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*Katembo, Fabrice S. The Mystery of the Church: Applying Paul's Ecclesiology in Africa. Plateau State, Nigeria: Hippo Books, 2020. 90 pages. ISBN 978-1-83973-056-6.*

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Fabrice S. Katembo hails from Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo and holds bachelor's and master's degrees from Africa International University in Nairobi, Kenya. He has written several books, including *Back to Eden: The Roadmap to Peace and Joy in Your Exile*, *The Birth of a Christ-Centered Leader: Understanding God's Calling for Your Life*, and *The Balanced Church: A Biblical and Relevant Approach to Understanding the Church*.

In *The Mystery of the Church: Applying Paul's Ecclesiology in Africa*, Katembo attempts to introduce his readers to 'the mystery of the church as explained by Paul in his epistles' (1). His purpose is not technical, nor does he engage in a critical analysis of scholarly writing in the field of study. He attempts to apply Paul's ecclesiology to African Christianity, and while he appears to acknowledge a degree of continuity between the African traditional religions and the Old Testament, he insists on the importance of the role of the New Testament in an evaluation of ATRs.

In his introduction, Katembo describes the term 'mystery' as a Pauline category. His description arises principally from Ephesians 3:4-5, where Paul describes a mystery as divine knowledge which was once hidden but is now revealed. Understanding the mystery and its application to the church in Africa is the aim of the book.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part, containing three chapters, focuses on Paul and his theology of the church; it provides a quick overview of the life and theology of Paul, discusses the metaphors of the church, and focuses on the mystery of the church, as revealed specifically in Ephesians 3:1-12. The second part focuses on the church in Africa. The fourth chapter (and the first under this second part) reflects on the Christology of John Mbiti and Kwame Bediako; the fifth chapter is titled: 'Corporate Unity in Christ and Its Consequences in Africa: Ephesians 2:11-17'.

In chapter one, Katembo gives a very brief overview of the life of Paul and provides a lengthier overview of his apostleship (13-15). His summary of Paul's theology contains hints of the author's penchant for Reformed categories with a favourable quote from R.C. Sproul on the transfer of righteousness (17) and treatments of election by decree (17) and the effectual call of God (18). In Katembo's discussion of soteriology, he rather oddly places the topic of justification subsequent to the discussion of other soteriological categories (without respecting the order of salvation) and just before the section on 'The Last Things'. The author's predisposition for Reformed themes seems to say more about them than it does about Pauline theology.

Chapter two discusses the metaphors of the church. His definition of the church is standard. In the section on the visible and invisible church, the author wants to avoid the

distinctions which seem to arise from platonic dualism, but he curiously maintains the title for this section. The following section begins his discussion of the metaphors of the church; he discusses the following: God's building, God's temple, the Bride of Christ, the Body of Christ, and the Church as a Flock.

'The Mystery of the Church: Ephesians 3:1-12' is the title of the third chapter. The author provides a background for the Ephesian letter. He acknowledges the debates surrounding the continuity and discontinuity of the church with the people of God in the Old Testament and holds that Bible supports both ideas. He intends to avoid either a radical continuity or a radical discontinuity. He summarises his position as follows: '...my point in this book is that whichever position one takes, it tends to deny any suggestion of continuity in the African traditional religions' (47). According to the author, there is no continuity between the church and the pre-Christian Africans; the only continuity is with the people of God, the Israelites. Thus, the uniqueness of the role of Paul as the apostle to the gentiles is stressed. In this way, Katembo sets the theological foundation for his application to the church in Africa in part two of this book.

As might be expected, Katembo continues his emphasis on discontinuity between pre-Christian Africans and the Christian message in chapter 4, 'The Concepts of Christ in African Christianity: A Brief Reflection on the Christology of John Mbiti and Kwame Bediako'. Katembo disagrees with Mbiti's view that '...Christ does not negate African traditional religions but crowns them' (50). The author makes an astounding assertion: '...to claim that the God of Scripture is the same God worshiped in the pre-Christian era in Africa is profanity' (56, 67). According to Katembo, Kwame Bediako (as well as John Mbiti and E. Bolaji Idowu) argue that the God of the Bible is the same God that the Africans worshipped prior to the entrance of the Gospel. He claims that their argument runs contrary to Scripture. While Katembo concedes that God is known through general revelation, the pre-Christian Africans' worship was idolatrous because their knowledge of God was erroneous (62). The author holds that the sinfulness of humanity clouds any genuine knowledge of God. Katembo cites approvingly Byang Kato, who asserts that Christ is '*not the fulfilment of African traditional religions or any other non-traditional religion*' (67, emphasis in the original).

In the last chapter, Katembo argues that the hope of healing Africa of its divisions is through union with Christ. For Katembo, 'sin is the main root of all ethnic conflicts' (71). Since the problem is spiritual, the solution must, of necessity, be spiritual. The author argues that the solution to the problem of tribalism and divisions within the church will be eliminated when people fully comprehend the Gospel (81). The hope for the unity of Africa resides within the reconciliation accomplished through the Gospel of Christ.

Katembo should be commended for his concern for unity within the church and among African communities. His focus on the spiritual roots as the cause for divisions and unrest between tribes and ethnicities in Africa merits a more sustained treatment of the topic. One can appreciate the fact that the author focuses on biblical answers and particularly his focus on the passages in Ephesians in which Paul addresses the sociological and spiritual divisions between Jews and gentiles. The Ephesian letter holds great promise for addressing these issues. Katembo is to be commended for pointing his readers to some critical Scripture passages to resolve the problems he has broached.

Despite these commendations of his work, there are several concerns and criticisms. While Katembo has only proposed an introduction to the topic, it appears that he has bitten off

more than he can chew. He asserts that he is not engaging in a critical analysis of the scholarly works on the subject (1); however, he raises important issues which need more sustained treatment than he is willing to give. Let me address a few of these issues.

The writer seems to hold a rather myopic view of the problem of sin when he suggests that sin is the main root of all ethnic conflicts' (71). The author seems to compartmentalise tribal conflict into a spiritual category whose solution is nothing more than the salvation of individuals rather than viewing and treating sin as a systemic problem with a more comprehensive remedy. His description of 'Pauline' soteriology employs principally Western categories and does not make a connection to the idea of African communalism or between soteriology and ecclesiology (16-23). It appears that the writer proposes Western solutions to African problems.

Katembo does not acknowledge that the issue of discontinuity and continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament communities are very nuanced. He does not recognise the continuing discussion of this issue in the history of Christian thought. He takes a hard-line Calvinistic approach, stressing a radical discontinuity between the OT people of God and the church. Katembo utters Barth's 'Nein' to any idea of the effectiveness of a general revelation in leading human beings to true worship. He leaves his readers with more questions than answers.

The author reads the biblical text through his own theological lens. Katembo, like certain Calvinists, holds apparently that the love of God is accidental to the divine nature rather than it being essential to the divine nature; thus, the doctrine of particular predestination does not pose a problem for Calvinists. However, how does one understand the statement 'God is love' (1 John 4:8, 16) if God condemns all the pre-Christian Africans to hell? How does one understand the concept that 'where sin abounded, grace did much more abound' (Romans 5:20) when there is no gospel for the pre-Christian African? Katembo complains of erroneous knowledge of pre-Christians which does not lead to the true worship of God. Yet, how can one understand John's assertion that Christ 'is the true light which enlightens everyone coming into the world' (John 1:9)? How does one understand the many passages of Scripture which point to the universal application of the atonement and God's desire for the salvation of all humanity (e.g., Romans 5:18; 1 Timothy 2:4)? In contrast to the author's assertions, other passages of scripture point to the salvific effects of general revelation (e.g., Romans 10:5-21). How does one understand these passages? Katembo subscribes to a theology that appears to pit nature against grace and to separate the God of nature from the God of grace, for he does not accept the continuity of the pre-Christians with the redemptive activity of God in redeeming a people unto himself. These issues and many others plague Katembo's work.

Though Katembo's book is only intended to introduce the topic, it raises more problems than answers. It appears to be a 'knee jerk' reaction to the problem of ATRs and ultimately says more about the theology he espouses.