



Review: "A Critical Analysis of Pentecostalism and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa"

By Bednicho Nyoni

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OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

The article "A Critical Analysis of Pentecostalism and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa" by Bednicho Nyoni, delves into the complex relationship between Pentecostalism, particularly new Pentecostal/Charismatic Mega Churches, and sustainable development in the context of sub-Saharan-Africa. The author highlights the manner in which these churches have created power structures that hinder Indigenous Africans from shaping their own futures for sustainable development, instead keeping them confined in a cycle of poverty and dependence on charismatic leaders promising miracles and prosperity.

The article begins by exploring the roots of classical and new Pentecostalism in Africa, emphasizing the influence of American pioneers and the significant impact of these movements on the religious landscape of the continent.¹ The historical trajectory is examined to uncover biases in traditional interpretations of Pentecostal history that have overlooked the key role of African, Asian, African-American, Caribbean, and Latino pioneers. The author critiques the Euro-Western influence on classical Pentecostal denominations in Africa, contrasting them with the newer Pentecostal/Charismatic movements that emerged from the 1970s onwards with an emphasis on prosperity theology and miraculous manifestations.

The article proceeds to analyze the distinctive characteristics and theological tenets of classical and new Pentecostalism, highlighting the theological orientations towards issues like salvation, healing, and empowerment.² Classical Pentecostalism is portrayed as more grounded in developmental programs that support African communities, while the new Pentecostalism movements are criticized for their focus on prosperity theology, material accumulation, and excessive wealth among charismatic leaders. The pervasive influence of American televangelists and the incorporation of commercial

¹ Bednicho Nyoni, "A Critical Analysis of Pentecostalism and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Academic Research* 1 (July 12, 2018),5. <https://doi.org/10.32476/13557abf-f116-4d35-bd68-7123bd71e55e>.

² Nyoni, "A Critical Analysis of Pentecostalism and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa," 8.

practices within these churches are discussed as factors contributing to the spiritual coloniality and economic exploitation of followers.

Moreover, the article delves into the impact of new Pentecostalism/Charismatic movements on African futures, pointing out the prevalence of spiritual coloniality and the unbalanced power dynamics between charismatic leaders and congregants.³ The exploitative practices, relentless fundraising techniques, and illusions of instantaneous wealth portrayed by these leaders are scrutinized as detrimental to the genuine development and liberation of African minds. The article emphasizes the urgency for emancipation from spiritual coloniality and the need for conscious awareness among followers to challenge the illusions propagated by charismatic preachers.

DISCUSSIONS

This review brings to bear that, Nyoni's work is comprehensive and holistic because the article delves into the theological, social, and economic impacts of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Mega-Churches in Sub-Saharan Africa. The main idea of the article revolves around the concept of spiritual coloniality propagated by these churches, leading to a power structure that inhibits Indigenous Africans from shaping their own futures for sustainable development. The article highlights how these charismatic leaders imprison their followers with promises of miracles and faith healing, exploiting vulnerable individuals seeking relief from socio-economic challenges.⁴ Briefly elaborated below are the strong points, weaknesses, areas for improvement, biases, and reflections on the article as gleaned from the review:

Strong Points

1. **In-depth Analysis:** The article provides a detailed examination of the historical trajectory of classical and new Pentecostalism in Africa, shedding light on their theological distinctions and developmental impacts.
2. **Critical Reflection:** The author critically evaluates the negative aspects of new Pentecostalism, such as the focus on prosperity theology, financial exploitation, and lack of genuine spiritual liberation for African congregants.
3. **Historical Perspective:** The article brings attention to the biases in historical narratives of Pentecostalism, specifically the neglect of the significant contributions of African, Asian, and Latin American pioneers.
4. **Insightful Comparison:** By comparing classical Pentecostalism with new Pentecostalism, the article elucidates how the latter is entwined with Western influences and commercialization, contrasting with the more community-focused approach of classical denominations.

Weaknesses

1. **Biased Views:** The article has a bias against the new Pentecostal/Charismatic movements, painting them solely in a negative light without acknowledging any potential positive contributions.
2. **Lack of Counterarguments:** While the criticisms of financial exploitation and spiritual coloniality are valid, the article could benefit from including perspectives from supporters of these movements for a more balanced view.
3. **Generalizations:** Some over-generalizations are made about the motives and practices of charismatic leaders without considering the diversity within these movements or the nuanced motivations behind their actions.

Areas for Improvement

1. **Balanced Perspective:** To enhance credibility, the article should present a more balanced view by incorporating counterarguments or acknowledging potential positive impacts of Pentecostalism in the African context.

³ Nyoni, "A Critical Analysis of Pentecostalism and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa,"9.

⁴ Nyoni, "A Critical Analysis of Pentecostalism and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa," 12.

2. **Empirical Evidence:** Including empirical data or case studies could strengthen the arguments made in the article and provide concrete examples to support the claims.
3. **Policy Recommendations:** Offering practical policy recommendations for addressing the negative impacts of spiritual coloniality and exploitation within Pentecostal churches could enhance the article's applicability and relevance to policymakers and practitioners in the field.

Biases

The article exhibits a bias against new Pentecostal/Charismatic movements, portraying them solely as exploitative and detrimental to African development. While valid concerns are raised, the lack of acknowledgement of the potential benefits or diverse perspectives within these movements reflects a biased viewpoint.

Reflections

The article provides a thought-provoking analysis of the intersection between Pentecostalism, development, and spiritual coloniality in Sub-Saharan Africa. It highlights critical issues of financial exploitation, Western influences, and the loss of indigenous agency within these religious contexts. However, a more nuanced and balanced approach would enhance the article's overall impact and credibility. Addressing the complexities and multifaceted nature of Pentecostalism in Africa necessitates exploring diverse perspectives and considering the broader socio-economic and cultural dynamics at play. In conclusion, while the article raises crucial concerns, further research and inclusivity in perspectives could enrich the discourse on Pentecostalism and sustainable development in Africa.

CONCLUSION

The article advocates for the liberation of African minds from the grip of spiritual coloniality perpetuated by new Pentecostalism movements. It calls for a shift towards empowering Indigenous Africans to take charge of their own destinies and shape sustainable futures free from the influence of charismatic leaders driven by wealth accumulation and material prosperity. The article underscores the importance of fostering independent thinking and critical consciousness to combat spiritual exploitation and pave the way for genuine development in sub-Saharan Africa.

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