
The diversity and fertility of Nigerian religion is well displayed in this useful collection of essays. Except for one paper by P. Clarke on the Maitatsine movement, all the papers deal with religion in southern Nigeria; and in contrast to the bias in the existing literature on movements, like Aladura, of Yoruba provenance, the focus is on peoples to their east. It is excellent to read a collection in which nearly all the contributors are Nigerians, who write with first hand knowledge of their own societies. One's only major grouse against the editor is that she has neglected to supply an index.

In her introduction Rosalind Hackett emphasizes what she calls the "world building" capacity of these religious groups, and this may be their main historical significance: that at a time of sustained change and dislocation in Nigeria—touched on in many of the essays, but never itself analyzed in any detail—they are a vehicle by which ordinary Nigerians imagine and represent communities in which human needs are more fully met than they are at present. That there is, in the broadest sense, a social critique implicit in many of these movements is not inconsistent with Friday Mbon's observation that their leaders stay clear of politics, or even Gabriel Amadi's comment that Prophet Wobo "subtly endorses" Nigerian norms of social status. Perhaps one could say that the movements evince two basic impulses, to thaumaturgy and to the creation of community. Each of these presumes something of the other, but they also vary in their saliency in any particular movement and promote contrasting attitudes. Hackett notes the appeal to Nigerians of "spiritual science", and where the concern for techniques to achieve individual well-being predominates, as in Prophet Wobo's church, social critique as such is muted.

The one Yoruba-based church which does figure prominently in the collection is the Celestial Church of Christ, which has proved itself the fastest-growing Aladura church over the past twenty years. J. K. Olupona describes its growth in Oudo, and Hackett herself surveys the overall dynamic of its growth in terms of the church/sect antithesis—though I am left still rather puzzled as to
what exactly is the secret of Celestial’s comparative success. Is it to
do with the way in which, as Olupona acutely observes, its rituals
are conceived of “as reenactments rather than mere remem-
brances” of cardinal episodes of sacred history, and hence felt to be
especially empowering? In Amadi’s nicely detailed chapter on
Wobo’s Spiritual Healing Church of the Lord we have the develop-
ment of Aladura, in the non-Yoruba context of Port Harcourt, to
the logical extreme of pure individual thaumaturgy.

Of special interest is a trio of papers dealing with the closely
related Isoko and Urhobo peoples of Bendel State. D. I. Ilega
writes on God’s Kingdom Society, founded in 1934 as a secession
from Jehovah’s Witnesses. Its founder, Gideon Urhobo, had links
with the nationalist movement; and community, rather than
thaumaturgy, has remained the prominent concern, with a degree
of communal living at its Salem City headquarters near Warri,
where two notable annual festivals take place. In two chapters,
Samson Akama introduces us to the unusual variety of religious ex-
pression among the Isoko. The Igwe cult originated before 1920,
the latest in a series of cults of purification against witchcraft, which
though “‘neo-primal” (as it is described in the cant favoured in
some religious studies circles) drew significantly on Christian con-
ceptions of Oghene, the Supreme Being. He also writes on the re-
markable ministry of Evangelist Adam Igbudu (died 1981) whose
movement emphasizing prayer, holiness and to a lesser extent heal-
ing, was retained within the Anglican Church in Isokoland. It
underscores how few and valuable are the studies we have of
“African agency” at local levels within the mission churches.

A final group of papers takes us to the far south-east. E. A.
Offiong gives a short account of a schism in the Brotherhood of the
Cross and Star, a highly dynamic movement based in Calabar,
which has attracted especial attention because of claims for the
divinity of its founder, Olumba Olumba Obu. Calabar is also the
setting for a sensitive and informed study by Rosalind Hackett
herself of the nature of women’s leadership roles in small spiritual
churches. She argues that though female participation rests upon
the traditional cultural ideal of women as nurturing mothers, it yet
serves to increase significantly the respect for women in churches
where managerial power tends to be conceded to men. Finally
Friday Mbon examines the reception of the new religious move-
ments, particularly the B.C.S., by various public and private agen-