

RELIGION

Paul Gifford. *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. xv + 216 pp. Map. Bibliography. Index. \$60.00. Cloth. \$24.95. Paper.

This book explores Ghanaian charismatic Christianity (or neo-Pentecostalism) in relation to economic and political processes. Its aims are, first, to identify this new Christianity and its religious vision, and second, to analyze its sociopolitical role in effecting modernity. Acknowledging the great diversity of Accra's new churches, Gifford offers a study that is both extremely rich in data—on leaders, adherents, theology, discourse, practices, Bible use, media activities, music, finances, and organization—and broad in range. It addresses the whole charismatic spectrum, from prophets and healers who focus on deliverance from demonic forces to teachers who stress human responsibility and development. The central role of these specially “anointed men of God” in their churches’ organization, teachings, and practices justifies Gifford’s approach to the phenomenon through its leaders and their ideas.

Chapter 1 presents the political and economic context in which Ghana’s charismatic Christianity has evolved. Chapter 2 describes the paradigm shift in Ghana’s Christianity from the 1980s onward, dwelling particularly on the strong public presence of charismatic churches established through their enormous media output. Chapter 3 identifies common emphases, particularly the emphasis on this-worldly success which, Gifford argues, embodies indigenous religious orientations but is expressed in ways that are profoundly influenced by North American developments. Also, how success is understood and how it is to be attained varies considerably. Presenting the case of Prophet Salifu, the following chapter discusses the widespread charismatic phenomenon of deliverance and the prophetic. It argues that the practice of casting out evil spirits has its roots in pre-Christian religious traditions that held supernatural beings responsible for human fortune and misfortune. Chapter 5 presents an entirely different form of charismatic Christianity: the socially and politically conscious “cultural adjustment theology” of Mensa Otabil. Analyzing his plea for education, responsible leadership, productive entrepreneurship, and cultural transformation, Gifford presents—almost celebrates—Otabil as the exception to other charismatic stars. Chapters 6 and 7 deal with charismatic churches’ economic and political role, respectively. Taking Weber’s “Protestant ethic” as a yardstick, Gifford argues that their overemphasis on the miraculous and low valuation of work counters the modern work ethic needed for Ghana “to join the modern world economy” (197). Instead, they “represent a step back beyond the Industrial Revolution” (159). He is equally disappointed with their political role, maintaining that their tendencies to spiritualize, to be co-opted by the ruling government, and to

develop unchallengeable leadership structures do not promise to transform the political system in any meaningful sense. Otobil is again the major exception to both findings, and Gifford's observation that his questions, concerns, and suggested solutions are likely to assume greater prominence is the one ray of hope offered in his overall conclusion that "the claim that charismatic churches of themselves or as such must be fostering socio-political reform has not been proved" (197).

Gifford's effort at measuring the role of Ghana's charismatic Christianity in promoting "modernity," that is, in "bringing Ghana into the world's modern political and economic system" (ix), can be questioned for ignoring the fact that Ghana has been part of that system for over two centuries. Moreover, his normative approach to modernity has long been superseded by a body of work on modernity in Africa and elsewhere. His attempt to establish what this new Christianity is, however, is eminently successful. This book offers a wealth of data on all its aspects and much insight into a world-stirring phenomenon from a local, insider's perspective. As such, it is of great value not only to students of religion, but also to all those who are interested in how Africans deal with the processes, attractions, and disappointments of modernity and globalization.

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