



## BOOK NOTE REVIEW

**Idumwonyi, Itohan Mercy.** *Crashed Realities? Gender Dynamics in Nigerian Pentecostalism.* Studies of Religion in Africa 52. Leiden: Brill, 2024. Pp. xvii + 221. €121.00 (Paperback, ebook)

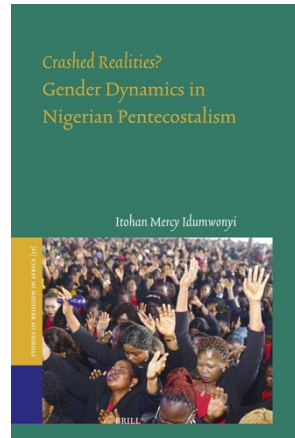
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It is a sincere pleasure to write a review of this well-written book. For one, growing up in southeast Nigeria, my father used to tell me about the exploits of Bishop Benson Idahosa, the founder of Church of God Mission International (CGMi), one of the foremost Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, which Idumwonyi writes about in the book. I am happy that this well-written book now tells the story of CGMi from a gender dynamics lens. As a scholar of religion, and a firm believer in the field work approach in the study of religion, I am greatly impressed with the quality of work Idumwonyi put into this book. A probable reworked version of her PhD thesis, *Crashed Realities* introduces readers to the issue of gender dynamics from a seven-part perspective.



The first part of the book is introductory; it is a detailed description of the methodology applied in the book and a general overview of how the book is structured. This is followed by the second part which deals with the perception of women in the Benin people's culture. Its argument is that the perception and status of women generally in Benin is difficult to de-historicize owing to patriarchal structures of the people. The third part of the book focuses on the emergence of Pentecostalism in the religious landscape of Benin. In this part, Idumwonyi argues for the recognition of the indigenous efforts of the Benin people in pioneering the spread of Pentecostalism in the area. It is within this context that she locates the emergence of the late Bishop Benson Idahosa and the CGMi. One thing Idumwonyi made sure to stress is the male-dominated structure of CGMi from its beginning. In the next part of the book, Idumwonyi

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weaves a narrative of gender inequality in the structures and operations of CGMi as a Pentecostal movement. In Idumwonyi's thought, the male-dominated structure of the movement subtly enthroned gender inequality and the relegation of women's roles to the background. It was, within this context, as Idumwonyi argues, that Margret Idahosa emerged as the leader of the movement at the demise of her husband Benson, CGMi's founder.

Next, the book weaves its narrative around the life of Margret Idahosa as she emerged the new leader of CGMi. According to Idumwonyi, her emergence as the leader of the movement was an affront and challenge to male domination in the movement thereby bridging the gap of gender inequality and challenging "the 'masculine too-muchness' that punctuate Pentecostals' everyday life, power of tradition, and patrilineal norms" (13). A further discussion on Margret Idahosa's stance on women's ministry is explored in this part of the book. In the next part of the book, Idumwonyi discusses critically what she terms "the weight of femaleness" (13). Here, she finds support in the theory of negro-feminism as theorized by Obioma Nnaemeka to discuss how the Pentecostals negotiate contemporary inclusivity as far as gender troubles are concerned. Its take here is that through building and accumulating resources, women find greater voice in a male-dominated leadership structure of Pentecostalism.

The concluding part of the book discusses the Pentecostal view of gender equality; Idumwonyi's point is that gender inclusivity in the Pentecostal view is an embedded negotiation in day-to-day practices of the movement. In all, the book calls for a more balanced Pentecostal re-distribution of gender roles — an inclusive approach to religious practices where women find their voice and partake actively in leadership roles which is in line with a balanced understanding of the Pentecost experience in Acts 2. In this book, Idumwonyi has discussed an important issue not only within the Pentecostal circles in Nigeria but also within the Christian movement in Nigeria generally. The Christian practice being patriarchal in its Jewish and Roman beginnings, found a home in a Nigerian culture where patriarchy is a fact. The interaction of the Christian practice with the Nigerian patriarchal structures deepened gender inequality in Nigerian Christianity. Thus, Idumwonyi's work has analyzed the problem of gender inequality using a particular strand of Pentecostalism — the CGMi.

Herein also lies my reservation about the title of the book. Being a focus on the CGMi, the title of the book is a little bit misleading as it is presented like its discussion generally applies to gender inequality in Nigerian Pentecostalism. This is why I think that such an approach is over generalization. I had expected the author to have drawn parallel(s) from (an)other Pentecostal culture-dominated denomination in Nigeria (even if it was in Edo State) to

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briefly prove its point regarding the preponderance of gender inequality within the Pentecostal circles in Nigeria. If this had been done, then it would become easier for the reader to judge if the patriarchal structure of CGMi was more of a problem to gender equality than other contemporary strands of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. That notwithstanding, Idumwonyi's book is a well-written piece with methodological rigor that introduces its readers to the realities of gender inequality in the CGMi as a strand of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. It comes highly recommended for scholars and students of religious studies, those with an interest in Pentecostalism and gender dynamics in Nigeria, and even those who would wish to understand the perception of women in the Benin culture.