

Book Review

Kaunda, C.J. 2023. *The paradox of becoming: Pentecostality, planarity, and Africanity*. Theology & Philosophy Series: Religion and Society in Africa. Vol. 7. New York: Peter Lang. 252 pages. SSN 2328-921X (print); ISSN 2328-9228 (online); ISBN: 9781636670317 (hard back); ISBN 9781636670324 (ebook); ISBN 9781636670331 (epub). doi: 10.3726/b20439

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In this book, Chammah Judex Kaunda, a Zambian scholar based at Yonsei University in the Korean Republic, and a professor of world Christianity, presents an African Pentecostal theology of humanism. In this innovative trajectory, he utilizes the Bemba (Zambian) concept of *Muntu* (humanism) in a manner akin to the *Ubuntu* (humane) philosophy that is rooted among the Nguni speakers of East, Central, and Southern Africa. As will be noted in this review, Kaunda's *Muntu* concept also compares with the Igbos' community-driven African philosophy (*Igwebuiké*). The *Igwebuiké* ideology, as a concept among the Igbo linguistic speakers of Nigeria, and as an indigenously lived philosophy, builds on the strength in numbers, a phenomenon where togetherness and the spirit of being in one accord, and being in a state of engagement, are the watchwords. Kaunda (2023:16), like other Africanist scholars finds the African resources as a critical partner in enriching the Pentecostal theology or any other Christian theology for that matter. Hence, *Muntu* finds its terminological parallels in *Igwebuiké*, *U-buntu*, and *Utu* (*humanness*) of the East African Swahili peoples. These concepts and/or African philosophies argue for the case of the human community as the exact locus in developing any Christian theology in tropical Africa, including the African Pentecostal theology.

With regard to chapterization, this insightful masterpiece consists of five chapters and an introduction which is in fact a first chapter that provides shape to this treatise. In this introductory part, the author falls short of declaring a Kairos moment for Pentecostality and African Pentecostalism in particular (Kaunda 2023:1-5). He underlines the importance of the concept of *Muntu*, which he regards as a critical resource that ‘we cannot adequately articulate African Pentecostal experiences without giving adequate attention to it’ (Kaunda 2023:4). The first chapter addresses the poetics of mysticality and materiasticity (also called the poetics of mystico-materiasticity) and vouches for ‘a philosophical and indigenous oriented imagination’ in a bid to unveil the paradox of becoming in African Pentecostalism (Kaunda 2023:43-76). The second chapter (Kaunda 2023:77-106) addresses the prospects of resurrection after ‘deaths’. The third chapter (Kaunda 2023:107-154) discusses rituality and becoming, a phenomenon where a shift from ritual to rituality is well enumerated. The fourth chapter (Kaunda 2023:157-209) brings out the post-colonial specter of *Muntu*. That is, ‘I am because we are’ (*di domini non tantum scientia*) – which compares with *Mundu ni mundu niundu wa andu* (Kikuyu for *a person is a person through other people* or in Latin, *homo est homo per alios*). The chapter argues that the ‘unbecoming *Muntu*’ can be reclaimed. The fifth chapter (Kaunda 2023:211-246) on ‘new (post)humanity in Christ’ is the *modus operandi*. This becomes possible through kenotic becoming, divine becoming, Christo-becoming, and through cosmocarnations.

In this book, Kaunda comes out as an apt philosopher of religion and indeed a realistic thinker, who understands his limitations and strengths. In vouching for his concept of Planetarity, he states: ‘I am aware that “Planetarity” like all human-invented ideas is always in danger of falling into the trap of “faceless universalism” or faceless planetarism and humancentric chauvinism’ (Kaunda 2023:16). This tendency of defining and clarifying his new concepts such as Africanity, Pentecostality, *Muntu*, mysticality, and materiasticity among others, remains a common trend throughout the book.

In line with his creative genius in this presentation, Kaunda (2023:4) seems to agree with Nimi Wariboko, the celebrated Nigerian scholar, that Pentecostalism in general constitutes a creative and alternative epistemology. This is evidently observed when African Pentecostals, like the rest of global Pentecostalism, test their beliefs on a daily basis, as they make the necessary re-adjustments as the need arises or as the context demands – without necessarily becoming erratic and mercurial in character. In viewing African Pente-

costalism as something that functions within indigenous ontology that is easily perceived as a complex paradoxical reality, Kaunda (2023:211-246) strives to demonstrate the influential nature of Pentecostality – locally and globally.

To back his treatise, Kaunda (2023:17-246) has ably borrowed heavily from established anthropologists, philosophers, and theologians from other disciplines, like Ogbu Kalu, Kwame Bediako, John Mbiti, Edwin Smith, Ivan Petrella, Alfred North Whitehead, Ebenezer Obadare, Harvey Cox, Ruth Marshall, Catherine Keller, Andrzej Kobyliński, Nimi Wariboko, and others, some of whom are not keen in Pentecostal studies, as well as Clayton Crockett, Jeffrey W. Robbins, Eduardo Kohn, Kevin Schilbrack, Sonia Hazard, Lucy Bond, Ben de Bruyn and Jessica Rapson, Alexandre Kojeve, Frederick Hegel, Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Gerald Bruns, Rosemary Reuther, and Sallie McFague. He has also borrowed from the works of Rauna Kuokkanen, Amelia Moore, Mark Wallace, Grace Jantzen, Laurel C. Schneider, Amos Yong, Douglas Jacobsen, Colin M. Turnbull, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, among others. Perhaps, this serves as his weakest link, as well as his strongest point, for in utilizing a multidisciplinary dimension in his bid to unveil the paradox of becoming, the complexity of the matter under consideration comes out clearly. Indeed, why should a matter of faith get so complex? Second, are there risks of bias in making critical observations for a practicing Pentecostal scholar-leader? Put differently, how can we overcome biases when addressing scholarly issues that are too close to our chests? Are we likely to make fair judgments on such crucial matters? As a believer-scholar in African Pentecostalism, Kaunda's case is certainly another paradox of becoming, as it can equally be a genuine and indeed an informed way of unveiling a significant academic subject from an insider and epistemologically superb perspective.

On the other hand, unveiling a serious concern, from a multidisciplinary approach, resonates well within Africanity, as the ideals of communality, inclusivity, and oneness of purpose become a reality that informs the African religio-cultural worldview. In so doing, Kaunda utilizes a multidisciplinary design to evoke Bemba's *Muntu* to address four things: First, it aids in building his philosophy of 'planetary becoming' and eventually ushers in 'materialist philosophy and indigenous liberative theology' (Waliboko's foreword, Kaunda 2023:vii); second, his *Muntu* invocation also drives us to view Pentecostality as the *de facto* planetary spirituality that will continue

to inform theo-social discourses of the 21st century; third, the invocation of Bemba's *Muntu* concept also drives us to the idea of a paradigmatic shift, from Pentecostalism to Pentecostality – a phenomenon where a wholistic and human-driven (anthropological) concern informs the *modus operandi*; fourth, his Pentecostal theology of *Muntu* drives us to understand the whole philosophy behind unveiling the paradox of becoming a multicentric society. The latter is well captured in his concept of Pentecostality.

In a nutshell, Kaunda's book is well-written, epistemologically solid, and is very appealing to scholars of all persuasions: Africanist scholars, historians of religion, philosopher-theologians, Pentecostal scholars, sociologists, and philosophers of religion, among others. It would be useful for undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate students in the abovementioned lines. It is a resourceful book for studies in African Pentecostalism.

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