

BOOK REVIEW

WARIBOKO, Nimi. *The Pentecostal Hypothesis: Christ Talks, They Decide*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020. 184pp. Pbk. ISBN: 9781725254510. £19.

Reviewed by: Benson Ohihon Igboin, Adekunle Ajasin University, Nigeria.
Email: bensonigboin@gmail.com

Does it “make sense” or does it “make spirit” to start by saying that the entire thrust of *The Pentecostal Hypothesis* lies in a suspense: a gap, split or crack between “what there is” and what is to be expected? Even “what there is” is not fully grasped except in anticipation of what is to be expected, even though it does raise enough satisfied tension of reality and expectation. This suspense, once realized and yet expected, emplaces *The Pentecostal Hypothesis* in a gap between *The Split God* (published already) and *The Pentecostal Incredible* (yet to be published) (p. ix). Thus, *The Pentecostal Hypothesis* hangs in completeness and incompleteness between *The Split God* and *The Pentecostal Incredible*. The *Split God* undergrounds the split that encircles the thoughts in *The Pentecostal Hypothesis*, without which it is difficult to grasp the full arguments therein. *The Pentecostal Incredible* is yet an unreached, but reachable realm of testing the other planks of *The Pentecostal Hypothesis*.

I have introduced my review in this way to suggest the consistency in Wariboko’s thought, methodology and theory as he philosophizes, theologizes and ethicizes Pentecostalism. *The Pentecostal Hypothesis*, which flies on the wings of Elsie Nene Obed’s “It does not make sense, but it makes spirit” (p. ix), forcefully brings to the fore the core of Pentecostals’ everyday thought, acts, encounter, ratiocination and expectation – a mesh of theology, philosophy and social ethics. Wariboko creatively expounds this seemingly innocuous assertion that could probably have passed the thorax of secular philosophy without a feel. Thus, using continental philosophy as his methodology, Wariboko argues as a jazzman who can spontaneously improvise to thread disparate dialectical thoughts and actions into a harmonious symphony or beat. The many voices in *The Pentecostal Hypothesis* echo dialectical spirituality, dialectical philosophy, dialectical Christianity, even dialectical Pentecostalism, all toward the symphony – human flourishing. In other words, if human flourishing is subtracted from the algebra that defines the book, the whole essence is completely missed.

It might at first have appeared that there is a drive toward “sense-cide” and “spirit-cide” where sense data is completely destroyed in order to make spirit, and spiritual data is destroyed in order for sense data to enjoy exclusive preference. But gradually it dawns on the reader that though we might talk about dialectical or alternate epistemology, it is not an unresolvable tension or wholesale rejection

of each other. It is rather a transition, transition from sense data – it makes sense – to spiritual data – it makes spirit, and even back because no Pentecostal is absolutely held up in the spiritual nor detained in the sensical. The Pentecostal in navigating the threshold of it makes sense and it makes spirit transits, combines, separates, dissolves, fuses and enacts both sense and spirit as she or he stands in a cross-like position. This is the gap the Pentecostal leaps into between it makes sense and it makes spirit.

Chapter 1, which is the most interesting and fundamental of the entire book, where the mind and heart meet, invites us to a sermon on the story of Abraham, a story that does not make sense but makes meaning and makes spirit. One take-away of the story of Abraham is that for both Pentecostals and any other person, there is usually a time when we find ourselves in a situation that does not meet our rational quest for meaning, but we step into a gap and act in ways that make meaning and give peace via intuition. It is to abandon ourselves to a non-reason. This is what a Pentecostal does when she or he empties her or himself and steps into the gap that is rationally uncertain. “For you to know Christ you must come to that place where it doesn’t make sense, but it makes spirit” (p. 49). Christ is the centre of the leap of faith, the basis and zenith of human flourishing; in him there is freedom, the freedom that guarantees a fresh beginning and a stretching forwards and towards – the act of a continuous experiential becoming.

Although Wariboko argues that his interest is not in Christology as given or understood, his split Christ opens up a new dimension of Christology at once traditional and evolving, a hybrid, split Christology, which tends toward and derives from the common everyday thought and performance of a Pentecostal. The beauty of this new understanding of Christology is that it is not hinged on past theological giants whose tomes are continuously being revisited, but hardly performatively enacted, but on “the mundane epistemological practices of plain Pentecostal folk” (p. 107). This split Christology resonates thought and praxis, a connection or relationship on the bases of sense and spirit. The beauty of the new Christology is found in the very act of the Pentecostal being able to enact it makes sense and it makes spirit even in a single performance. Can someone really deny this?

Yes and no! For the Pentecostal, it is not deniable; it is an act, a repeatable and enlivening act that only those who step into the gap can experience and build an epistemic explanation. But for those who are not in the gap, it can be denied even though such denial does not invalidate the experience. What is implicated here are: sense, no-sense and non-sense. But they are the fallouts of the Enlightenment, which Wariboko’s book enters into as a split, critiquing the Enlightenment and turning to a new vision of Christology that meets the people (the Pentecostals) at their very point of need. The alternate epistemology of *The Pentecostal Hypothesis* pushes us toward pluriversality of epistemology itself, and its full implications on praxis are expected in *The Pentecostal Incredible*. But for those who are inclined to experience Christ in the new Christology grounded in faith and reason, spirit and sense, Wariboko has provided a definite source.