

## Book Review

***Abimbola Adunni Adelakun. Powerful Devices: Prayer and the Political Praxis of Spiritual Warfare. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022. ix + 194 pp. ISBN: 978-1978831520***

Seun Abimbola  
University of Ibadan

Abimbola Adunni Adelakun's book, *Powerful Devices: Prayer and the Political Praxis of Spiritual Warfare*, offers a different exploration of the transformative potential of prayer as a performance of spiritual warfare. By focusing on the role of prayer as a powerful device in the Nigerian context, the author brilliantly suggests how prayer shapes and is sometimes shaped by certain social and cultural logics. The interventions in this book build on the author's experiences in the field of performance studies, shedding light on the defiance of societal norms and the radicality inherent in religious practices.

This book is divided into four sections, each providing a unique viewpoint on the intersections of spiritual warfare and power dynamics. The introduction sets the stage for the examination of powerful tools and the mechanics of Pentecostal power, while subsequent sections explore topics such as prayer as apocalyptic tools, the authority of spiritual warriors as God's human weapons, the con-spirituality of "fake science" during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the shift of churches to virtual platforms during the crisis. One of the book's focuses is on the skepticism expressed by Nigerian Pentecostal pastors who questioned the government's decision to keep places of worship closed for a prolonged period. Using this as a premise, Adelakun interrogates the influential power held by Nigerian Pentecostal leaders, which shapes public opinion and challenges state authority. In the process, the book offers a solid argumentation that recalls other more recent works on Nigerian Pentecostalism, including Ebenezer Obadare's *Pentecostal Republic* and its 2023 sequel.

However, Adelakun's analysis exceeds the confines of religious practices and addresses the intricate relationship between charismatic Christianity and

various societal spheres, including science, secular authority, technological discourses, and neoliberal capital. By critically engaging with established power structures, the author unveils alternative narratives and challenges prevailing norms, highlighting the transformative potential inherent in spiritual warfare. The author explores the deliberate attempts by Nigerian Pentecostal actors to “disestablish various forms of authority” (9) particularly in relation to scientific authority during the pandemic. In this sense, Pentecostalism may be read as caught up in the constitution of power and its various modes of refutation. In the context of the pandemic, therefore, the book particularly examines the significance of attributing supremacy to God’s power by Nigerian Pentecostal pastors over the impact of the virus, which led to skepticism towards the prolonged lockdown measures in the country.

*Powerful Devices*, enriched by the author’s engagement of firsthand accounts and experiential observations, provides a solid ethnography and a nuanced understanding of prayer rituals as devices that shape conceptions of time, self-enhancement, political dynamics, and authoritative structures in contemporary Nigeria. Its critical approach enhances the scholarly rigor of the study and engages readers in an intellectually stimulating experience. While the book focuses on Nigerian Pentecostals and US Evangelicals, its thematic and analytical implications extend beyond these specific groups. It serves as an intellectual catalyst for readers to critically reflect on the multifaceted roles of religious practices within broader societal frameworks and invites a deeper exploration of the complex relationship between spirituality, power dynamics, and social transformation.

However, there are times it appears the book, like many other works on (Nigerian) Pentecostalism, suggests a limited understanding of the Pentecostal experience that does not always capture its complexities and diverse manifestations. It tends to situate Pentecostalism within a mediatized realm that ignores the voices and perspectives of many who have a tenuous relationship with popular media cultures. More so, in certain instances throughout the book, the author’s commentary appears to exhibit a subtle bias that replaces conjectures for scholarly evidence. For example, when comparing a teleportation story to scenes from fantasy novels, the author’s subtle biases come through. For instance, the author writes: “While this story of teleportation looked like a scene out of D.O Fagunwa or Amos Tutuola’s fantasy novels or science fiction where characters can be magically teleported, what is reflected here is how religious imagination of keeping up with the reality of a world where time and space can be folded and unfolded” (62). In this instance, rather than seek to articulate the conditions that produce and shape people’s faith in such a fantastical world as

the author claims, what is presented is a hasty dismissal that runs contrary to the kind of objectivity often expected in Adedokun's writings.

In sum, *Powerful Devices: Prayer and the Political Praxis of Spiritual Warfare*, is an important work that brilliantly explores the complicated dynamics of spiritual warfare and the transformative role of prayer in shaping societal structures and fostering social transformations. Following in the footsteps of other critical works on Pentecostal power, Adedokun pushes the boundaries of the conventional discourse on Pentecostal power, uncovering a diverse range of critical narratives and experiences within the realm of spiritual warfare. The book offers valuable insights and contributes to the relationship between religion and power structures which many readers will find useful.