

Nimi Wariboko, *The Split God: Pentecostalism and Critical Theory* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018).

Reviewed by Amos Yong ²²⁰

The Split God will be challenging for most readers of this journal, not least because the author operates here in a primarily philosophical key – in contrast to the ministerial perspectives foregrounded in these pages usually – and even then, his interlocutors derive mostly from the European continent, especially French and poststructural arenas, rather than from working in English speaking languages. Further, if that were not enough, our author deploys as his primary pentecostal lens West African forms of the movement rather than the Euro-American or Australasian versions more familiar with those who frequent this periodical. Finally, we are also dealing with a prolific and trans-disciplinary thinker who traverses not only the broad scope of pentecostal studies but also works deftly in the arena of social ethics, particularly at the nexus of where this primary discipline of his encounters economics and economic theory (he spent, after all, ten years of his life working in the financial sector of Wall Street, while pastoring a West African diasporic pentecostal congregation on Manhattan). This means that those who have not read his prior works – including but not limited to *The Pentecostal Principle: Ethical Methodology in New Spirit* (2012), *Nigerian Pentecostalism* (2014), and *The Charismatic City and the Public Resurgence of Religion: A Pentecostal Social Ethics of Cosmopolitan Urban Life* (2012) – will be ill-prepared for the inter-disciplinary analyses of this book.

Nevertheless, perhaps the most important thing to know about *The Split God* is its central theological thesis and its main methodological proposal. The latter is Wariboko's claim that much of formal pentecostal academic theology has operated at the more abstract discursive level, perhaps consistent with the thoroughfare of the theological traditions upon which emerging pentecostal theologians desire to attain recognition, but this is not only inconsistent with but also dismissive of the sociality of pentecostal practices in the everyday domain that sustain the life and catalyze the growth of the movement. Hence the wager is that attentiveness to the intersubjective sociality of embodied pentecostal praxis pushes forward the discussion in ways that pentecostal theologians have yet to mine. One might say that Wariboko springs off the phenomenology of pentecostal sociality in order to think theologically about and with the movement. Methodologically, this would be a consistent "next-step" for pentecostal theological work.

So, what is the resulting theological claim at the material level from this more formally re-oriented approach? Succinctly, Wariboko urges that pentecostal praxis – e.g., its prayers, its exorcisms, its attitudes toward and confessions about prosperity, its singing and worship, its spirituality of miracles, dreams and visions, including visions of the divine manifest in and through mundane daily life – is suggestive of the *split-ness* heralded

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in the book's title. There is a split between pentecostal realities and pentecostal aspirations, desires, and hopes, and this split, consistent with the pentecostal imaginary that sees God more or less straightforwardly as manifest in these prayers, rites, and practices, persists ontologically and theologically: thus God is also split, between who God is as manifest to pentecostal believers and in Godself, between what God is as apparent in the present and the God who is coming, between the reality of God perceived in the ordinary and the promised deity that delivers us into the super-ordinary, etc. Wariboko makes sense of this theological thesis in conversation with continental philosophers and critical theorists.

Even if most Pentecostals who pick up this book will not be familiar with the critical theoretical apparatus central to the dialogue, I suggest that we ought to stay with *The Split God* as long as we can. Doing so will extend our philosophical horizons, will stretch our theological considerations, and will deepen our appreciation of how our pentecostal spirituality is rooted primordially in West African and sub-Saharan sensibilities as unveiled in this book. Critical engagement with Wariboko's arguments, methodological and theological, can arise only through, not around, *The Split God* (not to mention its predecessors). Toward this end, I recommend this book and its thought-provoking author.