
The editors of this volume, in their introduction, set themselves the following tasks: to establish the factors that determined and directed the struggle between Islam and Christianity on one side and the Indigenous Religions on the other in capturing the African moral terrain; to examine the relationship between Christianity as an agent of change and as, simultaneously, an agent of continuity of expression of African values and ideals; to explore the roles of Christianity in providing education for evangelization and for fostering state/church relationships; to determine what Nigerian Christianity has given to the Christian world in return for what it has received from it; to investigate what factors guided and informed the often inharmonious relationship between religion and politics; and to examine what have been the roles of Christianity and Islam in weakening or strengthening the male dominance that has been part of the African cultural heritage.

One of the strengths of the book is the wide range of scholarly interests of the contributors, who work in areas including gender and development, anthropology, international development and politics, religion, theology, globalization, language, educational psychology, and philosophy. The collection’s interdisciplinary flavor also makes it suitable for a wide readership.

Another achievement is the packaging of information into four distinct sections, each dealing with a central theme: Christian Encounter with Islam and Indigenous Religions; Religion and Politics; Gender and Pastoral Care; Nigerian Pentecostalism Abroad. Following a forward by Obioma Nnaemeka that captures the versatility of Kalu’s scholarship, and an introduction by the editors, there are fifteen chapters, generally well knitted to the theme of their section. However, Chapter 12 seems to be out of place with the other two papers in the third section. Another paper on pastoral care could have given a more balanced coverage.

Worthy of note in the first section is Jude C. Aguwa’s thesis that the exchange between Christianity and Nigerian cultures produced what could be described as nationalistic Christianity—Nigerian Christianity—at both church and intellectual levels. He brilliantly presents how the imperative of ‘self-reaffirmation’, ‘self-renewal’ (21) and eclectic spiritual yearnings acted as cultural stimuli, and how racist attitudes in the leadership of the church provided the political impetus in the formation of African Independent Churches (AIC). Femi Kolapo skillfully explores the class protectionist attitudes of Nupe emirates towards preventing Christian evangelization, negating the often assumed explanation that this was largely for the preservation of Islam. This significant contribution is, however, marred when he states that ‘…an Islamic state determined to carry out the imperative of its legal obligation in Islam to collect tribute and take plunder from Dar al Arb (abode of war) and wage jihad’ (emphasis mine) (45). Many analysts have run into error in assuming that militant jihad and the dichotomous communities of dar al-islam and dar al-harb have doctrinal roots in Islam. Indeed, jihad assumed militancy with the politically constructed dichotomy of dar al-islam and dar al-harb to give religious legitimacy to the political skirmishes of the Abbasid era (750-1077 CE) (for a discussion, see A. Afsaruddin, ‘Views of Jihad Throughout History’, Religion Compass 1.1, 2007).
Jehu J. Hanciles provides an excellent exploration of how African agency informed the character of church leadership, via the works of two personalities in pioneering church leadership. Raphael Chijioke Njoku's paper, with the Igbo example, powerfully dispels the myth of cultural passivity and accords a negotiating status to African institutions and values in the trilateral cultural exchange. However, Njoku largely underestimates the combined forces of the Christian missions and the colonial administration that placed African institutions and belief systems at a disadvantage when ‘civilizing mission’ coincided with the widening of the search for the 'lost sheep of the house [not] of Israel [but of humanity]' (Matthew 10: 6). With regard to the encounter of the American Baptist missionaries in Nigeria, Michael Ogbeidi explains how the assumed alliance between the Christian missionaries and the colonial government in the ‘civilizing mission’ was not as amicable as is often presented in the literature, underlining the mainstream argument that politics and religion have different orientations, goals and values.

The second part of the book is an excellent collection of papers that show the interconnection between politics and religion. While these papers demonstrate that the intermingling of politics and religion in Nigeria has often been initiated by conscious actors in both arenas, the papers of Chukwudi A. Njoku and Paul J. Yancho show how the intermingling can be inevitable because of the labyrinth of social interactions especially during crises and wars. Njoku's paper strengthens the readers' comprehension of how the Christian theological enterprise dynamically responded to economic and political processes in Nigeria. Yancho's paper is a valuable help to readers in identifying the intricacies surrounding the employment of religion before and during the Nigerian civil war. Interestingly, Afe Adogame, by presenting useful data on how religious enterprises have set out to change the course of politics, and by arguing well his thesis of 'religionalization of politics', ventures into areas that are often glossed over in the literature.

Section three also presents stimulating papers. Adelaide Maame Akua Boadi explores how the mainstream churches failed to liberate African women and the imaginative ways in which women have hijacked some positions of authority in the Pentecostal churches. Having examined the clashes between Islamic culture and western values, Hannah Ngozi Eby Chukwu challenges the notion that there can be a universally accepted concept of women's liberation and calls for a culturally specific and individually relevant 'self-fashioning' conception of women's liberation. Wilhelmina J. Kalu excellently displays how the ideas of indigenous soul care and healings have found Christian equivalence through the imaginative and hermeneutical practices within the Pentecostal pastoral services. Another strength of this paper is that it demonstrates how unfathomable happenings, in their origination and conclusion, invoke and strengthen the divide between witchcraft and religion on one side and rationality and science on the other. A weakness of this chapter, however, is that the author sometimes slips from academic argument to language more appropriate to preaching.

The papers in the last section examine Nigerian Christian activities abroad. Edith A. Miguda explores how Nigerian Christians in diaspora are dispelling the myth of African inferiority. She takes readers through the need to see this as a reaction to global and local forces in the context of reinforcing African nationalism and religious identity as they played out in the initial encounter with the West and Christianity during the colonial era. Philomena Njeri Mwaura investigates the influence of Nigerian Pentecostal activities in Kenya