

BOOK REVIEW

DASWANI, Girish, *Looking Back, Moving Forward: Transformation and Ethical Practice in the Ghanaian Church of Pentecost*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. 276pp. Pbk. ISBN: 9781442626584. £17.99.

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How do Pentecostals manage the unfulfilled promises of conversion, and the challenges and contradictions that their commitment to Pentecostalism brings to their everyday lives? Girish Daswani addresses this question in this book, which can be considered part of a second generation of studies of Pentecostalism in the anthropology of Christianity and of Africa. Whereas an emphasis on rupture and radical transformation has tended to predominate in the study of Pentecostalism, Daswani's book offers a nuanced perspective on the complexities that characterize processes of continuity and change in the religious lives of converts.

This book portrays the experience of Pentecostal Christians in the Church of Pentecost (CoP) in Ghana, and among the Ghanaian diaspora in London. From Accra and Kumasi to London, the book explores the intrinsic dilemmas that Pentecostals experience while trying to remain committed Christians, and in the face of challenges and conflicts in their social relations. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2002 and 2004, this book suggests that Pentecostal transformation manifests itself as an ethical problem and practice. The book builds on and re-examines some common debates in the anthropology of Christianity, such as those of rupture and continuity, personhood and time, and offers a novel understanding of Pentecostal experience.

Daswani's interlocutors struggled to reconcile existing contradictions in their lives, and continuously reflected on how "Pentecostal transformation should look like and how it could be achieved in their own lives and the lives of others" (p. 6). Thus, Daswani argues that Pentecostal conversion not only is a form of rupture from a non-Christian past, but also, it is seen as a "problem of continuity" that converts constantly try to resolve. He defines Pentecostal transformation as "an ethical practice that creates commitment to specific disciplinary practices and standards concerning how a virtuous and prosperous life ought to be achieved, while simultaneously presenting new dilemmas and questions" (p. 13). Rupture is accompanied by multiple tensions. In Ghana, these often unfold as contradictions between the claims of the church leaders and the work of the prophets, who establish and enforce different criteria of what is acceptable or unacceptable in the lives of church members. In London, church members experience additional contradictions as migrants, as they try to negotiate their commitment to

evangelism and to secure a space in an unfamiliar social environment and work economy. These tensions offer church members an opportunity to reflect on how to negotiate and reconcile their identities as Pentecostals with the relationships that they value and the challenges that they face.

One of the key contributions of this book is its focus on the relational quality of Pentecostal ethical practice and its affective aspects. Church members evaluate the limits of transformation through their relationships with Christian and non-Christian human and non-human spiritual others. The book offers a rich and intimate portrayal of people's lives, aspirations and struggles. It captures a condition that church members experience as living "in-between", trying to make sense of what it means to leave behind a non-Christian past and to aspire to reach a promising future; when they discern what aspects of their former lives should be brought forward, and what need to be left behind. Church members try to find answers to personal questions such as *why* they continue to suffer after conversion, to have "unhealthy relationships" or to experience problems as migrants, and "how" they can deal with these situations (p. 27).

The book is structured in seven chapters that take the reader from Ghana to London. Chapter 1 outlines the history of Pentecostalism in Ghana. It portrays its shifting patterns over time, its conflicting values, and the ways in which Pentecostal churches have reinterpreted the past to secure the continuity of a community (p. 54). Chapter 2 further examines the relationship between rupture and continuity, and presents this relationship as an ethical one. It highlights the struggles, disputes and negotiations that accompany a rupture with the past and "tradition". By examining these tensions through the lens of ethical practice, Daswani gives account of multiple positions and opinions that define a Pentecostal transformation (p. 57). Chapter 3 examines the role of prophets in the CoP in Ghana, who assist church members to fulfil their aspirations of international migration with their prayers. Prophets are highly valued by the congregation, but their church superiors often regard them with suspicion and scrutinize their practices. Prophets use this tension to present themselves as models of moral virtue, by submitting themselves to the authority of the church and the Holy Spirit. Chapter 4 explores the role of personhood. In their relationships with others, CoP members often find themselves haunted by the presence of the past in the present. While they strive to fashion themselves as "individuals-in-God", they are bound to re-evaluate their Pentecostal identities as "dividual" persons, who are connected to the spirits of the past and are vulnerable to the actions of others in their lives.

Chapter 5 presents the stories of two men with different experiences of migration, one from the country side to Accra, and another from Accra to London. It portrays how these young men manage their obligations and responsibilities towards their families in Ghana and towards church members. It also explores how church members create "kin-like" relations that often mirror the struggles that characterize "traditional" ones. The next two chapters portray how migrants in London strive to maintain religious continuity in their lives, in the face of cultural dislocation and discontinuity. Chapter 6 explores how Pentecostal migrants shape themselves as moral agents engaged in building a "virtue community"

(p. 164) in a socio-cultural context that is considered to be corrupting. Chapter 7 considers the globalization of Pentecostalism and how Ghanaians in Britain participate in a project of “reverse mission”. CoP members constitute themselves as Christian citizens, whose prayers and religious commitments go beyond national boundaries. However, they perceive “culture” as an obstacle to their evangelistic efforts and the expansion of a transnational church.

An epilogue reflects on how this condition of living “in between” cultural worlds, localities and unfulfilled promises or dreams manifests itself in relation to time. I consider, however, that the book could have benefited from a bolder theoretical formulation about the role of time in relation to ethics and rupture, as a feature of Pentecostal Christianity in general. This is an excellent book and a welcome contribution to the anthropology of Christianity and Pentecostalism in Africa that opens new avenues for investigation in the comparative study of global Pentecostalism.