

Book Review

Abeneazer G. Urga, Elizabeth W. Mburu, and Ferdinand I. Okorie, eds., *An African Introduction to the New Testament*

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Urga, Abeneazer G., Elizabeth W. Mburu, and Ferdinand I. Okorie, eds. (2026). *An African Introduction to the New Testament*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, ISBN: 9798889836513 (hardback), US \$67.00, pp. 570; ISBN: 9798889836520 (ebook).

In the *African Introduction to the New Testament*, edited by Abeneazer G. Urga, Elizabeth W. Mburu, and Ferdinand I. Okorie, 25 African New Testament scholars seek to provide an Africa-centered introduction to the books of the New Testament. The editors contend that “In most instances, students in Africa use introductory texts that have a Eurocentric orientation” (xv). They argue that introductory books from the Minority World “are unable to ask and answer questions that are relevant in the African context. This volume seeks to address this gap” (xv). The aim is to address the lack of such a book and to reduce African theology students’ overreliance on Eurocentric materials.

The book is written primarily “for African students in theological institutions and Bible Colleges” (xv). However, it is also beneficial for pastors, church leaders, and ministers. The volume focuses on introductory matters of the New Testament books while exploring and applying the biblical theological themes of each book from diverse African sociocultural, religious, and political perspectives. This multifaceted aim constitutes the role of each contributor: to first explore the introductory matters of a particular Bible book in a more traditional way (historical-grammatical matters) and then identify and explore relevant themes from contemporary African contexts.

The editors are convinced that “By so doing, the theological, Christological, pneumatological, and ecclesial dimensions of the Christian faith in the African context are broadly identified as readers are invited to deepen their appreciation of these themes in their various contexts and experiences of encountering with God” (xv). The volume is an introductory book on the New Testament by Christian African scholars for Christian Africans, which takes the biblical (first-century Greco-Roman) context and African contextual realities seriously. According to the editors, the purpose of the book is “to equip theological students in the African context with tools necessary to understand and address both biblical and contextual issues in ministry and/or academia” (xvi).

The editors also acknowledge that the book is “not meant to replace Eurocentric introductory books, but rather to complement them by offering an African lens” (xvi). They also admit that the volume does not address all the rich and diverse African cultural heritages and contextual realities, even though the 25 contributing scholars come from various African cultural and church-tradition backgrounds. Hence, the editors state that “the representative voices from the continent in this volume offer readers an invitation to delve deeper into a contextual interaction with the biblical texts from their own peculiar and unique cultural world” (xvi).

The book consists of 24 chapters. The first two chapters offer a discussion of an interpretive context and hermeneutical techniques that enable the analysis of each book of the New Testament

from African contextual realities. In chapter 1, Bitrus A. Sarman explores and analyzes the New Testament in relation to the sociocultural and religious realities of the African context (1–26). In this section, Sarman observes similarities and differences between the New Testament world and African contexts while noting the impact of the gospel in Africa from both retrospective and prospective views.

In chapter 2, Elizabeth W. Mburu presents a contextually sensitive African biblical hermeneutical tool (27–54). Mburu discusses Africentric hermeneutical approaches, assumptions, and common characteristics. She contends that the Majority World needs a hermeneutical tool that helps them explore the worlds behind, of, and in front of the text while considering African contextual realities (27). She observes that the rapid growth of the Church in Africa, challenges in interpreting biblical texts, and the lack of an Africentric hermeneutical tool necessitate the development of a unique African biblical hermeneutics (28). In this section, she introduces a five-step African biblical hermeneutics using the analogy of a four-legged stool (four legs and a seat), which parallels the African, theological, literary, historical, and application contexts (35–37). She also offers a demonstration and application of the method using two sample texts from the New Testament (37–53).

Chapters 3 to 24 are dedicated to each book of the New Testament in the order they appear in the Christian Bible. Each chapter follows a uniform structure: each contributor first addresses the historical context (authorship, date, audience) and the literary context (genre, outline) of the book, then identifies biblical-theological themes that resonate with specific contemporary African contexts and offers discussion. Each contributor seeks to engage in critical analysis of the original language (Greek) and, where necessary, African native languages to better elaborate and understand the text. This linguistic approach appears to be a unique feature of this volume.

Although the contributors to each chapter on a New Testament book follow a uniform structure while engaging with diverse biblical-theological themes that resonate with African contextual realities, the volume makes it evident that the themes identified in each New Testament book are limited to the immediate contextual realities of the contributors' backgrounds. The discussions center on what appears relevant to the contributors, based on their cultural and contextual exposure, experience, and encounters. In so doing, the volume appears to leave out themes that would have been addressed by other New Testament scholars from other parts of the continent who did not contribute to the volume. This tilted focus is one of the book's main weaknesses. The volume has no representation from North Africa—e.g., Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya—where there were several centers and origins of key thinkers in the early African Christian world. The volume, while representing West Africa (Ghana, Nigeria), East Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya), Central Africa (Congo), and Southern Africa (South Africa, Zambia), appears to be dominated by East Africans (Ethiopia and Kenya). In the subsequent edition of the volume, these limitations require attention from the editors.

Another observable weakness of this volume is the lack of clarity regarding the methodology employed by each contributor. There are a few instances where a contributor's methodology is clearly defined and described. However, in most cases the methodology followed is not clear. This is another area in which this volume needs to improve in its subsequent editions. Moreover, one would anticipate that most contributors would use the African biblical hermeneutical framework introduced in chapter 2 of the volume as an interpretive method, yet this is not the case. Such an

exercise would have increased the volume's unique feature as an African introduction to the New Testament.

Despite the areas highlighted for improvement, this book is a groundbreaking contribution to African biblical and New Testament scholarship. The volume is a valuable resource for theology students, teachers, church leaders, and ministers. It can be used as a primary teaching text in theological seminaries in Africa. Furthermore, Western scholars, theology students, church leaders, and ministers can benefit from this volume to gain rich insights into reading, interpreting, and applying the New Testament from African contexts.