



**Muindi, Samuel W. 2024.** *Ezekiel's Spirit Motif in the Context of African Pentecostal Theology.* New York: Peter Lang. ISBN 9781636670539

### **Reviewed by Canon Francis Omondi (Ph.D.)**

In *Ezekiel's Spirit Motif in the Context of African Pentecostal Theology*, Samuel Muindi responded to a lacuna in biblical scholarship a hermeneutic of the African “spirit” worldview and the African Pentecostal pneumatology in particular (1).

Muindi interprets Ezekiel's spirit motif in the African Pentecostal theology in Africa's “en-spirited” worldview and relates Ezekiel's spirituality represented by the imageries and symbolism of spirit's experience to the African Pentecostal spirituality. He points to African peoples' contextual construct of divine presence in an African spirit worldview. Muindi associates the African spirit worldview with the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement pneumatology, the African Christianity considered a syncretistic blend of Western Christianity and African traditional beliefs. However, he contends, African Christianity is a contextual faith and not as syncretistic as it appears.

Muindi's hypothesis of Ezekielian leitwort represents a polysemous symbolism, focusing on an overarching leitmotiv, symbolism signifying a significant change in ancient Israelite perception of divine presence (4). It is a shift from a visual divine presence represented by theophanic phenomena, mediated through religious rituals at cultic sites in Israel, to an ethereal concept of “unmediated” experiences of divine presence in Israel (126). His “unmediated” context implies a transpositional mediation through the human conscience (171–2).

Muindi recognises a pneumatological construct in the Ezekielian spirit motif (4), underscoring the transcendence of Yahweh, which he integrates

with Yahweh's immanence in the existential exilic and post-exilic worlds of the ancient Israelites. In this hermeneutical engagement, Muindi unravels the exegesis of Ezekiel's spirit, a biblical symbolism, informed in a mythopoetic hermeneutical context of the African "spirit" worldview (9). He shows how the African "spirit" worldview can reciprocally illumine biblical symbolism (5).

By reviewing contemporary scholarship of the Ezekiel text, Muindi discusses its social-historical settings, its literary, thematic, and rhetorical designs, including exegetical explications of the leitwort as a structuring device in the book (25–52). He shows the depth and coherence of Ezekiel's spirit motif, rhyming it with nuances of the spirit symbolism in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near Eastern context (53–80). The Ezekielian leitwort, according to Muindi, is a polysemous symbolism, accentuating the paradigmatic shift of divine presence in the Israelites' worldview during the exilic and post-exilic (81–89).

Muindi analyses the African Pentecostal pneumatology and "spirit" worldview for interpreting the Ezekielian spirit motif (91–122) and employs African Pentecostal pneumatology as a hermeneutical context to interpret the motif in greater detail. Through a critical reader-response approach, Muindi shows the significance of the spirit motif as a product of the interaction between the text and the readers in a community (123–168). Here, Muindi observes a mutual effect of the motif on African Pentecostal pneumatology, for it informs the cultural context of African Pentecostal pneumatology while illustrating the meaning of the Ezekielian spirit motif.

Muindi enlists contemporary scholarship as a guardrail for his contextual reading of Ezekiel's spirit motif aligning it to African Pentecostal-sacramental ontology. He vouches for the reader response method critical in their cultural-hermeneutical context and for studying biblical texts.

Using Ezekiel's spirit motif to portray the African spirit experience stands out. Muindi discusses positively a rarely broached field of study and brings to light African Pentecostal spirituality nuances within theological thought.

He observes a paradigm shift in Israel's experience of divine presence, which endured into the post-exilic period and the New Testament. This

shift, from ancient Israel's Levitical priesthood liturgical to Ezekiel's "spirit" imageries, symbolisms, and experiences, Muindi links with the African "en-spirited" worldviews, which also informs African Pentecostal spirituality. This is the book's outstanding feature.

Muindi's nuance of Ezekiel's spirit motif has opened new possibilities in studying African spirituality, especially Pentecostal. For, it links Christianity with Africa's "en-spirit" worldview, redeeming a once frowned-upon ontology. He questioned the reductive understanding of Christian pneumatology, seen as a theological reflection on the third hypostasis of the Christian triune God (107). He expounded on African Pentecostal Pneumatology to express a relational theism where African Pentecostal Christians integrated the divine realm with their phenomenal world. I found this idea helpful in studying African deities, a notion intricately linked to the spirit motif.

Muindi contributes to the study of African Pentecostal Spirituality, by centring on the African spirit worldview, often dismissed as syncretism or mere superstition. He relates Ezekiel's socio-historical context and the contemporary African "en-spirited" hermeneutical context (p. 134). In addition, he compares the usage of foreign cultural symbolisms, tropes, and narratives of Ezekiel's exilic settings to clarify the African religious communities' use of symbolisms, tropes, and narratives of their traditional spirituality to inculturate an otherwise "foreign" Christian faith.

Muindi attributes trauma theory to Ezekiel's spirit motif (27–30) and links it to African Pentecostal (145). Comparing Ezekiel's trauma schema with African Pentecostalism creates a challenge. The African trauma context may not compare fairly with the trauma in Ezekiel.

Studying African spirituality requires a special method, which Muindi found in the hermeneutical theory, whose study methodology is reader response criticism viewed as inculturation hermeneutics (12–16). In adapting the inculturation model of Fiorenza's, Muindi, de-centred traditional ways of interpreting scriptures and allowing voices from the margins, in this case African spirituality, to be heard (134). Scholars of African Pentecostalism, African Christianity, biblical intercultural studies, and Old Testament prophets will value this book.