



Oral Sources and Missionary Historiography in Igbo Church History, 1940 – 2012: A Church History With Complexities

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ABSTRACT

The paper takes a look at the problems of oral sources and missionary historiography in Igbo church history, 1940-2012. Findings show that the problems of missionary and African Christian oral informants and historiographers had significant effect on Igbo church history. Primary and secondary means in the collection of data were used in the research procedure.

INTRODUCTION

The reconstruction and interpretation of Igbo Church history produced new theories that characterized academic study of Igbo church historiography as regards religio-cultural, economic, anthropological, sociological and political nationalistic historiography. The influence of the natives on the missionary task, the place of indigenous institutions in the spread of Christianity which the missionary historiographers neglected and which the African historiographers have translated to suggest that Christianity has to be expressed in terms of African religio-cultural milieu devoid of much Gothic influences. It is against this backdrop that Igbo Church historiography began to emerge in the fifties whose aim was to reconstruct and interpret the history of the Christianity in Africa in order to highlight the various misconceptions of African historical image painted in missionary historiography. Kalu (1978) discovered that the current historiography of Christianity in West Africa by African writers has exposed the undignifying and non-biblical dimensions of

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the activities of the missionaries to black people. Igbo and Africa would be used interchangeably.

Conceptual framework

Historiography refers either to the study of the methodology and development of “history” (as a discipline), or to a body of historical work on a specialized topic. In the early modern period, the term historiography tended to be used in a more basic sense, to mean simply “the writing of history.” Historiographer therefore meant “historian,” and it is in this sense that certain official historians were given the title “historiographer Royal,” in Sweden (from 1618), England (from 1660), and Scotland (from 1681).

Furay and Salevouris (1988) define historiography as “the study of the way history has been and is written” the history of the historical writing. Achunike (1996) described history as:

- i. The reconstruction or interpretation of what happened in the human past.
- ii. The activity and the process of enquiry into that past based on rigorous source criticism and striving conscientiously to change myths and legends.
- iii. The interpretation(s) produced by this activity.
- iv. The accumulated body of knowledge (often provisional and at times contradictory) about the past, coming from the historians’ interpretations based on their use of fragmentary and imperfect source materials.
- v. Significant aspects of the past made accessible by historical enquiry and an accumulated body of historical knowledge (documented) and this actually refers to known and documented facts.

History is the study of important past events in a lay man’s view on history. It has been variously defined by people from different works of life. Carr (1961) defined history as a “continuous process of interaction between the history and its facts” (p.30). He views history from the perspective of what the historian is doing to the historical facts and what they are doing also to the historian. In this case the facts determine what the historian will present. Carr’s view on history was influenced by the on going intellectual, academic and technological development of the present age.

Agha (1999) has it that “history is the story of human destiny and the discipline that deals with the development of human societies in time and space” (p.6). Kalu (1996) analyzes the historical reconstruction and interpretation, but has his full emphasis on the historians’ interpretation of the past events. His emphasis was that all histories are written from the historian point of view. We can still conclude that all histories both written and oral can be interpreted from the historian perspective. History is

therefore, the reconstruction and interpretation of the past and contemporary past events, in order to serve some purpose in the present and in the future. This succinctly directs us to the major issue in history which includes the meaning, purpose, interpretation and bias. On the other hand, Church history is seen by him as the property of social history.

Achunike defines oral traditions as formalized accounts of the past and oral histories as non-formalized extempore interviews. The two terms convey more or less the same meaning. Oral history is today generally regarded as “oral tradition.” Afigbo (1983) has given a conventional definition of oral tradition as ‘stories about historical or quasi historical events handed down from generation to generation and undergoing varying degree of conscious and/or embellishments in the process. Actually, oral tradition encapsulates society’s wisdom and achievements in arts, science, technology, health, law, politics and the like, and also its beauty and history. The terms oral tradition and oral history, despite our distinctions, are used interchangeably.

The Igbo: A sketchy ethnography

The Igbo occupy the south – eastern and a part of the south – western territories as well as the mainland section of the present Rivers State of Nigeria. They are among the single large ethnic groups in Nigeria. The River Niger, before it enters the Atlantic Ocean through its network of tributaries which characterize its Delta, divides the Igbo country into two unequal parts, with the greater portion lying in South –Eastern Nigeria. The other triangular portion lies west of the Niger, now Delta State. The Igbo land area falls also within five main vegetation belts namely, mangrove forest, freshwater, swamp forest, rain forest, derived Savanna, and Guinea Savanna. Nwabara (1977) and Nwafor (1973) argue that the Igbo are a compendium of paradoxes, but their greater asset is a copious supply of versatile common-sense and the unique capacity for improvisation.

As regards their religion, occupation, and politics, African traditional religion, agriculture and *umunna* pattern of democracy constitute their way of life. Much stress is laid on healing and purification from different kinds of contamination in the society. Hatred, dissension and frustrations within a group can bring about sickness (Haselbarth, 1976). *Okò nwanta onu, ojukwara chi ya ajuju?* (Before anyone blames someone of misfortune, he should first inquire from the person’s guardian spirit). This proverb and similar ones in Igbo cosmology justify the fact that sometimes, individuals are not responsible for their poverty in any aspect whether economic, political, and physical and the like. Some people are poor because of the activities of their guardian spirits or deities in charge of their societies or even as a result of forefathers’ sins (cf. Amos 5; Gen. 3; Jer. 17:1; Jn 9:1-5 etc). Igbo people are industrious and they hate laziness. An Igbo proverb, “Onye kwe Chi ya kwe” (When a person agrees to do something his guardian spirit agrees too) illuminates how Igbo man disposes himself in his everyday activities to avoid this kind of poverty (cf. 2Thess.3:6-10).

Oral sources clarification model

The use of oral sources in African Church history, according to Philippe (2012), is the view from the mission compound. The question and answer, until recently, has been to write the history of Africa on the basis of the only written documents that were available, that is, documents produced by Westerners or, at best, by Westernized Africans. This explains why, so often, the history of Africa reflects “the view from the district commissioner’s verandah or the mission compound” (Prins, 1992).

First century Jewish culture was what scholars today would call an “orally dominated culture.” It has been widely assumed by form critics to conclude that the early Christian Movement was entirely illiterate and thus that writing played no regulative role in the transmission of oral material about Jesus. Second, it has been unanimously assumed by form critics that oral traditions are not capable of passing on extended narratives, which is one of the reasons many critical New Testament scholars have assumed that the narrative structure in which the various literature forms are found in the gospels was created by the gospel authors themselves.

Oral tradition and oral lore is cultural material and tradition transmitted orally from one general to another. The messages or testimonies are verbally transmitted in speech or song and may take the form, for example, of folktales, sayings, ballads, songs, or chants. In this way, it is possible for a society to transmit oral history, oral literature, oral law and other knowledge across generations without a writing system.

The terms “oral tradition” and “oral history” remain ambiguous because their definitions shift in popular usage. Sometimes, the term oral tradition identifies a body of material retained from the past. Other times we use it to talk about a process by which information is transmitted from one generation to the next. Oral history is more specialized term usually referring to a research method where a sound recording is made of an interview about firsthand experience occurring during the life time of an eye witness (Vansina, 1985 and Lummis, 1992).

Because every culture has passed essential ideas from one generation to another by word of mouth, the serious study of oral tradition spans more than a century (Finnegan, 1992). In the nineteenth century, for example, European folklorists saw orally narrated accounts as disembodied “things” to be collected, much as museum collectors viewed objects of material culture. Folklorists treated oral narratives as cultural artifacts that had survived from earlier periods-as a kind of freeze-dried history-and hoped that these traditions might provide a key to the past. Embedded in an ideology of social evolution, this perspective has serious flaws. At best, E.B. Taylor and Sir James Frazer recognized the intellectual character of oral narrative, albeit treating it as kind of proto-science proto-religion. At worst, their approaches embodied a crypto-racist analysis of a so-called primitive thought.

Durkheim (1915) saw narrative as the glue that (with ritual) helped to bind communities together. People reflect on their oral traditions to make sense of the social order that currently exists. Scholars influenced by Claude Levi-Strauss proposed that oral narratives are not about either past or present, that they are essentially statements about the human mind. Oral narrative has been analyzed both as evidence about the past and as evidence about the social construction of the present. Broadly speaking, oral tradition (like history or anthropology) can be viewed as a coherent, open-ended system for constructing and transmitting knowledge. Ideas about what constitutes legitimate evidence may differ in oral tradition and scholarly investigation, and the explanations are certainly framed differently. Orally narrated accounts about the past explicitly embrace subjective experience.

Oral traditions are historical accounts, teachings, lessons and explanations that have been passed down for centuries, from one generation to the next. Indigenous people are traditionally storytellers. Native oral tradition is, however, difficult to write about academically, appropriately or accurately.

Oral African storytelling is essentially a communal participatory experiences dealing on morals, what is right and good, and what is wrong and evil. Every one in most traditional African society participate in formal and informal storytelling as interactive oral performance, such as in oral arts, music and skills and initiation into full humanities. The use of sources has the potentials to enhance the study of church history in Igboland. They concern what tends to be hidden-the spoken message, fugitive by nature. How is this message transmitted? Specialists of orality distinguish here two approaches and two methodologies.

1. Oral history

Oral history is based on hearsay or eyewitness accounts about events and situations which are contemporary, that is, which occurred during the lifetime of the informants. Oral historians base their work on interviews. They select witnesses and interview them on recent events.

2. Oral traditions

Oral traditions, by contrast, are not contemporary. They have passed from mouth to mouth, for a period of time beyond the lifetime of the informants.

The expression “Oral tradition” applies both to a process and to a product. The products are oral messages based on previous oral messages, at least a generation. Among traditions, Vansina (1985) distinguishes different classes according to the further evolution of the message. A first class consists of memorized messages and within it one distinguishes messages in everyday language (formula, prayer) from messages subject to special language rules (poetry). Memorized traditions behave very differently over time from others. Among the latter, one distinguishes again between formal speech (epic) and everyday language (narrative). Narratives themselves belong to different classes according to the criterion of factuality. Some are believed to be true

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or false, others are fiction. Factual traditions or accounts are transmitted differently-with more regard to faithful reproduction of content-than are fictional narratives such as tales, proverbs, or sayings (Vansina, 1985). The past of pre-colonial societies is mostly known through oral traditions. In one case, a rhyme about a grenadier, they have versions which carry the stable elements back to 1725 (Prins, 1991).

History as an academic discipline tends to rely almost exclusively on written sources. Critical methodology, conventional historians say, primarily applies to archival material. Oral data appear as imprecise and unreliable. Oral sources only come as a second best, when no written evidence is available. Written and oral sources are to one another what the diva is to the understudy. "When writing fails, says Vansina (1985), tradition comes on stage" (p.199).

Oral history, as a distinctive historical movement, only developed by the middle of the 20th century. But as Thompson (1988) pointed out in his book, "The voice of the past," history has always made use of the oral sources. "Oral history is as old as history itself. It was the first kind of history" (p.23). According to Thompson (1988),

By introducing new evidence from the underside, by shifting the focus and opening new areas of inquiry, by challenging some of the assumption and accepted judgments on historians, by bringing recognition to substantial groups of people who had been ignored, a cumulative process of transformation is set in motion. The scope of historical writing is enlarged and enriched; and at the same time its social messages changes. History becomes, to put it simply, more democratic (pp.7-8).

Paul Thompson's vision of a history "from the underside" has great appeal to Igbo and African writers, particularly in the field of Church history. Oral and written sources contribute in a different manner to the writing of history.

Missionary historiography: A clarification model

Some of the common topics in historiography are:

1. Reliability of the sources used, in terms of authorship, credibility of the author, and the authenticity or corruption of the text (cf. sources criticism).
2. Historiographical tradition or framework. Every historian uses one (or more) historiographical traditions such as Marxist, political history or Annales School, "Total history." Understanding the past appears to be a universal human need, and the telling of history has emerged independently in civilization around the world. What constitutes history is a philosophical question. For the purpose of informing future generations about events. Some experts have advised against the tendency to extrapolate trends for historical patterns that do not align with expectations about the future.

The problems associated with oral sources and missionary historiography in Igbo Church history

The first problem with oral evidence is its lack of precision. A written document is, by definition, stable. An informant can give different versions of the same events. Particularly worrying is the lack of precision in chronology. Historians think in serial time, as measured by the calendar and the wrist –watch. But serial time is not the only sort of time that people use particularly in Igbo.

The concept of time in African cosmology is classified into two: potential and actual times. The question of time is of little or no academic concern to African peoples in their traditional life. For them, time is implying a composition of events which have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are immediately to occur. The most significant consequence of this is that, according to traditional concepts, time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present and virtually no future. The linear concept of time in western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinite future is practically foreign to Igbo thinking. The future is virtually absent because events which lie in it have not taken place; they have not been realized and cannot, therefore, constitute time. If, however, future events are certain to occur, or if they fall within the inevitable rhythm of nature; they at best constitute only potential time, not actual time. What is taking place now no doubt unfolds the future, but once an event has taken place, it is no longer in the future but in the present and the past. Actual time is therefore what is present and what is past. It moves “backward” rather than “forward”; and people set their minds not on future things, but chiefly on what has taken place. This time orientation influence governed as it is by the two main dimensions of the present and the past, dominates Igbo understanding of the individual, the community, the church history and the universe which constitutes the five ontological categories mentioned above.

When Africans reckon time, it is for a concrete and specific purpose, in connection with events but not just for the sake of mathematics. Instead of numerical calendars there are what one would call phenomenon calendars, in which the events or phenomena which constitute time are reckoned or considered in their relation with one another and as they take place. For example, the rising of the sun is an event which is recognized by the whole community. It does not matter, therefore, whether the sun rises at 6am or 8am, so long as it rises. Very important things may be said to be very old-or very new –telescoping or elongating, depending upon the context and upon present purposes averred Prins (1991). But in history chronology is essential. Improved interviewing techniques represent a partial answer to the problem.

A second difficulty is the descriptive nature of the oral testimony. The historian’s function is to advance towards a fuller understanding of the past. The informants usually do not share this preoccupation. They are primarily concerned with issues that, from the historian’s points of view, seem

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marginal. They live in their own world and have their own mental categories. This contributes to the richness of their testimony. But personal stories can also fall into insignificance. Oral historians need to be aware of this danger. A good interviewer raises the testimony of an individual informant to the status of historical evidence. The interviewee does not have to be an important figure. He can be an ordinary person.

The third difficulty is the tendency to reconstruct the past. The restructuring of data is the most vexing problem of oral history. Consciously or not, informants often try to embellish the past. They distort their narratives in an effort to justify their past actions post facto.

The fourth difficulty that must be reckoned with is the unconscious use of literary sources. The informants' memory is filtered through subsequent experience. Instead of sharing their experience, they repeat stories read in the newspapers or in any other written source. The written documents, in such a case, are said to feedback oral tradition. "Uncontaminated oral tradition," writes Vansina (1985), "simply does not exist" (p.156). African Church history is faced with the same problem of a relevant accurate and all-embracing history of the Christian communities in Africa. According to Denis (2012), one could summarize the limitations of the existing Church history literature in the following way viz:

i. Overemphasis on institutional aspects of Christian life

Most writers are excellent at writing, sometimes with great details, the history of institutions, arrival of missionaries, establishment of Synodal or Episcopal structures, building of churches, schools and hospitals, conflicts of jurisdiction or area of influence, ecumenical endeavours, among others. At the same time, they tend to write the history of particular denominations, churches or religious congregations. The missionary historiographers narrate also the abolition of slave trade and killing of twins, the destruction of long juju of Arochukwu and its pagan tendencies. Cross-denominational phenomena are often overlooked. Very little attention is paid to the daily life of the believers. We rarely know how the social, political and economic context impacts the life of the church. Absent from the history books is also the popular culture of the Christian communities namely family prayer, grass-roots liturgy, traditional ceremonies, processions, funerals and so on.

ii. Outsider's versus insider's points of view

The same writers rely, sometimes exclusively, on evidence produced by European or American missionaries or people trained by missionaries. This is a consequence of the primacy given to written sources. The indigenous point of view is ignored or distorted. Considerable attention is given to the white missionaries' whereabouts and to the development of the settler churches. The indigenous people are seen as the object, rather than the subject of evangelization. Little is said about their contribution to the mission of the church and the way they incorporated and reconstructed the Christian heritage to make it acceptable from the point of view of traditional culture.

The great bulk of the archives reflect what Scott (1990) calls the public transcript, that is, the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate. The written sources document what happens “on stage,” that is, how bosses and workers, masters and slaves, missionaries and converts, leaders and ordinary citizens interact. The hidden transcript, namely what the people in hegemonic position on the one hand and the dominated on the other hand usually hide, escapes attention.

Uncritical writers do not realize that, by only paying attention to the public transcript, they miss half of the story. Like any social group, the Christian communities experience situations of hegemony. Church history writers are particularly prone to espouse the views of the dominant elites. They ignore the resistance practices of the indigenous people within the churches themselves. Such practices do take place in the church but they are usually concealed. They take the form of subtle and ambiguous gestures of defiance. It is only in extreme circumstances that conflicts become public. When this happens, as in the case of the formation of *aladura*, Ethiopian or any other independent churches at the end of the 19th century, wrong interpretations are often given because the dynamics of hegemony and resistance are misunderstood.

The activities of the handful of ardent converts among them Nwoye Okonkwo in Umuofia and Mbanta as recorded by Achebe (1984) were not recorded by any western historiographer. We saw in these converts in their early years struggling for a footing in a town bound by age-long traditions, taboos and expectations and with stiff opposition like any other community in Igboland even in this contemporary generation. Some of these converts even served as interpreters without which it would not have been possible for the white man to communicate the gospel to the Igbo people. In Umuaro, these converts along side the missionaries and district officers have to struggle for authority between them and Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu (a deity).

The western or American church historians did not acknowledge how many of their converts especially liberated slaves and outcaste helped to propagate the gospel to the hinterland and used also Christianity to create identity for themselves which their society denied them. Many of them are priests, academics, business moguls and knights in their respective churches and communities. The missionaries who introduced the Christianity in Nigeria were interested in battling within their literatures on their itineraries, achievements and to a greater extent their failures (Nmah, and Nwadiolor, 2012). They did not historically put the anthropology or ethnography of the Igbo people into consideration. This brought them into conflict with the Igbo nation especially the greater number of Igbo Christians and academics who could not understand the activities of these Western and American missionaries.

Nwosu (1994) citing Ogbu Kalu described the whole missionary historiography as uncritical, romantic and propagandist in nature. He stated that the contribution of Africans to the missionary enterprise was neglected.

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For the missionaries, the social change the people's pattern of response to the missionary propaganda, the rate and pattern of missionary expansion among others were all explained in terms of the activities of the man within the mission house, with particular reference to the European missionaries. At the opening of the last century, missionaries were beginning to write the histories of their respective denominations in order to justify the missionary incursion into Nigeria (Nwosu, 1993). This historiography is sermonistic and hortatory, characterized by an unbridled euphuism on the missionary intervention of what he did or did not do.

Some of the historiographies such as Freed Dodd's *Tales of the African wilds* published in 1811 and F.D. Walker's two volumes *Black Continent* (1923) in which both the authors were infatuated with the same popular imagination about Africa as dark continent, Black rivers, Black Man of the Nile, Ethiopians or people with burnt faces and black hostile heathen. In his book, "Invasion for God" (1944), by a Methodist missionary called H.G. Brewer who described his invasion into the interior from Okigwe to the northern most parts of the Igbo country amidst exaggerated suffering and occasional blood shed. Fr. Joseph P. Jordan's Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria (1994) is a calculated propaganda and whitewash for this vibrant Roman Catholic Priest made to caricature Igbo traditional religion. Jacob Richards in his book, *Cannibals were my friends* (1957), in the same vain described the Africans as cannibals to state that the latter type of writing Christian history may earn the author honour in both secular and ecclesiastical circles in Europe. But here in Africa it evoked the wrath of the African nationalist historians who know the pictures were over painted and exaggerated.

It is against this background that African church historiography began to emerge in the sixties whose aim was to reconstruct and interpret the history of the church in Africa in order to rectify the wrong conceptions of African historical image painted in missionary historiography. The pioneering works of Ajayi (1969) and Ayandele (1966) are excellent books outlining respectively the racist attitudes of the whites to the first generation Christians in Nigerian; and the socio-political effects of missionary activities in Nigeria.

This reconstruction and interpretation of African church history produced new themes that characterized the religio-cultural nationalism of the period under review. This includes the role of the traditional rulers and native evangelists, the role of the indigenous religion in the African church history, the peoples' traditional worldview and its influence on the missionary task, the place of indigenous institutions in the spread of Christianity which the historiography translated to suggest Christianity has been expressed in terms of African culture.

Ajayi (1969), *Christian missions in Nigeria: the making of a New Elite 1841-1891*, examines the socio-economic and political consequences of the new elite produced by missionary education. Ayandele (1966), *missionary impact on modern Nigeria* (1966), extol the heroism and nationalism of those Nigerians who recognized the political dimension of the missionary

enterprise and thus offered resistance. Ayandele demonstrated also nationalist spirit in his book, *Holy Johnson: The father of African nationalism* (1970).

Isichei (1983), *A History of Nigeria*, discusses many successful non-military responses of the Igbo to colonial aggression in Igboland and the role of the *dibia* (the medicine men). There are many other African historiographers who wrote to correct the wrong impression the western historiographers created. The historiographers included Idowu (1973), *Towards An indigenous Church*; Babalola (1988), *Christianity in West Africa*; Ekechi (1971), *Missionary enterprise and rivalry in Igboland*; Temu (1972), *British Protestant mission*; Kalu (1978), *Christianity in West Africa: The Nigerian story*, and many others that are not referred to in our our research work.

According to Idowu (1973), the time is now overdue for the church in Nigeria in particular to look at her self; to examine her own soul. She is being called upon to justify her existence in the country; to answer in precise terms the question as to whether her purpose in Nigeria is not to serve as an effective tool of imperialism, a veritable means of softening up Nigerians for the purpose of convenient exploitation by the Europeans. Further still, there is the question as to whether what we have in Nigeria today is in fact Christianity, and not in fact only transplantations from a European cult the various ramifications of which are designated Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Roman Catholics, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventists, and so forth. These various questions are all of a piece: they arise from the basic question as to whether Christianity is not, after all, a European institution which has no beneficial relevance for Nigerians, but which has nevertheless been imposed upon them as an engine of colonial policy by their European overlords.

Some of the invaluable heritage bequeathed to the nations in Africa by these African scholars included the translation of the Bible into various African languages, so that the language of evangelism would be spoken in clear accents instead of commending the Saviour to Africans in strange tongues, the evolving of African theology; liturgy; dress and vestments. Evangelism has certainly failed where some Africans call themselves Christians, set up edifices where they congregate for worship, and yet cannot say from their hearts and in their own words whom Jesus is, what he has done and is doing for them corporately and individually. And what he means to them as the absolute Lord of life-the whole of life –within the context of the world in which they live.

While such a formula like the Apostles' Creed or a book of formulas like the Church Catechism, may have its intrinsic value, it is certain that such a value can be realized only when the articles of faith are learnt and repeated with understanding and the truth which they convey is appropriated intelligently. Otherwise, our congregations are just another sample of the parrot- like or robot- like worshippers of the prophet Isaiah's description (*Isaiah 29: 13*), or those whom St Paul describes as "holding the form of religion, but denying

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its power” (2 Tim. 3:5). As regards liturgy, it should be seen within the African context as people’s way of approaching God in worship; a means of expressing themselves, especially in a congregational setting, before God and of assuring themselves of communion with him. Spiritual suitability for Africans are not to be found in the Anglican liturgy, or in the Methodist recession of it according to the Book of offices, as it is imparted intact into Africa by the missionaries. When hymns, psalms, or canticle are translated from English into Nigerian languages and then sung to European tunes, then we often find ourselves attaining the limit of cultic atrocity (Idowu, 1973). Music is a part of everyday life in Africa Christian songs, especially those composed by African song-writers in keeping with the rhythmic style and the pentatonic scale of most African music, have enriched the services and greatly enhanced the diffusion of the gospel.

Falk (1997), a missionary, narrated how the missionaries were sent by Portuguese and British governments to explore Africa as pathfinders for early colonization. While the Portuguese and the British were vying for a monopoly of the Zambezi River area, the French and the British suspiciously watched each other on the Zanzibar, Madagascar, and Mauritius islands. The Germans, the French, King Leopold of Belgium, and the British carefully observed the political situation at Zanzibar and on the coast opposite Zanzibar. These colonial masters formed an association which served as an intelligence agency, establishing posts at strategic intervals across Central Africa to promote exploration and civilization on the continent. Leopold was the president of the association.

Another interesting foreign historiographer who portrayed Africa as depot of kingdom of Satan is Baur (2005) in his book, 2000 years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History. Citing basic tenet of Augustinian view of history in Africa as a fight between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, hence missionaries saw the fight against paganism as a fight against Satan, and traditional religion simply as idolatry. Its sacrifices were adoration of Satan, to be fought as Satan himself.

This was due to two misconceptions: on the one hand there was the unfortunate but quite general European prejudice that Africans were a primitive people without religion; on the other hand it had become generally accepted in Europe that magic and all spirits were devilish. Consequently the missionaries, not knowing anything about ancestor and fertility cults, or the African distinction between protective and harmful magic and between medicine man and witch, rejected all and everything as Satan’s service. Hence all fetishes had to be burnt or buried. As a result the medicine men became their great adversaries, to be pursued mercilessly until they submitted. This ruthless attempt at rooting out all superstitions can only be explained by another European axiom: “There is no part with the devil”, (Baur, 2005, p.66). The missionaries regarded also customary marriages as concubine.

Idowu (1991) described this missionary conception of African traditional religion as “errors of terminology” (p. 108). To him, the anthropological or sociological use of the words “primitive”, “savage” and

“native” have been defined on the grounds that it only refer to that which is adjudged to be nearer in behaviour or pattern to the original with reference to the human race or culture. It stands at the opposite end of the pole from “civilized”. It is native since it is an indigenous religion.

Casely Hayford and Wilmot Blyden, according to Nwosu (1993), were the expression of Christianity in African culture, and the founding of African churches. The themes of suffering, courage, and bravery of the early missionaries serve as the backdrop of African hostility which appeared to be the staple food of missionaries’ historiography. Kalu (1978) observed that the recent historiography of Christianity in West Africa by African writers has exposed the underrating and non- biblical dimensions of the activities of the missionaries to black people.

The objective of the authors was to resuscitate the battered iconography of past African nation states and by so doing acknowledge the activities of the heroes- the black nationalists without who the positive missionary endeavors would have failed and the cultures that produced those heroes. African scholars tried to analyze profoundly on the negative missionary attitudes on the people’s culture, religion, economic, education, and coupled with the colonial aggression, their opposition to Africa leadership in mission Church and their wrong historiography about Nigeria and Africa per se. Baeta (1968) in his article, Introductory Review: Facts and problems, agrees with Onunwa(1991) that the missionary historiography galvanized African nationalism.

CONCLUSION

This research work examined the problems of oral sources and missionary historiography in Igbo Church history which in turn gave rise to African Church nationalistic historiography. The African historiography reflects a desire for liberation from the oppressive paternalism and fraternity of some western and American missionaries. It poses for Igbo people and Africa at large the vision of a new order of relationships free from the injustices and incongruities of foreign institution and domination. In analyzing the problems of these Christian oral informants and historiographers from the Europe- America and Africa, one will discover some similarities and dissimilarities in these schools of thought.

In conclusion, we deduce the whole research work by stating with special emphasis that the challenges of the missionary and African Christian oral informants and historiographers as having had significant impact on Igbo Church historiography.

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