



RESENSI BUKU

Wariboko, Nimi. *The Pentecostal Hypothesis: Christ Talks, They Decide*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2020; xxi + 193

This book is about hearing from God in ways that make for flourishing. Nigerian Pentecostal social theorist Nimi Wariboko derives this guidance by exploring how Pentecostals typically listen to the “voice of Christ” and respond in ways that often result in miraculous breakthroughs and greater flourishing. From this study he articulates a “Pentecostal theory” of decision-making that wields profitable resources for fostering the common good of human societies. Wariboko thus presents “practical wisdom” that exemplifies a “Pentecostal account of human good living” (162). Though the prose is scholarly oriented, Wariboko has also written this book for “educated laypersons” and “pastor-scholars” (20, 157).

Wariboko begins by vividly recounting how this decision-making theory, and hence the book, originated from a 2017 sermon he extemporaneously preached at a Pentecostal church (The Kings Temple) on Long Island, New York (USA), pastored by Nigerian-American senior pastor, Elsie Obed. Situated as the book’s first chapter, he titled the sermon “Who Christ Is,” which is the specific theme she asked him to speak about. As Wariboko explains, his message thus addressed the question, “Who is Christ to the world today and what does it mean for a Pentecostal Christian to claim that she knows him?” (xviii). Yet more specifically, he structures the message on a proverb Pastor Elsie has “formulated and popularized: *It does not make sense, but it makes spirit*” (xviii). That dictum is what the book title refers to *The Pentecostal Hypothesis*. The book’s sub-title, *Christ Talks, They Decide*, thus implies its underlying epistemology; meaning, discerning how Christ *speaks* guidance to us in times of decision making.

As reader will discover, Wariboko’s sermon is spiritually edifying, highly inspirational, and decisively challenging. Its main Bible text is the Genesis chapter 22 story of God “testing Abraham” by seemingly commanding him to kill his son Isaac as a sacrifice of worship. The story thus illustrates Pastor Elsie’s saying, “*It does not make sense, but it makes spirit*”; meaning, *it makes for miracles* (48-49). For as Wariboko notes, after Abraham “obeyed” by lifting

his knife-wielding hand ready to carry out the action, God miraculously provided a ram for the requested sacrifice (Gen 22:13).

Wariboko describes this event in Abraham's life, as a "space" of deciding whether or not to obey the voice of God; specifically referring to those times where, though we might believe God is speaking guidance to us, it just "does not make sense." At least not according to normal rational logic (49). We might think of other biblical examples, such as when God told Noah to build an ark for coming floods, though circumstance gave no indication of their coming (58-61, 158). Or when the angel told Mary, "Get ready to become and look like an unmarried pregnant girl walking through the village gossip." Or when Jesus told Peter, "Get out of the boat, and step in the water, believing you shall not sink. For in none of these instances does obedience to the seeming "voice of God" make rational sense. Yet eventually, it made way for miracles; hence, "*for spirit*" (58).

Now in more philosophical language, both in the sermon and throughout the book, Wariboko refers to these decision-making events as a "split" between "sense" and "no-sense," a "void" before us, or as a "crack-in-reality" (49-50, 158). In his sermon Wariboko thus draws from his innovative "void/split/crack" concept that consistently permeates his writings. In both here and past publications, he consistently explores how it functions within human experience as a *liminal* space that when well traversed, thrusts people and communities to higher levels of flourishing (ix). So, in his sermon Wariboko passionately exhorts, explains, and challenges us to obey the voice of Christ whenever he calls us, just like he called Abraham, into these "spaces" that appear "split in the middle" between sense and no-sense (48). For, "it is in the crack, that space, where Jesus Christ is about to meet us" (49). In ways that ultimately, make for *greater flourishing* (126).

The other parts of the book detail and elaborate how Wariboko phenomenologically identifies the *Pentecostal Hypothesis* operative within Pentecostal spirituality through methodical concepts associated with Continental philosophy (ix, 31, 36, 39-41). Readers will especially enjoy the introductory section that summarizes the book's main arguments and themes, while critically evaluating contemporary discussions within Pentecostal studies on Pentecostal reasoning, rationality, and epistemology (ways of knowing).

Let me conclude by further clarifying this book's value. First, given its specific focus from a philosophical perspective on decision-making, this book falls within a growing literature corpus on Pentecostal epistemology that are expanding beyond the earlier 20th century singular focus on Pentecostal orality. Second, as

sociologist Bonaventura de Sousa Santos has pleaded for, it thereby contributes towards the de-colonizing aims of “cognitive”/“epistemic justice” by delineating another form of reasoning that contrasts with more mainstream European-rooted Enlightenment grounded epistemology (x-xiii, 67-71). Third, as Wariboko states in his sermon conclusion, and gestures throughout the book, readers are thereby encouraged to identify how God might often prompt us to discern “cracks in the world” that should elicit from us, ethical actions that, though according to rational thinking *may not make sense, yet can make for “spirit,”* according to the Christian vision of flourishing (61).

Finally, I must stress that the spiritual value of Wariboko’s “Who Christ Is” sermon, outweighs all other warrants. For readers shall find it not only spiritually edifying, but far much more, life transforming. For through it readers may freshly hear Jesus calling us from safe boats to cross deep risky waters where faith in God miraculously makes the impossible possible, and the possible—actual.

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