

BOOK REVIEW

David Tonghou Ngong. *Senghor's Eucharist: Negritude and African Political Theology*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023. x + 166 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$59.99. Paper. ISBN: 978-1-4813-1779-5.

Writing at the intersection of contemporary understandings of Negritude and Black critical thought; Black, African, and North Atlantic political theologies; and scholarship on decolonialism/decoloniality, David Tonghou Ngong, in *Senghor's Eucharist: Negritude and African Political Theology*, offers a balanced, multifaceted, and socially engaged theological commentary on Léopold Sédar Senghor's second volume of collected poems, *Hosties Noires* (*Black Hosts*). In doing so, Ngong's work fills a void present within African theology—namely, its lack of conscientious engagement with African poetry, in general, and the theo-political implications of Senghor's poetically expressed understanding of Eucharist, in particular. By mindfully probing the ways in which Senghor's lived experience of being a Black, Roman Catholic residing under an occupying, White colonialist French regime influenced his moral imagination and ethical praxis, Ngong presents an illuminating, systematic, and timely picture of who Senghor was and what he was about: a man determined to ensure that the “sacrifice of Africa does not continue” in the present (120).

Divided into five chapters, *Senghor's Eucharist* moves from a discussion of what Ngong calls the “Hegelian tradition” or the “heretical doctrine of creation” (Chapter One) to Senghor's deconstruction of this theology in *Black Hosts* (Chapter Two) and subsequent reconstruction of what Eucharist is and is for through Negritude and a reimagined notion of Christian salvation (Chapters Three to Five)—namely, a Eucharist rooted in an African theo-political understanding of Black suffering, forgiveness, and reconciliation. As such, Chapters One and Two lay the foundation for Ngong's analysis of *Black Hosts*, examining the ways in which the so-called “Hegelian tradition” constructed Africans as “the quintessential bestial other” (24), portraying them as “completely devoid of the movement of the [Holy] Spirit,” and thereby “creating Africa and Africans in the image of Europe rather than in the image of God” (25). Here, Ngong contends: “*Black Hosts* is about a Eucharist that has become a witchcraft, a Eucharist that has turned into the consumption of the other, into the sacrifice of the other” (37).

Following this foundational setup, Chapter Three of *Senghor's Eucharist* turns to the import of Senghorian Negritude—and its representative decolonialism in *Black Hosts*—for imagining anew the basis by which a reconstruction of Eucharist *qua* genuine communion can be authentically enacted. In this chapter, Ngong contends that, for Senghor, Eucharist needs to be a communion that calls many


worlds into being through a theo-politics enlivened by Black African and diasporic experiences, but not confined to them. While such an idea may initially seem to be counter to many strands of Negritude, such a notion does not in fact decenter Senghorian Negritude's focus on the Black experience. Rather, it rethinks the experience of Blackness and intentionally connects it to a broader understanding of the whole of creation, thereby moving beyond the often-isolated categories of the local, national, and international—which some African political theologies have stressed—to a vision of “a world of plural unity” (69).

It is precisely in this eschatological vision of Eucharist that Ngong places Senghor's notion of Christian salvation in the book's next two chapters. It is here where Ngong's analysis becomes most ripe—and Senghor's theology, most controversial. As Ngong illustrates, Senghor offers the suffering of Africans as a replacement for the suffering of Christ and suggests that it is in the suffering of Africans that the reconciliation and remaking of the world is possible. Thus, Ngong contends, for Senghor, it is only in the global experience of Blackness that the “Hegelian tradition” can be exposed and the moral imagination of the peoples of the world can be recalibrated to one of a “nondominating international order” (116). As Ngong pithily summarizes: “In the context where Black and White people lived as *de facto* enemies, Senghor offered the suffering of Africans not only as a site where reconciliation and healing may be achieved, but also as the context where the world may be transformed and remade from a brutal and brutalizing place to one of friendship and communion” (2).

While Ngong's work provides an apt and learned reading of Senghor's *Black Hosts* and its implicit Eucharistic theology, Ngong's own assessment of Senghor's reconstruction of what Eucharist is and is for, and how this can be reimagined through a Black theo-political soteriology of suffering, forgiveness, and reconciliation that remakes Eucharist as communion, and not as witchcraft, is not always clear. So, too, only in brief examples is a practical relation drawn between Senghor's Eucharistic theology and his political praxis. While speculative theology certainly need not map onto what moral theologians/ethicists and political theorists call “non-ideal theory,” such an omission is problematic in this work since Senghor's political praxis is tremendously important for understanding the enactment of his theology. As such, a keen reader might wonder: How exactly do these two domains relate for Senghor, if at all?

Despite these lacunae, Ngong's work sheds important light on a number of critical areas. These include, for example, the importance of: (1) understanding Senghor not only as a poet, professor, statesman, thinker, and writer, but also as a theologian; (2) recognizing Senghor's relevance for a world in which the logic of the “Hegelian tradition” is still (implicitly) active within the Christian tradition, especially when considering the practical consequences of contemporary ecclesiologies of communion; and (3) appreciating Senghorian Blackness as a wider and more expansive category than colonialism, nationalism, or internationalism—areas that are often the centripetal locus of Christian political theologies. As such, scholars interested in better understanding Senghor, Senghorian

Negritude, and Black political theology are sure to find *Senghor's Eucharist* a vibrant and enriching read.

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