

WWL 2018

Church History and Facts – NIGERIA

How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
191,836,000	88,906,000	46.3

Source: WCD, May 2017

How did Christians get there?

The first Christian mission that reached Nigeria was during the Portuguese dominance of the Atlantic Coast in the 15th and 16th centuries. However, during that period, the Portuguese Catholics gave priority to economic and political activities, as a result of which Christian mission made no headway.¹ Following the British Empire's abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807, another serious attempt was made to reintroduce Christianity to Nigeria. The liberated slaves who had already converted became instrumental in evangelizing the indigenous population. The case of Samuel Adjai Crowther, who was the first Nigerian Anglican priest, can be taken as an example. He played a key role in evangelizing in Yorubaland.² After witnessing the success of Crowther, Anglicans of the Church Missionary Society, Methodists, Baptists, and the Roman Catholics increased efforts to have a strong Christian presence in Nigeria.

As Christianity started flourishing in Nigeria, issues of discrimination, marginalization of African elites and disputes over resources etc. started pitting Christians against Christians and many church divisions resulted. The United Native African Church and the African Church (Bethel) broke away from the Anglican Church in 1891 and 1901 respectively. In 1917 the United African Methodist Church seceded from the Methodist Church. Since 1950, Pentecostal churches have become very visible and include the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Deeper Life Bible Church, and the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church. There are also Pentecostal groups like the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, the Full Gospel Businessmen Fellowship International, Youth with a Mission, and Christ for all Nations.

¹ See <http://www.waado.org/UrhoboCulture/Religion/Erivwo/HistoryOfChristianity/ChapterOne.html>.

² See http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/crowther5_samuel.html.

What church networks³ exist today?

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
52,600	24,965,000	56,575,000	33,781,000	150,000	-26,617,000	38,999,000	57,451,000

Source: WCD, May 2017

According to WCD statistics, the largest Christian denominations in Nigeria are:

Catholic Church in Nigeria:
 Anglican Church of Nigeria
 Evangelical Churches of West Africa
 Nigerian Baptist Convention
 Apostolic Church of Nigeria
 Celestial Church of Christ
 Fellowship of Churches of Christ of Nigeria
 Assemblies of God in Nigeria.

Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others ⁴
88,906,000	88,403,000	35,200	10,100	13,875,000	1,300	45,400	554,800

Source: WCD, May 2017

Religion plays a pivotal role in Nigerian society. According to WCD data 46.1% of the population is Muslim. Even though Nigeria is constitutionally a secular state with freedom of religion enshrined in the constitution, for nearly 40 years the northern ruling elite have been giving preferential treatment to Muslims and discriminating against Christians. Since 1999, Sharia law has been imposed in 12 northern States to the resentment of Christians, causing a very high level of concern. Also, in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, the Muslim Hausa Fulani herdsmen/settlers are killing and displacing Christians and taking over their farmland. Little has been done to stop the persecution of Christians in these areas.

³ **Orthodox:** Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Believers who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelicals:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalists:** Church members involved in the Pentecostal/Charismatic/Independent Charismatic renewal in the Holy Spirit.

⁴ This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

Notes on the current situation

The impact made by Boko Haram is immense. Boko Haram has carried out many violent attacks against Christians in the northern states that have resulted in widespread killings and the destruction of churches.

The uncertainty and secrecy behind the poor health of President Buhari is creating an environment in which factions and conspiracies are thriving, even leading to rumors of a coup.

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