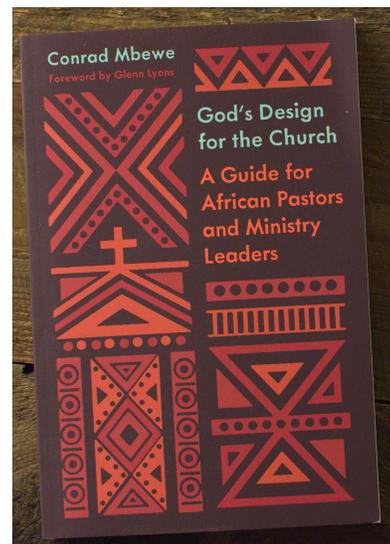


Mbewe, Conrad. *God's Design for the Church: A Guide for African Pastors and Ministry Leaders*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.

Reviewed by Kevin Rodgers, IMB Field Personnel, Africa

God's Design for the Church is a relevant, readable ecclesiology written by Zambian pastor and popular preacher Dr. Conrad Mbewe. Mbewe is the pastor of Kabwata Baptist Church in Lusaka, Zambia, and the founder of African Christian University in Lusaka. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Pretoria and has authored over nine books. Mbewe is a gifted speaker and theologian sometimes referred to as “the Spurgeon of Africa.” In *God's Design for the Church*, he delivers a thorough treatment of the necessary theology and praxis of healthy churches in the African context. While developed for an African audience, this work is a helpful tool for any church in any context.



Missionaries worldwide would do well to use this resource to help churches they plant as well as existing churches with which they partner. As I read the book, I found myself nodding and affirming with every page. Mbewe has said, in this single volume, things I have been teaching new churches for years. Yet, as an African pastor with years of pastoral experience, he speaks with a winsomeness and cultural adeptness that is unequalled. This ecclesiology is extremely thorough, covering every aspect of a healthy church, but it is also engaging and readable with illustrations, stories, and examples drawn from around the continent. This volume would be an excellent addition to every pastor's library and would help promote

sound ecclesiology, biblical fidelity, and Baptist theology in their church and ministry.

While Mbewe's work is unapologetically Baptist, he is cautious to stay balanced and defers on issues that would require undue excursus. This even-keeled style is what makes the work so universally helpful. Yes, it is a work by an African for Africans, but it is something that Baptist churches at any time or in any context would find enriching.

The strengths of *God's Design for the Church* are many. Today's African church faces a host of theological challenges, from syncretism to Neo-Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel. These threats affect the theological grounding of church members and the ecclesiological praxis of the church as a whole. Mbewe's work offers a much-needed biblical counterbalance to this drift, and he does it as an African speaking to other Africans. His writing is academically and biblically sound but easily accessible for any reading level. Additionally, each chapter ends with a helpful study guide and discussion questions, allowing small groups to utilize this book as a Bible study tool if desired.

Most striking is Mwebe's realization that Africa is now poised to be "the next major sender of missionaries to the rest of the world" (162). His cry is that the African church would embrace this perspective and step into the role of senders instead of receivers. Having influential African theologians like Mbewe promote this vision is the key to the future of the church in Africa. It is encouraging to see African theologians at the helm and exciting to see the African church owning the mission. It starts with books like *God's Design for the Church*.

If you are looking for a healthy, contextualized ecclesiology covering everything from membership to worship to cooperation in missions and beyond, this work is for you. This book is one you will want in your library and will want to give to all your national partners. Mbewe has written a book that will be used for years to come to help the African church get back on course practically, theologically, and missionally.