

CRITICAL BOOK REVIEWS

The Bible, Cultural Identity, and Missions, edited by Daniel Berchie, Daniel Kwame Bediako, and Dziedzorm Reuben Asafo. Colorado Springs, CO: Cambridge Scholars, 2016. 470 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1-4438-8586-7. Hardcover US\$57.99.

Daniel Berchie, Daniel Kwame Bediako, and Dziedzorm Reuben Asafo's book *The Bible, Cultural Identity, and Missions* provides a helpful resource in understanding the scripture, culture and its related emphasis in missions. Berchie, a Senior Lecturer, Bediako, an Associate Professor of Old Testament Studies, and Asafo, an Associate Professor of Theology, all of Valley View University, Oyibi, Accra, Ghana, blend their knowledge with their experience of the teaching of the Bible to space out the difference and connections that exist between the Scripture and its implementation in doing missions. The editors bring together a group of well-written articles that set out practical methods to three of theology's most captivating subjects, namely The Bible, Cultural Identity, and Mission. Each of these foci is essential to both the astute Christian theologian and the believer since they form the primary tenets of what Christians believe. The editors observe that "African biblical scholars are asking for intercultural dialogue between our African cultures and the cultures in the biblical texts that we read. In that interaction, we envisage a give and take process. In this process, we learn things from the Bible and we contribute our quota to the interpretation of the Bible. This is the way of the moment when subject interpretation of the Bible is not seen as anathema. It is my hope that more people will be receptive to this way of looking at reality of reading the Bible today" (p. xx).

The twenty-six articles are considerable resources taking its advantage from a common geographical context or point of view. The first four articles address issues in relation to mission and how the concept of mission should be understood in the African context. It starts from diagnosing the problem which is contained in the first article "The Bible, Culture Identity and Mission: A Biblical Appraisal" by setting out that "the Bible as a 'word of God', it did not fall down to us all at the same time unmediated. The contents of the Bible are captured for us through the medium of the Jewish

people. Thus the assumptions and motives of the Jews, who preserved the Bible for us, can be gleaned in the word they have preserved for us" (p. x). The study then offers a prescription or treatment to the issue in the concluding statement that "God is not a Jew or is God tied to the Jewish culture to the neglect of other cultures. God found it necessary to put us here and revealed himself to us" (p. xix).

Whereas the next four articles are on studies in relation solely to the Ghanaian context, the following next four articles focus on Pentecostalism, spirituality, and religious tolerance. In a like manner, the following eight articles give insightful exegetical studies of issues of some selected text and passages, and their implicational relation to the African context, while the next three articles deal with contextualization of some traditional concepts and practices as a means to reaching out and doing missions in Africa. The last four articles explore some contemporary issues of discourse that centers on gender, dancing in worship, and trending mission strategies in Africa. All these are aligned in a way to providing a comprehensive reference for readers and practitioners in the biblical enclave or ministry.

The main thesis or idea that runs through the book is how readers of the Bible should view and understand its content given in a cultural background, and how the principles could be used in doing missions. Missiologists and readers alike will be effectively equipped in their service to God and the people they serve by maximizing their mission approaches to meet the current challenges presented in the church's ministry in Africa. Since God have unique things to accomplish through the missions to people groupings across the continent, there is the need to exercise contemporary strategies in transforming bright potential into enduring reality. This embraces all areas of a missions and ministry in Africa. From service to both God and humanity, and to finishing God's work assigned to His church and the individual. All of these start from a special call to mission and its subsequent development along the ministry. God thus places responsibility to all in His service concerning their understanding of Him from the personal level and its relation in doing mission across the globe.

The integration of Biblical understanding with cultural values in missions is also explored by Berchie, Bediako, and Asafo. They highlight the preparation and its associated importance of how and when to approach the Scripture and mission. These are very important due to diverse issues associated with culture and missions. The integration of concepts from modern mission theories into the methodological approaches and directly applying them to practical setting in missions seems to be good and interesting. Though there are considerable

differences between modern and ancient mission strategies when it comes to doing missions in Africa and its responsibilities. The authors of the articles provide convincing and real cultural context examples ranging from biblical era to modern times in demonstrating different mission approaches and styles. By highlighting the trending mission strategies, the authors bring to bear the best approach to do in mission and ministry where God's people are to be cared for.

Culture and missions somehow goes hand-in-hand. One cannot undertake a good mission outreach if he or she does not properly understand the culture of the people within which missions are carried out. Missions is a reflection of culture. The authors' approach in both areas show the need to effectively address each in our appreciation of the Bible. The church in Africa's Missiological experience coupled with the knowledge of the authors makes the book a good material for the Bible students, pastors and those interested in missions.

The book is an interesting piece to read. People in their quest for personal understanding of the cultural context in Africa and their possible integration with the Bible should embrace this book. The topics are well arranged together and not scattered throughout the book. A major contributing strength of the book is the array of Biblical support to most of the issues discussed in the book. Also the way they are intertwined and presented in an academic and scholarly style makes the book good to both people in missions and those in the academia. Berchie, Bediako, and Asafo's group of enthusiastic authors who are also experts does an outstanding work of offering a superfluity of notes and additional references within each article which present a priceless understanding on a wide range of areas and approaches. Due to the topical arrangement of the articles, it is also easier finding materials or reference on a particular subject of interest. The introduction which is a relevant article is provided to give practical understanding of the Bible, culture and missions as a way to following the subjects under discussion later in the book. The articles also covers specific aspects of the subject under review to give better presentation of the topic. This makes the book particularly beneficial and handy for swift referencing. The editors' unique selection of contributors in the compilation of this handbook makes the book worth reading. The authors are some of the most esteemed, educated, keen pastors in the religious world, authors, and teachers in their own rights across Africa. Their combined scholarship and insights offers an implication for biblical theology in the area of Bible and missions. This intellectual and scholarly teamwork enhances assurance in the strength of the entire book. One

surprising thing in the book is the authors' use of certain practices in their experiences to give support for certain practical elements and assumes that these must be applicable to all situations and contexts/settings. In a way these are good, however, special consideration to be given to different situations and context as even within the African setting there are disparaging understanding of some cultures. Also Missiologist and the church settings must be aware of the place of culture in missions and ministry, and the great possibility for clashes of worldviews due to the multiplicity of cultural backgrounds.

Though Berchie, Bediako, and Asafo establishes a biblical basis for achieving and advancing missional orientation and impact from a well view point of the cultural identity from the African perspective, they fell short to ascribe tangible Christian cultural practice that will help and strengthen the individual in adhering to Christ teaching and methods that bring perfect solutions to achieving the goals of doing mission. Also most of the cultural issues discussed in the book seems to concentrate mostly in Ghana and Nigeria with the neglect of the several cultural settings and identities across the African continent. This could be seen as the editors and most of contributing authors residing in these two countries—Ghana and Nigeria. The authors' practical ways of attending to the issues to create awareness are good and insightful in providing motivation and strength for the individual to find and develop true identity for doing mission in Africa. However, the question that rings in the ear is "are these the best way to approach the issue?" Also "can the church's quest to deeply penetrate the African continent to their attainment of the goals be long lasting when Christ is still presented as the Christ of Palestine to the Africa?"

I am overwhelmingly impressed by the content of the book. It is worth reading as it gives an in-depth explanation on biblical strategies for undertaking a successful mission in the African continent, as well as understanding the scripture, culture and its related emphasis in missions. A fact is that readers of the Bible read it—and the world—through Western eyes. Undeniably, people approach the Bible with cultural behaviors which is deeply ingrained in the forms of interpreting the world as well as our interpretation and understanding of Scripture. This has somehow called for a conventional in the discourse on the interpretation of the Bible in cultural context. The church together with its members may be directed by God to enter a foreign culture that may not share their world view, as in the case of the numerous cultural identities on the African continent. Or, they may be directed to enter the culture that surrounds them, which can be devoid of the overt influence of a Christian world view. If so, then there is the need

to carry out such a duty with an understanding that the Lord respect cultural values that is why the Scripture in written with a particular cultural context. The Lord will demonstrate His power through them as the surrounding culture responds, if they could undertake mission with a clear acknowledgment of the cultural world view of the people. Indeed the believer's heart for the advancement of God's mission should lead him or her to acquire the need strategies in entering certain unknown cultures. Mission in Africa need people with action oriented mind. People who attempts new things, takes initiative, and works toward something in the diversity of manners.

I recommend that every pastor, leader, teacher, particularly those interested in doing mission in Africa, should have a copy of *The Bible, Cultural Identity, and Missions* in his or her library. Also churches and institutional libraries should have copies to assist students and members to have access to this volume. Readers will find the rich insights and principles for reflection and review on cultural issues and mission strategies in Africa amidst the diversity that abounds from both within and outside. The volume will be beneficial to readers in the area of advancing the course of God and the church in Africa and those who seeks to develop their mission skills from a biblical and spiritual perspective in the African context. It is a major contribution to discourse in the Bible, culture, and missions as an area of study. I commend the editors and the contributing authors for such a work.

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Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction, by Ellis R. Brotzman and Eric J. Tully. Second edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2016. 255 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0801097539. Softcover US\$24.99.

Over the years of scholarship, textual criticism has gradually become a major point of discourse and plays relatively a maximal role in the OT debate. Moreover, there has been a significant change in the implications for interpretation and discussion in the OT. In this volume—which is a second edition of Ellis R. Brotzman's book in 1994—Ellis R. Brotzman and Eric J. Tully, a senior professor of Old Testament at Tyndale Theological Seminary in the Netherlands and an assistant professor of Old Testament