeneas. Instead, he identified passionately with Queen Dido" (5). If we read Augustine through the traditional Euro-centric lens, Augustine's notes about being rebuked for his love of Carthage over Rome does not raise any significance (*Conf*. 1.13.20-14.23). Conybeare draws attention to the fact that Virgil's Dido foreshadowed Hannibal, i.e., the archetypal Roman enemy. In other words, Augustine was drawn to the African Queen Dido as if she were the protagonist rather than Aeneas. Even throughout his *Confessions*, as Conybeare highlights, Augustine portrayed his wanderings and abandonment of God (and his mother) as him acting like Aeneas, i.e., Augustine portrayed himself (and Rome) as the antagonist. Augustine tricked his mother and slipped away from the port in Carthage to sail for Rome, just like Aeneas had tricked Dido in Virgil's epic (*Conf*. 5.8.15 — note Augustine's wording: "I went to Rome . . . I was going to Hell"—5.9.16). As Conybeare puts it, "Augustine had become Aeneas. He had tricked the woman who loved him and was sailing to meet his destiny in Rome. His tears for the Carthaginian queen Dido were far away in the past" (19). Augustine's time in Italy was incredibly difficult, and Africa was inescapable. Even his closest friends in Italy were all Africans. "Augustine was recreating his circle of North African intimates in Milan: Carthage and Thagaste had arrived in Italy" (25). Conybeare also shows how Augustine's return to Africa was not the home coming he imagined. His mother died on their way home in Ostia, and his close friend Nebridius died just a year later (cf. *Ep*. 3-14). Most painful of all was the death of his beloved son, Adeodatus, just a year after Nebridius. It was this grief-stricken and broken Augustine that traveled to

Hippo in 391 where the aged bishop Valerius manipulated events to ordain him as presbyter and later bishop. Still, he always felt unsettled in his identity as an African among Africans and he carried the grief over his lost son for the rest of his life.

The African Church (i.e., the Donatists) was such a central element of the North African context, that by the time Augustine was ordained, "the schism between the two churches had already endured for more than a hundred years" (71), and the African Church held the majority population in North Africa (76). The primary issue was over purity, i.e., the Church in Africa (Conybeare's term for Augustine's Catholic Church) had tainted itself through accepting *traditores* ("traitors" and those who "handed over" Christian writings). Apart from the hyper-exclusionist nature of the African Church, "there was no significant difference between the two sides" (70). A central difficulty for Augustine was that the Donatists seemed to have the stronger claim to what it meant to be an African Christian. He "was now obliged to construct arguments against people who wanted to place Africa at the center of their faith" (87). "The problem for Augustine was . . . how it impinged on his own African identity" (88). In other words, there are elements of identity crisis in Augustine's writings against the Donatists. The controversy came to a climax, through a state-mandated summons to the Council of Carthage "beginning on June 1, 411" (101). Conybeare dedicates chapters 7 and 8 to discussing this council and its aftermath. Conybeare shows how these events shook Augustine to his core as an African seeking to find settlement in his African identity, whilst condemning a deeply rooted part of the African ecclesial culture. With this focus on Augustine's Africanness, one can understand (though not condone) his reasoning for accepting the aid of judicial power to force the Donatists to dissolve into the Church in Africa.

Next Conybeare discusses Augustine's relationship with Punic, the pre-Roman vernacular of North Africa, which came to the Carthaginian region with the Phoenician settlers around the eighth century BC. Augustine regularly defended Punic and sought ways for its native speakers to participate in services and events (cf. *Ep*. 66.2). Conybeare suggests that Augustine's beloved companion (mother of his son) was a native Punic speaker, and that his son, Adeodatus, was named according to the Punic Mutanba'al, which means "gift of God" (122). One of the best places to find Augustine's engagement with Punic is in his sermons. He frequently paralleled Punic alongside Latin and Greek (e.g., *Serm*. 288.3), to highlight the notion that each language has equal participation in communicating divine truth. Unfortunately, his desire to support Punic led to some problems. Conybeare recounts when Augustine sought a bishop for a Punic community south of Hippo in 423. Due to the paucity of Punic proficient clergy, Augustine chose Antoninus, a young monk

(twenty years old) from his monastery in Hippo. The immature bishop exploited his congregation to finance the construction of his episcopal palace. The whole situation was ugly (cf. *Ep*. 20*, wherein Augustine recounts the events to a wealthy patroness). These examples, among others that Conybeare discusses, showcase Augustine's affection for his African heritage, particularly that this Latinist loved Punic.

In the final section Conybeare elaborates on her earlier statement: "much of Augustine's mature thought depended upon his ability to look at Rome from Africa and question that dominance" (xvi). In the wake of Aleric's sacking of Rome in 410, Augustine had to deal with an influx of wealthy and entitled Roman refugees in North Africa, many of whom (e.g., Volusianus) were "blaming Christianity for the vulnerability of Rome" (157; cf. *Ep*. 135, 137). Volusianus' challenges as well as Augustine's correspondence with the Tribune Marcellinus (*Ep*. 136, 138, 139) — who oversaw the Council of Carthage in 411 — prompted Augustine to write his *City of God*. Augustine requested that Marcellinus inquire after all the possible objections to Christianity, "so that I can respond with care to *everything*" (160; *Ep*. 138.20). Throughout Conybeare's discussion on Augustine's process of writing his tome, she highlighted the elements of how Augustine's African perspective enabled him to respond to the fear over Rome's fragility. It was not just his extensive familiarity with classical literature; it was the fact that Augustine was African that enabled him to reinterpret the heroic history of Rome to expose its futility. For example, Regulus, the man who kept his word and returned to Carthage to be tortured and executed comes out looking bad (169-70; *Civ*. 1.15, 24). Even Augustine's depiction of Hannibal, Rome's archetypal enemy, appears more virtuous than Rome's heroes (170-2). This latter feat is something that only an African could do. It is possible that, had Augustine been writing in Italy or any other part of the Roman world, his critique of Roman grandeur would not have survived as it has.

Despite this biography's greatness, there are some critical points to note. The first is the limited scope. Conybeare has brilliantly presented Augustine as African, but there is a lot to his life and writings that were hardly mentioned, if at all. For example, Conybeare discussed copious examples from his preaching, but she hardly mentioned his exegetical writings. Consider that Augustine had to request time to study Scripture after he was ordained presbyter in 391 (*Ep*. 21, 22), a sabbatical that led to the writing of his early commentaries and set the foundation for his later exegetical works. She does discuss his *On Christian Teaching* and its relation to the Donatist controversy, but only briefly. Another point is that Conybeare's discussion on the Pelagian controversy was insightful but seems to have less focus on the African elements in Augustine's rhetoric than her other topics. Rather, she focuses on how Augustine's residual grief over

his lost son, Adeodatus, shaped his harsh correspondences with Julian of Eclanum. As much as Conybeare's connections between Julian and Adeodatus are insightful and excellently argued, they are less directly part of Augustine's Africanness than other potential topics. Despite these critical points, the biography is an amazing work that does showcase how Augustine has been misread through the ages. Even the critical points expose gaps in scholarship for further exploration. For example, how did Augustine's African heritage shape his *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, or his *Questions on the Heptateuch*? These, and other research questions, are areas that will now require scholarly analysis thanks to Conybeare's work.

This new biography is a much-needed corrective to our understanding of this figure who looms so large in the history of Western Christianity. To read Augustine properly, we must read him as an African among Africans.

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vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 332–335

Reclaiming Revelation

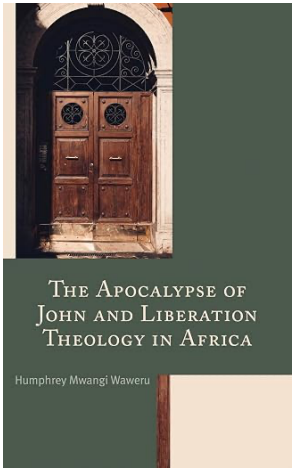
Postcolonial Hermeneutics, African Liberation, and the Theology of Hope and Resistance

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Waweru, Humphrey Mwangi. *The Apocalypse of John and Liberation Theology in Africa*. Lanham, Maryland, USA: Lexington Books, 2024. Pp. ix+188. US $100.00 (paperback), $ 90.00 (ebook)

Nebeyou A. Terefe / ኑበዩ አለሙ ተረፈ

ORCID: 0000-0002-5599-6189
Wycliffe Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia;
University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa
nebeyout@gmail.com



Humphrey Mwangi Waweru is a senior lecturer in philosophy and religious studies at Kenyatta University. He is well known for his postcolonial biblical scholarship. In this book, Waweru rereads the Apocalypse of John through a postcolonial interpretive lens, presenting it as a liberative text for the African context that subverts colonial hermeneutics. The topic and issues that the book raises are important for both African biblical interpretation and liberation theology, as they are informed by the realities of African society.

The book of Revelation has distinctive literary features that make it difficult to interpret. As a result, it has often been neglected or misused in Africa and beyond. However, the book contains relevant messages of hope and comfort. By depicting that ultimate victory belongs to God, it encourages readers to face the future with resilience.

In Africa, colonial and imperialistic cultural hegemony historically eroded and subordinated indigenous cultures and practices. Because the Bible has been frequently weaponized to legitimize imperialism, it came to be considered as a

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tool of oppression. This process created "a 'self-validating' world" (vii, 6, 14, 37) in which European domination was presented as natural and permanent. Furthermore, mainstream biblical studies are primarily shaped by a Western academic paradigm. Waweru argues that addressing these legacies demands an alternative way of reading biblical texts suitable for addressing these and other related issues. In such a process, this same text can be regarded as an instrument of liberation in African hands. Doing so requires the re-appropriation of the biblical text to empower African readers to critique oppressive structures while addressing postcolonial socio-political challenges.

Waweru contends that one cannot read the Book of Revelation in isolation from its first-century socio-cultural context. Hence, he briefly discusses standard introductory issues such as authorship, literary genre, the source of apocalyptic literature, and methods of interpretation. He argues that reading the book solely from a historical perspective focusing on historical meaning (though legitimate) reduces its contemporary impact for Africans who share structural similarities with John's first audience(s). Thus, this book employs postcolonial criticism specifically employing contrapuntal reading as a primary methodology.

The term "contrapuntal" originates from the musical concept of counterpoint and was first introduced into literary theory by the postcolonial theorist Edward Said in his *Culture and Imperialism*.[1] Said argued that texts should be read simultaneously attending to various, at times competing, voices. Adopting such an approach highlights that the Bible is inherently "polyphonic" (multi-voiced rather than monophonic). Applied to Revelation, contrapuntal reading engages with the biblical text along with African voices from "culture, democracy, modernity, and Christianity interacting, resulting in a proper counterpoint" (5). However, the intention of this listening is not for comparative analysis; rather this approach allows a dynamic conversation between the African context and the Apocalypse of John. The aim is to examine the two separately as distinct lines of thought and to discover fresh or unexpected ideas by keeping them separate.[2] The attempt is to introduce "a new way of 'producing theology'" (vii) where listening to others is prioritized. This method involves African culture and exhibits commitment to the readers' world, including their lived experiences. Even if contrapuntalism is participatory and emancipatory, it is not at odds with Western methods. Waweru, in essence, aims to liberate the Apocalypse from colonial hermeneutics

[1] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

[2] In African biblical studies, comparative study mainly focuses on examining continuities, tensions, and intersections between the Bible and African religions.

by exploring three key perspectives: apocalyptic communities, African cultural heritage, and contemporary Christian trends within biblical studies.

The contemporary African is marked by systemic injustices where many dictators have come and gone and still dictate in the post-independence era. There are many social challenges emanating from colonial and neocolonial legacies and some of the challenges emerge from post-independence African leaders. In such a context, the concept of "apocalypse" is not perceived as only as a prophecy of the end time, but as a text that "unveils" insight into present socio-political realities following colonialism (2–3).

Comparing the apocalyptic settings with the current situation in Africa, the author highlights that apocalyptic writing emerges in times of crisis. As a result, apocalyptic literature "made life tolerable under intolerable situations with its emphasis on God's final and perfect solution. This is the element that makes Africans more attracted to this book" (15). Allan Boesak pioneered Black liberation theology in Africa during the apartheid era.[3] Waweru draws from such a legacy and frames the book of Revelation as a theology of hope and resistance which can be applicable to anytime or every age. Technically speaking, the book proposes a new way of reading — a new paradigm of apocalypse through the lens of African experiences such as colonialism, the quest for self-identity, and oppression.

Apocalyptic literature presents the present as imperfect and looks for solutions to the current problems; this, in turn, makes it an African text. Since Africa is facing numerous modern problems and seeking liberation and solutions, this literature encourages African readers to pursue liberation and resist accommodation of oppressing powers. Apocalypse is also fitting with Africa's future expectations of better living.

The commentary section of the book demonstrates the practical application of this methodology. For example, the destruction of "Babylon" is connected to the modern struggle against structural injustices and political oppression in Africa. The reality of demonic forces is recognized within African worldviews, yet their power is shown to be limited because the God of the Apocalypse conquered them. This gives hope to African readers and indicates that these forces do not control the lives of believers. The sealing of the 144,000 is interpreted as a form of divine protection that gives security to Africans who are oppressed by their own leaders and who are in the midst of trials and afflictions. The two witnesses are presented as a model for African churches' prophetic

[3] See Allan Boesak, *Comfort and Protest: The Apocalypse from a South African Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987).

ministry to speak out against social, moral, and ethnic injustices, even at the cost of affliction or martyrdom. Conversely, failing to exercise one's prophetic ministry may threaten the existence of the church. God's judgment is regarded as liberative justice against oppressors, for God judges the oppressor.

A major strength of the book is that it contextualizes Revelation for African readers through the integration of African cultural and theological concerns and by emphasizing on hope, resistance, and divine justice. The book also emphasizes the theology of hope and resistance, presenting Revelation not merely as an eschatological text, but as a source of inspiration for contemporary readers seeking societal transformation and liberation. Furthermore, Waweru avoids single-focused critique by equally confronting postcolonial African leaders who perpetuate oppression, noting that post-independence leadership can sometimes prove as oppressive as colonial rule or first-century emperors.

Contrapuntal reading is an interpretive method rather than historical claim about the authorial intent. As a result, the potential risk of contrapuntal reading is that it may overshadow the historical context for it focuses on contemporary ethical or political questions or it may risk reading contemporary concerns back to ancient texts. Fortunately, Waweru avoids subjective overreach by balanced integration of postcolonial reading with literary and historical-critical analysis. By holding the three horizons together — the ancient text, African culture, and current trends in biblical studies — Waweru offers an ethical and responsible reading of Revelation. However, the book could have been further strengthened by incorporating more concrete, localized case studies from across the African continent.

Overall, *The Apocalypse of John and the Liberation Theology in Africa* is a well-written and valuable contribution to New Testament studies, African biblical hermeneutics, and liberation theology. By reframing Revelation as a text of transformative hope, divine justice, and resistance, Waweru offers us an ethically responsible, engaging dialogue partner for theologians, pastors seeking to address pressing socio-political realities in Africa and beyond.

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vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 336–341

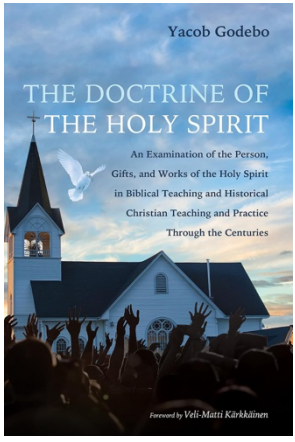
An African Pneumatological Contribution to World Christianity

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY
Godebo, Yacob. *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: An Examination of the Person, Gifts, and Works of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Teaching and Historical Christian Teaching and Practice through the Centuries.* Foreword by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. Eugene, Oregon, USA: Wipf and Stock, 2025. Pp. xxi+188. US $43.00 (paperback and ebook), $63.00 (hardback)

Bruk Ayele ASALE / ብሩክ አየለ አሰሌ

ORCID: 0009-0002-3987-3872
The Bible Society of Ethiopia;
Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology;
Mekane Yesus Seminary, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
bruk.ayelea@gmail.com, *bruk.ayele@egst.edu.et*

Introduction



Within the history of Christian theology, pneumatology has frequently been regarded as a comparatively underdeveloped doctrinal locus. While Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology have received sustained and systematic attention, theological reflection on the Holy Spirit has often remained fragmented or subordinate to other doctrinal concerns. This imbalance is striking given the central role of the Holy Spirit in Scripture, ecclesial life, and Christian spirituality.

In African Christianity, this situation is particularly paradoxical. On the one hand, African Christian life is marked by a vivid awareness of the spiritual realm, a strong expectation of divine presence, and an experiential engagement with the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, formal theological education in many African contexts has historically relied on inherited Western theological curricula in

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which pneumatology receives limited and uneven treatment. This disjunction has contributed to ongoing ecclesial tensions, especially in relation to Pentecostal and charismatic movements.

Yacob Godebo's *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* addresses this gap by offering a comprehensive, historically grounded, and pedagogically oriented examination of the person, gifts, and works of the Holy Spirit. Written by an African theologian with long experience in theological education and church leadership formation, the book seeks to clarify theological confusion, situate contemporary debates within the wider Christian tradition, and provide resources for informed ecclesial discernment. This review argues that Godebo's work constitutes a significant African contribution to global pneumatological discourse. Its major strengths lie in its breadth of coverage, clarity of organization, and constructive engagement with contested issues, even as it leaves room for further contextual and methodological development.

Authorial Context, Purpose, and Theological Motivation

The origins of this book are explicitly pedagogical and ecclesial. Godebo situates the project within his years of teaching theology in Ethiopian institutions, where he encountered persistent and often unresolved questions concerning the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, and Christian experience. These questions were not merely academic but arose from concrete ecclesial developments, particularly the growing influence of Pentecostal and charismatic movements within historically non-charismatic churches.

The author clearly identifies a twofold deficiency in existing literature. First, many classical systematic theological works treat pneumatology briefly and primarily in doctrinal terms, often neglecting questions of lived experience, charismatic practice, and ecclesial conflict. Second, much Pentecostal and charismatic literature, while rich in experiential reflection, lacks historical depth and sustained engagement with the broader Christian tradition. The book is thus conceived as an attempt to bridge these two worlds by offering a historically informed and theologically balanced account of Christian pneumatology.

Although the author writes from within a Lutheran ecclesial context, he consistently emphasizes that the study is not intended to advance a narrowly denominational agenda. Rather, it seeks to examine biblical teaching and historical Christian practice in order to illuminate contemporary pneumatological questions. This commitment to breadth and balance shapes both the tone and structure of the work and enhances its suitability for a wide readership.

Overall Structure and Methodological Orientation

The book is organized into three major parts that reflect a classical theological method: Scripture, tradition, and contemporary practice. This tripartite structure provides a clear roadmap for readers and allows the argument to develop cumulatively.

Rather than presenting a speculative or narrowly dogmatic account, the author adopts a synthetic historical-theological approach. He draws together biblical texts, historical developments, and modern ecclesial realities in order to show how Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit has evolved and diversified over time. Each part builds upon the previous one, enabling readers to see contemporary debates not as isolated disputes but as expressions of long-standing theological trajectories.

Part I: The Holy Spirit in Biblical Teaching

Part I examines the biblical foundations of pneumatology in both the Old and New Testaments. The author begins with a discussion of the linguistic roots of pneumatological language, exploring the Hebrew *ruaḥ* and the Greek *pneuma*. This discussion serves as a theological entry point, highlighting the Spirit's association with life, movement, power, and divine agency.

In his treatment of the Old Testament, the author emphasizes the Spirit's role in creation, prophetic inspiration, leadership empowerment, and covenantal life. T hese diverse manifestations are presented as expressions of the same divine presence at work among God's people. The author avoids proof-texting and instead seeks to demonstrate the coherence of the Old Testament witness to the Spirit as the active presence of God.

The New Testament discussion focuses on the personhood of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit's relationship to Christ, and the Spirit's role in the formation and mission of the early Church. Particular attention is given to Pentecost, the distribution of spiritual gifts, and the Spirit's role in guiding and sustaining the Christian community. The author situates these themes within the broader narrative of salvation history, emphasizing continuity and fulfillment rather than discontinuity.

Throughout Part I, the author adopts a descriptive and theological approach rather than a narrowly exegetical one. His aim is not to resolve every interpretive question but to establish the biblical contours within which Christian pneumatology has historically developed.

Part II: The Holy Spirit in Historical Christian Teaching and Practice (AD 100–1900)

Part II constitutes the most extensive section of the book and represents one of its major strengths. Here the book offers a sustained survey of Christian

teaching and practice concerning the Holy Spirit from the apostolic period through the nineteenth century.

The discussion begins with the post-apostolic and patristic periods, highlighting early efforts to articulate the Spirit's relationship to the Father and the Son within emerging Trinitarian theology. The author shows how doctrinal controversies shaped pneumatological reflection and how the Spirit's role was clarified in response to Christological and Trinitarian debates.

The medieval period is treated with attention to both doctrinal development and devotional practice. Rather than portraying medieval pneumatology as static, the author demonstrates how reflection on the Spirit continued to evolve in response to ecclesial and cultural contexts. The Reformation and post-Reformation periods are examined with particular care, especially with regard to differing Protestant approaches to Scripture, sacrament, and spiritual experience.

A key contribution of this historical survey is its demonstration that disputes concerning the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, and religious experience are not uniquely modern phenomena. By tracing similar tensions across Christian history, Godebo situates contemporary debates within a much longer theological trajectory and challenges simplistic historical narratives.

Part III: The Holy Spirit in Contemporary Christian Teaching and Practice (Chapters 11–13)

Part III represents the most contextually significant and arguably the most original contribution of the volume. While Parts I and II provide necessary biblical and historical foundations, Part III addresses the lived realities of contemporary Christianity, with particular resonance for African ecclesial contexts.

Chapter 11: The Rise, Emphases, and Expansion of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements

Chapter 11 provides a carefully structured account of the origins and global spread of Pentecostal and charismatic movements. The author situates these movements within the broader history of Christianity, emphasizing that they arose in response to perceived gaps in ecclesial life — particularly the desire for experiential faith, divine empowerment, and spiritual vitality. The chapter highlights key theological emphases such as baptism in the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, healing, prophecy, and experiential worship. Importantly, Godebo refuses to reduce Pentecostalism to a single doctrinal claim or sociological explanation. Instead, he presents it as a multifaceted movement shaped by theology, history, and ecclesial need. In African contexts, this analysis is especially significant. The author notes that Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity resonate strongly in Africa because they provide theological frameworks that

articulate long-standing spiritual sensibilities. By situating African Pentecostalism within global Christian history, the author challenges narratives that portray it merely as a derivative or imported phenomenon.

Chapter 12: The Influence of Charismatic Movements on Established Churches

Chapter 12 examines how charismatic movements have influenced the theology, worship, and practice of mainline churches. The author identifies multiple modes of interaction, ranging from renewal within denominational structures to conflict and fragmentation. The chapter carefully balances recognition of positive contributions — such as revitalized worship, increased lay participation, and renewed missionary zeal — with attention to theological and pastoral challenges. These challenges include doctrinal confusion, overemphasis on subjective experience, and problematic leadership practices.

A key strength of this chapter is its resistance to simplistic binaries. Godebo demonstrates that the tension between charismatic movements and established churches is not fundamentally about the presence of the Holy Spirit, but about differing theological frameworks for discerning and regulating the Spirit's work. This insight has significant implications for African churches navigating continuity and change.

Chapter 13: Summary, Reflections, and Theological Conclusions

Chapter 13 draws together the book's major themes and offers reflective conclusions. Rather than proposing a rigid doctrinal synthesis, Godebo emphasizes theological humility and ongoing discernment. He affirms both doctrinal clarity and experiential faith, arguing that divisions within contemporary Christianity often arise from inadequate theological frameworks rather than from the Spirit's activity itself. The chapter situates these reflections within African ecclesial realities, implicitly calling African theologians and church leaders to take greater ownership of pneumatological reflection. In doing so, it underscores the need for theology that is both historically informed and contextually responsible.

Taken together, Chapters 11–13 constitute the book's most distinctive contribution. By integrating biblical teaching, historical precedent, and contemporary experience, Part III offers a balanced and constructive framework for engaging Pentecostal and charismatic phenomena within African and global Christianity.

Critical Evaluation and Limitations

Despite its many strengths, the book exhibits certain limitations. First, although written by an African theologian, its conceptual framework remains largely shaped by classical Western theological categories. Indigenous African

epistemologies, cosmologies, and spiritual ontologies are only implicitly present. A more explicit dialogue with African epistemologies and worldviews — particularly regarding spiritual reality, community, and embodiment — would have enriched the book's contextual depth. Second, the author repeatedly emphasizes that his work is not denominationally driven and aims at neutrality. While this intention is commendable, greater methodological transparency would have helped readers assess the criteria by which historical and contemporary positions are evaluated. Explicit discussion of historiographical method and theological normativity would enhance the work's academic robustness. Third, engagement with contemporary African scholarship — particularly work by African scholars in contextual and public theology — is relatively limited. Broader dialogue in this area would further align the book with current African theological discourse.

While the volume demonstrates impressive engagement with biblical and historical sources, its contribution would have been further strengthened by more sustained dialogue with African theologians who have explored spirit, power, and lived Christian experience within African contexts. Engagement with scholars such as Mbiti, Bediako, Kalu, Oduyoye, and Asamoah-Gyadu could have deepened the book's contextual resonance, particularly in its discussion of contemporary pneumatology.

Intended Audience and Contribution

The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit is well suited for theological students, educators, pastors, and church leaders. Its comprehensive scope and clear organization make it a valuable textbook and reference work. Beyond Africa, the book contributes meaningfully to World Christianity by offering a sustained African scholarly voice in a field still dominated by Western perspectives.

Conclusion

Yacob Godebo's *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* is a substantial, carefully researched, and pastorally attentive contribution to Christian theology. Its strengths in historical synthesis, pedagogical clarity, and constructive ecclesial engagement far outweigh its limitations. While future work might engage more deeply with African epistemological frameworks and contemporary African scholarship, this volume already stands as a landmark African contribution to pneumatological studies. The book is therefore strongly recommended for theological education, pastoral formation, and scholarly dialogue within African Christianity and the wider world.

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vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 342–345

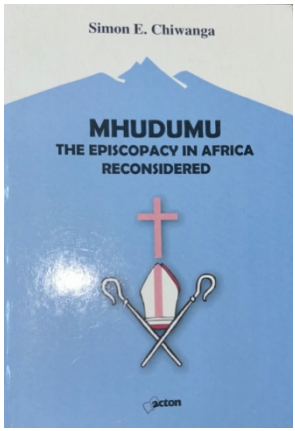
Cheo ni dhamana (Leadership is Trust)

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY
Chiwanga, Simon E. *Muhudumu: The Episcopacy in Africa Reconsidered*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2011. Pp. 121. (paperback)

Francis OMONDI

ORCID: 0000-0003-0650-4595
Bishop, Diocese of Garissa, Anglican Church of Kenya
bishop@ackgarissadiocese.org

Introduction



In *Muhudumu: The Episcopacy in Africa Reconsidered*, Simon E. Chiwanga proffers a provocative critique of episcopal leadership in the African Church. African episcopacy must vacate the monarchical leadership model and embrace a collaborative paradigm he terms *Muhudumu* ('servant' or 'minister' in kiSwahili). Drawing on his experience as Bishop of Mpwapwa in Tanzania, Chiwanga addresses the roots of the authoritative leadership crisis: namely, dependency, clerical domination, and hierarchical leadership within both church and society. By developing a Christian ecclesiology from the Tanzanian philosophy of *Ujamaa*, Chiwanga develops a leadership model that seeks to empower all church members to participate in God's mission.

Although this book includes significant theological reflection, its major thrust is in its practical proposal for ecclesiastical reform. It contributes to African theology, Anglican ecclesiology, and contemporary discourse on servant leadership.

Book Summary

From the onset, Chiwanga identifies a "dependency mentality" as one of the most significant challenges facing the African Church (7) — a mentality forged by colonialism, whose systems of domination produced in followers *fear of*

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rather than *respect for* leaders. On the church front, this manifests in distorted relationships between clergy and laity. Ordained ministers are often viewed either as proprietors of the church or as employees hired to perform ministry on behalf of passive congregants. Chiwanga refutes both assumptions as undermining the biblical vision of the church.

The first section of the book examines the historical roots of episcopal leadership in Tanzania, exposing the genesis of the present crisis. Chiwanga analyses the influence of two missionary traditions responsible for the planting of the Anglican church. These are the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) and the Church Missionary Society (CMS). He also evaluates the impact of German and British colonial administrations. These influences, he argues, contributed to hierarchical patterns of church leadership based on the imported notions of monarchy and on traditional African chieftainship.

In the second half of the book, Chiwanga constructs an alternative framework through the concept of *Ujamaa*, a philosophy characterized by mutual respect, shared responsibility, hard work, and communal accountability. Chiwanga interprets the biblical concept of *koinonia* (communion) through the *Ujamaa* prism, arguing that the church is a community of equals in which every member possesses gifts for ministry.

The crown of his argument is the *Muhudumu* model of episcopacy. According to Chiwanga, the bishop should not function as a *ruler* but as a *servant-leader* who empowers others, nurtures collaboration, and facilitates participation in the church's mission. The bishop's primary role is to equip the whole church for ministry rather than to monopolize authority.

Analysis of the *Muhudumu* Leadership Concept

Chiwanga's main contribution is his formulation of the *Muhudumu* concept. He defines a *muhudumu* as a leader who serves in collaboration with others, recognizes the dignity and gifts of every member, and enables others to exercise their God-given capacities. This is built on the notion that *Cheo ni dhamana* (kiSwahili: 'Leadership is Trust'). Theologically, Chiwanga draws particular attention to Christ's actions of washing the disciples' feet and serving others as paradigmatic examples of Christian leadership. As such, the *Muhudumu* model aligns with contemporary servant leadership theories, including Robert Greenleaf's,[1] but remains anchored in African cultural realities and Christian theology. An important feature of Chiwanga's argument is his insistence on leadership structures emerging through contextual discernment.

[1] See Robert K. Greenleaf's seminal *The Servant As Leader* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA: Centre for Applies Studies, 1970), along with several of his later titles.

As he shies from aping Western ecclesiastical models, he insists that African churches should evolve new forms of ministry. He calls for contextualization as a mature approach to African theology, transcending earlier approaches of adaptation or superficial indigenisation. Chiwanga's *Ujamaa* ecclesiology is compelling. He demonstrates that *Ujamaa* values of collective responsibility and communal participation resonate with both African social traditions and the New Testament church model. The result is an ecclesiology that challenges clericalism while affirming the ministry of all believers.

Book Strengths

Contextual sensitivity makes the book unique. Chiwanga develops his model from African historical, cultural, and ecclesial realities. His analyses of colonialism, missionary legacies, and traditional leadership structures provide a persuasive explanation for many leadership challenges facing African churches. His work is practical. Chiwanga does not theorize about leadership, but rather reflects on concrete reforms implemented during his episcopate in Mpwapwa Diocese. This includes increasing lay participation in church governance, decentralizing decision-making, and promoting accountability, illustrating how servant leadership can operate within ecclesiastical institutions. This book also offers an important corrective to clericalism. By emphasizing the gifts and responsibilities of all baptized believers, Chiwanga recovers a more biblical and participatory vision of the church. His insistence that ministry is not an exclusive domain of the ordained but belongs to the entire community has profound implications for mission, discipleship, and church growth. His intellectual creativity in integrating *Ujamaa* and *koinonia* has theological and ecumenical significance. Thus, Chiwanga demonstrates that African social philosophies can enrich Christian theology without compromising biblical foundations.

Critical Evaluation

Chiwanga's limitation is in pivoting on *Ujamaa* and traditional African communal values without paying attention to potential weaknesses. Such limitations include potential conformity, collectivism, or the suppression of dissenting voices. A more critical exploration of *Ujamaa*'s limitations would have strengthened his argument. Perhaps avoiding binary contrasts in his historical analysis would represent the reality of the African context. It is more complex than the contrast between foreign, hierarchical forms of leadership and indigenous, collaborative alternatives. Both African and Western traditions contain elements of servanthood and domination, and a more nuanced treatment would have avoided oversimplification. Collaborative leadership that Chiwanga advocates leaves unanswered the question of authority in times of

conflict, doctrinal disputes, or institutional crises. There should be a balance between servant leadership and necessary ecclesiastical authority. Although his insights are transferable, readers from different cultural contexts may need to adapt his proposals considerably.

Contribution to African Theology and Church Leadership

The continuing relevance of *Muhudumu* lies in its critique of clericalism and its advocacy of participatory church leadership. Many African churches continue to face challenges associated with the concentration of authority in clergy, limited lay involvement in decision-making, weak accountability structures, and leadership succession crises. Chiwanga's conception of episcopacy as *muhudumu* directly addresses these concerns by redefining the bishop's role as one of service, empowerment, and facilitation rather than domination. His appropriation of *Ujamaa* provides a framework for shared responsibility and communal participation that challenges inherited hierarchical models of church governance. This book is significant for contemporary discussions on the decolonization of African Christianity, demonstrating how indigenous African concepts can serve as legitimate resources for ecclesiological reflection. As African churches increasingly seek leadership models that are both biblically grounded and contextually rooted, Chiwanga's vision of collaborative episcopal ministry remains a valuable contribution to ecclesial practice and theological discourse.

Conclusion

Simon Chiwanga's *Muhudumu* is a thoughtful and bold examination of church leadership in Africa. His model is a compelling alternative to authoritarian and clerical forms of leadership. Chiwanga's central argument remains persuasive, although part of his analysis needed further critical engagement. *Muhudumu* is a valuable contribution to the continuing search for authentic and contextually relevant forms of Christian leadership in Africa. It demonstrates that effective episcopacy is not defined by power and privilege but by service, participation, and the empowerment of the whole people of God. The book is an important resource for theologians, church leaders, and students interested in African Christianity, ecclesiology, and servant leadership.

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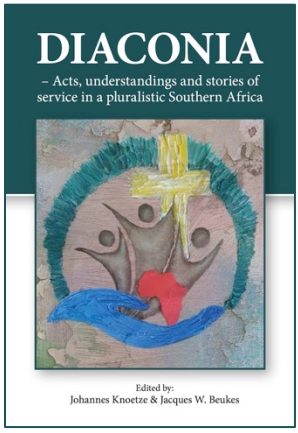
Grassrootlevel Church

God's Children in Action

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY
Knoetze, Johannes, and Jacques W. Beukes, eds. *Diaconia: Acts, Understandings, and Stories of Service in a Pluralistic Southern Africa*. Wellington, South Africa: Barnabus Academic Publishers, 2025. Pp. 334. South African Rand 350 (paperback) [1]

Willem-Henri DEN HARTOG [2]

GZB, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
WdHartog@gzb.nl



This volume explores the theology and practice of diaconal ministry within the context of Southern Africa. Edited by Johannes Knoetze and Jacques W. Beukes, both academics based in Pretoria, the book is divided into four sections:

(A) *The Context through Africa's Stories*;
(B) *Diaconia: A Challenge*;
(C) *Diaconia: An Indicative*; and
(D) *Diaconia: A Practice*.

One of the strengths of the book is that it begins with a concrete example of the Church in action. **Isabel Apawo Phiri**'s chapter, "Missiological and Diaconal Imperatives in the Context of Cyclone Freddy in Phalombe, Malawi," describes how churches responded after Cyclone Freddy devastated southeastern Malawi in 2023. Rather than approaching *diaconia* merely as a theological concept, the chapter demonstrates how Christian service is embodied in practical ministry during times of crisis. This immediately sets the tone for the volume by showing that

[1] The Fellowship of Deacons of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) has made an open access copy of this book available at https://acsafod.org.za/papers/2025%20Diaconia-Acts-understanding-and-stories.pdf

[2] Rev. den Hartog is a former Associate Pastor of Limbe Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP) in Limbe, Malawi.

Published with license by ACTEA | DOI: https://doi.org/10.69683/228j2x27
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diaconia is not simply a theoretical construct but an expression of the church's lived witness.

For me, the highlight of the book is **Nioma Venter**'s chapter, "Collaborative-Integrated Missional Diaconal Praxis: Introducing the Scaling Diaconate Model." This is one of the most practical and innovative contributions to the volume. **Venter** explains how the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) has played a significant role in South Africa's social welfare sector through both local congregations and church-related social service organisations. By 2024, twelve registered social service organisations were directly affiliated with the DRC.

She argues that the transition to democratic South Africa after 1994 forced the DRC to rethink both its identity and its social responsibility. Faced with widespread poverty, inequality, and unemployment, the church recognised that a more systematic and collaborative approach to social ministry was required. At the same time, cooperation between church structures and professional welfare organisations often remained fragmented and ineffective. These challenges eventually prompted the DRC to rethink its mission within a rapidly changing society. A significant milestone was reached in 2013, when the General Synod formally adopted a missional ecclesiology, encouraging new ways of understanding and practising diaconal ministry.

One practical outcome of this renewed vision was *Little Seeds*, a partnership between congregations in the Western Cape and Badisa, a major non-governmental organisation providing professional social welfare services. The project focused on early childhood development as a means of addressing deep-rooted social challenges. Little Seeds became a successful example of collaborative and integrated diaconal ministry and ultimately served as the prototype for what later became known as the *Scaling Diaconate Model*.

The model seeks to help congregations move beyond isolated acts of charity towards sustainable, community-based social engagement. The experience of Little Seeds demonstrated that effective partnerships require a shared vision, shared resources, shared knowledge, and strong communication. At the same time, it became evident that churches and welfare organizations often operate according to very different organizational cultures. Churches are typically volunteer-driven, relational, flexible, and motivated by a sense of calling, whereas NGOs tend to be more formal, professionally managed, highly regulated, and accountable to legal and policy frameworks.

Rather than viewing these differences as obstacles, **Venter** argues that they should be understood as complementary strengths that require careful management. Churches contribute local trust, committed volunteers, buildings, and deep community relationships, while organisations such as Badisa provide

professional expertise, sound governance, legal compliance, and extensive experience in social work and early childhood development.

Theologically, this approach is grounded in missional theology, the *missio Dei*, and the relational nature of the Triune God. **Venter** supports her argument with numerous diagrams and tables, which clearly explain the Scaling Diaconate Model. The model identifies four interconnected spheres of diaconal engagement — advocacy and support, intervention, protection, and flourishing — and encourages movement between these different forms of ministry according to local needs. In **Venter**'s view, the Scaling Diaconate Model offers the DRC a flexible and relational framework for building partnerships that strengthen collective impact and contribute to the flourishing of communities.

The chapter by **Nioma Venter** provides valuable theoretical insights that can be applied relatively easily to the wider context of Southern Africa. This is less the case with the chapter by **Johan M. van der Merwe** on *diaconia* in the Dutch Reformed Church, entitled "The Ghost of Apartheid Arising?" **Van der Merwe** argues that Afrikaner nationalism is experiencing a resurgence, partly reflected in the restoration of statues commemorating Boer soldiers. For the author, this recalls the apartheid era, when Afrikaner nationalism was also highly influential. During that period, *diaconia* functioned, at least in part, as an instrument of apartheid ideology: assistance was primarily directed towards their own group (Afrikaners), while mission work was focused on non-white communities.

Van der Merwe warns that neo-Afrikaner nationalism carries the risk of returning to this pattern: that the church may once again focus its diaconal efforts primarily on Afrikaners, especially in the context of failing government services in South Africa. He rightly urges the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) not to follow this path again. Members of the DRC should be reminded that their diaconal calling extends to all cultural groups and communities. This is an important and timely appeal.

However, **Van der Merwe** develops his argument through references to Afrikaner cultural history (for example, Sarel Cilliers) and makes frequent use of Afrikaans terminology. For readers who are not familiar with Afrikaner culture or who cannot read Afrikaans, this chapter may therefore be difficult to engage with fully.

An article of exceptionally high academic quality is **Erica Meijers**'s contribution, entitled "A Praxis of Grace, Desire and Resistance: Methodology for a Eucharistic Diaconia." She describes the practice of communal worship in the Nassau Church in Amsterdam, where the sharing of bread and wine is open not only to the congregation but also to the surrounding neighbourhood, in this case the Staatsliedenbuurt. The central question she explores is how the wider

neighbourhood can become involved in the rituals of the church community. Within this framework, Holy Communion becomes more than a ritual concerned solely with individual salvation.

Meijers then provides a highly informed explanation of the meaning and function of Holy Communion within the Calvinist tradition. As a Dutchman, I can fully appreciate the context she describes, especially because I have also worked in Amsterdam myself. However, the social reality of the Staatsliedenbuurt neighbourhood and the Western European understanding of church life are far removed from the ecclesial realities in Southern Africa of churches such as the Reformed Church of Zimbabwe or the Zionist Christian Church. This raises an important question: who benefits from the inclusion of this chapter in a volume focusing on diaconal practices within the pluralistic context of Southern Africa?

Very little has been published on the subject of diaconal ministry in (Southern) Africa. Although the majority of contributions in this book focus on South Africa, Malawi, or the Netherlands, it would have been valuable if the editors had applied a more critical selection process regarding which contributions should be included. This observation, however, does not diminish the significant achievement of **Knoetze** and **Beukes** in bringing these authors together and publishing this volume.

The book provides churches and Christians with inspiration to engage in diaconal ministry and practical guidance on how to implement such ministry. The "Afterword" at the end of the book is particularly helpful in this regard. CLF[3] has done an excellent job in publishing this beautifully produced volume, and I hope it will find its way into the hands of many Christians in Africa and beyond.

[3] Barnabus Academic Publishers is an imprint of CLF Publishers.

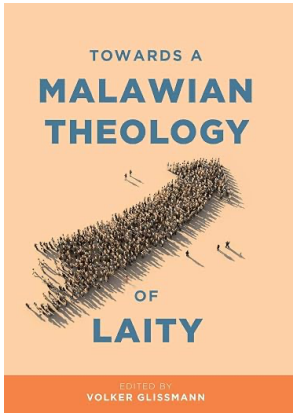
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vol. 3, nº 2 (2026) 350–357

The *Missio Dei* Calls for an Equipped and Empowered Laity

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY
Glissmann, Volker, ed. *Towards a Malawian Theology of Laity*. Mzuzu, Malawi: Luviri Press, 2020. Pp. 284. US $46.20 (Paperback), US $40.00 (Kindle)

Donald Stanley MEADOR

ORCID: 0009-0009-0464-3066
Little Flock Baptist Church, Shepherdsville, Kentucky, USA
swmeador2000@gmail.com



The fourteen chapters comprising this book examine the scriptural and historical basis for an equipped and empowered laity actively engaging in the *missio Dei* alongside the clergy, as well as practical ways to accomplish that New Testament objective. Most of the contributors are Malawian. Those who are not Malawian have a significant connection with Malawi and a strong commitment to the health and growth of the Malawian Church. All are accomplished theologians. **Hany Longwe** writes in the **Introduction**, "The aim of this book is to bring together different contributors to address biblically and theologically the role of the laity within the context of the Malawian church" (13). The tome brings numerous Malawian voices to the global discussion of the clergy-laity divide, providing context-informed insights for the consideration of African and World Christians. Given the breadth of the contributions and the benefit of aiding each voice to reach a wider audience, a review essay is in order.

Hany Longwe, a Baptist theologian and educator, lays the groundwork in "**The Church, the Laity, and the Priesthood**." He lays out the New Testament vision of equality across sex, age, race, and class, arguing that the New Testament Church did not distinguish sharply between clergy and laity. During the Protestant Reformation, the Church recovered the doctrine of the Priesthood of

Published with license by ACTEA | DOI: https://doi.org/10.69683/b0123091
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All Believers. He posits that "Although some churches have embarked on a lifelong relationship with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, they have had a difficult time agreeing on the precise language for describing this most important belief to which they hold fast" (17). He recognizes that the clergy-laity divide is widening once again, in both the Malawian and global Church. In a statement that could represent the overall message of the book, he wrote, "The priesthood of the ordained ministry is to enable and not remove the priesthood of all believers. The clergy are not prior to or independent of or against the church; rather, with the rest of the laity, they are the church sent into the world" (29). He concludes the chapter with a call for theological training institutes to develop programs for training the laity.

The second chapter, "**The Place of the Laity in the Church under the Priesthood of All Believers**," was written by author and lecturer **Joseph Andrew Thipa**, who posits that too many church leaders in Malawi seek elevated status and honor from their congregations. This tendency is not limited to Malawi; it is a global reality in the Church. He examines the history of the doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers, from Martin Luther to the present. The Life and Work programme of the 1910 World Missionary Movement, according to **Thipa**, sought the renewal of temporal orders by learning "how Christians could assist one another in bringing their faith to bear on the general life of society — in politics, industry, education, international relations, et cetera" (39). He observed that the laity is already present in society and engaged in societal issues at a level not available to most clergy. He concluded the chapter with a call for the clergy to aid the laity in functioning holistically as the people of God in society.

The Right Reverend **James Tengatenga**, professor and Anglican bishop, wrestles with what it means to be a minister in the third chapter, "**Not Just Loyal Sheep: Informed Ministry of the Laity**." He warns that referring to clergy as *ministers* can foster the errant idea that the laity are not ministers. While Malawian churches have done a thorough job of convincing Christians otherwise, "being a Christian is being a minister" (43). The growth of the Anglican Church in Malawi has outpaced the formation of clergy, resulting in many lay leaders with little to no formation being appointed to positions of leadership, which is less than ideal. "The laity," writes **Tengatenga**, "are not considered ministers in the way that clergy are. In fact, their work is not considered ministry. After all the laity are but sheep" (46). The prevailing attitude he describes runs counter to the priorities of the Protestant Reformation and conflicts with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. He declares that both clergy and laity are ministers and need theological formation. He calls for the reinvigoration of Theological Education by Extension for educating and forming lay ministers.

Chapter 4, "**The Laity as Church in the World: The Need to Equip Them in Their Apostolate**," was written by the Right Reverend Dr **Fanuel Magangani**. The nature of the Church universal and the *missio Dei* are examined in this chapter. **Magangani** explains,

> The main point to be made in this presentation is that Christ did not intend merely to save individuals but to save the world, and for this He founded the Church to continue His mission in the world. As members of the Church, the laity have a specific mission to the world and in the world to be fully Christians just like the clergy. (54)

He observed that the ongoing expansion of the church in Malawi occurs through the movement of the laity into new areas, and the formal presence of the church follows them. He concludes the chapter with a call for every parish to serve as a lay training center to further equip them to carry out the *missio Dei*.

Manuel Kamnkhwani, a theologian and professor, wrote "**Servants or Maters? 21st Century Pontification of the Church in Africa**." He decries the state of the church in Africa, diminished by scandals, materialism, spiritual abuse, and weaponized church discipline, and thus fallen into disrepute, which he attributes in large part to pastors who lead their churches as a CEO leads a company. He likens the current situation to the rise of the pontiff in the eleventh century. He urges churches to engage in a theological reflection on the difference between "biblical leadership models and those promoted by society" (61). He calls on seminaries to rethink their mission since numerous graduates have compromised biblical standards and values of leadership. His call includes the necessity of theological formation for lay leaders with a strong connection to the local church.

The sixth chapter, "**The Place of the Laity in Doing Theology at Grassroots**" by **Chatha Msangaambe**, challenges the Malawian church to learn from the history of the church in the West, to glean its value, adapt it locally, and avoid its mistakes. Drawing on decades of experience as a pastor and lecturer, and on his current service as the National Chairperson of the Evangelical Association of Malawi, he aims to rediscover "the place of the laity in the church's on-going efforts to remain missional and relevant in the contemporary world" (73). He follows the characteristics of a missional church delineated in Dan Kimball's book *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, 2007), which he encapsulates as "a church that is having an energizing faith; outward-looking focus; and frequently participating lay people" (74). The undergirding premise is that the majority of the church comprises lay people who interact directly with the world outside the church. Their experiences provide valuable insights for contextualizing theology and engaging missionally, which is the

crux of doing theology at the grassroots level. He admonishes church leaders and theological educators: "For any training curriculum to be relevant, it has to formulate its objectives with the goal of offering the most important skills that the students need for the work in which they are being trained" (88). In my own work in discipleship and theological education in North and South America, I have focused on skill development as the crucial difference between teaching (imparting knowledge) and training (making disciples). **Msangaambe** observes that Western approaches that focus on theory rather than practice in the local context are doing a disservice to Africans, whether clergy or laity. His observation is accurate and highlights the necessity of contextualized theological formation. He concludes with words of wisdom for the Malawian church, "the success of any clergy begins in the appropriate engagement of the laity in the life of any church" (89). This is a leadership lesson of global import.

The Reverend Dr **Blair Bertrand** contributed chapter 7, "**Changing Expectations: A Sociology of Ordination in Malawi**." He posits that Malawi has millions of Christians but few ordained ministers. While the number of Christians has increased, the number of trained ministers has remained static. In many Malawian pulpits, sermons are preached by lay preachers with no formal Bible study or theological education. He does not call Malawian churches to live up to the expectations of Western Europe or North America regarding ordination; he calls Malawian churches to establish their own expectations, which, as of yet, they have not. He writes, "Malawi has not shaped its own norms for Christian ministry nor does it meet the ones adopted from the West" (93). He then adroitly traces the concept of ordination through history as a form of contextual theology. He applies the "Two Publics" framework from sociologist Peter P. Ekeh's landmark study, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa,"[1] to the dynamics of power and authority structures related to ordination in post-colonial Africa. He observes that "even the best-intentioned missionaries played out the logic of power and authority inherent in their [contextually formulated] understanding of ordination" (95). In post-colonial Malawi, foreign church leaders were replaced by local leaders but the imported power structures remained in place. This reality brought the "two publics" into the life of the church. The first public, Ekeh's primordial public, is that ruled by primordial commitments in which public and private morality are

[1] Peter P. Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17, no. 1 (1975): 91–112, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500007659 (also available at JSTOR and on ResearchGate.net); see also Ekeh's later "Afterword: Note on 'Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement,'" in Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities through African Perspectives, vol. 1, ed. Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho, 219–232 (Legon-Accra, Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2012).

the same. The second public, Ekeh's civic public, is that ruled by the imported concepts of morality and justice, in which there is little to no moral connection between public and private commitments; morality exists in private while public interactions are amoral. The split between public and private morality posed numerous challenges for the church regarding corruption. Bertrand writes, "because of the two publics there is no moral imperative to change because both ordained and lay avail themselves of the spiritual benefits of the primordial public and the material benefits of the civic public" (102). He concludes the chapter with a call for a contextualized theology that reimagines "how the Malawian church determines who has the authority to lead Christ's church" (109). In the end, he argues for an Africanized qualification for ordination of clergy rather than a diminished clergy-laity divide. His contribution is observant and fascinating, especially to an outsider. Despite addressing the Malawian church reality in greater depth than many of the other contributors, he did not clearly connect his study of ordination to a Malawian theology of laity. Undoubtedly, some readers would have hoped for a more explicit connection.

Volker Glissman, editor of the volume under review, contributed chapter 8, "**Voices from the Grassroots: Meaningful Partnership**." He argues that a meaningful partnership between the clergy and laity can only develop if the voices of the grassroots (aka the laity) are included in the conversation. Through qualitative research via interviews, he endeavored to give voice to the laity. In English, he interviewed 7 females and 8 males from urban and semi-urban contexts. Four participants had experience with non-Malawian churches. Two participants were not Malawians (to include global concerns). Eight of the participants were married couples. The researcher acknowledged the limitations of the small sample size and considered his findings as a first step toward amplifying the voices of the Malawian laity. Readers should be aware that the limited sample size and its demographics may not be a representative sample of the Malawian laity. The findings, while interesting, may not produce sound conclusions needed to amplify the voice of the laity in the conversation at hand. Nonetheless, the author found that "a significant obstacle for the empowerment of the laity in the Malawian church comes from the very clergy-centered view of ministry and the mediative role between the divine and human world role ascribed to the ordained ministry" (141). The author concludes that the church has failed "to properly and theologically teach the full participation of all God's people in [the] ministry of the kingdom. This is missing in the lived theology of the people here in Malawi but actually worldwide too" (145). In short, this research suggests that the concept of the priesthood of all believers has yet to become a part of the living theology of Protestant churches in Malawi.

The Reverend Dr **Gertrude Aopesyaga Sulumbu-Kapuma**, argues for the importance of the laity in congregational care in chapter 9, "**Lay People and Caring for the Widows**." She posits that the laity both serve the congregation and inform the clergy of needs. The laity need additional training in some aspects of congregation care; the care of widows is one such aspect. The chapter examines some of the challenges widows face in Malawi. Globally, widows need someone to journey with them through the grief cycle. She observes that "widows are not supported in their time of need and the church which is supposed to accompany them, plays no role in helping them heal" (148). Beyond this universal responsibility of the church, she focuses on harmful cultural practices that the Malawian church should help widows avoid. One such practice is widowhood cleansing, in which the family of the departed husband requires the widow to have sex with a "cleanser" to achieve ritual purity. Until she is "cleansed," she cannot make important decisions and is often left with nothing as her late husband's estate is settled by his family. Such cultural practices are incompatible with Christianity, go against the principle of ubuntu, ignore basic human rights, and are against the laws of Malawi. However, "the cultural practices have made [widows] believe that they have no rights to fight against the injustice done to them" (156). Condemning all forms of abuse, she challenges the church to find "ways that can help restore the dignity of women so that they live a life that has meaning" (158). She concludes the chapter with a call for the church to train lay leaders to aid widows and address harmful cultural practices in their theological training.

Volker Glissmann also wrote on "**The Fragmentation of Theological Education and Its Effect on the Church, Grassroots Theological Education in Malawi and TEE**." He observes "that something is not aligned between the pastoral and spiritual needs of the community of God's people, and the kind of theological education that theological institutions offer" (172). Fragmentation refers to the misalignment of theological education and ministry needs or the breaking into fragments a once unified content (e.g., academic, ministerial, or grassroots theological education), resulting in "an essential loss of usefulness of theological education" (173). The fragmentation created three interrelated issues for the church and grassroots: the meaning and unifying principle of theology have been distorted, the ill-defined nature and purpose of theology contributed to the fragmentation of theological education, and the fragmentation separated theory from practice. The author calls for the reintegration of theological education with the following considerations: clearly defined theological and pedagogical outcomes, identification of the end recipients, and inclusion of the grassroots in theological education. He proposed Theological Education by Extension (TEE) as the best model of reintegration of theology and grassroots formation.

Watson Rajaratnam, a lecturer and missions mobilizer, wrote "**Lay Empowerment and Mission for the Malawian Church**." His impassioned contribution asserts that Malawi has great potential to contribute to the world's mission force by sending, funding, and praying. He laments that few pastors have a vision to equip and send their laity. He writes, "the problem lies not with God or His ability to empower the Malawian church to fulfill His Great Commission, but with the Malawian clergy who have been failing in their entrusted responsibility of discipling and mobilizing their congregation to fulfill the [missionary] task" (209). He posits five focal points for a course correction: 1) transforming lay members into disciples, 2) training laity to become disciple makers, 3) turning lay disciples into lay leaders, 4) using lay disciples' resources (gifting and finances) for ministry and mission, and 5) empowering the laity following Jesus' example. He challenges the Malawian church with these words, "The time has come for the Malawian clergy to awaken the Malawian laity and reinstate them to their rightful position in the churches" (216). He concluded the chapter with a call to biblical disciple-making that equips and empowers a missional laity.

Paul Matthews Louis Mawaya wrote on "**Theological Training in Malawi: The Case of CCAP Blantyre Synod**." He presents feedback from participants and practitioners of theological training within the Blantyre Synod of the CCAP (Church of Central Africa Presbyterian) from 2014 to 2018, with a particular focus on sustaining theological training for the grassroots. His research comprised seven personal interviews with key respondents who completed theological training and then successfully graduated a cohort using the same training. His research revealed that low literacy levels, limited financial resources, a low view of the value of training, and the general difficulties and busyness of life worked against successful theological training. Those who completed the training reported qualitative improvements in their personal life and family relationships, as well as congregational growth. He concludes that "only a theologically trained community can experience transformation that remains Bible centered and Christ centered" (239). He calls church leaders to promote, facilitate, and participate in theological education in their churches.

Isabel Apawo Phiri calls for an end to gender discrimination in "**Ministry for All God's People: Laity, Gender and Theological Education in a Rapidly Changing Malawi**." Intersectionality is her analytical tool of choice as it "encourages examination of how different systems of oppression intersect and affect groups of women in different ways" (240–241). She attributes the oppression of and discrimination against African women in the church to clericalism and patriarchy. She traces the clergy-laity divide through Church history, including a discussion of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, which is widely accepted by Protestants in theory, albeit unevenly applied across

gender lines. She included biographical information about her own journey through several Presbyterian churches as the ordination of women became acceptable over time. She also advocated for the World Council of Churches and lauded its Programme to Combat Racism that promotes peace and justice. She concludes, "In Malawi, we need to prepare the people of God for ministry where every Christian will develop the consciousness that they have to contribute to peace and justice in response to God's mission" (254).

Finally, **Volker Glissmann** contributes a discussion of the "**(Financial) Viability of Grassroots Theological Education**." He defines *viability* as the question of "whether something can achieve its intended purpose" (260). He argues that theological education is a matter of covenant faithfulness, thereby asserting that viability is covenant faithfulness, that covenant faithfulness requires comprehensive theological education, and that comprehensive theological education requires church-based funding. He writes,

> Viable theological education allows the church, in all its many manifestations, to work successfully and fully participate in the mission of God in the world. A key question here is, is it actually viable for the church *not* to comprehensively train the grassroots and instead focus predominantly on ministerial theological education? (261)

Clearly, the church in Malawi, as well as the global Church, must acknowledge that equipping and empowering the laity through theological education is a biblical imperative.

I sincerely recommend this book to theologians and lay leaders seeking to better understand the biblical and historical development of the theology of the laity. The authors present a well-reasoned, unified argument for the priesthood of all believers as orthodoxy. Readers will also note that orthodoxy in this matter divorced from orthopraxy will never result in a robust pursuit of the *missio Dei* in Malawi, nor anywhere. All the contributors to this work are to be lauded for boldly taking a seat at the theological table of the global church. My highest praise is reserved for chapter 9, "Lay People and Caring for the Widows," by **Sulumbu-Kapuma**. Her chapter should be required reading in seminaries around the world to illustrate the necessity of contextually developed practical theology. May theologians around the world welcome these authors with open arms for their effort to establish a sound doctrine of laity in Malawi's churches.

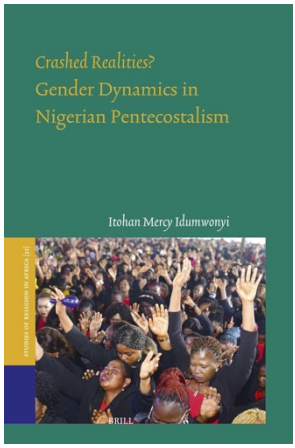
AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
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BOOK NOTE REVIEW

Idumwonyi, Itohan Mercy. *Crashed Realities? Gender Dynamics in Nigerian Pentecostalism*. Studies of Religion in Africa 52. Leiden: Brill, 2024. Pp. xvii + 221. €121.00 (Paperback, ebook)

Kingsley Ikechukwu UWAEGBUTE

ORCID: 0000-0002-9697-0444
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria
kingsley.uwaegbute@unn.edu.ng



It is a sincere pleasure to write a review of this well-written book. For one, growing up in southeast Nigeria, my father used to tell me about the exploits of Bishop Benson Idahosa, the founder of Church of God Mission International (CGMi), one of the foremost Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, which Idumwonyi writes about in the book. I am happy that this well-written book now tells the story of CGMi from a gender dynamics lens. As a scholar of religion, and a firm believer in the field work approach in the study of religion, I am greatly impressed with the quality of work Idumwonyi put into this book. A probable reworked version of her PhD thesis, *Crashed Realities* introduces readers to the issue of gender dynamics from a seven-part perspective.

The first part of the book is introductory; it is a detailed description of the methodology applied in the book and a general overview of how the book is structured. This is followed by the second part which deals with the perception of women in the Benin people's culture. Its argument is that the perception and status of women generally in Benin is difficult to de-historicize owing to patriarchal structures of the people. The third part of the book focuses on the emergence of Pentecostalism in the religious landscape of Benin. In this part, Idumwonyi argues for the recognition of the indigenous efforts of the Benin people in pioneering the spread of Pentecostalism in the area. It is within this context that she locates the emergence of the late Bishop Benson Idahosa and the CGMi. One thing Idumwonyi made sure to stress is the male-dominated structure of CGMi from its beginning. In the next part of the book, Idumwonyi

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weaves a narrative of gender inequality in the structures and operations of CGMi as a Pentecostal movement. In Idumwonyi's thought, the male-dominated structure of the movement subtly enthroned gender inequality and the relegation of women's roles to the background. It was, within this context, as Idumwonyi argues, that Margret Idahosa emerged as the leader of the movement at the demise of her husband Benson, CGMi's founder.

Next, the book weaves its narrative around the life of Margret Idahosa as she emerged the new leader of CGMi. According to Idumwonyi, her emergence as the leader of the movement was an affront and challenge to male domination in the movement thereby bridging the gap of gender inequality and challenging "the 'masculine too-muchness' that punctuate Pentecostals' everyday life, power of tradition, and patrilineal norms" (13). A further discussion on Margret Idahosa's stance on women's ministry is explored in this part of the book. In the next part of the book, Idumwonyi discusses critically what she terms "the weight of femaleness" (13). Here, she finds support in the theory of negro-feminism as theorized by Obioma Nnaemeka to discuss how the Pentecostals negotiate contemporary inclusivity as far as gender troubles are concerned. Its take here is that through building and accumulating resources, women find greater voice in a male-dominated leadership structure of Pentecostalism.

The concluding part of the book discusses the Pentecostal view of gender equality; Idumwonyi's point is that gender inclusivity in the Pentecostal view is an embedded negotiation in day-to-day practices of the movement. In all, the book calls for a more balanced Pentecostal re-distribution of gender roles — an inclusive approach to religious practices where women find their voice and partake actively in leadership roles which is in line with a balanced understanding of the Pentecost experience in Acts 2. In this book, Idumwonyi has discussed an important issue not only within the Pentecostal circles in Nigeria but also within the Christian movement in Nigeria generally. The Christian practice being patriarchal in its Jewish and Roman beginnings, found a home in a Nigerian culture where patriarchy is a fact. The interaction of the Christian practice with the Nigerian patriarchal structures deepened gender inequality in Nigerian Christianity. Thus, Idumwonyi's work has analyzed the problem of gender inequality using a particular strand of Pentecostalism — the CGMi.

Herein also lies my reservation about the title of the book. Being a focus on the CGMi, the title of the book is a little bit misleading as it is presented like its discussion generally applies to gender inequality in Nigerian Pentecostalism. This is why I think that such an approach is over generalization. I had expected the author to have drawn parallel(s) from (an)other Pentecostal culture-dominated denomination in Nigeria (even if it was in Edo State) to

briefly prove its point regarding the preponderance of gender inequality within the Pentecostal circles in Nigeria. If this had been done, then it would become easier for the reader to judge if the patriarchal structure of CGMi was more of a problem to gender equality than other contemporary strands of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. That notwithstanding, Idumwonyi's book is a well-written piece with methodological rigor that introduces its readers to the realities of gender inequality in the CGMi as a strand of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. It comes highly recommended for scholars and students of religious studies, those with an interest in Pentecostalism and gender dynamics in Nigeria, and even those who would wish to understand the perception of women in the Benin culture.

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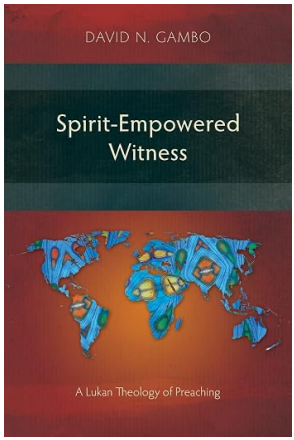
BOOK NOTE REVIEW

Gambo, David N. *Spirit-Empowered Witness: A Lukan Theology of Preaching*. Studies in Homiletics. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Academic, 2022. Pp. ix + 140. £ 16.99 (Paperback)

Kingsley Ikechukwu UWAEGBUTE

ORCID: 0000-0002-9697-0444
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria
kingsley.uwaegbute@unn.edu.ng

Any serious scholar of the gospels would agree that the Spirit is an important theme in the Gospel of Luke. David Gambo's book is therefore written on the theology of preaching from a Lukan point of view of the Spirit. According to Gambo, irrespective of the fact that the Gospel of Luke has a lot of material on the Spirit, which should help the contemporary church re-discover its Spirit-empowered preaching activities, the reality remains that "few books focus on the theology of preaching, especially Spirit-empowered preaching" (ix). By implication, Gambo's argument is that there is a neglect of pneumatology in the preaching activities of the Church today. This book therefore focuses on providing the contemporary church with material that will serve its Spirit-empowered preaching needs. To do this, the author carefully selects four passages within the Luke-Acts corpus (Lk 4:14–30; Lk 24:13–35, Acts 1:1–5 and 10:34–43) which, he argues, deal with Spirit-empowerment. Methodologically, the author approached his task of reading these texts through a careful exegetical approach which, to him, was a combination of the grammatical, syntactical, lexical, historical, and literary analysis. After a thorough-going exegesis of the identified texts, the author gives their implication for preaching. That way, he was able to weave together an exegesis of these passages with a focus on their implications for preaching.



As a Lukan scholar who completed my doctoral thesis on material possessions in Luke, I had read some of the works Gambo reviews, enabling me to identify gaps in his literature review. But I will strongly say that of the many

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books on Luke on pneumatology and issues of preaching I have read, I rank Gambo's work the most thoroughly exegetical. One of the strengths of this book is its deep and careful analysis of Greek words in the texts it exegeted. The book therefore shows rigor in its approach, methodologically. It is accessible to both experts and non-experts of biblical studies.

Notwithstanding, I feel that the author's claim that the contemporary Church is silent on the Holy Spirit (ix) is not entirely true. Equally problematic is his other claim in being motivated to write the book because of the rate at which preachers are quitting the ministry because of ministerial burnout and depression (ix). While it is always advisable to put such claims in a context, especially in an academic work, I doubt the correctness of Gambo's claim even when applied to his own roots in Nigeria. Nigeria happens to be my own context and I would not know how true his claims are in other contexts. But since the time the Pentecostals and Charismatics began to exert huge influence on Nigerian Christianity, there has been an awakening of Holy Spirit consciousness in the Church. The different charismatic groups in the churches have emphasized, and continue to emphasize, the place of the Holy Spirit in the Church. In fact, the contemporary Church is Spirit-conscious more than ever. Even so, it is clear that instead of ministers of the word being in shortage in Nigeria, they are ever-multiplying. From a critical perspective, church ministry in the country is being driven by, most times, economic gains. This is why multiplicity of churches in Nigeria is a fact and a troubling situation to keen observers of the situation.

One more thing that deserves to be said is the eclectic methodological approach by the author. His combination of many exegetical methods in reading the texts could have been reduced to three important ones: grammatical, historical, and literary analysis of the text. After all, there is a thin line between lexical and grammatical analysis. In addition, a good exegesis should present readers with the texts being exegeted in both their original language and the author's translations. Gambo's work only did the later.

Irrespective of these few shortcomings of the work, Gambo has presented today's church with formative material to help church leaders in their preaching activities from a Spirit-empowered perspective as contained in the gospel of Luke. I strongly recommend this piece for church leaders, those preparing to become preachers of the word, New Testament scholars, and those particularly interested in issues of pneumatology and preaching.

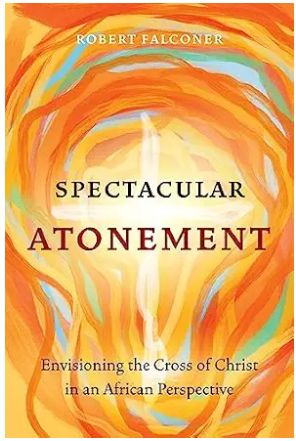
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BOOK NOTE REVIEW

Falconer, Robert. *Spectacular Atonement: Envisioning the Cross of Christ in an African Perspective.* 2nd edition. Foreword by Samuel Waje Kunhiyop. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2023. Pp. 147. US $22.99 (Paperback), US$12.99 (Kindle)

Donald Stanley MEADOR

ORCID: 0009-0009-0464-3066
Little Flock Baptist Church, Shepherdsville, Kentucky, USA
swmeador2000@gmail.com



Spectacular Atonement: Envisioning the Cross of Christ in an African Perspective adds a valuable African voice to the growing body of World Christian contributions to contextualized theology. Drawing on biblical and historical theology, as well as African Christian theologians, it explores the penal substitution and Christus Victor theories of the atonement as complementary and then applies the finished work of Christ to specific realities within broader African cultural contexts. The book argues that the cross of Christ fulfills "the very yearnings of the African people as revealed in their myths and traditions" (xvi). This book speaks to the global Christian community while speaking with a voice that is uniquely African.

Recent literature treating atonement theory includes studies arguing for either penal substitution or Christus Victor. Rare contributions such as Hans Boersma's *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Academic, 2006) and Scot McKnight's *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Abingdon Press, 2007) argue that the two theories are both equally biblical and valid. This book argues that penal substitution is the means of atonement and Christus Victor is its purpose. Aside from *Spectacular Atonement*, the reviewer is not familiar with any contributions outside Western Christianity that treat the two theories as complementary, which adds to the value of the work under review.

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Utilizing qualitative methodology, the book was written in two parts. The first part examines atonement in Scripture, historical sources, and African Christianity. In the Post-Reformation section of the historical review, the author's sources focus heavily on Reformed-tradition authors. The work could have included a brief sampling of Wesleyan and Pentecostal views of the atonement to provide a broader theological spectrum. The second part applies atonement to specific aspects of a general African traditional worldview and African spirituality, including ancestors, evil spirits, sin, witchcraft, suffering, humanity, cosmic harmony, and an African hope. This section is well-informed and skillfully argued, providing readers with a comparison and contrast of African worldview topics from a variety of African authors. Falconer's unique contribution is his contextualization of Christ as the Supreme Ancestor, based largely on Christ's role as the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). Readers leery of contextualization may have concerns with this proposal; those supportive of the practice will understand Falconer's concern and the logic of his argument.

Spectacular Atonement is well researched and thoroughly documented. At the same time, the language is accessible to a wide range of readers. The theology is orthodox without diving too deeply for lay readers. Falconer clearly grasps the biblical languages yet rarely refers to them directly. This work is suitable for everyone interested in contextualization, the atonement, African Christianity, and African worldviews. The book would serve well as a supplementary textbook in Bible colleges and seminaries for missiology and theology students. Finally, anyone going to Africa for short- or long-term mission work would benefit from reading this book. *Spectacular Atonement* is an important contribution to the literature of World Christianity.

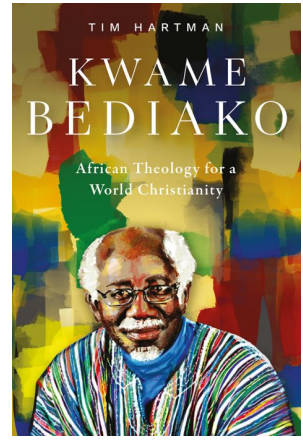
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BOOK NOTE REVIEW

Hartman, Tim. *Kwame Bediako: African Theology for a World Christianity*. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2021. Pp. xvii + 166. £15.99 (Paperback) [1]

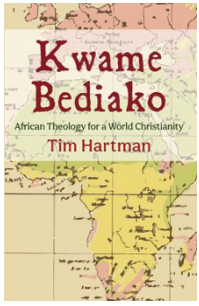
Ryan FABER

ORCID: 0000-0003-2929-2695
Theological Education by Extension in Zambia
faberific@gmail.com



Is the future of Western theology African? Tim Hartman's theological introduction to Kwame Bediako's work suggests that it might be. Hartman, an associate professor of theology at Columbia Theological Seminary (USA), describes Bediako as "an apostle to the West" (xiv) who "exposes how syncretistic Western theology can be while also offering concrete suggestions for the future of Western theology" (xvi).

Though Hartman describes his work as "a theological introduction rather than a biography" (xvi), biography is not wholly absent. After all, as Hartman notes, "Bediako's theology is deeply personal" (5). Bediako's rejection of Western theology was "informed and intentional" (3). He had been trained in Western thought and done "his best to internalize Western ways of thinking" (6). Yet, as Bediako himself testified: "My exposure to Western intellectual culture . . . had not led me to find Christ; instead, it made me an atheist" (8). Bediako's "sudden and surprising conversion" (6) was "the defining event in his life" (7). As Hartman explains, it "opened up a way for him to become spiritual again" (8), so that, in Bediako's words, "in becoming Christian . . . I was becoming African again" (8). That statement defines



[1] A reprint for the North American market is available from Fortress Press (Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA), 2022.

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Bediako's project — to help "Africans feel that they were authentic Africans and true Christians" (9).

Bediako believed that Western culture, particularly the Enlightenment's emphases on reason and the individual, and the experience of Christendom, had corrupted the Christian faith. In its place, Bediako sought to develop an authentically African Christian theology, drawing on Africa's pre-colonial Christian past, especially second-century apologists — though only two of the four apologists (Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian) on whom Bediako relies were African, a point overlooked by Hartman — and on African traditional spirituality. Bediako saw African traditional religions as preparation for the gospel — Africans were worshipping God "even before they knew the name of God as Jesus Christ" (57). Bediako had a positive view of primal traditions. The primal provides a people's religious substructure, the substructure on which the Christian faith is built and expressed. One failure of Western theology was its replacement of the primal with reason. For Bediako, the primal (or spiritual) is always primary.

The incarnation — the eternal, universal Word of God becoming flesh — was central in Bediako's theology. It defined his understanding of translatability: Christ is translatable (able to take on flesh) into any and every culture. Bediako started "with the universality of Jesus Christ rather than from his particularity as a Jew . . . the incarnation was the incarnation of the Saviour of all people, of all nations, and of all times" (85) He distinguished between Christ and Christianity and between gospel and theology. Christ (or the gospel) is universal; Christianity (theology) is not. Instead, there are a plurality of Christianities or theologies as the singular Christ (or the gospel) is understood and expressed through the primal religious sub-structures and languages of different cultures.

Bediako emphasized the importance of mother-tongue Scriptures and vernacular translations. Just as the primal provides a religious sub-structure, so one's mother tongue is also "formative in shaping thought and religious ideas" (69). His emphasis on translatability extended to the Bible. Every translation "remains in every respect the Word of God" (68) through which God continues to speak directly to people, reinforcing Bediako's conviction that "the gospel has no permanent resident culture" (66). Thus, Bediako considered African Christianity an indigenous religion.

In addition to these key themes in Bediako's theology — identity, translatability, history, and mother-tongue Scriptures — Hartman also explores other themes in Bediako's work, often in contrast with Western theology. He notes, for example, that "Bediako's Christology defies Western categorization" (80). Bediako was more interested in translatability than the trinitarian and Christological controversies of the first Christian centuries. Hartman observes

that "in Bediako's published works there is a general lack of discussion of sin" (82) and that Bediako "preferred a *Christus victor* model of the atonement over a substitutionary model" (88). Hartman also includes a chapter on politics, highlighting Bediako's potential contribution to Western theology in a post-Christendom era. Western theology's captivity to Christendom has left it unable "to clearly articulate Christian identity in post-Christian societies" (113). The Western church can "learn from Africans who have never understood Christianity as a religious monopoly" (113).

Hartman's hope is that his "book will encourage readers, Africans and non-Africans, to learn from Bediako for themselves, and to allow them to shape their theological thinking" (xiv). Though he writes of African readers, his book is primarily written for non-African readers, especially Western theologians. Hartman concludes with a helpful list of critiques of Western Christianity from Bediako: Its lack of a response to religious pluralism; its emphases on reason over revelation, the individual over collective and communal consciousness, and the present over the past and tradition; and its lack of a primal substructure and need to recover spirituality. For each critique, Bediako offers a prescription for Western Christians, who would be wise to embrace and imitate aspects of his theological methodology. If Western Christianity has indeed been corrupted by Western culture, especially Enlightenment rationalism and the experience of Christendom, Hartman's prescriptions, rooted in Bediako's work, may be just what it needs in this postmodern, post-Christendom time.

Hartman is clearly appreciative of Bediako's work, yet his work is no hagiography. The book not only engages Bediako's work, it also dialogues with his critics and includes some of Hartman's own criticisms. Throughout, Hartman engages directly with Bediako's corpus, relying primarily on Bediako's own publications. Each chapter concludes with a "for further reading" section that directs readers to relevant works in Bediako's corpus. The book also includes a chronological bibliography of Bediako's work. Overall, *Kwame Bediako* provides a clear and comprehensive introduction to the work of an important African theologian, especially for Western readers. Bediako's work, for which Hartman's volume whets one's appetite, provides a necessary critique of Western theology. The future of Western theology may be African, and it may begin with listening to and learning from this apostle to the West. Hartman's volume is an essential introduction. It is highly recommended.