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Review

Ngaruiya, David K., and Reed, Rodney L. (eds), *Ecclesiology in Africa*, Langham Global Library, Carlisle: 2024, ISBN 9781786410245, xvi, 413pp.

Review by Dr Ryan Faber¹

Ecclesiology in Africa, the ninth volume in Langham’s Africa Society of Evangelical Theology (ASET) series, reflects the maturation of the ASET. The volume includes eighteen papers from ASET’s thirteenth annual conference, which was themed ‘On this rock I will build my church: Ecclesiology in Africa’, and includes contributions from all regions of sub-Saharan Africa, the African diaspora, and North American, European, and Australian expatriates.

Although the volume does not provide an systematic African ecclesiology—key aspects of ecclesiological studies such as church government, the attributes and marks of the church, holy orders or ordination, and the sacraments or ordinances are not discussed—it makes an important contribution to understanding the African church today.

One strength of the volume is the contextual nature of its contributions. Appealing to the example of the Johannine community in the New Testament, Catherine W. Chege considers how traditional African religious beliefs can (and cannot) be incorporated into Christianity today. She argues for a balanced approach that carefully scrutinises cultural elements with the lens of Scripture. Robert Falconer advocates for church architecture in the vernacular, that is, architecture that employs indigenous building technology and local resources and that responds appropriately to its landscape and climate. Edward Buertley and Abraham Nana Opare Kwakye recount the ministry of Rev. E. N. Amin, a

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twentieth-century Ghanaian revivalist, as a model for contextual Christian ministry today.

Theological contextualisation is evident in several contributions that consider kinship and the church. Contra the youth church trend, that is, churches exclusively for young people, Isaac Ampong promotes the image of church as household. His argument relies primarily on the African expression of household, which is multi-generational. He concludes that youth churches are inappropriate in the African context. Because he relies on African households, which also tend to be tribal or clannish, his argument that the image also addresses the challenges of ethnocentrism and tribalism is less clear or persuasive.

The solution may not be appeal to the African household as a model for the church, but a redefinition of the church as a new household or family, as Paul N. Mwangi does in his chapter, 'The Church as Family Writ Large'. Mwangi describes 'how adopting family characteristics and patterns helped CITAM Valley Road overcome and thrive in a [multi-ethnic, multi-tribal] urban context' (268).

E. Okelloh Ogera also explores the church as a new family. He focuses on spiritual parenthood or the tendency to refer to pastors as 'daddy' or 'mommy'. Ogera notes how the model may be susceptible to inordinate control of congregants' thoughts or behaviours by pastors. He also observes the irony of pastors who claim to be spiritual parents to their congregants yet have never met many of them one-on-one.

Another strength of *Ecclesiology in Africa* is its attention to relevant issues for the African church today, including prosperity preaching and use of the title Apostle. Florah M. Kidula reflects on false prosperity pronouncements 1 Kings 22:1-18 and their lessons for the church today. Diedonne Komla Nuekpe makes a case for the continuing gift of apostleship and for use of the title Apostle. The argument for a continuing gift is compelling, but the wisdom of using the title today is less clear. Nuekpe acknowledges the unique foundational role of the Twelve (Eph. 2:20) and laments the abusive use of the title in some churches. His contribution fails to provide safeguards that would ensure responsible use of the title today.

Another relevant issue for the African church is the role of women. Given the disproportionate percentage of women in African churches, these are important considerations. Cornelia van Deventer and Jesse Fungwa Kipimo explore ministry of 'single' women in John's gospel and its implications for the church today, concluding that their survey 'leaves the church in Africa with a biblical mandate to intentionally include single women in the life and ministry of the church' (89). Practical examples of or suggestions for such inclusion would strengthen their contribution.

Marike Blok-Sijtsma explores the contribution of the Women's Fellowship in the Reformed Church in Zambia, both for the women who participate and for their congregations. The essay reflects ambivalence between the spiritual benefit of participation in the fellowship and the significant financial pressures placed on members. Tamie Davies analyses the 'mama voice' of Tanzanian women preachers, noting how female experiences shape the content of women's sermons and female attributes affect the sermon's delivery. Though Davies' contribution is primarily descriptive, there are lessons here for all preachers, especially males, whose audiences are predominantly female.

Other contributions consider ministry in the midst of pandemics and war, ministry in the midst of insecurity, recovery of the Word in Christian worship, the necessity of cross-cultural missions, and balanced church growth strategies.

Ecclesiology in Africa is a good introduction to and representation of the evangelical church in Africa. However, given the prevalence of the Pentecostalism, growing charismatic movements, and the increasing influence of African Indigenous Churches, some consideration of these movements, their ecclesiology, and their impact on the ecclesiology of the evangelical church in Africa would strengthen the volume. Even so, for those who seek to better understand the evangelical church in Africa today, this volume is highly recommended.