Christians and Christianity in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

Christians constitute a significant minority in northern Nigeria. This report introduces some of the main dynamics that characterize the contemporary Christian population of Nigeria, with a focus on Christianity in northern Nigeria. It sketches the origins of the divide between 'old' and 'new' Christian movements and presents data on the demographics and diversity of Nigerian Christianity, suggesting that there are five main Christian movements in Nigeria: the Roman Catholics, the 'orthodox' Protestants, the African Protestants, the Aladura churches, and finally the Pentecostals. Furthermore, the paper discusses some of the ways in which Nigerian Christians are positioning themselves and their religion in Nigeria's public sphere. In particular, it focuses on the 'internal' and 'external' democratic challenges facing Christianity in Nigeria. As such, this paper outlines several themes that are important in the development of contemporary Nigerian Christianity, with special reference to the north.

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1. Introduction

This chapter is about Christians and Christianity in Nigeria, with a specific focus on the northern region of the country. It is based on, and partly summarises, the research on "Christianity and Democratic Governance in Nigeria", conducted by Jibrin Ibrahim and his colleagues (Ibrahim, 2008b; Ojo, 2008; Alubo, 2008). It is written as part of a working paper series produced by the Nigeria Research Network based at the University of Oxford, which is funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Within this series, the paper aims to bring some balance to the research outputs, most of which were focused exclusively on issues within the Islamic population of northern Nigeria. Given the extremely diverse and dynamic nature of Christianity in contemporary Nigeria, it can only fulfil this aim in a modest way: by highlighting some of the major issues and developments that characterise the contemporary Nigerian 'body of Christ'.

With this modest aim in mind, the paper will focus on a few issues in particular. First, it will give a brief overview of the history of Christianity in Nigeria, paying specific attention to the increasing divergence of 'Old' (or 'orthodox') and 'New' Christian movements. On this contextual basis, the subsequent section will then provide a brief demographic sketch of the Christian population of northern Nigeria and a typology that helps to differentiate the main Christian denominations and organisations. The chapter will go on to discuss some of the main issues in the relationship between Christianity and politics, which may be summarised as the 'internal' and 'external' democratic challenges facing Nigerian Christians. Finally, we will focus on one particularly significant aspect of the 'internal' democratic challenge, namely the issues that arise in the interaction between Christianity and gender relations.

We begin by defining what we understand as the Christian religion. Who is a Christian and what is Christianity? In this chapter, we will resist the temptation

of attempting to answer this question in relation to any specific religious doctrine, foundational principles, or religious practices. Instead, we will attempt to view Christianity as a multifaceted collection of beliefs, individuals, and organisations, which may be analysed through a wide range of analytical lenses. In this way, Christianity may simultaneously be 'used' as the provider of a social identity, a social group, a religious doctrine, a moral compass, a source of community, or a tool for political competition. It is dependent solely on the self-identification of the actors who 'use' these aspects of the religion as Christians.

2. The Development of 'Orthodox' and 'New' Christianity in Nigeria[1]

As Alubo (2008) argues, the origins of Christianity in Nigeria predate the formal colonization of the country, even though it was introduced in northern Nigeria only in the middle of the 19th century. In southern Nigeria, however, Christian missionaries arrived as far back as the 15th century. Most of the missionaries came from Portugal, Spain and Ireland and they built schools and hospitals but combined these efforts with evangelisation and widespread attempts to convert the people living in what is now southern Nigeria from their 'traditional' religions to Christianity. Alongside the missionaries also came the European traders who sold gunpowder, bought spices from the locals, and later developed the West African slave trade.

Initially, therefore, Christianity spread in Nigeria through social development projects, mainly organised through schools, health centres, and of course training facilities for local clergy (e.g. seminaries). Logistically, there was a clear geographical pattern to the growth of the different (often competing) church missions. As a consequence, there were thus Catholic, Methodist, Evangelical Church for West Africa, Baptist, Church Missionary Society, and other enclaves of Christians. Mostly, these early churches in Nigeria could be classified as Catholic or 'orthodox' Protestant. Many of these churches were particularly effective in 'their' enclaves because they did not directly confront 'traditional' religions as a foundation for Christianity, instead of attempting to fully eradicate local religions and replacing them with Christianity. Thus, many Christian rituals and articles of faith became 'localised' – that is, they became fused with aspects of the existing African religions.

In northern Nigeria, Musa Gaiya (2004) identifies two phases of the introduction of Christianity. In the first phase, from 1857 to 1894, the main vehicle of evangelisation was the Anglican Niger Mission of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). As Gaiya shows, this period begins with the establishment of the first Niger Mission station in northern Nigeria and ends

[1]This section is a summary of the writing of Alubo (2008: 14-8).

with the beginning of the ‘Sudan’ Mission. The second phase coincides largely with the period of colonial rule in Nigeria, beginning with the coming of the Faith Missions and ending with the rise of the first indigenous churches (ibid.: 357-9).

In this second phase, Christianity received a boost from Nigerian unification (1914) and its independence (1960), when missionaries were determined to lend a hand in building the young nation. They did so through the award of scholarships, further building of schools, and the establishment of new churches. Although Christianity remained in practice connected to local, pre-Christian beliefs, the conversion process also often involved profound cultural changes. Examples of such changes are the replacement of local names by Christian ones, or the conduct of marriages in accordance with the new teaching of monogamy. Some Nigerians were also sent abroad where they received secular and sometimes clerical education.

In the early post-colonial era, Christianity remained mostly limited to Catholics and mainstream Protestants. However, from about the mid 1980s the Pentecostal movement began to emerge as a major force. Like the early denominations, Pentecostalism commenced in the southern half - mostly around Benin and Lagos from where it spread rapidly to the rest of the country, especially from the late 1990s (Gwamna 2006, McCain 1999). While the Assemblies of God have existed for over 50 years, the newer brands of Pentecostalism are more recent creations, dating back to the late 1970s and even 1980s (McCain 2006, Gwamna 2006).

Although other, more ‘orthodox’ Catholic and Protestant churches can also continue to boast a huge public support in Nigeria, the Pentecostal movement has grown enormously over the past two decades and is now arguably the dominant Christian movement in Nigeria. Pentecostalism, in general, is the flagship of the charismatic renewal that is happening throughout contemporary Christianity. The charismatic movement refers to the gift of grace described in the New Testament (I Corinthians 12-14) displayed by Christians imbued with the Holy Spirit. It refers to extraordinary behaviour displayed by people who have undergone what is called, in Pentecostal language, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The Charismatic movement has always been part of Christian history and politics. It was first expressed in St Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, then undergoing a charismatic wave. It reappeared in Phrygia in A. D. 156 during the Montanist movement but was strongly opposed by the hierarchy of the young Church, which felt that its legitimacy was being undermined by the prophetic claims of the Montanists (Atiemo 1993:7). Already at that time, the Montanists were calling on Christians to directly experience the power of the

Holy Spirit, thereby subverting the intermediary role of the Church establishment. The radical stance of the charismatic movement towards Orthodox Churches remains a basic cause of friction to this day.

In the 20th century, the revival of the Pentecostal movement is often traced to 31st December 1900 at Bethel College in Topeka, Kansas, United States of America. An evangelist, Charles Perham, was conducting a prayer vigil with his students. A female student requested he lays his hands on her to receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, which he did and she started speaking in many tongues, allegedly including Chinese (Atiemo, 1993: 13). In 1906, William Seymour, a Black student of Perham also received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and established a mass movement whose significance lay in breaking down barriers of race, class, creed and sex: "In this revival, white bishops and black workers, Asians and Mexicans, white professors and laundry women, were equals" (Atiemo 1993:14). Classical Pentecostal churches in Nigeria such as the Assemblies of God and the Four Square Gospel Church are offsprings of this movement.

Pentecostal Churches are increasing their adherents all over the world but their success in Africa has been extraordinary. It is part of the rise of a 'new' Christianity which has the following characteristics:

i. Christianity is defined and experienced as a religion of agency with high capacity to transform lives.
ii. Christianity offers equality among believers and all members of the congregation must aspire for the highest level of spiritual development.
iii. Christianity is lived as a rational religion and those who are born again can see proof of the power of God in their daily lives.
iv. Christianity is not about families, groups or communities but about the individual who has opted for salvation (Ibrahim 2008: 2-3).

According to Birgit Meyer (1997:11), a large cross-section of Africans is attracted to Pentecostalism for different reasons. The young generation believes that it can empower them in their quest for a better future. Middle-aged women who have responsibilities for taking care of their children and who are suffering from the yoke of male-dominated gerontocratic societies find that Pentecostalism could be a good route to building a career in trade or business. For others, affliction and ill-health and the search for cure is the problem that leads them to Pentecostalism. The young and upwardly mobile are particularly central to the growth of Pentecostalism. In her incisive essay, Marshall-Fratani argues that the great advantages of Pentecostalism for the upwardly mobile are that it frees them from financial pressures imposed by cash-strapped extended family members:

> Pentecostalism's stress on the nuclear family and its exhortations to break with unbelievers accords young people striving for upward mobility not only a relative freedom from such pressures but also protection from resentment in the form of witchcraft, most feared and dangerous in the hands of blood relatives. (Marshall-Fratani, 1998:5)

Indeed, as Marshall-Fratani contends, one of the most important reasons for the success of Pentecostalism in Africa is that it is even more capable of incorporating aspects of 'traditional' African religions and cultural practices. This relates especially to the issue of the reality of the forces contending in the African cosmology. Like most Nigerian 'traditional' religions, the Pentecostalism emphasizes the existence of demons that torment humans. These demons can be subdued and exorcised through prayers. Thus, there are regular services for casting out demons, often marked by spectacular scenes of seizure and catharsis. As Marshall-Fratani says,

> What is novel about Pentecostalism is that it directly addresses the problem of the forces of evil and incites public testimony about the workings of evil forces, producing discourses, which expose these forces and show the individual how to overcome their dangerous and destructive influence. These narratives enable the individual to constitute himself as an historical agent who is not only empowered in his personal life, but together with other believers has the strength to do battle with "powers and principalities", "raising up an army for God in the land". (Marshall-Fratani 1998:21)

Pentecostalism is also related to African 'traditional' religious belief in supernatural healing. According to McCain "Since miraculous healing has always been important part of the traditional beliefs, it was [a] natural thing to embrace Pentecostalism which believed in supernatural healing" (McCain 1999:5). Healing of a range of ailments is regularly undertaken as part of crusade and church service. According to Gwamna (2006), healing or the claim to doing so, is part of the defining criteria of Pentecostalism. Supernatural healing thus saves the believers the difficulty of paying hospital bills. It is commonplace to see posters and banners advertising miracles, which like in the bible, proclaim that the "the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed". Many of such miracles were shown on television but because of their doubtful authenticity, the Nigeria Broadcasting Commission intervened to compel television channels to stop airing scenes of miracles as there was no proof of the veracity of their claims (Gwamna 2006). The miracles are now shown on the internet and distributed through electronic storing devises.

At a more profane level, Pentecostalism provides new social and economic networks that can provide access to jobs, contracts, welfare facilities and even possibilities for emigration. Sometimes called prosperity gospel, several of the newer Pentecostal churches often teach that “God is not a poor God”; God creates and gives wealth. Even though this kind of materialist, wealth-centred doctrine remains controversial among some churches, Pentecostalism therefore offers a lot, including heaven, health, wealth, success and happy family life. This combination of a gain-all and lose-nothing cocktail might play a major role in explaining the recipe for success.

The Pentecostal movement is transforming Nigerian Christianity in a profound way. At one level, it is deepening the integration of Nigerian Christianity into the global nexus while at the same time developing local roots to sustain itself. At another level, it has introduced at least two new elements into Christian belief and practice in Nigeria. The first is the gospel of prosperity. It reverses the anti-materialism associated with the early Church and justifies, and indeed, legitimises the acquisition of material wealth. In this context, it has been a major ideologue for liberal economic thinking and the promotion of capitalism. The second element is the gospel of power. It attracts new converts and maintains existing members on claims of a continuous capacity to perform miracles. This aspect of Pentecostal belief promotes agency as a mode of social action.

In yet another sense, Pentecostalism is clearly changing the nature of clergy, or Christian leadership in Nigeria. This is not only important for the nature of the religious movements, but, as we will see below, also has implications for the relationship between Pentecostal churches and the wider political arena. In general, training in many Pentecostal churches is less formalized and shorter than in the ‘orthodox’ Catholic and Protestant churches. Charisma, or the gift of grace, can be bestowed on anyone. This means that in some cases, church elders, with or without formal training, are “blessed” by pastors and encouraged to establish their own churches. Also, in some cases succession of church leadership becomes a family affair, going from the husband to the wife. However, in many other situations, there are seminaries and theological schools, some of which are owned by other denominations.

The state of play is that a major transformation of Christianity has been occurring in Nigeria over the past three decades; new religious movements have been encroaching on the membership of the more established denominational churches. The most successful strand within the new religious movements is the Pentecostal one. The Pentecostal movement has a wide appeal, especially among the youth, and the upwardly mobile. The movement is characterised by a myriad of fellowships, missions and churches that are not held together by a common organisational framework except the umbrella

cover provided by the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria. Indeed, even a common doctrinal framework is difficult to discern. Nonetheless, the subsequent section will attempt to distil some of its basic distinctive features, especially in relation to all the other Nigerian churches.

3. Diversity of Christians and Christianity in Northern Nigeria[2]

It may be clear that given the size of Nigeria, its ethnic and cultural diversity, and the diversity of influences on the development of its Christian community, Nigerian Christianity is a highly diverse creature. This section will attempt to describe the main currents of doctrine and organisation within this rather amorphous category, summarising the typology of Nigerian Christianity proposed by Matthew Ojo (2008a). First, however, we will briefly look at the available data on the demographic characteristics of Christianity, particularly in the context of northern Nigeria. As has been detailed elsewhere (e.g. Ostien 2012), there is little reliable data on the relative group sizes of Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. The last census that collected religious data was conducted in 1963; its results, aggregated for the territories that now constitute the northern States of Nigeria[3], are presented in table 1 below.

[2]This chapter is largely a summary of the work of Ojo (2008a).

[3] Federal Capital Territory of Abuja and 19 states, namely, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau (North Central); Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe (North East); and Kano, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kaduna, Jigawa, Katsina, and Zamfara.

Table 1: % of Muslims, Christians, and 'Others' by State as per the 1963 census[4]

Present State (North)	1963		
	% Muslim	% Christian	% Other
Sokoto	98.9	0.4	0.7
Zamfara	98.9	0.4	0.7
Jigawa	98.0	0.8	1.2
Kano	97.0	1.1	1.8
Yobe	94.8	1.0	4.2
Katsina	94.6	0.4	5.1
Borno	88.3	2.7	8.9
Kebbi	85.5	0.5	14.0
Bauchi	83.4	1.6	14.9
Kwara	75.6	13.6	10.8
Gombe	75.0	6.2	18.8
Niger	62.4	4.0	33.6
Kaduna	55.7	25.1	19.2
Kogi	37.5	28.2	34.2
Adamawa	34.6	16.0	49.4
Nasarawa	30.2	13.8	56.0
Taraba	26.2	13.7	60.0
Plateau	26.1	23.2	50.7
Benue	2.8	53.4	43.8
Total North	71.7	9.7	18.6

In the forty nine years since this census, the categories have shifted considerably. The large numbers of 'Others' have almost completely disappeared and integrated into the two major monotheistic religions. There are however several patterns in this table that continue to characterise northern Nigeria to this day. Most importantly, the table clearly shows that in the large majority of northern States, Christians are in the minority. Irrespective of several decades of conversion, migration, and other forms of religious mixing (cf. Gaiya 2004), it is unlikely that this general status of Christianity as the minority religion in the north has changed substantially. For Kano, the second largest city in Nigeria, this argument can be corroborated by data collected by one of the authors of this chapter (Ehrhardt 2011), which also shows that Christians make up at most 15-20% of the population of this cosmopolitan hub.

[4]Source: Ostien (2012: 3)

Although virtually all Christian denominations are well represented in the region, it is therefore important to remember that they represent minority populations – a fact that is significant given the highly charged and politicised relations between Christian and Muslim communities in Nigeria. Within the Christian population at large, however, it is virtually impossible to estimate the relative size of the various Christian churches. An indication may be given by data presented in Ehrhardt (2011) about Kano, which is included in table 2. This table shows that at least within the context of Kano, the Catholics constitute the majority Christian group, followed by the Pentecostals, the 'orthodox' Protestants, and many smaller (often Nigerian) churches. It should be borne in mind, however, that these proportions may well be particular to Kano, given its unique historical trajectory as an economic centre of gravity in the region.

Table 2: Relative group sizes of Christian denominations in Kano (N=149)

Denomination	**Percent**
Catholic	51.7
Pentecostal	20.1
Protestant	11.4
African Independent Church	8.7
Others	8.0
Total	*100.0*

Source: Fieldwork

Although the group sizes of Kano's Christians may thus not be representative for the wider northern region, the diversity of these communities is. We will now turn to Ojo's (2008a) typology of Christianity in order to sketch the broad outlines of this diversity. In his succinct description, Ojo differentiates the following main denominations, which we will then summarise in some detail:

- the Roman Catholic church;
- the mainline or 'orthodox' Protestant denominations;
- the African Protestant churches;
- the Aladura churches;
- the Pentecostal churches;
- the pseudo-Christian churches; and
- The syncretistic sects.

Finally, in addition these individual churches, we will also discuss the organisation that has tasked itself with the representation of Nigerian Christians more generally: the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

The Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church arrived to southern Nigeria in 1862, when some missionaries extended their work from Porto Novo to Lagos. It now forms a major Christian block in Nigeria, with a followership and political strength that is comparable to the combined Protestant churches. As is the case in the rest of the world, there is a high level of uniformity of doctrine and practice in the Roman Catholic Church. However, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal has official sanction and operates within the parishes, for example through exorcism and healing through charismatic prayer sessions that resemble those that characterise the Pentecostal churches. A few Nigerian Catholic charismatic groups that have taken their exit from the Church, for example the Charismatic Renewal Ministries formed in 1992 by Cosmas Ilechukwu and others.

The Mainline or Orthodox Protestant Denominations

These Protestant churches resulted from the missionary efforts of evangelical movements from Europe and North America in the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries. Ojo describes two types. First, there are the churches that resulted directly from the denominational mission agencies, such as the Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and the Baptists. Second, Ojo highlights the churches that resulted from the efforts of the inter-denominational evangelical and faith missions, mostly in northern Nigeria. Sonia Graham, Jan Harm Boer, Yusufu Turaki, Matthew Kukah, Niels Kastfelt, among others have examined various aspects of these Christian movements. The major churches that resulted from these evangelical missions are the following:

1. Sudan Interior Mission produced the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA)
2. Sudan United Missions (SUM) British branch produced Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) with headquarters in Jos.
3. SUM Danish branch produced the Lutheran Church of Christ in Numan
4. SUM Dutch branch produced the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC) with headquarters in Akwanga
5. SUM Basel branch (Switzerland) produced Ekklesia Yankawa a Nigeria (EYN) with headquarters in Mubi.
6. Qua Iboe Mission, the only one that worked in Southern Nigeria has no relationship to any of the above.

Ojo also notes that while initially, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the term ‘evangelical’ was applied to most of these churches, this term is now mostly reserved for the churches resulting from the inter-denomination faith missions and to the Baptists.

The African Protestant Churches

Alongside the orthodox Christian movements, African Protestant Churches emerged from the 1880s.Ojo notes that this development was at least in part caused by a popular demand for the recognition of certain African cultural norms and by the disgruntlement about the racial discrimination that characterised some orthodox churches. As a consequence, Ojo argues, the churches were entirely under the control of Africans, and they generated a significant African initiative in missions into Nigeria by the 1960s – even though the African Churches often continued to follow the liturgies of the churches from which they broke away. Examples of African Protestant churches are the Native Baptist Church, the United Native African Church, the African Church Organisation, the United African Methodist Church (Eleja), and the Ethiopian National Church of Christ.

The Aladura Churches

As a fourth type of Christian movement in Nigeria, Ojo highlights the emergence of the Aladura Churches from the second decade of the twentieth century from the indigenous revivals that broke out in churches in Yorubaland. Cherubim and Seraphim is the name for the group of these Aladura churches that traced their origin to the evangelistic works started by Moses Orimolade and Christianah Abiodun Emmanuel in South-western Nigeria in the 1920s. The early congregations were made up of Yoruba people and Aladura churches are still considered as predominantly ‘Yoruba’ churches. According to Ojo, by the late 1960s, they had about 15,000 congregations in Nigeria, with an estimated membership of over 100,000. Examples of Aladura churches include the Christ Apostolic Church (see box 1), the Church of the Lord (Aladura), Holy Flock of Christ, Christ Holy Church (Odozi Obodo), Celestial Church of Christ, and the Brotherhood of Christ.

The Pentecostal Churches

As noted above, Ojo (2008a) also argues that Pentecostalism in Nigeria presently the most dynamic Christian movement. Its activities are widely discussed in all news media, and the Pentecostal churches are actively seeking publicity for their sermons, healing and miracle services, breakthrough programmes, and other religious activities. Pentecostal churches are also very explicitly in the evangelisation agenda (for example through their ‘Crusade’ rallies) – a tendency that is sometimes difficult to combine with the sensibilities of Muslim populations in the Muslim-dominated northern States. Ojo (2008a) differentiated three streams of Pentecostalism

presently in Nigeria. The first are the classical Pentecostal churches many of which resulted from the activities of Western missionaries in Nigeria. The second type includes the indigenous Pentecostal churches that were set up between the 1940s and 1990s. The third category, which is arguably the most visible, comprises the newer independent Charismatic churches, which have emerged since the 1970s.

Box 1: Christ Apostolic Church (Ojo 2008a)

Christ Apostolic Church is the largest and the most widespread indigenous Aladura church in Nigeria. Many of its doctrinal emphases and practices are distinctly Pentecostal, yet also African – factors accounting for the church's considerable spread. The church resulted from the Aladura ("the praying people") revivals of the 1930s in Western Nigeria. The background could be traced to a prayer group named 'The Precious Society', formed in 1918 by a few members of St. Saviour's Anglican Church, Ijebu-Ode, under the leadership of J. B. Shadare (later known as Esinsinade), the People's Warden, for the purpose of seeking divine intervention in the influenza epidemic that affected Lagos and its environs in 1918. In response to a vision by a young woman, Sophia Odulami, the group devoted itself to prayer as the only cure against the epidemic.

The beginnings of the Christ Apostolic Church is also intertwined with the revivals that arose from Ilesa under the leadership of Joseph Ayo Babalola, now venerated by members as an apostle. In October 1928, while on a road construction site repairing his steamroller, Babalola claimed that Jesus Christ called him to abandon the job and preach the Gospel. He started to preach immediately in an itinerant manner in north-eastern Yorubaland, and about 1929, he joined the Faith Tabernacle Congregation and was baptized in Lagos. In the late 1930s, personality clashes between the supporters of Babalola and the English missionaries resulted in the establishment of the Christ Apostolic Church, while the remnants remained as The Apostolic Church.

Ojo argues that there are a great number of Charismatic organizations in Nigeria, and there is a great variety within the movement. In his PhD thesis in the 1980s, Ojo (1987) identified two broad types using the pattern of leadership as the criteria. Solitary leadership that is found mostly in the independent churches and collective leadership found in the trans-denominational ones.

Box 2: Ojo's (2008a) six categories of Charismatic movements in Nigeria

Faith seekers are conversionist groups that emphasise the need for a religious re-orientation of the individual. These groups insist that the means of acquiring power is for the individual to establish a relation with God, usually through conversion. These groups organise regularly evangelistic activities such as door-to-door witnessing, retreats, camp meetings, etc. The slogan 'Jesus is the Answer' invariably assume a larger than life reality for them. Examples of Faith Seekers include groups such as Deeper Christian Life Ministry, the various Christian Drama groups, such as Mount Zion Faith Ministries, and Hour of Freedom Evangelistic Association.

Faith builders resemble Marshall-Fratani's prosperity churches and emphasise the realisation of human potential in the individual to overcome contemporary difficulties of life. Most of these groups that emphasize prosperity tend to prosper in the urban areas and among the educated middle class who are seeking rapid social mobility through the acquisition of material comforts or societal recognition. Examples of faith builders are David Oyedepo's Living Faith Church (Winners' Chapel), George Adegboye's Rhema Chapel, Gabriel Oduyemi's Bethel Ministries Incorporated.

Faith transformers are Charismatic organizations that seek to alter the socio-cultural and religious milieu of large groups of people or specifically ethnic groups or even a national entity. These groups are aggressive in locating ethnic groups and establishing contacts with them through educational, medical, social, agricultural, and industrial missions. They recruit and send out missionaries to work among 'unreached people groups'. Faith transformers mostly work in the rural areas among deprived population, preaching and planting churches. They include Calvary Ministries, Christian Missionary Foundation, and Ethnos Ministries.

Reformists seek to kindle revival and renewal within existing non-Pentecostal denominations. They are literalists, educated middle class and students, who see their denominations as their religious inheritance which must be improved upon. To this end, they are fervent with prayers and do organise Bible studies. Examples of reformists include the Scripture Union, the Methodist Evangelical Movement, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the Baptist Student Fellowship, and the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Church.

The Modernists are mostly those churches of Aladura origin or Christians from Aladura background who have adopted or are trying to adopt the religious style of the Charismatics and Pentecostals. Their preoccupation is how to present the 'old Aladura religion' to a modern world of the educated. They usually start from the premises of imitation, but later on they may adopt certain religious emphases as the Charismatics.

Finally, deliverance churches are preoccupied with activities that will liberate or extricate Christians from their traditional past, which they considered as stumbling blocks to a fulfilling life in the contemporary world. These churches are a sort of specialists casting out the demonic past, the ancestral curses,

and the traditional gods through complex prayers. They claim that until the Christian is extricated from the traditional past, he is not yet empowered to deal with his or her future and enjoy life to the full. The best example of a deliverance church is The Mountain of Fire and Miracles led by Daniel Olukoya.

At around the same time, Ruth Marshall (1992) distinguished between the 'holiness churches' and the 'prosperity gospel churches'. While this distinction, as an ideal-typical categorisation, remains useful, Ojo (2008a) complements it with a new set of six categories of independent Charismatic organisations. In constructing these categories, he uses the two principles of 'power' and 'piety', which lead him to the following typology: faith seekers, faith builders, faith transformers, reformists, modernists, and the deliverance churches. Box 3 will briefly summarise his descriptions of these categories.

The Pseudo-Christian Churches

Ojo (2008a) uses this residual category to denote The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons), the Jehovah Witnesses, God's Kingdom Society, and similar ones. His argument for the 'pseudo' label is that these organizations claim to be Christian churches but the generality of Protestants think otherwise because of the non-centrality of Jesus Christ in the faith of these churches. Needless to say this is a contestable argument; it may therefore be more appropriate to consider these churches as outside the mainstream of Protestant Christianity (or 'alternative' Protestants) rather than pseudo-Christians.

The Syncretistic Sects

Ojo's final category denotes those religious movements that combine Christian beliefs or rituals with those of other religions to constitute new religions. Some may accept and use the Christian Scripture; none of them are within the Christian mainstream. Examples include the cult of Mama Water, a vibrant religious system in the West African coastal belt, the various prayer houses in Eastern Nigeria in the 1960s, and recently Chrislamherb, a group that has attempted a fusion of Christianity, Islam and 'traditional' religion.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)

CAN is the organisation that brings together the five official categories of Christian organisations in Nigeria:

1) The Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN);
2) The Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN);
3) The Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (CPFN) /Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN);
4) The Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC); and

5) The Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Nigeria (TEKAN) and Evangelical Church of Winning All (ECWA) Fellowships.

In bringing together these diverse groups, CAN serves their common interests, such as lobbying for the rebuilding of churches that have been destroyed. However, in interviews with Christian leaders in Kano, several leaders were open about the limitations of CAN in this respect (see Ehrhardt 2012). In addition to the encumbered representation of Christian interests, however, CAN also serves a more symbolic purpose: uniting the fragmented community of Christians. For much like the Muslim leaders, several Christian leaders insist on the unity of Christianity in Nigeria. In this sense, it is significant that CAN is a highly visible political player at the national level in Nigeria, responding to issues related to Christian interests all over the country. So while Christians in Nigeria as elsewhere are organised in distinct churches, CAN unites them on the basis of shared interests and, in a basic foundational way, a shared faith in Jesus Christ.

4. Christianity and Nigerian Politics

Christians in Nigerian thus constitute a very diverse segment of the country's population, characterised by a wide range of doctrinal beliefs, religious rituals, and forms of organisation. This diversity obviously has implications for the individual and collective experiences of Christians living in Nigeria; but it also impacts on the wider influence of Christianity on Nigerian society. This section will address this wider societal relevance of Christianity in Nigeria by focusing on its role in the public sphere and, more specifically, in the processes of Nigerian politics. To appreciate the significance of religion in Nigeria's public sphere however, there are some contextual factors that need to be explicated. Arguably the major factor to note in this regard is the extremely high salience of religious identities and piety among Nigerians (Lewis and Bratten 2000). Correspondingly, religious affiliation is a factor of major importance in the everyday lives of all Nigerians, be they Christian or Muslim. More to the point, furthermore, many Nigerians also feel that their religion *should* have a major impact on their lives, and on the ways in which Nigerian society is organised.

All arguments about the role of Christianity in the Nigerian public sphere should therefore be understood within the context of the high salience of religion in the everyday lives and moral convictions of Nigerian Christians. One of the consequences of this salience, for example, is that while political leaders are generally regarded critically by Nigerians, religious leaders (both Christian and Muslim) can boast high levels of trust and legitimacy. As such, they are considerable political authorities in their own right, even if they are not formally engaged in the political process (cf. Ehrhardt 2011). Moreover, another consequence of religion's salience is that there is a widespread

consensus that religion should be used to improve the processes of political competition and governance. With the rise of religiosity, people increasingly search for solutions to concrete political and economic problems in the spiritual realm. The pertinent question for many Nigerian Christians is therefore not *if* religion should impact on politics, but *how great* this impact should be and *how* it should be realised.

Few questions are as divisive, however, as the question of how to relate religion and politics. Some of the divergent opinions on this matter will be highlighted below; but before we do so, it is useful to differentiate between the popular demand for religion to be used to bring morality back into Nigerian politics, and the more academic debates about the existing politicisation of religion. As discussed at length by Ibrahim (1989, 1991) and many others after him, the politicisation of religion denotes the ways in which political entrepreneurs, including some religious leaders, use religion and religious sentiment to manipulate the Nigerian public in their own (private) quests for power and wealth. In this way, politicised religion has been identified as a cause for conflict and violence, as well as state patronage along ethnic and religious lines. It may be clear that this politicisation stands in rather stark contrast to the widespread normative wish for a more religious form of politics – in which religion could be a catalyst of morality and good governance, rather than conflict and destruction.

With these preliminary considerations in mind, the remainder of this section will look in more detail at the ways in which Nigerian Christians, and Christian organisations, relate to politics and the Nigerian state. It will build, as the preceding sections have done, on the comprehensive studies edited by Jibrin Ibrahim (2008b) that focused primarily on the relationship between Nigerian Christianity and democracy. One productive way of framing this relationship may be to present it as a connected set of challenges: one 'internal' challenge of democracy within Nigerian Christianity and another, 'external' challenge of the wider functions of Christianity in Nigerian society. In other words, democracy is thus both an issue in the internal organisation of churches and in the pastoral work of the Church towards the larger society. This has made it into a very salient issue in contemporary debates within Christian movements. Talking about Catholicism for example, Rev Fr Nwaigbo argues that "Democracy is currently the topic most written and intensively talked about by the Church's Magisterium since the Vatican II" (Nwaigbo 2003:viii).

The Internal Democratic Challenge

Some participants in these debates argue that Christianity is inherently connected to democratic values and practices, not because churches are democracies *per se* but because of the strong egalitarian democratic ethic

that they deem Jesus Christ to have represented. Rev Fr Simeon Eboh, for example, states that:

> The Church is not a democracy. [But] neither is the Church a totalitarian dictatorship, an absolute monarchy, nor a resurrection of the defunct Roman imperial administration. On the contrary, the Church is a fellowship of believers (*congregation fidelum*), a communion (*koinonia*), the People of God, the Body of Christ. Its ecclesiological understanding contains strong analogues to crucial elements of democratic culture (Eboh 2003:71).

Eboh therefore concludes that the Church has a doctrinal responsibility to fight tyranny and advocate for freedom. Democracy is therefore one of the pastoral missions of the Church. At the same time, however, the capacity of the Church to carry out this pastoral mission is constrained by the organisation's internal democratic challenge:

> The great challenge to the Church today, is not so much the content of our theological education, but leadership structures at all levels. The division of one People of God into laity and clergy has diminished the voice of non clerics in the Church, and culminated in the excessive accumulation of power in the hands of the clergy (Nwaigbo 2003:204).

In this light, one of the main reasons for the success of Pentecostalism may be related to its ability to respond effectively to this laity/clergy divide. Indeed, some argue that Pentecostalism has impacted on Christian culture through the intensification of what Assamoah-Gyadu (2005) has called the praxis of the democratisation of charisma. Church hierarchies are being stripped of their exclusive rights to the administration of Christian praxis:

> The democratisation of charisma, therefore, has made the style of ministry of charismatic missions a task-oriented one. The style of ministry is one in which, instead of relying on hierarchies of ministers or on so-called extraordinary gifts of the spirit, the laity have been mobilised on the basis of their spiritual gifts and talents to minister in the power of the Spirit in leading worship, personal evangelism, healing, deliverance and others (ibid.:130).

In some ways, this approach introduces popular democratic practices into church practices as the laity is empowered in its agency. As is generally known, active engagement of people in associational life has been recognised in political sociology as a positive force in deepening democratic culture. It should follow therefore that active engagement of ordinary Christians in the operationalising of the spiritual life of the church should boast democratic culture among Christians. More specifically, the Pentecostal churches should

be at the forefront of this democratisation movement, given their effective democratisation of religious authority.

The reality of many churches, however, is that new hierarchies develop, some of which may be equally or even more constraining than their predecessors. In the Pentecostal churches, for example, the final arbiter is the General Overseer. One of the most common phrases used by Pentecostal leaders has been popularised by Ruth Marshall. The phrase is that "God is not a democrat" (Marshall 1995). The form of authority exercised in Pentecostal organisations is personal and charismatic. Those who establish a fellowship or exercise religious leadership do so on the basis of claims to having seen visions or dreams, or of having somehow received a message directly from God. The routine governance of Pentecostal organisations is done on the basis of such claims. For example, when Bishop Idahosa of the Church of God Mission died, the leadership of the organisation was passed on to his wife. The succession was done by a simple declaration by an American friend of the Church who announced that he had seen a vision in which God had said that Idahosa's wife should take over the mantle of leadership. Another example is the Family Worship Centre in Abuja when leadership was passed from Mr to Mrs Omaku in 2003 following the death of the founder general overseer of the church.

There are no elections and even consultations are very limited in Pentecostal organisations, because direct messages from God supersede earthly questions of democratic governance. Once members are integrated into a Church or Fellowship therefore, they tend to have limited voice except when they exercise their right to simply exit the space. In many such Christian spaces, the internal religious environment is increasingly authoritarian irrespective of the egalitarian impulse that may or may not be inherent in Pentecostal doctrine. Often, the only option for dissent in Pentecostal organisations is that of exit - which all those who want to exercise their own charismatic power are obliged to take. It is an open field and many actors have set-up their own organisations.

This example of the Pentecostal church thus highlights some of the complex, and sometimes contradictory trends of democratisation within Nigerian Christian movements. It provides a vivid illustration of the internal democratic challenge that Christian groups are facing. Nwaigbo summarises this challenge thus:

> At the moment, there is clamour for democracy in the Church… There is talk about relationship, about autonomy in the Church and about freedom of speech… There are huge questions being posed about ordination and the role of women in the Church. There is irresistible movement of people

towards pluralism and the vibrating voice of liberation theology (Nwaigbo 2003:206).

The pertinence of this challenge is corroborated by some of the findings of Ibrahim's (2008) study: for example, the study shows that only about half of the interviewed church leaders had arrived at his position through elections; the remaining half were either appointed, identified through divine revelation, or given the position simply on the basis of seniority (ibid.: 64). These figures indicate the lack of democracy in the basic organisational expression of the life of the church. Given the importance of Christian leaders in Nigerian society as it is, this internal challenge is of great societal significance. This internal challenge is further compounded by the external democratic challenge.

The External Democratic Challenge

The external relates to the way in which Christians as a community relate to the democratic political process. It is an interrogation into the challenge to determine how Christianity's members should or should not participate in Nigeria's political process. The precise mechanisms that connect the internal and external challenges remain to be explored. It may be, for example, that highly democratic practices within the church lead to democratic engagement of the church and its members with Nigerian politics. Currently, however, there is not enough reliable evidence to address such specific hypotheses. Instead, this section aims to elucidate some important aspects of the external democratic challenge of Christianity. To do so, it will first outline the broader institutional framework that regulates the position and role of religions in Nigeria's political process. With that context in mind, the section will then continue to discuss to the perceptions and opinions of Christian churchgoers and leaders on the role of religion in Nigerian politics. Finally, the section will analyse the function of CAN in this respect, as the primary political body representative of Nigerian Christians.

Clearly, there are institutions at all levels of the Nigerian society that affect the position of religion in politics, including the complex institutions around *Sharia* that have been created in northern Nigeria after 1999. Because of the large regional focus of this paper however, we will only summarise the main national institutions in this field, which are circumscribed in the Nigerian Constitution. Often referred to, controversially, as the foundation of Nigerian 'secularism', these constitutional provisions comprise four basic principles: the formal equality of individual Nigerian citizens; the prohibition of a single State religion; freedom of conscience and religious education; and the prohibition of political parties that are affiliated to a single religion.

First, the formal equality of Nigerian citizens is circumscribed in article 17.2(a) of the 1999 Nigerian constitution, which states that “every citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law” (Federal Government of Nigeria 2010). This formal equality is strengthened by a principle of non-discrimination on religious grounds, which is delineated in article 15: “discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited”. The Nigerian constitution thus prescribes the equality of Nigerian citizens and the principle of non-discrimination on religious grounds, summarised in the Federal motto of article 15.1: “Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress”. This constitutes the first set of constitutional provisions that shape Nigerian struggles around secularity.

Second and more controversially, article 10 states that “the government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion”. Many analysts interpret this article as the core of Nigeria’s secular state, especially in conjunction with the articles 15.3(c) and (d) which hold that it is the duty of the state to

> Encourage inter-marriage among persons from different places of origin, or of different religious, ethnic, or linguistic association or ties; and [to] promote or encourage the formation of associations that cut across ethnic, linguistic, religious, and or other sectional barriers.

The Nigerian state is therefore not only prohibited from adopting a “State Religion”, but it is also obliged to promote interreligious association and marriage. It may seem that these articles provide clear directions, and constraints, for the relationship between religions and the state. As we will see below, however, the everyday reality of Nigerian politics has produced a range of creative ways in which to re-interpret, or even circumvent, these constraints.

The third set of constitutional provisions for Nigerian “secularity” is contained in article 38 and pertains to the freedom of religion. Article 38(3) notes, furthermore, that “no religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination”. Thus, article 38 provides Nigerians with the freedom of conscience and religion, the freedom to change, practice and propagate their religion, and the freedom to educate their community members in the tenets of their religion. It also protects them, in legal theory, from being taught religious knowledge against their will.

Fourth and finally, article 222 prescribes the way in which political parties can relate to religions. It states that

> no association by whatever name called shall function as a party, unless […] the membership of the association is open to any citizen of Nigeria irrespective of his place of origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religion, or ethnic grouping; [and] the name of the association, its symbol or logo does not contain any ethnic or religious connotation or give the appearance that the activities of the association are confined to a part only of the geographical area of Nigeria.

As such, article 222 prohibits political parties from affiliating themselves exclusively to a single religious community; this, after all, would likely give a 'biased appearance'. The Nigerian Constitution thus provides, formally, for citizen equality and basic freedoms of religion, while prohibiting the state and political parties to affiliate themselves with a single religious community. This is not to say, however, that these institutions translate directly into political realities. But they do provide a framework for the potential (legal) engagement of Christian organisations with politics. Simply put, nothing constrains Christians from being involved in politics. But there are constraints on the involvement of religions in the affairs of the state, for example as a state religion or as the foundational principle of a political party.

With these institutional constraints in mind, it is interesting to consider some of the predominant perceptions and views of Christians, both laymen and clergy, on the role of their faith in politics. In this respect, Ibrahim (2008b) presents some interesting findings. First, his extensive survey data show that a large majority of Nigerian Christians are in favour of democracy and, perhaps more strikingly, do not believe that governments are created by God. The latter finding is significant because it opens up legitimate avenues for contestation against the government – seeing as its leadership is not based on a divine intervention. Moreover, Ibrahim (2008b: 68) shows that over one third of the church members who were interviewed thought church leaders should seek leadership positions in government. Although this is obviously a minority view, it still provides a solid basis of legitimacy for many Christian leaders to engage with the formal political process. In this regard, Ibrahim (ibid. 70) shows that church leaders themselves also want such engagement, not only in civil society groups but also formal political parties.

These findings suggest that Nigerian Christians are open to, and often explicitly supportive of, the idea of Christian religious leaders engaging in formal Nigerian democratic politics. This seems indicative of an underlying wish for further integration of the religious and political spheres – an argument that may find some corroboration in Ibrahim's (2008b) finding that almost two

thirds of the interviewed church goers believe that religious leaders should discuss politics with their congregation. At the same time, however, both religious leaders and their followers overwhelmingly identified prayer, and preaching, as the primary means of political engagement for Christian leaders and organisations (ibid.: 76). This indicates that while there may be a general wish for Christianity to be part of Nigerian politics, the ways in which this should be realised remains a subject of deep disagreement.

The diversity of views and the widespread ambivalence on the relationship between Christianity and politics is a recurrent feature in the literature on Nigerian religion, interfaith relations, and 'secularism' (e.g. Alubo 2008; Boer 2006; Ehrhardt 2012). On the one hand, many Christian organisations (including CAN) have expressed their support for the Nigerian state as a 'secular' state, which may be 'neutral' (i.e. un-religious) or multi-religious in orientation. Especially in the light of Muslim attempts to (re)implement *Sharia* laws, Christians have used this line of argument as a line of defence against what they perceive as the growing Islamisation of Nigeria. At the same time, as noted above, many Christians feel that religious values should inform politics and politicians, for example as an antidote against the pervasive self-serving corruption. Other Christians and Christian organisations have gone even further, arguing for more comprehensive integration of Christianity into the functioning of the state (perhaps partly mimicking Muslim demands for *Sharia*). One result of this line of argument has been the creation of Christian Pilgrim Welfare Boards, which subsidise Nigerian Christians to go on pilgrimages to Israel and Italy.

In all these external politics of Nigerian Christianity, CAN has been a particularly significant player, at the Federal, State, and Local Government levels. As the primary umbrella organisation of Nigerian Christians, it is the only actor that can claim to speak on behalf of the entire Christian community. Moreover, due to its high level of organisation, it has been able to engage in politics with considerable fervour and efficacy. At the local level, such engagement is often aimed at local issues such as the building and maintenance of churches. This representative function is particularly important in northern Nigeria, where CAN also originated, because of the minority status of northern Christians. At the national level, however, CAN's political behaviour is both more encompassing and more diffuse. For example, CAN is always one of the first actors to respond to situations of crisis, such as the attack on churches and Christians. More broadly however, CAN has also expressed clear views on external Christian politics:

> We, the Christians of Nigeria, believe that government is ordained by God to provide justice and security for its people, encourage and facilitate development, and protect and manage its resources. Since government is

an agent of God, it must always be respected, supported and obeyed, unless it conflicts with the Law of God. We believe, therefore, that Christians must actively participate in the political process to ensure that government is just, transparent and efficient. We recognize that governance is an honourable service to humanity. Thus, we believe Christians should actively seek public office and reflect the beliefs of their faith in their public service as much as in their private lives. We insist that our politicians should be completely honest and fair in the fulfilment of their duties. This means

- That they must not make promises that they know they cannot fulfil;
- They must take nothing from the government for their personal use other than what has been legitimately approved;
- They must not use their offices to give unfair favours to relatives, friends or others;
- Christian public servants must not give or accept bribes, favours, positions, honours or any other benefit that would compromise fairness in fulfilling their duties.
- Christian public servants must seek the prayers and advice of body of Christ and regularly report to its leaders their roles in government (CAN 2004:1-2)

Thus, CAN clearly expresses its preference for having Christians and Christian values in government. Although this is presented as a way to ensure morally 'good' politics, it may also easily be understood as a way for the Christian community as a whole to strengthen is societal position (cf. Ojo 2007). Because even if Christianity as such is not proposed as a structuring principle for this government, Christian public servants are advised to seek the counsel of their church and Christian leaders in matters of politics and government. CAN's position presents a good illustration of the ambivalence of many Nigerian Christians about politics and the fine line that many Christian organisations attempt to draw in their approaches to Christianity and the public sphere. As such, it is indicative of the complexity of Christianity's struggle with the external challenge of democratisation – a challenge that is likely to remain on the agenda of Nigerian religious groups for the foreseeable future.

5. Gender and Christianity in Nigeria

As is highlighted in Ibrahim (2008b), Alubo (2008), and Ojo (2008b), one important aspect of the internal democratic challenge of Christian movements relates to gender, and specifically the ways in which they envision the social roles of women in religious organisations and society at large. Of course, this

is a challenge for Nigerian Muslims and 'traditional' believers as well as Christians; nonetheless, there are clear differences between religions, and between denominations, in the ways in which this challenge is taken up. In essence, the 'gender challenge' for Nigerian Christians can be divided into two distinct issues: first, the relevance of gender in the organisation of Christian movements themselves and, second, the impact of gender on social life outside the church. We will look at each issue in a bit more detail in this section.

The first issue, that of gender in Christian organisations, is neither new nor particular to the Nigerian context. The most pertinent question in this regard is often whether women can be ordained and become part of the clergy – or, in other words, if women can hold positions of power in the church organisation. Jibrin Ibrahim (2008: 79) shows some interesting data in this regard: 70% of the Christian respondents of his nationwide survey are against the ordination of women in church. Irrespective of this public resistance towards women as church authorities, different Christian groups have dealt with this question in different ways. The Roman Catholic Church arguably represents one end of the spectrum, where positions of authority (i.e. priesthood) are reserved exclusively for men. Moreover, the institution of celibacy prohibits men in positions of religious authority to marry, thus restricting the potential influence of women on the management of the church even further. The Anglican Church, as a second example, may be seen as representing an intermediate position on this spectrum, as highlighted by the excerpt from Dauda Ibrahim (2008a) in box 3.

As a third example beside the Roman Catholic church and the Anglican church, some of the Pentecostal churches (e.g. Foursquare Church) may be closer to the other end of the spectrum of equality of gender roles. Because in many of these 'new' churches, as Martin (2001: 54) says,

> Women are especially favoured with spiritual gifts in a movement which is, after all, expressly constituted around the gifts of the Spirit. Women supply most of the healers and prophets, they are particularly prone to be "slain in the spirit", and they receive the gift of tongues and the gift of prayer.

Although the leaders of many Pentecostal churches are still men, Pentecostalism's 'radical egalitarianism' of the Spirit may therefore be interpreted as a considerable move towards the equalisation of gender roles. But this egalitarian impulse may be particularly significant, according to Martin, outside the direct reach of the church. This is because it has "allowed women to use Pentecostal religious discourse to rewrite the moral mandate on which sexual relations and family life rests" (ibid. 54). Martin argues that this is "nudging a whole section of the poor in the direction of modernity" (ibid.

55) by emphasising the importance of the nuclear family over kinship, and of monogamy and faithfulness over polygamy. This, in Martin's analysis, has prioritised issues that would otherwise have been considered "mere women's issues" and thus transformed gender relations in the direction of what she considers modernity.

Box 3: Women in the Anglican Church (Ibrahim 2008a: 45-6)

The church is made up of members (male and female) who believe in Jesus Christ and are baptized. Women constitute the majority of members in any church in the Anglican Communion today and are among its greatest devotees. These women are baptized members, communicants, mothers, housewives; they also take care of their children and train them for Christ.

Women ordination is an area that the Anglican church has not given priority especially in the Church of Nigeria. The women believe that the lack of priority attention to this issue by the leadership is purely a gender issue and not based on any spiritual convictions. The majority of the women are therefore optimistic that in no distant future women will be ordained into priesthood of the Anglican communion in Nigeria.

In the contemporary Nigerian Anglican Church, women can have the following roles:

- The pastor's wife. She is the leader of all women organizations in her church, i.e. the Mothers Union, Women Guild, Girls Guild and the Girls Brigade. They are trained for their roles as pastor's wives and as co-workers and helpers to their husbands.
- Lay readers. Some women are lay readers in their churches; they assist the priest in leading the church services on Sunday and during the week. They preach sermons when instructed by their priest to do so.
- Counsellors. Some of the women are trained counsellors who work with members of the congregation.
- Sunday school teachers. Women endowed with love and patience lead children in Sunday worship.
- Women also engage in associations such as the choir, wardens, parish church council members, diocesan and provincial synod delegates.

Although the precise impact of Pentecostalism, as well as other Christian doctrines and organisations, requires further localised and contextual empirical research, one important indicator for the connection between gender and 'new' Christian movements is that women are far more actively engaged with them than men (ibid.). Although data is hard to come by in Nigeria, several of the contributors to Jibrin Ibrahim's (2008b) edited volume also identify this dynamic in different Nigerian churches. The strong female support

for these ‘new’ Christian groups indicates that, at the very least, many women consider these groups to function in their interests. This may be due to the ‘domestication of men’ that occurs in these churches, as Martin argues, but there may be other, more locally-specific, reasons at play as well. The field of gender relations and Nigerian Christianity, or religious movements more generally, therefore offers ample opportunities for further research.

6. Conclusion

This chapter set out to provide an introduction to some of the main dynamics that characterise the contemporary Christian population of Nigeria, with a focus on Christianity in the northern region of the country. With this purpose in mind, it has sketched the origins of the divide between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Christian movements. The dynamics and growth of the Nigerian Pentecostal movement have been particularly important in this regard and were therefore discussed in some detail. The paper has also presented data on the demographics and diversity of Nigerian Christianity, as well as a typology of contemporary Christian movements as proposed by Matthews Ojo (2008a). On the basis of these findings, the paper suggests that there are five main Christian movements in Nigeria, each of which comprises a wide range of individual churches. The five main movements are the Roman Catholics, the ‘orthodox’ Protestants, the African Protestants, the Aladura churches, and finally the Pentecostals.

Furthermore, the paper has discussed some of the ways in which Nigerian Christians are positioning themselves and their religion in Nigeria’s public sphere. In particular, the paper has focused on the two ‘democratic challenges’ facing Nigerian Christianity: the internal challenge of re-structuring authority within the churches and the external challenge of relating Christianity to Nigerian politics. In relation to the internal challenge, the paper has discussed the ways in which church authority structures are changing, becoming more democratic in some cases but more authoritarian in others. Special attention was given to the issue of gender relations, and the position of women in Christian communities. With respect to the external challenge, the paper highlighted the constitutional provisions for state and religion, the variety of Christian views on this issue, and the ways in which CAN operates as a representative of Christian interests in the political arena.

The chapter has outlined several themes that are important in the development of contemporary Nigerian Christianity. What we have attempted to do is very broad and limitations of the work include significant gaps in our current understanding of Christians and Christianity in Nigeria – gaps that suggest clear avenues for further research. This suggestion applies to the development of authority within Christian organisations, to the complex ways

in which Christian leaders and Christian organisations engage with politics and the state, as well as to the development of gender relations in the various Christian denominations. It is our hope that such research will not only lead to a better appreciation of Christianity in Nigeria, but also to concrete avenues for the improvement of interfaith relations in the country.

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