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Book Review

Wobodo, Johnwealthy Jacob. *Christianity in West Africa: A Manifestation of African Independent Churches, Pentecostalism and Proliferation of Churches in Nigeria*. 2018. Port Harcourt: Publisher: Alheribooks. ISBN: 978-978-55690-7-0. xiv+146 pages.

The history of Christian enterprise in Africa particularly south of the Sahara has enjoined the attention of writers from different backgrounds for centuries. It started with European missionaries with the purpose of showing how they were used by God to “bring light to benighted souls in far-away countries”. A shift in the goal began to appear from the twentieth century with western educational awareness in Africa. Others factors were the rise in nationalistic feelings and quest for self-understanding by Africans themselves. Focus was on how Africans are responding to the Christian message in the light of their African environment and cultural milieu. A down trend in the circulation of twentieth century African ecclesiastical historiography publications is posing some challenges to young minds.

Johnwealthy Wobodo, an Anglican cleric, growing and zealous academic in the discipline of religious and cultural studies with fare for church history whose Master’s thesis I had supervised, took a step by putting together the information as contained in this publication for easy accessibility to students of church history especially at the Rivers State owned Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. He applied multi-dimensional method in the study of religious phenomenon in his writing. The eleven-chapter book is an introductory story of the church in West Africa with particular focus on Nigeria. In his words, the book “is an attempt to review the missionary activities in Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Nigeria.” It took a critical view at the pre-contacts and Christian contacts at North Africa, particularly Egypt and Ethiopia.

In the first four chapters, Johnwealthy Wobodo highlighted the advent of Christian religion in Africa from Egypt, a city that provided security to the Holy family when King Herod arose against Jesus-the new born King. Though the Church flourished in Egypt in her early years, the unchecked attack of Islam, poor missionary spirit and internal conflicts made her to lose ground in North Africa. The succeeding seven chapters gave insight into the planting of Christianity in the Western, Southern, Eastern and Northern parts of

Nigeria. The place of Sierra Leone as a springboard in the rooting of Christianity in West Africa was well captured.

Johnwealthy Wobodo went further to discuss some aspects of modern developments in the Nigerian ecclesiology. These included the emergence of African Initiated Churches (AICs) factored by nationalist feelings, freedom to exercise leadership gifts, indigenization of Christianity and charismatic personalities like Garrick Sokari Braide as well as socio-economic distress. The AICs are characterized by common worship attire, use of prayer aids, and emphasis on spirituality and rooted in African worldview. Pentecostalism, a movement to re-awaken primitive Christianity, is the fastest growing stream of Christianity as well as reshaping the twenty first century is characterised by ecstatic enthusiasm, speaking in other languages, miracles, women ordination, prosperity preaching, mass evangelism and rapidity in the multiplication of new brands of the Christian religion. Among some founders of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria is Apostle Geoffrey A. Numbere of the Niger delta region. The proliferation of the Pentecostal churches he observed is a development which revealed that the church in West Africa has come of age and can stand on her feet without depending on European or foreign missionary support for the fulfilment of her mission to the African people.

It appears Johnwealthy Wobodo was in some hurry in editing and publication of the book considering the absence of illustrations in the body of the book. Again, the gaps in some of the contents and referencing should have been minimised. Devoting over half of the pages to events within the geo-political entity known as Nigeria would have made it appropriate for the title to have read, "Christianity in Nigeria: A Manifestation of African Initiated Churches and Pentecostalism". The book content would have been enriched had Johnwealthy Wobodo as an Ikwerre growing scholar, demonstrated patriotic scholarship by including stories of some of the unsung native heroes and heroines in the development of Christianity in modern Nigeria.

The criticisms notwithstanding, the effort of Johnwealthy Wobodo in providing an introductory resource material for the study of Nigerian church history is highly commended. He traced the early missionary activities in Nigeria from the Niger expedition which span from the upper Niger to the far Northern Nigeria highlighting some of African tribes in the routes of the mission. Students of the humanities and social sciences as well as lovers of the Church will find the book helpful. I therefore recommend *Christianity in West Africa: A Manifestation of African Independent Churches, Pentecostalism and Proliferation of Churches in Nigeria*, a church history genre to the reading public.