

Antiparallel Missional Dynamics

Spiritual Power from Nigeria, Financial Resources from the Rest

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Chewachong, Amos B. *Intra-African Pentecostalism and the Dynamics of Power: The Nigerian Winners' Chapel in Cameroon*. Foreword by Brian Stanley. Eugene, Oregon, USA: Wipf and Stock, 2024. Pp. xxv + 242. USD \$35.00 (paperback and ebook), \$50.00 (hardback)

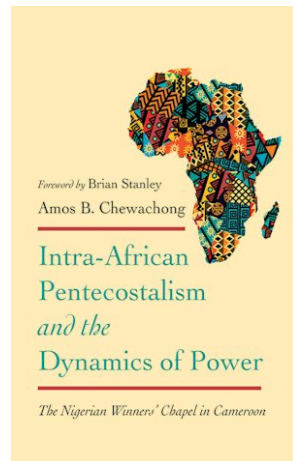
Chammah J. KAUNDA

ORCID: 0000-0001-6879-6330

Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology,
University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa
pastorchammah@gmail.com

While the book still carries traces of “PhD-ness,” with occasional repetition, Amos B. Chewachong’s monograph — introduced with a foreword by Brian Stanley — is nevertheless well-written, tightly focused, and supported by a useful index. It offers readers an important window into the shifting contours of world Christianity, particularly the ways in which the material legacies of colonial mission are subconsciously reproduced and perpetuated. These legacies, though often resisted, continue to shape and re-emerge within intra-African Pentecostal relationships.

For instance, Chewachong himself, perhaps subconsciously, retains the colonial terminology of “*mother church*” to describe the relationship between Nigeria’s Winners’ Chapel and its Cameroonian counterpart. Moreover, he operates within the established framework of reverse mission, merely extending it slightly by introducing the notion of “*reverse mission in reverse*.” He employs this notion to highlight how Nigerian missionaries increasingly direct their efforts toward other African regions that were themselves once missionized. This framework helps him trace the emergence of intra-African missionary activity and the ways



it is reshaping the continent's religious landscape. At the same time, he argues that intra-African Pentecostalism is marked by tensions, particularly the uneasy relationship between founders and followers.

Following the introduction, the book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 sets the stage by exploring trajectories of power and cultural homogenization. Nigerian churches export their culture into other African contexts through "spiritual resources" — the circulation of Nigerian miracle testimonies and Bishop Oyedepo's weekly sermons, which are expected to be reproduced verbatim in all "daughter churches." In this process, cultural diversity is diminished as local spiritual imaginations are subordinated. Nigeria thus emerges as a kind of "spiritual empire," deploying miracles and universalizing promises of liberation, but always within a Nigerian Christian cultural framework. Chewachong contends that Nigerian Pentecostalism reproduces imperial theology, structured around hierarchies of power and domination. Ironically, while its leaders claim to resist Western theological imperialism, they replicate its dynamics through Nigerian categories of theology of power.

Chapter 2 turns to paradigm shifts in African Pentecostalism, charting its rapid expansion and embrace of prosperity theology. It emphasizes the "Nigerianization" of African Christianity, fuelled by the strategic use of social media, satellite television, and other digital platforms to export a distinctly Nigerian brand of Christianity. Chapter 3 develops a phenomenology of Pentecostal power, showing how Nigerian Pentecostalism operates less by coercion than by soft power. Through spirituality, anointing, finances, and policy, Nigerian churches impose hierarchical culture in ways that privilege top-down flows of authority. Spiritual power is conceived as emanating from Bishop Oyedepo, transmitted first through Nigerian pastors and then extended to pastors from other African countries. This transmission is regarded as "untainted and authentic" (75). The closer one is to Oyedepo, the greater the intensity of spiritual authority — a flow of power from the centre to the periphery or from 'Nigeria to the rest' reminiscent of colonial missions: "from the to the rest."

However, unlike Western missions, which involved financial resources flowing outward with significant control, this reverse flow of resources strengthens the "mother church" and consolidates its domination. Nigerian missionaries, sustained financially by local congregations rather than the headquarters, treat mission as a form of spiritual enterprise — constantly planting new churches in affluent areas and closing them if they prove unsustainable. Local pastors employed by Nigerian churches often find

themselves relegated to the bottom of what resembles a Social Darwinian hierarchy, occupying second-class status within the system.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how power and persuasion function in practice: even highly educated Cameroonian pastors are eclipsed by less educated Nigerian counterparts. Nigerian pastors are valorised as authentic custodians of Oyedepo's teaching and spiritual authority. Chapter 6 offers a more appreciative account, noting the positive economic and social contributions of Winners' Chapel through job creation, investment, humanitarian initiatives, and moral influence. Yet even these contributions are intertwined with Nigerian symbolism — community boreholes, for example, are marked by conspicuous portraits of Oyedepo. Such gestures, Chewachong argues, also serve as strategies to mask suspicion about the reverse flow of financial resources.

The final chapter examines mission dynamics and the politics of Pentecostal power under the theme of “reverse mission in reverse.” Chewachong argues that Nigerian Pentecostalism's pursuit of control is not merely a matter of power but reflects a deeper failure of self-reflection — specifically, its inability to rethink the Nigerian worldview of spiritual power and its modes of transmission. Thus, even as it resists Western Christian dominance, Nigerian Pentecostalism reproduces and perpetuates it within Nigerian cultural categories, thereby undermining the incarnational nature of the gospel.

However, the concept of “reverse mission in reverse” lacks both creativity and nuance. By relying too heavily on Western categories, the book overlooks the reality of mission as a multidirectional phenomenon — “from everywhere to everywhere” — and interprets it instead through a framework of reversal rather than *transversal-networked mission*. African Christianity, with all its complexities and contradictions, has matured and must increasingly be interpreted on its own terms, rather than through perpetual reference to Western frameworks. Nonetheless, the book highlights a crucial model of Nigerian mission that could be described as an *antiparallel missional dynamic*: *spiritual power (intangible) flows outward from Nigeria, while financial resources (tangible) flow inward from other African churches to Nigeria*. This model exposes the unsettling reality that mission activities in world Christianity — particularly South-South and Africa-Africa missions — are not free from serious problems. Indeed, they may reproduce challenges more troubling than those associated with colonial missions. In this regard, the book opens a can of worms that should not be closed. The time has come for scholarship to move beyond critique of Western missions alone and to turn equal attention to intra-African

Chammah J. Kaunda

The Antiparallel Missional Dynamics

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY: *Intra-African Pentecostalism and the Dynamics of Power: The Nigerian Winners' Chapel in Cameroon*, by Amos B. Chewachong

and South–South mission practices, particularly through the critical voices of scholars from the Global South.

There is also a clear reproduction of a theology of exceptionalism. Although Chewachong acknowledges this dynamic, he does not give sufficient attention to how Nigerian exceptionalism is not unique but rather part of a wider global problem within evangelical-shaped Christianity. Much like American evangelicalism, Nigerian Pentecostalism often presents itself as uniquely chosen and divinely mandated — a self-understanding that resonates across many evangelical-grounded nations in the Global South. Yet if every evangelical-shaped nation now claims exceptional status, then none can truly be regarded as exceptional. This persistent pursuit of exceptionalism constitutes one of the most problematic Christian worldviews in the contemporary world, as it underwrites forms of Christian nationalism that perpetuate structures of domination rather than fostering genuine mutuality.

Chewachong's book remains a welcome contribution to the evolving literature on African Pentecostalism and its role within world Christianity. It will be of particular value to scholars of religious studies, economics, mission studies, transnationalism, and intercultural studies, as well as to policymakers and political scientists seeking to understand the intersection of religion, culture, and power in contemporary Africa.