

## BOOK REVIEW

ELORM-DONKOR, Lord, *Christian Morality in Ghanaian Pentecostalism*. Oxford: Regnum, 2017. 246pp. Pbk. ISBN: 9781911372264. £12.

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In the existing literature, Pentecostalism has been assessed through various historical and theological studies, but Pentecostal ethics and morality still remains under-researched. Against the backdrop of the criticisms that the movement, especially in its more contemporary versions, has received on account of its emphasis on material prosperity and authoritarian leadership, it is refreshing to hear another side of the story. Lord Elorm-Donkor's *Christian Morality in Ghanaian Pentecostalism* is a groundbreaking work because it studies Christian morality within an indigenous classical Pentecostal tradition with a very strong holiness ethic. The Church of Pentecost, officially listed as the single largest Protestant denomination in Ghana, has within the last two decades in particular extended its mission abroad. In the popular imagination, the Church of Pentecost is noted for certain specific characteristics. First is its missionary zeal, second is its simple leadership style, and third is its strict moral ethic. In the Church of Pentecost, to give an idea of how moral infractions are handled, teenage pregnancy, the bane of many young women in Africa, is treated in the harshest of terms and a pastor dismissed on moral grounds is never readmitted into the ministry. Elorm-Donkor's study is premised on the disconnect that scholars often lament exists between Christianity and morality in African societies like Ghana. The factors that affect public morality are many and religious faith is only one of them, but it is such an important one. The book, a product of the author's PhD thesis, deals with the following basic question: from a Pentecostal perspective, what is the relationship between the African traditional worldview and African Christian moral practice? The issue is examined using the Church of Pentecost as a case study. Given my observations of the Church of Pentecost as upholding a stricter holiness piety than most churches including other Pentecostal churches, the author could not have selected a better denomination from whose perspective to examine this matter.

The book is made up of six chapters with a foreword written by Allan H. Anderson, arguably the foremost scholar on world Pentecostalism today. As Anderson points out in his foreword, Elorm-Donkor's work illustrates powerfully the fact that practices present within Pentecostalism everywhere may be found invested with contextual interpretations and meanings through encounters with indigenous cultures (p. xvi). The ministry of deliverance is one of them. It is present

in Pentecostalism everywhere but in Africa, strong notions of mystical causality give that ministry a certain contextual character. In Ghana, the main context of this study, Elorm-Donkor, himself a Pentecostal pastor, resists the temptation to be trapped into African Pentecostalist hermeneutics that seek to blame evil spirits, demons and witchcraft for moral failures and thereby offer those looking for it an excuse for reneging on their responsibilities for the negative choices they make in life. He writes that the focus of what he refers to as “deliverance theology” on spiritual causation presupposes a “passive/experiential method of knowledge,” a situation that leads Pentecostals to blame external spiritual forces for personal problems even if those difficulties could be attributed to natural causes (p.50). The method adopted for this study is the “critical correlation method” founded on the claim that “truth and revelation may be realized beyond the confines of the Christian tradition through the minds, hearts and cultures of all humans” (p. 5). Ghanaian notions of morality, Elorm-Donkor points out, pre-date Christian evangelization. They have always flowed from indigenous rational reflections and philosophical responses to the primal imagination. Deliverance theology in particular, with its emphasis on the role of demons in moral decisions, resonates very much with the African worldview of mystical causality.

In spite of the importance of the African worldview in understanding African Pentecostalism, Elorm-Donkor’s conclusion is that deliverance theology is inadequate as a hermeneutical tool for the moral dilemmas confronting Global Pentecostalism. This is so, he argues, because in the moral scheme of the Akans, morality does not flow out of religious belief (p. 202).

This is a fine work that I have endorsed as taking the study of African Pentecostalism on a new trajectory putting it in conversation with global Pentecostal practices. Nevertheless, there are two contradictions that I find in the argument. The first one is with the author’s main conclusion and the second is with methodology. Elorm-Donkor’s thesis that Ghanaian morality is not based on religious belief is very difficult to sustain. In fact, he writes consistently that African traditional values for personhood depends very much on cosmological ideas based on relationship with the ancestors. He argues that in life, wealth, good health, felicity and peace are believed to be facilitated by the spiritual realm. It is virtually impossible for the spiritual realm, represented by the ancestors, to facilitate the blessings of abundant life and not have a direct interest in moral values. The two are inseparable and a number of African scholars have previously debated this matter. Secondly, and related to that, chapter 5 of the book deals with “Character Formation in John Wesley’s Moral Theology”. Although, historically, John Wesley is very relevant for understanding Pentecostal notions of sanctification and holiness, one would have thought that for a work on African Pentecostalism, the theoretical framework would have profited better from an African Christian moral philosophy rather than from the theology of an eighteenth-century English Evangelical Episcopalian. These two reservations do not in any way undermine the significance of this book. It will help scholars interested in African Pentecostalism to appreciate the gaps that exist between Christianity and public life in a continent in which religion remains pervasive and resilient in every aspect of life and behaviour.