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Pioneer, Patriot, and Nigerian Nationalist: A Biography of the Reverend M. D. Opara, 1915-1965 (African World)

Felix Ekechi

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This biography of the Reverend M. D. Opara of eastern Nigeria is based on extensive archival, oral, and relevant secondary sources derived from Nigeria, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It presents a fairly comprehensive life history of our subject, known popularly as MD an indomitable missionary pioneer, patriot, and nationalist. Essentially, the biographical study tells an elite history from the bottom-up, which entails the examination of how the village milieu shaped the career of this legendary elite figure in conformity with the emergent Africanist historiography. Furthermore, this book bears marks of originality, insofar as it does not follow the traditional biographical format. Rather, Ekechi organized the narratives around specific themes that best defined the career of the Reverend M. D. Opara. It is noteworthy that MD had hitherto remained in relative historical obscurity, inasmuch as to date, no book dealing with his life, and his multifaceted activities, exists. This pioneering historical study, therefore, seeks to rescue M. D. Opara from the benign neglect of both Nigerian and foreign historians and scholars. Additionally, the book provides a panoramic view of the dynamics of social and political change in the history of Eastern Nigeria, and particularly the Owerri Province from about the post-Second World War up to the post-Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967-70. Special emphasis is given to MD s missionary zeal and fiery, political activism, pioneering initiatives in secondary and teacher training education, and, above all, the democratization of education that remains, as he defined it himself, my great work for Africa. The discussions that focus on politics and the crisis of underdevelopment further throw light into the politics of decolonization, the problems of nation-building, and the vexatious issue of rural development that have remained the bane of Nigeria till date. This multidisciplinary study will appeal to those in African political and social history, intellectual history, mission history, as well as in development studies. Overall, it will be a welcome reading to both undergraduate and graduate students, and will equally serve as a useful companion to specialist audiences, and the general reader.

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