Book Reviews

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The book focuses mainly on Ghanaian experiences but the author argues that similar developments are taking place in various corners of sub-Saharan Africa (p. 3). Those who have read his _African Charismatics and Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity_ will recognize many of his thoughts developed in the present work.

The opening chapter discusses the crucial role of healing among contemporary Pentecostals in Africa. The basic assumption is that the main reason for the emergence of most renewal movements remains ‘the experience of the Holy Spirit’, although not all label themselves as Pentecostal (p. 1). Kwabena maintains that from an African viewpoint, renewal or revitalization refers to ‘supernaturally inspired attempts to rescue religion from moribund fate at the hands of traditional representatives of its belief systems and practices’ (p. 7). In this context spiritual revivalism is marked by intense religious experience in individual lives for men and women, and communal worship as well as moral renewal are emphasized and experienced. Kwabena states that the translation of the Bible into African languages has promoted renewal movements (p. 10).

Kwabena argues that the ‘pneumatic orientation’ that characterizes revitalization movements resonates both with Biblical traditions and African traditional religious beliefs according to which physical realities of health and wealth find their causality in the metaphysical sphere (p. 1). He repeatedly asserts that Pentecostalism’s relationship with African religious sensibilities determines its fast spread on the continent (pp. 12, 149). He contends that the rise of revitalization movements, which have largely contributed to the significant growth of Christianity today in Africa (p. 3), was a reaction to the neglect, marginalization and even dismissal of charismatic experiences by historic
mission churches. These pneumatic experiences include ‘aggressive and glos-
solalic prayer, prophecy, healing, deliverance, visions and revelations and are
very much at home among African people’ (p. 2). Kwabena’s categorization
of Christian revitalization movements comprises four groups: Independent
itinerant charismatic prophets that emerged after the first World Missionary
Conference in Edinburgh in 1910; African Initiated Churches which empha-
sized prayer, healing and prophecy; renewal movements that emerged within
historic mission denominations, and the neo-Pentecostal / contemporary
Pentecostal movements and ministries that have risen since the late 1970s.

Kwabena writes that the supernatural causality that explains illness and
other bad happenings justifies why healing and exorcism are prominent in
Pentecostalism to the extent that evangelism in this context ‘involves preach-
ing the word and casting out demons of affliction’ (pp. 149, 152). He confi-
dently maintains that in this respect the movement has proven to be rooted in
Biblical tradition since it re-enacts ‘the ministry of Jesus Christ in the power of
the Holy Spirit in our time’ (p. 149). The reader learns that in Ghana mainline
churches are consciously incorporating charismatic experiences ‘including
healing and exorcism in particular, into their worship and spirituality’ (p. 152).
The same welcome to Pentecostals’ concerns is attested in theological teaching
institutions like Trinity Theological Seminary.

The author notes that contemporary African Pentecostalism breaks denom-
inational barriers. To give some examples, Chapter 8 focuses on two lay-
initiated trans-denominational movements that arose in Ghana and have been
very active in evangelism inside and outside the country. Both the Full Gospel
Businessmen’s Fellowship International Breakfast Meeting and the Women’s
Aglow fellowship have left their positive imprint on Christianity and the
Ghanaian society in general (pp. 105-148).

Kwabena also discusses the case of one indigenous classical Pentecostal
denomination in Ghana, the Church of Pentecost. He demonstrates that reli-
gious experience enabled by personal conversion to Christ, discipleship and
experiences of the works of the Spirit account for the growth and influence
of the movement on society (pp. 125-148). He insists that the Spirit seen as
the vivifying power ‘remains a non-negotiable element of Christian mission’
(p. 126). According to Kwabena, many examples of prominent people con-
verted to lay-initiated fellowship with a Pentecostal persuasion challenge the
theory that says that Pentecostalism appeals only to ‘lower classes and the
socially marginalized’ (p. 117). However, Kwabena recognizes that historic mis-
sion Christianity has left a huge impact on society mainly through educational
facilities and socio-economic initiatives (p. 116).