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Mburu, Elizabeth. *African Hermeneutics*. UK: Langham Global Library, 2019. Pp. 223. Index 225–34. ISBN 9781783684649. Price: \$ 20.

Elizabeth Mburu is an African author who has authored books and several articles, such as “From the Classroom to the Pulpit: Navigating the Challenges” in Rodney L. Reed, ed., *African Contextual Realities* (Cumbria, UK: Langham, 2018); “Realized Eschatology in the Soteriology of John’s Gospel,” *Testamentum Imperium* 3 (2011): 1–36; “Jesus, our Liberator: An Inter-

cultural Dialogue,” *SATS* 31 (2021): 58–73; “The Importance of African Hermeneutics in African Theological Education” in Johannes J. Knoetze and Alfred R. Brunson, eds., *A Critical Engagement with Theological Education in Africa: A South African Perspective. Reformed Theology in Africa 7* (Cape Town, South Africa: OASIS Books, 2021). She is a professor of the New Testament at International Leadership University.

The author divides the present book into two parts. The first part comprises four chapters that outline the African theological and philosophical worldviews and her proposed contextualized method. The second part, which contains six chapters, discusses the application of the method. In the introduction, the author alleges that the Bible has been interpreted through the lens of Western hermeneutics and applied to African Christians. This interpretation, she argues, does not respond to the African needs because it does not consider the African context and, therefore, creates a dichotomy in an African believer’s thoughts and way of living (p. 3). In this introductory section, the author describes Paul’s example of a contextualized method when he preached at Aeropagus in Athens (Acts 17). She adopts Paul’s approach “of moving from the known to the unknown,” arguing that this principle is adequate in presenting the gospel (P. 19).

Chapter two deals with the theological aspects of an African worldview. In this section, the author first defines what she understands as a worldview. She argues that a worldview is “a set of beliefs and values that guide one’s thinking about all of life” (p. 22). Though she acknowledges a variety of worldviews in African cultures, she also points out that these cultures present certain commonalities that form a unified African worldview. Theologically, the author categorizes this worldview in three aspects: the understanding of ultimate reality, external reality, and human relationships. For each aspect, the author discusses its traditional and modern understanding within the African context, providing its implications on interpreting the Scriptures. Concerning the ultimate reality in African traditional understanding, she argues that “ultimate reality is defined as the Supreme Being” (p. 25). This supreme being is known as the creator, who is transcendent and immanent. He is approached through the medium of spirit, diviners, ancestors, etc. She also posits that this supreme being is approached chiefly in times of need in what she calls “transactional and relational” (p. 29).

On the other hand, the author contends that in modern Africa, the ultimate reality, as introduced by Christianity, left Africans with two separate

views of God (God and Jesus) that do not meet their needs. As a result, she argues, Africans portray dual allegiance (p. 30). For the external reality, she points out that Africans believe that the world is a product of the supreme being, not an outcome of evolution, as the modern understanding tends to emphasize (p. 34). Finally, the author highlights the usefulness of *Ubuntu*, a concept that explains the interrelationships among Africans. She claims that the African communal life compares to the biblical worldview. These relationships highlight mutual support and interdependence. However, these practices go beyond and portray how Africans understand the afterlife. They believe that after death, there is a continuation of life. This results in ancestral worship with the belief that they continue to interact with the living. She notes that despite some divergencies the African worldview presents from the biblical one, the similarities that both exhibit must be considered in interpreting the Scripture.

Chapter 3 discusses the philosophical aspects that form an African worldview. The author highlights five elements: “knowledge, morality, suffering, history and time, and arts” (p. 45). She argues that these elements have the same denominator, ‘community or relationship.’ She argues that Africans acquire knowledge through the immediate and extended family, spiritual beings, and life experiences (p. 50). In addition, the author argues that moral values derive from the community mainly with an honor and shame culture. In this culture, people cultivate commendable ethics to preserve their honor in their community or not to offend others. Further, the author avers that in some African cultures, suffering is understood as a result of breaching moral values, which displeases the supreme being who, as a result, casts calamities upon the people and nature (p. 54). Concerning history and time, she posits that Africans are more event-oriented than chronological time-oriented (p. 56). According to her, for Africans, history—that is, past and present—matters more than the future (p. 57).

Chapter 4 discusses the author’s hermeneutical model, i.e., the four-legged stool, whose elements are “parallels to the African context,” “the theological context,” “the literary context,” and “the historical and cultural context.” The author adds to the model a fifth element, the “application,” as the outcome of the interpretative work. The first leg involves finding the parallels/contrasts between African and biblical contexts. Once they are established, the theology of the text is examined, followed by a literary analysis of the context by paying attention to the literary genre, techniques, lan-

guage, and literary flow of the text. Further, the reader explores the historical and cultural context in which the text was communicated in, for “studying the historical and cultural background is the main way to uncovering the mindset of the author” (p. 84). The author then argues that the hermeneutical process must culminate in providing the reader with the application of the text.

The second part of the book, which covers chapters 5 to 9, begins with a concise historical context of the Bible and the major theological points found in the Old Testament and New Testament. The author discusses different genres of the Bible, which prepare the reader for the application of the four-legged hermeneutical approach to them. In addition, the author applies the four-legged principles to biblical literary genres such as narratives, wisdom, songs, and letters. In each genre, she presents the African counterpart of the given genre, sets out the hermeneutical principles, and then applies them to interpret the same genre in the Bible, using the four-legged method. However, she warns that such interpretation must be done carefully in order not to fall into syncretism. She argues that in doing contextualization, “every doctrine and practice” must be weighed by Scripture (p. 210).

The book is informative and instructive. It entails sound insights that can help contextualize the Gospel and, at the same time, help us be faithful to the teachings of the Bible. It emphasizes that African culture and worldviews should not inform the teachings of the Bible but rather should be shaped by it. The author emphasizes that the interpretative work must reach the pragmatic where the Scripture becomes part of the interpreter and the reader’s life. The question for review in each chapter creates the space for the reader to apply the material gained in it. That highlights that the book’s focus is application. Nevertheless, the author deliberately ignores the biblical prophetic genre and how the proposed hermeneutical tools could have profited from them in the African context. Africans had that gift of prophecy, and their prophecy could take place (Mwaniki, *Embu Historical Texts*, 24). Today, Africans face challenges in this area, where the plurality of prophecies has escalated, and addressing them using the four-legged tool approach would yield commendable results. In addition, the author discusses little the notion of shame and honor. The author should substantiate a discussion about them and how they contribute to understanding the Bible through the proposed model.

This book is a valuable tool that can benefit readers from any cultural background who would like to adapt the method to their own context. It is

