A History of Christianity in Nigeria:
A Bibliography of Secondary Literature

D. Dmitri Hurlbut
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By D. Dmitri Hurlbut

Introduction

As long as scholars have been writing about the history of Nigeria, they have been writing about Christianity. After more than sixty years, however, it is time to take stock of this vast body of literature, and get a sense of where we have been and where we are going. It is my hope that the compilation of this relatively comprehensive bibliography, and a brief discussion of some of the gaps that need to be filled in the literature, will inspire scholars to take their historical research in exciting and novel directions.

Based on a reading of this bibliography, I would like to suggest that future research into the history of Christianity in Nigeria should be directed in three broad directions. First, historians need to focus more research on the development of mainline mission churches following independence, because the historiography remains skewed in favor of independent churches. While the contribution of mission churches to the development of education, medicine, and language standardization in Nigeria has certainly received its fair share of attention, historians have neglected this research topic since nationalist scholars criticized them for not writing about the creative activities of African Christians in the late nineteen-sixties.1 Little information is known about Catholicism or the various Protestant denominations in Nigeria following the Second World War even though the majority of Nigerian Christians remain Catholic and Protestant.2 While this historiographical gap can partially be attributed to the lack of sources following the destruction of archival materials during the Nigerian Civil War, it is perhaps

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2 An obvious exception is the small but growing body of literature that examines the relationship between mainline churches, especially the Catholic Church, and the Nigerian Civil War. To a certain extent, another exception is the literature on the history of Catholicism in Igboland. In the 1980s, the late Ogbu U. Kalu supervised many students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, who made great strides in writing the history of Catholicism, but the majority of these theses and dissertations remain unpublished and thus inaccessible to most researchers.
mainly the result of scholars’ fascination with the growing prominence of Pentecostal and charismatic churches throughout Nigeria.³

Second, historians should make an effort to explore the contributions of more recent additions to the Nigerian religious landscape beyond the Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Since independence, for instance, many American churches including the Seventh-day Adventists, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Mennonites, and the Latter-day Saints, have established a presence throughout the country. Historians have yet to explore fully these archives. Although the remote location of these materials might limit the ability of many researchers to access them, their histories can help shed light on the changes that have occurred in the Nigerian religious landscape since colonialism came to an end.⁴ These archives will further add to Nigeria’s postcolonial history more generally, given the absence of historical materials for the years after independence in the Nigerian National Archives.⁵ New additions to the Nigerian religious landscape that are worthy of investigation, might also include the rise of Christian non-


⁴ The LDS Church History Library, for instance, is located in Salt Lake City, Utah, while the archives of the Mennonite Church USA are located in Goshen, Indiana. David Maxwell has made a similar observation about the archives of the American Assemblies of God, which are located in Fort Mill, South Carolina, Shobana Shankar used to write her 2014 monograph, Who Shall Enter Paradise? Christian Origins in Muslim Northern Nigeria, c. 1890–1975 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014). See also Barbara Cooper, Evangelical Christians in the Muslim Sahel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).


governmental organizations. While their presence has been felt throughout the continent, their contribution to the economic development and spiritual life of Nigeria remains unexplored.6

Third, historians ought to do more work on women’s religious orders. Although many scholars have demonstrated the central importance of women to both the spread and maintenance of global Christianity in the twentieth century, the literature on Christianity in Nigeria does not reflect this important reality.7 Over the past few decades, for instance, many women have chosen to become nuns, and historian Elizabeth Isichei has even claimed that “African nuns outnumber African priests.”8 Their presence will be felt by anyone who visits Nigeria today. Nevertheless, the history of Nigerian sisterhoods remains unwritten. Future research should explore the reasons why Nigerian women chose to become nuns, the functions that these religious orders perform in Nigerian society, and the extent to which they serve either as an oppressive or a liberating force for women throughout the country.

Finally, I would like to discuss briefly the boundaries imposed on this bibliography. The bulk of this list consists of literature on Christianity in Nigeria from the sixteenth to the late-twentieth century. Readers will also notice the inclusion of some contemporary anthropological research as well. While I have chosen to exclude many works that deal with theological questions or contemporary policy issues, I have chosen to include many works on the history of Sierra Leone and Liberia given their connections to the development of Christianity in Nigeria at various times in their shared history. It is also worth pointing out that the literature in this bibliography is of uneven quality, but as the late linguist Bernhard Struck astutely observed at the beginning of the twentieth century, “in a bibliography no judgement of values is to be made” because “even a bad piece of work may be of use.”9 The ultimate goal of this bibliography is to provide a resource for future scholars to mine for materials as they take the plunge into Nigeria’s fascinating religious history.

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8 Isichei, A History of Christianity in Africa, 333.

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Buttici, Annalisa. “Religion in Motion: A Missionary Narrative of Creativity and Survival from the Pentecostal Nigerian Diaspora in Italy.” In *Religion in the Move! New Dynamics of...*


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Dissertations and Theses


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