

Pastoral Power, Clerical State. Pentecostalism, Gender, and Sexuality in Nigeria by Ebenezer Obadare, University of Notre Dame Press, 2022, 195 pp., \$100 (hardcover); \$35 (paperback), ISBN: 9780268203139; ISBN: 9780268203146

Ebenezer Obadare's account of the political and sociological impact of powerful Pentecostal preachers in Nigeria is an interesting and important addition to the relatively limited literature on contemporary religion and politics, including democracy, in Africa. Obadare is explicitly focusing on one – albeit very large – African country, a state which is politically and religiously divided between its Christians and Muslims. He makes no claim that what he discovers in relation to the role of religion, explicitly Pentecostalism, in politics and society in Nigeria is applicable elsewhere in Africa, or more generally. One of the book's main strengths is its well-informed and historically accurate depiction of the "rise" of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, to the extent that this strand of Christianity now dominates not only the Christian landscape but more generally the religio-political one.

The brief book – just 123 pages of text – with 40 copious pages of notes and an extensive bibliography, is the follow up to Obadare's well-received 2018 research monograph: *Pentecostal Republic: Religion and the Struggle for State Power in Nigeria*. The situation he described and explained in the earlier book is further developed analytically in *Pastoral Power, Clerical State: Pentecostalism, Gender, and Sexuality*. Unlike *Pentecostal Republic*, Obadare is not primarily interested in the politics of Pentecostalism in *Pastoral Power*, although it does include a useful, albeit brief, concluding chapter which discusses the impact of "pastoral power" in Nigeria in relation to the country's problematic engagement over time with democracy.

Pentecostalism is Nigeria's dominant Christian denomination, where various Pentecostalist "big men" regularly interact for mutual benefit with Nigeria's political class, especially, of course, those in power, as well as in relation to policy, popular culture, and the moral imagination. Obadare is interested less in the relationship between Pentecostalist "big men" and the state than in the overlapping dynamics of gender, class, and sexuality in the operations of Pentecostal churches and pastoral power in Nigeria.

Obadare's analysis is chiefly motivated by two 'Why' questions? Why is Pentecostalism now so sociologically and societally important in Nigeria, and what are the implications for the country's struggling democracy? Seeking to answer these questions, he surveys the sociological conditions that he believes accounts for the contemporary rise to religious, social, societal and political visibility of Nigeria's Pentecostal "big men". Obadare contends that over time the very significant loss of social prestige by the Nigerian intelligentsia (primarily located within the country's universities) has facilitated and encouraged conditions which paved the way for the ascent of the Pentecostal "big men" pastors. Such men have in recent times acquired not only significant, perhaps unprecedented, social and political power but also great social prestige, in effect replacing the "ivory tower intellectuals" of an earlier era as focal points of opinion and insight. This is not to suggest that Obadare perceives that the Pentecostal "big men" have directly replaced the "ivory tower intellectuals". What he does argue is that Nigerians have witnessed the emergence of a new order and a form of elite authority, emanating from the influence and power of powerful, media savvy Pentecostal pastors. Millions of Nigerians look up to them and seek their guidance, while the "ivory tower intellectuals", believed to emphasise the power of reason and established knowledge, are marginalized.

The book's introductory chapter sets out the terrain of the volume, and explains how the current book has developed from Obadare's 2018 book: *Pentecostal Republic*. In the second chapter, the author focuses on the social origins of what he calls "clerical power" in Nigeria, although the title is something of a misnomer as Pentecostalism takes centre stage throughout. Chapter three looks at the Pentecostal "pastor" in Nigeria as "political entrepreneur", highlighting the importance of a dynamic public image and a savvy understanding of the power of social media. Chapter four, somewhat awkwardly in my view, looks at four brief case studies of relationships between sundry women – some well-known and others not – who apparently fell under the spell of Pentecostal "big men" and who lived to tell the tale - but did not necessarily prosper from their encounter.

The brief (seven page) concluding chapter – entitled "Rule by Prodigy" – briefly examines the role of Pentecostalist "big men" in Nigeria's democratic development, including in terms of state-society relationships. Obadare emphasizes that the Pentecostal pastor has stepped into a situation where the state is not only disapproved of, or at least distrusted, by many Nigerians, but also widely regarded as both incompetent and its personnel corrupt and/or uninterested in the country's burgeoning societal and political problems. Regarding democratic consequences of rule by Pentecostalist prodigies, Obadare contends that currently the future does not look promising because "all indications point to a perversion of democracy in Nigeria" (p.121). According to Obadare, "argumentation is the cornerstone of a democratic order, whether argumentation between citizens or between citizens and the state." (p. 121) This he believes is no longer possible in Nigeria today as there is no possible "meeting of minds" between the diminishing numbers of those believing in the power of reason and evidence and the burgeoning number of champions and followers of what might be called the Pentecostalist "worldview". The closing sentence of the book captures the author's pessimism in relation to Nigeria's political development: "[F]or the moment, all the evidence seems to point to a dark future for Nigerian democracy under the spiritual auspices of rule by prodigy ...". (p.122).

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