
This slim monograph by Ebenezer Obadare, Professor of Sociology at the University of Kansas, explores the relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic (1999–present). Over the course of six chapters, Obadare argues that the country’s transition to democratic rule in 1999 was accompanied by the triumph of Pentecostal Christianity as a political force in Nigeria. The book is organized chronologically, analyzing the influence of Pentecostalism on Nigerian public life during the successive administrations of Olusegun Obasanjo (1999–2007), Umaru Yar’Adua (2007–2010), and Goodluck Jonathan (2010–2015), as well as the election of Muhammadu Buhari to the presidency in 2015. A final chapter deviates from the chronological structure of the monograph to provide an analysis of the Pentecostal discourse about the ubiquity of diabolical forces in the Fourth Republic. Obadare finds a correlation between the Pentecostal cosmos and the uncertainty of life in neoliberal Nigeria.

Obadare successfully demonstrates that Pentecostal elites have garnered a great amount of political influence over the past twenty years. Not only have Muslim and Christian politicians alike made regular pilgrimages to the largest Pentecostal congregations on the Lagos-Ibadan expressway in order to make the case for their administrations and political strategies (e.g., 67, 130, 157–160), but both Obasanjo and Jonathan draped their presidencies in Pentecostal symbolism. Obasanjo frequently claimed in public that the three years he spent in prison for allegedly plotting to overthrow Sani Abacha, Nigeria’s brutal military dictator from 1993 to 1998, had transformed him “from ‘common’ Christian to ‘prayer warrior’” (52). Jonathan similarly narrated the story of his unlikely and meteoric rise to the presidency as an embodiment of the “ethos of the prevailing prosperity gospel, which prizes the heroic achievement of the individual” (110). Pentecostal elites have even become kingmakers. For instance, when Buhari asked Bola Tinubu, former Governor of Lagos State, to choose a vice president for him for the 2015 election, Tinubu felt it was necessary to get Enoch Adeboye, General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), to approve his choice of running mate (142).

Obadare’s monograph illustrates that the Pentecostal elite have not transformed Nigerian society in fundamental ways. Pentecostal pastors have used their newfound authority to gain access to resources. Goodluck Jonathan, for instance, allegedly donated thirty-million dollars to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in exchange for the support of Ayo Oritsejafor, the president of CAN, during the 2015 election (132). Similarly, Enoch Adeboye expressed
his support for Jonathan in 2015, because the latter promised to provide him with import licenses for steel and other materials required for an auditorium that the RCCG was constructing (135). Pentecostal leaders like Oritsejafor and Adeboye appear to have had a negligible effect on the formation of government policy at the federal level. With the exception of the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act of 2014, which Obadare claims that Jonathan passed in order to appease Pentecostal leaders and their constituents after he reneged on his promise not to run for a second term (112), this monograph does not provide any evidence to suggest that the Pentecostal elite have had a direct (or indirect) effect on the legislative agendas that the presidents of the Fourth Republic have pursued. In short, rather than use their political influence as a force for positive change, Pentecostal pastors have actually legitimated political status quo.

Obadare’s monograph relies on a wide variety of written sources. Excerpts from the columns of Nigerian newspapers, such as the Guardian, Punch, Premium Times, and the Vanguard, figure prominently throughout this book. Obadare also draws on the published writings of Obasanjo and D.K. Olukoya, General Overseer of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministry, and the public statements of Nigerian politicians, such as Goodluck Jonathan and Nasir el-Rufai, Governor of Kaduna State. Throughout the book, Obadare occasionally cites interviews that he conducted with informants during his Nigerian fieldwork or over email.

Although Obadare has produced a highly accessible book on the interplay between politics and religion in contemporary Nigeria, it is not without its shortcomings. A 214-page monograph requires more than four pages of historical context (46–50). While Obadare’s story focuses on the ascension of Pentecostalism as a political force following 1999, it is not entirely clear how this strange state of affairs came to exist in the first place. This monograph also leads us to wonder why the political influence of Pentecostalism is not more pronounced elsewhere on the African continent. A reading of Obadare’s book also underscores the need for a serious political biography of Obasanjo, given the immense and lasting impact that his sordid presidency has had on Nigerian society.

Additionally, the publisher needs to rethink its bizarre approach to citation in the African Arguments series. Instead of choosing to utilize either an author-date reference style or endnotes, the press decided to concoct a reference system that would displease social scientists and scholars of the humanities alike—endnotes that contain author-date citations. This peculiar citation style makes it difficult to map out the evidentiary and scholarly apparatus that underpins Obadare’s arguments. Despite the issues and questions that I have
raised, *Pentecostal Republic: Religion and the Struggle for State Power in Nigeria* remains a welcome addition to the literature on religion and politics in contemporary Africa.

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