Trends and Patterns in African Church Historiography: From Antiquity to Present

Kanayo Nwadialor
Department of Religion and Human Relations
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Ghana
kl.nwadialor@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

An easy assumption that African Church historiography is straightforward without branches and phases is incorrect. The science of Church history in Africa is rather uncertain, fluid and in the process of transition. The pattern and strategies in missionary expansion changes vastly through time, so is the pattern of African responses. Quite often, Church history in Africa tends to be understood in terms of what the missionaries did or continue to do. Sight is often lost of the contributions of native agents in the expansion of the gospel in Africa. Equally neglected is the fate of Christianity in the post-missionary period in Africa when the vestiges of missionary period have nurtured the debates on indigenization, moratorium, Church unity and ecumenism. This task of creating new structures in African Church produced new concerns for the Church and new perspectives in her history. Closely related to this is the emergence of new forms of Christian expression. The Independent Church movement is not actually new. Rather they characterize an important African contribution to Christianity. Their emphasis on the charismata correlates with African spirituality as well as the spirituality of the New Testament. The Independent Churches have splintered, grown very rapidly and permeated mainline Churches, drumming, healing, fasting, reliance on spiritual gifts and so on, are now regular features of worship. The tasks of the African Church historian, therefore, include the study of these new religious trends as forms of the continuing revelation of God in the African context. Church historiography in Africa, therefore, has come a long way. The contribution of this present research, therefore, is the articulation of the trends and patterns in doing Church history in African. The paper has presented a balanced view of African Church historiography, not necessary as the record of past events in the Church, but as an interpretation of the meaning of Christ in their midst.

Keywords: Trends, Patterns, African, Church, Historiography.
Introduction

One of the important currents in the life of the Church in Africa is a growing interest in Church historiography. Admittedly, the incidence differs from country to country but most interests can be traced to some common sources. Furthermore, African Church historiography is marked with variations as regards opinions and presentations from various categories of historians with each category betraying a particular bias that imaged African Christianity either as God’s intervention to redeem Africans from the citadel of Satan through the agency of Euro-American missionaries who sacrificed the comfort of their countries to preach Christianity and civilization to the benighted Africans, or a genre of history that sees African Christianity as an outcome of the combined efforts of Europeans and African agents but even more of an African initiatives and zeal. Kalu (1993) enumerated four categories of missionaries which inevitably suggest the existence of various forms and patterns of record of their apostolic works. There were those who nursed the fellowship, formulated policies and appointed missionaries, but were not necessary present in the mission fields. This category he called Missionary 0 (M.0). There were also those who were engaged in cross-cultural mission such as the British C.M.S. missionaries and the Irish Roman Catholic missionaries who undertook to evangelize Igboland and else were in Africa. This group belongs to the category of Missionary 1 (M.1). There were still those who undertook to preach the gospel afield but within the same culturally homogenous zone, like the ex-slaves who took the gospel to different parts of West Africa from Sierra-Leone and Liberia. This group constitutes the category of Missionary 2 (M.2). And finally, there were those who evangelized contiguous areas like the native agents of the missions who served in their local environments. Such native agents included men of note and influence who used their personal charisma to attract their relatives to the gospel. Some were lay converts who, acting individually, carried the gospel message to the hinterlands. Others were the interpreters whose ability to bridge the communications gap was commendable. Some included the catechists, evangelists, teachers and preachers who gave full-time service to the missionary work. Yet others were noble patrons who invited the missionaries to their towns and housed them; they make up the category of missionary 3 (M.3). All were engaged in mission and all were missionaries. All writings emanating from M0 to M3 missionaries privileged different images of missionary enterprise and African response to Christianity. This fact alone calls for a wide range of lens in capturing the images in their different historiographies.

This matter is confounded further by the close connection between the nature of records and the nature and dynamics of missionary structures. Put simply, the way in which a group of missionaries organized themselves would decide on the type of sources or records produced. Other determinants are polity, policy and strategy, personnel and material resource capabilities and range of operation. It is against this background that this study has undertaken to comb through the trends and patterns of these historiographies for the image of Africa which they portray with the view to capturing a comprehensive and balanced view of African Church history.

The proper framework, therefore, for examining these genres of literature will be in manifold form. Firstly are the writings generated in Euro-American mission bases and organizations and from those engaged in cross-cultural mission, which are the M0 and M1
categories. This is the external perception or image. Secondly is the writings emanating from the inside, by those engaged in M2 and M3 categories of missionaries. This is internal interpretation and reconstruction. Then thirdly is the materials generated from critical analyses of those who were not missionaries but were engaged and still engage in reconstructing local Church history. This is the dialogical pattern of the study of the history of missionary enterprise and African response to Christianity. Thus, in this pattern of the study of Church history in Africa, every period, every aspect of culture, every community, every class of people is an ingredient. However, it must be acknowledged here that in dealing with an African-wide Church history, it would be impossible to deal with each of the myriad forms of Christianity or with every community. It is for this that this paper has undertaken an ecumenical large terms about the presence of Christianity in Africa, in which case Christianity in Africa is examined in the light of religion, politics, economy and cultures of the society in a holistic form. The theme of religious encounter which has become topical in recent times, the history of the Church as a story of an encounter between two viable cultures and world views, all make up this ecumenical approach to African Church historiography.

Conceptual Clarifications

Church historiography refers not simply to history written by Christians, not to historical studies of the Church and theology, but to a historiography which itself examines the histories of people’s societal structures and patterns of life according to the sort of insights and values provided by a Christian view of history, the world and the why of created reality. It is a means of showing the unique Christian perspective of reality. Church historiography interprets facts from an understanding of what God was doing in Jesus in each peculiar environment or ecosystem. According to Kalu (1998):

Church historiography involves self-conscious reflection on foundational things in order that the vocation of the historians may more readily be transformed by the motivation of the gospel and that the product of their labour may carry implicitly the mark of the gospel. (p. 13).

Church historiography imposes a certain underlying meaning which forces theological perception of historical events. It subjects our understanding of the past to the ultimate reason for creation as well as the future of creation. It is in this underlying conceptual scheme which lays the difference between Church history and other genre of history.

Church history further refers to a scientific study of history with a religious or theological bias and goal. The root is in the Genesis myth of creation. The implication is that human history consists of the outworking of divine creation and continued revelation of God in human lives, human situations and nature. Church history, therefore, is the story of God’s presence in human communities and the responses to divine love in time perspectives and according to cultural patterns and age.
African Church historiography, therefore, is not merely the story of the role of white missionaries in cross-cultural missions, in which case one might be in danger of assuming that Euro-American initiatives dominates the history of Christianity in Africa, and that the African role has merely been one of passive receptivity. It is rather the study of the past and present experiences of the people with the gospel, both during and at the end of the missionary period. This genre of African Church historiography exposes the extent to which Christian evangelism was a joint Afro-European undertaking, in which Africans often held the dominant role. Gray (1968) holds that:

Not only did African ministers and evangelists supply a leadership and continuity which a rapid mortality prevented most Europeans from providing, but African Christian traders and craftsmen were also often effective pioneers far beyond the radius of European missionaries, Christian nuclei and arousing a demand for teachers and an interest in their message. (p. 26).

This genre of historiography triumphantly recalled from near-oblivion the achievements and initiative of Africans in missionary enterprise in the continent, extending to the study of new dimensions in African Christianity.

Historiographical Traditions of African Church

Institutional Approach to Writing Christian History in Africa

The first stage in African Church historiography was the institutional approach. It was African Church history emanating from missionary base and was often written by missionary leaders and policy makers who sent missionaries to Africa but did not necessarily embark on mission works themselves. This genre of historiography assumes that Christian history begins when a particular missionary arrives in a community, sets up shops and builds up a congregation or a Church. From that point, Church history was about what the missionaries did for the vertical and horizontal growth of the institution, the pattern of responses and the impact of change agent in the communities. However, a number of problems arise from the institutional understanding of Christian history. It reinforces the notion of Christian history as an extension of salvation history. The Church is portrayed as the custodian of saving grace. This is a short step from the exclusivist clause, “there is no salvation outside the Church”. The Church is idealized, and a dichotomy is created between the institution and the people. Nevertheless, to state the central premise, the organizational structure does not constitute the total character of the Church, even though it is undeniable that the Church operates as an institutional organization. Thus, Church history is more than the history of institutional structure. It is the story of the pilgrim people of God and their experiences of God redeeming grace in the midst of their existence in various cultural and ecological milieus. We must be recalled to Livingstone’s assertion, as preserved by Kalu (1988) that already Africa is God’s. God did not wait for the missionary to bring Him to Africa. The missionary found Him in every African village.

Another future of institutional approach to African Church historiography is that they detail the labours of nurturing the message and the level of success. The ulterior motives might be to
preserve and record, boost morale and material support, provide entertainment or build up the ego of the author. The motivation may also be evangelical or the work may carry the hidden agenda of showing how Europeans have born the white man’s burden which manifest destiny laid on them (Kalu, 1988).

A worse effect of the institutional approach is that it supports denominationalism. Many contemporary parish histories are forms of denominational propaganda. They make it difficult for Africans to see themselves as Africans instead of products of warring confessional groups in Europe. It is in this context that the nationalists perceived the Church as the handmaid of disruptive foreign agents. This position has been strengthened by the exposure of the sad history of Church cooperation with oppressive regimes and the increasing tendency towards leftist ideology in the politics of liberation. Kalu (1993) intentioned that the missionaries nailed their colours to the most of colonial rule, sang about the glorious security provided by government and discovered theological bases for their sense of moral superiority over Africans-clerical or lay.

Again, the institutional approach to Christian history imprints the image of God as a stranger to the African’s world. The argument is that the gospel cannot be indigenous to Africa in the true meaning of the world because the arrival of the missionaries could be dated. So the gospel is imported.

Another feature of institutional approach to Christian history in Africa is the biblical image of the Church which tends to pay more attention to a people (the white people) who have discovered something precious and are joyfully sharing, proclaiming and publishing the good news. Such history is written as if Christian history operated in closed plane with no underlying meaning and lesson. Thus, they fail to relate the history of the Church to the secular political, economic and social realities of the day. Their approach to the question of religious change has been a partial one. They have concentrated on its outward manifestation in the form of change of religious adherences, registered in the growth of station society and Christian congregations. Without discarding purely religious motives we have to try to define the role played by African material and political needs and the missionary offer in this respect. This is particularly so because in the African world, the religious is inextricably intertwined with the political, economic, ecological and other social forces. Therefore, there must be a balanced concern with the inward level of the religious as well as the outward level of political and economic interest, because religious expression as opposed to experience operates within cultural forms. The explanation for religious change must consider both purely religious factors as well as the ecological, political, cultural and economic factors. The reactions of African communities to Christianity were influenced by a host of these factors. Thus, Christian history is more than the history of the institutional structure. It is a people’s history of their perception of God’s saving grace in the midst of their struggles for survival.

Thus, this genre of literature betrays the fact that most practitioners were not trained historians. Often time Church bodies roll out self-justificatory, confessional histories which are myopic and churchy. These works pay no regard to the cannons of historiography and ignore both secular history and the realities of cultural contexts. Official writers who must win an
official nod before publication are the least likely to be critical. They are so narrative that they lack interpretations welded to larger issues of significance.

**The Imperial Tradition/Missionary Historiography**

The second stage in the writing of African Christian history is the imperial tradition, whose main feature was its European orientation and approach. Very close to the imperial tradition is a genre dubbed missionary historiography. This refers to histories of missions written by European missionaries and their protégés. The missionaries were the first Europeans to study, observe and record African history, culture and languages.

Missionary historiography, according to Nwosu (1993), “claims that the benighted people of the citadel of Satan, under the perpetual clutches of the devil, needed to be liberated by the active presence of the gospel of Christ” (p. 65). Serious attempts were made in this genre of literature to show how God helped the white missionaries to accomplish this difficult task of bringing the gospel to “hostile” indigenes. Such books as Fred Dodd’s *Tales of African Wilds* (1911), F.D Walker’s two volumes, *Call of the Black Continent* (1992) and the *Romance of the Black River*; H.G. Brewer’s *Invasion of God* (1944); J.P. Jordan’s *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria* (1949); Jacob Richard’s *The Cannibals are my Friends* (1957), are few examples of this genre of literature. The pictures of African hostility and the pre-eminent position of the missionaries in the evangelization enterprise were recurring decimal in missionary historiography.

The 19th century missionaries not only subscribed to the imperialist idea but actually saw it as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Despite their noble intentions, they wrote African history in terms of the attitudes and theories current in their time, such as the Hermetic theory. To focus on the Anglicans, for instance, there was a certain degree of unanimity by all concerned—whether the council at the home base or infielders—that Igboland was a difficult mission field which was more or less intriguing because of the character of the people.

Equally eye-catch- ing was the evidence of human sacrifice which along with mosquito turned the terrain into the white man’s grave. In his report for 1881, Archdeacon Henry Johnson said of Onitsha, as recorded by Kalu (1993) thus:

> The time has not much gone by, if at all, when a native of Onitsha, in quarrelling with his companion, would say to him in a tune of superiority, what do you mean to tell me? I have killed about six men in my time, how many have you killed? It is true; the feathers on his cap prove that the boast is not an idle one. (pp. 14-15).

All these reports were carried in the missionary intelligencer, a fund raising journal which circulated among subscribers to the missionary endeavour. They aroused curiosity and yielded material resources for combating such atrocities.

The image of a barbaric culture purveyed by an aggressive enterprising race prevailed in missionary historiography. The missionaries accepted the image of Africa painted by secular
authority and her anthropologists. As self-acclaimed, self–righteous experts, they paid little attention to African oral traditions and relied on guess-work, hearsay and excerpts from other missionaries, explorers and colonists. These accounts are usually suffused with missionary ideology, based on missionary sources and designed to tell the story of how a particular missionary or a group crossed the culture barriers with the gospel. Missionary ideology tended to share the scientific racism of the 19th century, thus, missionary historiography is often hagiographic, triumphalistic and disdainful of indigenous non-European cultures. A premium was upon distortion and degradation of receiving cultures. One then gets the impression that they were portraying African history to prove that the African had no civilization and that he needed Christianity and Europeanization (Hofmeyr, 1988). Like colonial historiography, the aim of missionary historiography was to justify the missionary incursion to Africa.

The missionary approach to the concern of African Church historiography was a partial one. In most cases, missionary historiography tended to ignore the roles of the African agents, such as men of local prominence who on their own initiatives invited and patronized the missionaries; interpreters and wards who influenced expansion; converts, including traders, acting in groups or individually to use their social powers in aid of missions; catechists, evangelists, Church elders and school teachers who bore the brunt of running new parishes; poorly paid and poorly trained; congregations which pioneered expansion through evangelical crusades to neighbouring areas and paid for the upkeep of ministers; local communities who built and maintained Church and school infrastructure; charismatic, prophetic figures who quickened the pace of Christianization in their brief careers.

The role of those engaged in cross-cultural mission in spreading the gospel and message of salvation is undeniable. However, the idealization of missionary agents and structures distorted the history of the Church. The irony with missionary historiography was that the authors failed to see that Africans were the real agents who spread Christianity.

Many of them also betrayed a lack of concern with methodology and secular history. In missionary historiography, archival sources constituted the most important source of information. However, the use of these sources is the bane of African Church history, because the myriads of missionary bodies from far-flung nationalities with their jealous secretive attitudes have made the data extremely fragmented. Denominational histories have turned into important sources of data gathering. They were the only means of peeping into many closed archives. But their dangers are palpable. A historian may slice and hack the sources to fit his interpretation. Only insiders may know of the distortions. Cost of access also deters research. Archival sources have been lost in wars, accidents and thefts. Some missionaries stole diaries and other papers en route home. Moreover, there are few concerted efforts to collect, house, and document fragments of archival sources. Consolidation of archival sources constitutes the first challenge in African Church historiography.

Thus, with eyes closely fixed on archival sources, they pose non-relevant, non-creative questions and fail to relate the history of the Church to the secular political, economic and social realities of the day. It is as if Church history operated in closed plane with no underlying meaning.
and lessons. This failure bred reflection and the willingness to dialogue with the cultural contexts. Unburdened by concerns of time frame and the drudgery of facts, nationalist historiographers waded into the matter.

**African Nationalist Historiography**

Christianity in Africa has had more than its share of the attention of western writers, including throngs of social scientists and their disciples. It has largely concentrated on the outward manifestation in the form of religious adherence, registered in the growth of station society and Christian congregations. This impression resulted in the emergence, towards the end of the 19th century, of an African nationalist historiography which differs from other traditions in that it lays claim to being a national history. This new genre of African Church history endeavours to redress the imbalance and the partisan character of much of the source of materials that adorns the missionary historiography. The decided change towards this new African Church historiography came with the movement towards independence as Africans began to experience their history as a struggle against European imperialism. They rejected the European appraisal of their past and demanded a new orientation and improved educational facilities to effect this reappraisal. Thus, nationalist historiography is a type of African Church history that was designed to give Africa a strong voice, enable her to recover self-identity and serve as an empowerment for the future.

Nationalist historiographers availed themselves of certain non-religious literature to gather facts about African Church history. Indeed, novelists and sociologists have made more contributions than historians in redressing the sad situation of European presence in Africa. Kalu (1988) argues that the Heinemann based African writers series has a number of novels which have focused on the religious change agent in the encounter between Europeans and Africans: Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and *Arrow of God* (1964), Mongo’s *Poor Christ of Bomba*, Ngugi’s *The River Between* (1965), Munonye’s *The Only Son* (1966), Nzekwu’s *Blade Among the Boys* (1962) and Echewa’s *The Land Lords* (1976), are only but few examples of such non-religious literature that laid the foundation for the emergence of African Church historiography.

Ogunsanya (1984) intentioned that “the main aim for the emergence of African Church historiography was to tell the story of the establishment and growth of Christianity in Africa from African point of view stressing the roles played by the African peoples and their indigenous cultures in the Christianization enterprise” (p. 12). This shift of emphasis from missionaries and their structures to indigenous agents and the traditional culture produced new themes that characterized the religio-cultural nationalism of the period. The role of traditional rulers and native evangelists, the role of the indigenous religion in the story; the peoples’ traditional world view and its influence on the missionary task, the place of indigenous institutions in the spread of Christianity, all were the concern of nationalist historiography.

Initially it was no more than a variation on the missionary tradition. The exponents of this tradition were Christian intellectuals, educated at mission schools and dependent on missionary
printing press. Most of them were ministers and teachers, who had become psychologically alienated from African culture and thus from themselves. They shared the universalism and utopianism of the missionary tradition and believed that through the Christian religion, education and industrial schools they could elevate their black brethren to the level of civilized Christianity. Their historiography was motivated by intellectualism and religiosity. They set out to fill the gap created by the missionary tradition and point out the roles of African agents of the missions. They were concerned with unsung native agents, while cultural revivalism is a predominant motif of their historiography. The main thrust of their theses was to emphasize that Africans were the real agents who spread Christianity because the existing accounts were generally partisan, uncritical and biased in favour of expatriate missionaries. Local African missionaries (teachers, catechists and evangelists) who bore the heat of the grass-root evangelization in the towns and villages received scanty and token references in missionary reports, journals and diaries. These accounts give all the credit for the missionary successes to expatriate missionaries. These accounts sparked off a new interest among African historians to redress the imbalance and partisan character of much of the source materials that adorn the missionary archives.

Another significant feature of African nationalist historiography is the use of oral sources. Since the renaissance on African historiography in the late 1950, the validity of oral sources has been accepted. Historians have held the methodology and a good number have produced useful works on the matter. According to Ajayi (1965), by the late 1940s, African research students were insisting that African history must be the history of Africans, not of Europeans per se in Africa, that local records and historical traditions must be used to supplement European metropolitan archives, in short, that oral traditions must be accepted as valid material for historical reconstruction. Even in the studies of European impact on African societies and cultures, where European archival material still remains the major source, this source should be checked and supplemented by oral tradition, material artifacts and other sources of history in Africa. The Church historian would find oral sources as important as oral theology in dealing with predominantly non-literate societies. Use of these sources would enable a more holistic approach to Christian history. This is particularly so because it is still possible to obtain abundant and reliable information from numerous and informed eye-witnesses. There are many elders who were young men and women when the first Christian missionary entered their villages.

Furthermore, a careful study of the social, political and intellectual environment into which Christianity entered in Africa will yield a good deal of useful and corroborative evidence. Thus, oral traditions, according to Agbodike (2004) are not only mere recountal by word of mouth of the remembered history of a people, it is also a presentation, in various forms, of the ideals and values of the society and of the ideological and spiritual patrimony handed down by the ancestors whose memory the present generation cherishes and reveres. Even in literate societies, no small part of culture is transmitted in conversation and by practical example; hence the perennial and nagging problem of studying the totality of the culture of any people, at any point in time, by mere reading of books and documents.
From the start, Christian missionaries tended to ignore the African traditional society and culture. The prevailing social systems and religious ideas and practices were deprecated and rejected without due examination. However, with access to more and better information, the shortcomings of the missionary historiography were overcome. Hence, Achunike (2002) insisted that oral history is particularly valuable to Christian history in Africa since a great part of Africa was happily evangelized after 1900. He further suggested that since some people who interacted with the colonialists and white missionaries are still alive with us, Church historians, therefore, must hurry before these old people are no more since some important information about Christianity can still be obtained from them.

Contemporary Patterns in African Church Historiography

The story of what the Euro-American missionaries and African agents did and did not do adorned the genre of both the missionary and African nationalist historiography. However, there is a new and more contemporary dimension in the study of African Church history which rebel against both missionary historiography and nationalist approach to the study of African Church history. This pattern is dialogical in methodology and ecumenical in approach. This approach rejects the easy condemnation of non-Christian religious and spiritual traditions, and in order to respond more emphatically to the concerns of the people of Africa, the approach emphasizes a clear profile of the African peoples before their encounter with Christianity, a clear understanding of the missionary-bases and their mentalities, and an identification of the varying response to it. It is a pattern of African Church historiography that tends to weave the activity of the Church into the fabric of the life of African communities. Indeed, there must be a balanced concern with the inward level of the religious as well as the outward level of political and economic interest, because religious expression as opposed to religious experience operates within cultural forms.

Additionally, this historiography suggests that Christianity should be expressed in terms of African culture. To this, Casely (cited by Nwosu, 1993) maintains that “the Christianity of Europe and America, with its oppressive hierarchy, its race prejudices and limitations, its pecuniary burdens and exactions, its injurious meddling in the harmless customs of alien peoples; is not the Christianity of Christ” (p. 67). The crux of the matter was the extent to which Christianity will be made an African religion.

Kalu (1988) insist that “African Church historiography starts with African religions and material cultures not simply as an introductory background but because God had created those communities in His own image. Hurling derogatory epithets at them is to regard what God has created as unclean and to disregard the force of the persistence of African religiosity among Christians.

Closely related to this is the fact that the explanation for religious change in Africa must consider both the purely religious factors as well as the ecological, political, cultural and economic factors. The reactions of African communities to Christianity were influenced by lots of these factors. The key questions in African Church history, according to Kalu (1988), therefore, are why and how Africans abandoned the gods of their fathers for Christianity. The
answer cannot come from looking at the straight religious aspects of Christianity. However, without discarding purely religious motives for conversion to Christianity, ecumenical approach to African Church historiography tries to define the role played by African material and political needs and the missionary offer in this regard. It further takes cognizance of the materialistic or instrumentalist root of African conversion to Christianity. It studies extra-religious motivations for conversion such as education, status, wealth and jobs, for escape from colonial violence or for refuge from traditional bondage such as slavery, caste ostracism or ritual murder. Hence, Ayandele (1966) is of the opinion that in statistical terms and in the desire to appropriate all the material and social opportunities that the missionary enterprise could afford, it was the African who have responded most enthusiastically to Christianity. Conversion in this sense was an instrument for gaining some benefits. The mass conversion missionary strategies intensified these possibilities.

There is also the functional and structural pattern of African religiosity. Ecumenical approach to African Church historiography advocates the need to understand the inner history of African religiosity as a means of assessing their encounter with Christianity. The argument is that conversion to Christianity was possible because of the general openness of African religions to new myths, rituals rites and symbols and techniques. Hence, responses to missionaries varied because what was needed from them in terms of myth, ritual, symbol and techniques varied.

There is also the growing interest in the study of the role of the Holy Spirit in evangelization and Church dynamics. The emergence in the 20th century and onward, of dynamic and charismatic indigenous prophets and their role in the evangelization of Africa demanded the scholarly attention of Church historians. These developments gave rise to the study of African Independent Church movements that characterized the history of Christianity in the 20th century Africa. These Independent Church movements are not actually new in many countries of Africa; it emerged in the colonial period. Thus, some viewed it as a form of political opposition or a religion of the oppressed and politically and economically marginalized. Others interpreted it as the syncretistic reaction of African religiosity in their encounter with Christianity. Early studies struggled to test the theological validity of the independent Churches and thus sparked off a reappraisal of their belief system and practices. However, the independent African Churches should be regarded as an important African contribution to Christianity; their emphasis on charismata is seen to correlate with African spirituality as well as the spirituality of the New Testament. This has now spurred African Church historians to study these new religious trends as forms of the continuing revelation of God in the African context.

Conclusion

Quite often, Christian history in Africa tends to be understood in terms of what missionaries did or continue to do in the introduction and growth of Christianity in Africa. Sight was often lost of African contributions to the Christianizing enterprise both in personnel and in material resources, as well as the fate of Christianity in the post missionary period when African states had grown fangs and the character of Christianity had been much modified by secular
forces and pressures. There was therefore the need to clarify the understanding of Christian history in Africa because the existing literature betrayed the uncomfortable fact that there has been lopsided reflection on African Church historiography. Consequently, vestiges of missionary historiography and the institutional approach to African Church history nurtured such genres of historiography like nationalist historiography and dialogical approach to the study of African Church history. The use of oral sources also emerged to make up for the short-comings of both institutional approach and missionary historiography. The rise in the 20th century of new Christian movements in Africa and various misinterpretations given to them also beckoned on historians of African Church to take critical look on the new movements with the results that the new movements became adjudged as unique contributions of Africans to universal Christianity. The on-going debates on indigenization, moratorium, Church unity, and ecumenism and the problem of the extent to which existing literature in African Church historiography reflects the areas of economic, political, social, religious and cultural character of African societies posed a new spur for further reflection on African Church historiography. The literature in this regard was thin and therefore called for honest research into these areas in African Christianity. The study of the domestication of Christian values is another interesting way of doing Christian history in Africa because it questions the ultimate relevance of Christianity amidst urgent contemporary issues. The task of creating new structures of ministry and ministerial formation will ultimately produce new concerns for the Church and new prospective on her history. The present study has, therefore, x-rayed these various dimensions in African Church historiography and a relatively balanced view of African Church history has been arrived at.
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