

Wariboko, Nimi. *The Pentecostal Hypothesis: Christ Talks, They Decide* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2020). 193 + xxi pp. AU\$32 paperback.

This book is about hearing from God in ways that make for flourishing, providing *epistemic* guidance for doing so. Drawing from continental philosophy relevant methods for phenomenological analysis, (pp. ix, 31, 36, 39-41), Pentecostal philosopher/theologian and social ethicist Nimi Wariboko derives this guidance from emically exploring (pp. x, 36-37) how Pentecostals typically listen to the “voice of Christ” and respond in ways (pp. 3, 12, 148) that often result in miraculous breakthroughs and greater flourishing (pp. 51-52, 57-61, 123, 134-135, 143-144). This basic theme accounts for the book’s subtitle: *Christ Talks, They Decide*. This is thus a study about “epistemology”; more specifically, a Pentecostal “mode of knowing” that “creates and sustains . . . a horizon for human flourishing” (p. ix). From this investigation, Wariboko articulates a ground-breaking, “Pentecostal theory of decision”-making; that he argues, wields profitable “social-ethical implications” for fostering the greater common good of human societies (pp. x, xix, 1, 161-162).

The book’s main title, *The Pentecostal Hypothesis*, refers to an aphorism regularly expounded by New York based, Nigerian-American Pentecostal pastor Elsie Obed; namely, “*It does not make sense, but it makes spirit*” (pp. 1, xvii-xix, 46, 61, 161). Wariboko argues that this aphorism, well describes common themes characterizing the best of Pentecostal decision-making practices. Grounded then in its seeming incongruity, *The Pentecostal Hypothesis* points to an epistemically practiced “capacity” Pentecostals often demonstrate; namely, “the capacity to resist conventional wisdom in personal decision-making” (p. ix, see also pp. 51-52). Yet positively stated via Hannah Arendt’s principle of natality (pp. 109-110) and thus building on his earlier book, *The Pentecostal Principle: Ethical Methodology in New Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012) (pp. 135-136), this is a capacity for “initiating” within challenging circumstances, “a new beginning” (p. 67). Hence, to transcend “limits” conventional wisdom often supposes, yet leading to outcomes far greater than what those conventions could achieve (p. 27). Within Pentecostal liturgy, the aphorism thus “circumvent”(s) “the logic of Babel” (“sense”) through the trans-cognitive reasoning “excess” (“spirit”) that Pentecost avails us (p. xi).

More specifically then, the “Pentecostal Hypothesis” is therefore “a form of interpretation that enables Pentecostals, amid multiple options, to know what is the most fitting decision (action) relative to their interest and commitment to Christ” (p. 2). We may therefore classify the “Pentecostal Hypothesis” as a “practical wisdom” (*phronesis*; or what we might call a practiced “philosophy”) derived from observing grassroots Pentecostal spirituality (pp. 4, 9, 125-126). Yet as Wariboko further explains through Aristotelian categories, doing this posits the hypothesis as a “virtue ethic” guiding people in a way of “excellence” that makes for social flourishing (pp. 12, 125-126). Wariboko’s main aim for this book is to therefore construct a

“critical -philosophical analysis of the hypothesis’ social-ethical implications,” in ways that foster “private decisions” and “social actions” that make for social flourishing (p. x).

Readers should note that this book falls within a growing literature corpus on Pentecostal epistemology that are expanding beyond the earlier 20th century singular focus on Pentecostal orality. One notable example would be Simo Frestadius’ 2019 monograph, *Pentecostal Rationality: Epistemology and Theological Hermeneutics in the Foursquare Tradition* (London, UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark). Yet written not just for scholars but for “educated laypersons” and “pastor-scholars” (pp. 20, 157), this book is actually very practical in orientation. For through it Wariboko presents “practical wisdom” that exemplifies a “Pentecostal account of human good living” (p. 162). Yet its driving argument is that the hypothesis “challenges the modernist imagination” (p. ix) insofar that it posits that best decision-making practices should utilize not only “sensory”-derived data, but “*spiritual-data*” (pp. x-xi); which within Pentecostal spirituality, emerges through hearing and rightly responding to the voice of Christ (pp. xiii-xiv).

Wariboko begins with a Preface that narrates his experiences with “cognitive injustice” operative within contemporary scholarship. Such injustice tends to marginalize, disparage, or suppress non-Cartesian grounded epistemologies found around the world, such as the “Pentecostal Hypothesis” (pp. x-xiii, see also pp. 67-71). Here he vividly recounts how this book originated from a very last-minute, 2017 sermon he extemporaneously preached at a Pentecostal church (The King’s Temple) on Long Island, New York (USA), led by Pastor Obed. In that sermon titled, “Who Christ Is,” Wariboko first explicated this book’s themes, as he explained Pastor Obed’s often expressed aphorism (pp. xvii-xviii). In his Introduction (“Logics of Pentecostal Worlds”), he more expansively summarizes the book’s main arguments and themes. Then in a preliminary section titled, “Interlude” (“Continental Thought and Pentecostal Theology”) he critically evaluates contemporary discussions within Pentecostal studies on Pentecostal reasoning, rationality, and epistemology (pp. 25-29). In response to observed concerns raised within Pentecostal theological scholarship (pp. 25-31), Wariboko well argues the value of “continental philosophy as a methodological assist” within Pentecostal studies; for it proffers helpful tools for analyzing grassroots Pentecostal living (pp. 31-41). While stressing this book should not be interpreted as a “Christology,” he argues the book’s value towards constructing what we might more appropriately call, a philosophy of “everyday Pentecostal Christology” (p. 43), that powerfully explicates how Jesus as the “*talking Christ*,” authoritatively summons responsive action within Pentecostal reasoning (pp. xiii-xiv, 31-32, 41-45).

Following the Sermon (Ch. 1), in chapter 2 (“Exegeting the Sermon: Exploring the Depths of Pentecostal Thinking”) Wariboko exegetes its driving themes, delineating how the “Pentecostal Hypothesis” illustrates his well-known “split/void/crack” concept; which I will explain below. Chapter 3 (“This is not a Christology: Writing Epistemology as the Christological

Turn”) explains *how Christology as a primary lived experience*, philosophically frames Pentecostal epistemology (pp. 88-91); thereby issuing in a theory of the “Split Christ” that metaphorically describes typical Pentecostal reasoning (pp. 91-96f). Wariboko calls chapter 4 (“Sense and Spirit: The Dialogical Imagination in Pentecostal Thought”) the “heart of this book” (p. 17). For through it he persuasively argues the social-ethical value of Pentecostal reasoning exemplified through the Hypothesis (pp. 115, 118, 126, 152). Aptly titled, “Unconcluding Provocations,” Wariboko prods the Pentecostal theological guild towards attending to the spiritual “excess” comprising the “creativity, splits, and volcanic eruptions” operative within Pentecostal spirituality which primordially funds grassroots Pentecostal theology (p. 159).

Now I shall review what I feel is the real “heart” of this book: Wariboko’s “Who Christ Is” sermon. In very inspirational rhetoric that effectively retains its oral delivery prior to printed form, he preaches what I would call the greatest definitive theme running through throughout his writings. Namely, his innovative “void/split/crack” concept. By primarily preaching from the Genesis chapter 22 story of God “testing Abraham (though referring to several other relevant biblical examples), he repeatedly illustrates this concept through Pastor Obed’s aphorism, what it says about “Who Christ Is,” and his aims when calling us to his summoning voice (pp. 46-47). Though derived from several converging themes within continental philosophy, in this book Wariboko primarily develops his “void/split/crack” concept from “Alain Badiou’s notion of event” (p. xvi). (see Alain Badiou, trans. by Ray Brassier [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003]) In both this and his past writings, 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.

In this sermon Wariboko thus preaches about special times when Christ forcefully calls us to this space (pp. 46-47, 49, 51, 56, 61). The aphorism thus refers to *stepping* into this place described in the sermon as, “split,’ “cracked,’ and a “void” before us (pp. 46-47, 49, 69). For if and when we do so, “it makes spirit”; meaning, it generates the natal “capacity to begin” something new (pp. 135-136). Amongst the sermon’s ample quotable prose, perhaps one quote that well summarizes the themes I have thus far surveyed goes like this: “Belief is taking a leap into what does not make sense,” yet is in “that space, where Jesus Christ is about to meet us” (p. 49). He then later states, “in that space between abundance and scarcity, that is where you meet him. And God will tell you something like what he told Hagar . . . ‘Lift up your eyes,’” and “she saw water and broke out in praise” (pp. 60-61).

One concern I might raise has to do with the stark contrast Wariboko seemingly makes between “spirit” and “sense.” For I believe there is growing transdisciplinary recognition that “sense” is a thoroughly *embodied* notion that operates with intuitive and appetitive reasoning modes. So, I think perhaps a better word choice would be something like, “mono-cognitive” modes of knowing. Yet I recognize that we should contextually appreciate the rhetorical use

of “sense” within its homiletically-derived aphorism. And in fact, Wariboko briefly stresses how embodied existence intrinsically shapes “spiritual insight” (p. 154). Perhaps then there is warrant here for more extensively exploring how the “Pentecostal Hypothesis” relates or even falls within other kinds of intuitive or transrational reasoning modes. For as Wariboko notes, Pentecostal epistemology is but one among many other kinds of reasoning modes worldwide that Euro-Enlightenment rooted epistemology has historically marginalized (pp. 68-67).

Let me conclude by further reiterating this book’s value. First, it represents another valuable contribution towards “global cognitive justice” (p. 69). Granted, as an African Pentecostal himself, Wariboko’s emic study (meaning in this context, data observed and interpreted as an “insider” of a researched social group rather than as what we may call an etic study, referring to data observed and interpreted as an “outsider”) specifically falls within “African (African Diaspora) Pentecostalism” (p. 45). Yet following through with sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ (*Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* [London, UK: Routledge, 2014]) plea towards global epistemic justice (pp. 68-69), we should appreciate its global relevancy as a valuable labor towards both epistemic justice and theories of decision-making that are hospitably grounded in globally diverse reasoning modes that robustly foster higher levels of human and planetary flourishing. Secondly then, I feel that the book’s assist within this labor, increases its warrant as prerequisite reading not only within the growing discipline of Pentecostal philosophy, but within the tradition’s theological guild (pp. 29, 159). 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.

Monte Lee Rice

Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines