

Book Review: *Apologetics in Africa: An Introduction*

Ndereba, Kevin Muriithi, ed. 2024. *Apologetics in Africa: An Introduction*. Carlisle: Hippo Books. xxiv, 382 pp. ISBN: 978-1-83973-662-9. Approx. 541.22 ZAR (29.99 USD). Paperback.

1. Summary

Kevin Muriithi Ndereba, the editor, is the Head of the Practical Theology Department at St. Paul's University, Kenya, as well as co-founder of Apologetics Kenya. This volume provides a wonderful introduction to apologetics in the African context, both its questions and methods, and lays a firm foundation for future apologetic endeavors.

The book is divided into four sections: the first addresses biblical issues. Mburu sketches an overview of biblical criticism and African hermeneutical approaches. Falconer examines resurrection in Scripture and African theology. Ndereba examines apologetics in the New Testament and church history, explaining different ways in which apologetics functioned in the church's ministry. In the second section, philosophical concerns are addressed. Okello argues that in African thought, moral and natural evil are one. Guta parses the question of whether all religions lead to the same God from a logical perspective. Kunhiyop argues that the Christian ethical foundation is the Triune God and further that morality is universal in nature.

The third section addresses cultural issues. Mugambi maps the history of Christianity in Africa, arguing that it can be considered an African religion, not a foreign one, and explores indigenous expressions

of Christianity that show African agency in appropriating Christianity. Ndereba explores Agikuyu eldership rites, concluding that while they have value in several ways, they conflict with the New Covenant in Christ and so should be rejected by Christians. Muyambo addresses dowry practices in view of hospitality, arguing that it should be reframed with women's dignity in view and a Christian view of money, in order to rescue the practice from misuse. Amenyedzi details domestic violence in its various aspects, and how misuse of biblical passages may appear to support it, before recommending practices the church can adopt to address the problem. Byamukama explores African traditional views of the divine, before demonstrating how the God of the Bible is unique in immanence and in becoming incarnate.

The final section engages practical matters: Maritz opens with an analysis of the New Age movement in South Africa, with its overemphasis on subjective experience as opposed to objectivity in the world created and sustained by Christ. Atwebembeire provides a survey of some contemporary cults on the continent and points with which to engage them. Ndereba exposes the Western roots of atheism, the impact of New Atheism, and some issues that it raises, including morality, the doctrine of God, and the supposed divide between faith and science. Wang'ombe addresses Christian-Muslim engagement from an interreligious dialogue approach, and Ndereba closes with reflections on apologetics in a digital age that can reach the Next Gens.

2. Analysis

As Ndereba's introductory chapter notes, one way for Christians in Africa to mature in their faith is by engaging questions and concerns raised in their context. Certainly, Romans 12:2 highlights the need for transformation in one's way of thinking, and therefore the rational side of the Christian faith must not be neglected. Neither should African Christians fall for the idea

that apologetics is the domain of Westerners, or that apologetics is only concerned with the head and not the heart and hands as well. In short, Christians in Africa have several reasons to pursue expansion in the realm of apologetics, and the hope is that by such engagement, the result would be an increase in maturity for the Church.

The intended readers of this book are African Christians. It aims to introduce them to several apologetic issues in the African context, assisting them to see the need for apologetics and encouraging their active engagement, as well as promoting a holistic apologetics approach that reaches heads, hearts, and hands. Wisely the book does not attempt to provide a complete overview but rather engages select issues in these four categories. On the whole, the various authors demonstrate how to write with gentleness and respect while conveying a desire to assist their readers to think more carefully.

One strength of this volume is that it represents the voices of scholars from a variety of church traditions, nationalities, and disciplinary fields while providing evangelical perspectives for the reader. Another strength is that the book is intentional in addressing major issues that churches are facing in their contexts, such as a rise in atheism among the youth or a proposal for a way forward in Christian-Muslim relations. Therefore, the book manages to be wide-ranging and yet deal with specific contextual challenges, addressing that gap in terms of Africa-focused resources. In terms of audience, some chapters could be assigned to advanced undergraduate students, whereas others are more complex and therefore better suited for master's level classes. Yet despite contributions from thirteen different authors (four of which are women), the editorial work has produced a consistent tone of gentleness and respect throughout.

Some criticisms are in order. Although Ndereba claims early on that apologetics arises out of a genuine concern for those who do not know

Jesus, and that all Christians are called to engage in defending their faith (p. 4), some chapters are dense, such as Guta's chapter, and would likely be overwhelming for a novice in the field. This may reinforce the impression that apologetics is only for *experts*. One specific weakness arises in Amenyedzi's chapter, as she cautions against victim blaming while on the previous page doing precisely that (pp. 236, 237), which then leaves the victims of domestic violence in a more hopeless situation. In this case, drawing upon the work of trained counselors and psychologists would have strengthened the case being made in that chapter.

It is well known that Christianity is growing swiftly on the African continent, which may tempt some to think that apologetics works from African perspectives are not necessary. However, just as Christianity grows apace, so do other belief systems, and a key aspect of Christian discipleship is coming to a clearer, stronger understanding of one's faith and knowing how to explain it in a clear, compelling way to others. While Africa took the lead in providing apologists and theologians during the time of the Church Fathers, over the centuries the situation has changed to the point that Christianity is sometimes described as a non-African religion and apologetics as a Western venture. In the era of modern African theology, English-language apologetics works by African authors have been scarce, aside from Reuben Kigame's *Christian Apologetics through African Eyes*. Ndereba himself refers to this gap in apologetic works that address African realities, and this book is a notable contribution to reducing that gap. More such works are needed, and it is hoped that this volume is only the beginning of a deeper, more intentional engagement of African Christians with their contexts.

Works Cited

Kigame, Reuben. 2018. *Christian Apologetics Through African Eyes*. Nairobi: Posterity Publishers.

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