Chapter Nine

The Missionary Factor in African Christianity, 1884-1914[340]

Chukwudi A. Njoku

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps very few historians will disagree that the colonial enterprise and the Christian missionary enterprise together constitute two of the most important historical events that have for good or bad considerably shaped contemporary Africa, besides the phenomenon of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. It is noteworthy that both defining events occurred almost simultaneously. The colonial enterprise focused on the economic and political dimensions of life in Africa, re-drawing its boundaries, re-shaping its political arrangements and structure and considerably re-ordering its economic orientation and its vital institutions. The missionary enterprise impacted heavily on the religious and cultural landscape of Africa and considerably tinkered with its dominant worldview and value system. A critical re-visiting of these two major events, either separately or as twin-events, is crucial and indeed unavoidable for self-understanding in contemporary Africa, of its institutions and of its emerging political and religious culture.

African Christianity has undergone immense transformation since the 1970s to the present time. Perhaps in order to appreciate the changes that have taken place, it is crucial to examine the period when the Christian faith was introduced to parts of Africa untouched by Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with a view to understanding the why,

[340] This builds on the various histories of Christianity in Africa as mentioned in the preface.

the how and the context of that foundational introduction. The major external agents for the introduction of Christianity to Africa were European missionaries. As we shall later make clear, African agents and circumstantial logic played an active and pivotal role in this process.

This chapter critically examines the missionary factor in African Christianity during the colonial era, between 1884/5 and 1970. We attempt to lay bare the circumstances of the missionaries who came to Africa and the varied approaches they adopted in their work of evangelization. This chapter also examines the mingling of the evangelization project with the colonial project with a view to highlighting the impact of the colonial enterprise on the missionary enterprise in Africa. Finally, we hope to briefly appraise the work they did, the methods they employed and the lasting contributions they made to both the religious and cultural landscape of Africa. Our style is unavoidably thematic rather than detailed, aiming to highlight in a representative manner the key issues that arise in the missionary factor in African Christianity during the period under review.[341] While some of the themes taken up here relate to certain trends in the South African missionary context, the peculiarities of the Christian mission in South Africa, particularly its apartheid entanglements, demand special attention and are largely left out in our present consideration. We have also deliberately left out of the present work the African response to the missionary enterprise, itself a rich area of discourse.

I. PERIODISATION

Of course both the European colonial powers and the missionaries of various hues and colors were already present in parts of Africa before 1884/5.[342] However, as is perhaps well known the Berlin Conference of

[341] The sheer volume of the courageous work of Bengt SUNDKLER and Christopher STEED, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), underlines the impossibility of cramming into a few pages the details of each moment of the missionary endeavor in the African continent. This chapter has a more modest goal, namely, to flag up key issues that deserve attention in the ongoing unveiling of the missionary factor in African Christianity.

[342] Even though their eventual fortunes differed remarkably in various contexts, the Protestant missionaries were very often the ones who preceded the Catholic missionaries in the African mission. Bauer has in this respect noted, "For half a century (1792 –1842) Protestant missionaries were practically alone in the field, and until that great nineteenth century ended with World War I, Protestant evangelists were far more numerous than Catholic ones. The major reason for this is that in the previous century the Protestant Church in Europe had experienced a great revival movement, while the

1884/5 played a pivotal role in formalizing and structuring the colonial enterprise in Africa. It was at that conference that European powers, hell bent on getting a piece of the huge cake that was Africa, held talks to declare for themselves "spheres of influence" and authority and put some civility and "legitimacy" into the scramble for Africa.[343] Like the World Missionary Conference that was to follow about two decades later (Edinburgh 1910), the Berlin Conference was geared towards saving the European powers the unnecessary shame, damage and wastefulness that would arise from waging wars with one another in order to acquire and consolidate colonies in Africa.

By giving clear form and order to the scramble for Africa, the Berlin Conference indirectly paved the way for stability and order in the missionary enterprise. While the scramble for "conversion-territory" by the missionaries lasted throughout their stay in Africa, the controlling and moderating presence of the colonial powers prevented this recurring religious scramble from becoming unduly disruptive and even explosive. It is also interesting to note that the formal end of the colonial enterprise marked the beginning of the end of the foreign missionary presence in most of Africa. The gaining back of political independence seems to have triggered and sustained the hand over of the reigns of control of the churches to indigenous successors. In broad terms, the period between 1884/5 and 1970, when most of Africa had gained their political independence, was one of intense missionary evangelization and witnessed an enormous flow of foreign missionaries into Africa. It was also a period that left its marks on the nature and character of the Christianity that eventually flourished in Africa.[344]

Catholic Church had suffered a serious decline from which she started recovering but quite slowly after the Napoleanic Wars (from 1815 onwards)." Cf. J. BAUER, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa, An African History 62 – 1992* (Nairobi: Paulines, 1994), 105. See also A. HASTINGS, *A History of African Christianity 1950 –1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 40 & 18-20.

[343] For a helpful introduction to this scramble see, Thomas PAKENHAM, *The Scramble for Africa 1876-1912* (London: Abacus, 1991). For Historians like Uzoigwe the Berlin Conference was a morally bankrupt meeting and was nothing less than infamous. Cf. G.N. UZOIGWE, "Spheres of influence and the doctrine of the hinterland in the partition of Africa", in *Journal of African Studies,* 3, 2, 1976, 183-203, 184 & 186.

[344] Numerous scholars have drawn attention to the flourishing of Christianity in contemporary Africa in such a way that they underline a critical shift in the epicenter of Christianity from the North to the South. See for example, David B. BARRETT, "AD2000: 350 million Christians in Africa", in *International Review of Mission*, 59,

As a prelude to our analysis, we first examine the general background to the Christian missionary enterprise in Africa as well as the background of the missionaries themselves. This general survey is aimed at providing the broader scope in which the missionaries did their work. The reasons why they came, where they came from, what kind of education they had as preparation for the mission, all entered into affecting the defining choices they made on the grounds in the mission.

II. INSERTION OF THE GOSPEL

The discoveries in navigational technology in the fifth century were momentous for Europe.[345] It enormously extended their hands and legs to reach far distant shores that hitherto lay only in the fertile imagination of some visionaries, dreamers, poets and scientific thinkers. It enabled them to put to test the numerous claims of legends about treasures that lay in far distant lands.[346] With regard to Africa, however, that singular event had an ominous ring to it, for it would clear the way for three centuries long subjection to the obnoxious Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The high seas that lay between Europe and Africa would be kept busy day and night, with ships crossing and criss-crossing one another on the way to or returning from Africa laden with human cargo.

There is an intimate tie between the formal end of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the beginning of the Christian missionary enterprise in Africa. In their decades long campaigns to end slavery, the abolitionists, which included ex-slaves, argued for mercy and compassion and reminded Europe and America of their Christian culture and the moral demands of

(1970), 39-54, 50; Kwame BEDIAKO, *Jesus in Africa. The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Akropong-Akuapem, Regnum Africa, 2000), 3-4.

[345] For the importance of the discoveries in navigational technology, see for example, Daniel R. HEADRICK, *The Tools of Empire. Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 17-42, 129-141.

[346] The role of legends and eventual travel literature in the missionary enterprise deserves a separate treatment. However, it is important to underline that they played a crucial role in inspiring missionaries and in shaping their attitude to the peoples and the places they went to. See for example, David CHIDESTER, *Christianity: A Global History* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 447, see also E. OBIECHINA, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 18-19. For a broader critical examination of travel literature in shaping the minds of subsequent European travelers see, Jas ELSNER & Joan-Pau RUBIES (eds), *Voyages & Visions. Towards a cultural history of travel* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999).

that culture with respect to the other, particularly the enslaved other.[347] A number of abolitionists suggested that rather than trade in human beings, Europe would profit more in trading in commodities with Africa.[348] With the formal end of slave trade therefore, some Christian groups felt an obligation to pass on their Christian faith to Africa.

However, this obligation was construed and seen as a kind of remedy for the slave trade and as a civilizing mission.[349] It was not exactly *mea culpa.* Some of the ex-slaves, possibly as a way of reconciling with their African homelands, also volunteered to be agents of the propagation of the Christian message and values to Africa.[350] In any case they were recruited into the mission by the European ministers and missions principally because they were seen as better suited to the vagaries of the tropical climate, and therefore considerably immune to the Land where the mosquito reigned supreme and played a critical role in dissuading

[347] One of the most outstanding contributions to the campaigns of the abolitionists was *The Interesting Narrative,* authored by Oluadah Equiano, an Igbo ex-slave in 1789. Cf. Olaudah EQUIANO, *The Interesting Narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African* (London, 1789); (reprinted in a facsimile edition by Paul EDWARDS, *The Life of Olaudah Equiano, or, Gustavus Vassa the African*, Colonial History Series (London: Dawson, 1969). This kind of work had enormous appeal and success, since it spoke from within the experience of an ex-slave. By appealing to the Christian sentiments of his primary audience, European slave owners, his autobiography carried a powerful moral authority. See in this regard, Elochukwu E. UZUKWU, *Resilient Diaspora – Keeping Faith with Destiny,* paper presented at the First *Muruako Lectures* (London: Whelan Research Academy, Owerri Nigeria, 20th December 2003); and Angelo COSTANZO, *Neither Saint, A Hero, Nor A Tyrant,* paper presented at first International conference on Olaudah Equiano, *Olaudah Equiano: Representation and Reality* (Surrey: Kingston University, Kingston-upon-Thames, 22 March 2003).

[348] Equiano certainly pointed towards trade in Commodities rather than trade in human beings.

[349] This obligation was often cast in zealous and self-righteous forms, as if they were obeying God's direct commands. See e.g., Sylvia JACOBS, *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa: Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), 5-6, F.K. EKECHI, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857–1914* (London: Frank Cass, 1971), 1. See also C.P. GROVES, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), 197-205.

[350] An outstanding example of this group of volunteers was Bishop Ajayi Crowther and the Sierra Leone Team of indigenous missionaries. See e.g., E.A. AYANDELE, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842–1914, A Political Analysis,* London: Longmans, 1966, 205-230. For a helpful background to "the Sierra Leonean team" see Christopher FYFE, *A Short History of Sierra Leone* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

Europeans from settling. This was especially the case in the West Coast of Africa.[351]

In some ways therefore the end of the slave trade overshadowed the nineteenth century Christian missionary enterprise in Africa and colored its motivation, as a reconciling mission as well as a "civilizing" mission. The greater emphasis, as far as European missionaries were concerned, was on the civilizing thrust of the mission. The reconciling mission and the need to share what they saw as "liberating faith" with their kith and kin in Africa were propelling the black missionaries more. They were there to re-claim and re-build their homeland and to restore its dignity tainted by the slave trade.[352]

III. Theological Background to the Missionary Enterprise

The most important theological backdrop to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' missionary enterprise was the reformation event. Even though the actual event seemed to be in the dim past, its effects, its echoes, the religious structures and cleavages it unleashed were abroad and seeking firmer consolidation. The fragmentation of the one church by the reformation events had continued unabated along national lines, along cultural lines, and along linguistic lines. The reformation gave various groups that resented the authority of Rome the opportunity to seek their freedom and hoist their own religious flags. By questioning the authority of Rome so deeply and courageously, the reformation also unleashed a

[351] Cf. Jacobs, *Black Americans*, xi. See also S.M. Jacobs, "The Historical Role of Afro-Americans in American Missionary Efforts in Africa, in *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa,* in Jacobs, *Black Americans*, 5-29, 16ff; S.D. Martin, "Black Baptists, Foreign Missions, and African Colonization 1814-1882", in Jacobs, *Black Americans*, 63-76, 33, 64ff. See also E. Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa,* London: SPCK, 1995, 264; M.J. Bane, *The Popes and Western Africa, An Outline of Mission History 1460-1960s* (Staten Island NY: Alba House, 1968), xii, 143; and H.J. Koren, *To the Ends of the Earth. A General History of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1983), 177-180.

[352] This motivation partly explains why they related in a spirit of collaboration rather than rivalry with other Christian groups who came to evangelize Africa. Witness for example, the fact that Bishop Ajayi Crowther, as Anglican Bishop on the Niger, warmly welcomed the Catholic missionaries who came to Onitsha. He indeed was willing to share the Land he had been given by the Obi of Onitsha with a group that in the eyes of his European counterparts were their main rivals. Cf. Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise*, p. 74.

secularizing strain into Christendom, creating several interpretations of the Bible, a profusion of doctrinal positions, a variety of liturgical forms and practices and a growing church literature that spoke from varied perspectives. A multiplicity of languages came into the liturgical and theological arena, signaling the beginning of the end of the reign of Latin and Greek.

Gone was one central church authority in Western Christianity. In its place there were several autonomous centers from which denominations of Christianity spoke their own truth and reached out for new membership. The resourcefulness, the liturgical creativity and the administrative autonomy that had its wellsprings from the reformation event was not abating by the nineteenth century. It merely found a new battle front, a new seemingly virgin arena for self-recreation, for self-glorification and for recruiting new membership into an epic battle for supremacy.

In the Catholic fold, the provisions of the Council of Trent, also called the Council of Counter-reformation was dominant and had by the nineteenth century begun to bear fruit in some of its more radical provisions such as the decree for the establishment of seminaries as formal places for the training and education of clergy and religious of the Catholic church; its endorsement of one liturgical language, namely, Latin and its development of catechisms as instruments for instructing the Catholic faithful.[353] By the nineteenth century the effects of the provisions of the Council of Trent had also largely restored the self-confidence of the Catholic Church, nearly traumatized by the devastating impact of the reformation and re-animated its missionary zeal.[354] The period when Catholics were so to say in hiding, its hierarchy afflicted by a siege mentality was effectively over.[355] It was ready again to reach out to the

[353] See e.g., Michael A. MULLET, *The Catholic Reformation* (London: Routledge, 1999), 63-65. See also John C. OLIN, *Catholic Reform. From Cardinal Ximenes to the Council of Trent 1495–1563* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 32.

[354] Beyond the doctrinal disputes, the reformation event dealt heavy blows to the Catholic Church on several strategic fronts. There was the unprecedented continuous hemorrhage of its numbers as well as the erosion of its immense economic and political powers. From being the state religion in many European states, Catholicism was forced to take on the role of subordinate religion and was indeed suppressed for a long time in countries such as England. The radical change of its fortunes deeply affected the self-confidence of the Catholic Church. The Council of Trent was the first major concrete effort to redress the situation.

[355] The publication of the *Syllabus of Errors* and the *Quanta Cura* of Pius IX in 1864 has been seen by some scholars as an important index of the siege mentality that enveloped the Catholic Church in the period following the reformation. See for

world and to seek converts. If anything Catholic triumphalism was abroad, the First Vatican Council, before its abrupt suspension following the disruptive effects of the Franco-Prussian war, even went ahead to restore and to underline the powers of the Pope, principally through the decree on papal infallibility.[356] The missionary enterprise was for Catholics a way of restoring their dignity, of reclaiming their pre-eminence in the scheme of things vis-à-vis the post-reformation churches.[357]

In sketching the theological background to the nineteenth century Christian missions in Africa, we must say that the theological and doctrinal voices were decidedly plural and the various missionary groups came into Africa with a strong feeling of intolerant rivalry and mutual suspicion carried over from the reformation event. The post-reformation churches were, in addition, considerably nationalized churches, sometimes merged intimately with the state.

While the Catholic missionaries cannot be said to be agents of a nationalized church, they were nevertheless implicated in the nationalistic fervor since the formation and organization of the Catholic religious and missionary congregations in the nineteenth century, were often along provincial, nationalistic and linguistic lines. Much later this picture would considerably change through the opening up of the various religious congregations to people of other languages and nations outside the original base or mother houses of the Catholic religious congregations. The decision taken by the Vatican in this century, instructing all religious congregations to move their administrative headquarters to Rome, is partly connected with this process of dismantling the provincial mental set that had begun to be encrusted among various religious congregations.

example, G. BULL, *Vatican Politics at the Second Vatican Council, 1962–5* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 42.

[356] See e.g. Norman TANNER (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils,* Vol. II (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 801; C. BUTLER, *The Vatican Council. The Story Told from Inside Bishop Ullathorne's Letters* Vol I (London: Longmans, 1930), 201-216; G. ALBERIGO, "The Christian Situation after Vatican II," in G. ALBERIGO, J.-P. JOSSUA & J.A. KOMONCHAK (eds), *The Reception of Vatican II* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 1-24, 14; and BULL, *Vatican Politics*, p. 94-95.

[357] T. Okere has written, "A comparatively decisive moment in the church history came after the Protestant reformation. The church was already over 1,500 years old in Europe and had become not only Europeanized but also europocentric. Missionaries were then sent out to evangelize other areas of the globe, no doubt partially to make up for the loss to Protestants of a considerable portion of Christendom." Cf. Theophilus OKERE, *Culture and Religion* (Owerri, 1974), 43-44.

The rivalry between the Catholic Church and the post-reformation churches was also a struggle for "supremacy" of beliefs or doctrinal heritage as well as a struggle for power, especially when Rome was still seen by nations that had opted out of the Catholic Church as a foreign power exerting overarching influence and authority over their national affairs.

Beyond their own enduring internal rivalries, the Christian missions seemed to converge in their mutual fear, and even dread, of Islam as a rival religion. A number of missionary groups in both the Catholic and the Post-reformation camps were dedicated to rooting out Islam from Africa. The Sudan Interior Mission, (SIM), is a classic example. The mission to Africa was therefore in some ways a mission to halt the spread of Islam on the continent, and indeed a mission to penetrate the regions where Islam was already entrenched for the purposes of converting its faithful to Christianity. The enduring dogged rivalry between what could loosely be referred to as "Christian civilization" and "Islamic civilization" seems to have been also at stake.

Underneath the issues of worldview and values lay a struggle for power and control of territories between two rival civilizations and powers. Inter-religious dialogue and ecumenism were still ideas for the future.[358] Religious intolerance was the rule rather than the exception. The "no salvation outside the church" of the Catholics seemed to summarize the theological predisposition of the churches, for each did arrogate rightness and truth to itself and charged the others with being false and imperfect.

This triumphalistic theological predisposition of the various Christian missionary churches would not only fuel their mutual rivalry in the mission territories but also predisposed their relations with the Traditional religions of the vast majority of the people they met in Africa. There was hardly any serious dialogue initiated between Christian theology and the theology of the traditional religions, between the Christian liturgical and ritual practices and the modes of worship found in the traditional religions. There was a general assumption on the part of the Christian missionaries that the traditional religions were far inferior, had no theology worthy of the

[358] Even though the World Council of Churches was formed at the turn of the century to bring the various Christian churches together into one family, its outreach of solidarity did not extend to other religions, certainly to Islam. In its later transformations over the decades, the grounds have been softened. On the side of the Catholic Church, the opening to other churches and other religious had to await the convening of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) to receive the green light.

name,[359] and was in fact devilish. The missionary theologians invented numerous pejorative names to refer to the traditional religion and to their visible leaders, custodians and their chief priests.[360]

There was also a general disregard for the sacred objects, the sacred spaces, places and shrines, the sacred observances, rituals, totems and taboos of the traditional religions. Indeed flouting these observances and taboos, violating these sacred places and objects, were the rule rather than the exception among the Christian missionaries both Catholic and Protestant.[361] Such sacrilegious acts against the traditional religions were ways of demonstrating the supremacy of the Christian religion over them, of interiorizing them as publicly, as vocally and as scornfully as possible their visible representations, their main religious rival in most parts of Africa where the Islamic influence had not yet penetrated.[362]

[359] The dominant adoption of the oral techniques and forms of storage for the theology of the traditional religions was partly responsible for this reduced visibility of the theology of the traditional religions. Christian missionaries, belonging to the group of religions referred to as "religions of the book", because of their dependence on such sacred texts as the Bible and the Koran, were understandably fixated about their idea of "texts" as essentially *written* texts. The idea of *oral* texts as a veritable organ for storage and transmission of a clear body of knowledge was strange to them and regarded as inadmissible and "hard" evidence. Elsewhere, I have examined the problems associated with this narrow misleading conception of texts in affecting the visibility of theologies of different religions. Cf. Chukwudi Anthony NJOKU, *On the Thresholds of Theological Conversations between the North and the South: Impediments and Hopes* (paper presented at the 3rd International Encounters in Systematic Theology, LEST III, *Theology and Conversation. Developing a Relational Theology,* Leuven, 6-9 November 2001).

[360] Cf. Bolaji IDOWU, *African Traditional Religion. A Definition* (London: SPCK, 1974), 135.

[361] For many missionaries, carting away these sacred objects from the shrines and households of the people and exhibiting them in their home countries in Europe was a sign of their success, their victory over "the evil heathen powers", and used them extensively in a variety of displays and exhibitions to campaign for extra moral and financial support at home for their work in the missions. Missionary museums in Europe still hold these objects as part of their treasures and trophies from Africa. Yet the market value of these sacred objects was quite high and was an important source of missionary funding both during the active days of the missionary enterprise, when they were often auctioned at public missionary fairs, and also much later when the artistic values of these objects began to be increasingly appreciated by Western curators. See for example Enid SCHILDKROUT & Curtis A. KEKIM (eds), *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[362] In two of his novels, Chinua Achebe has re-enacted some of these violations of the traditional religion. The incidents committed under Rev. Brown and Mr. Goodcountry, respectively, are vivid examples of this. Cf. Chinua ACHEBE, *Things Fall*

IV. Cultural Background

By the nineteenth century, the fruits of the enlightenment in Europe were beginning to be all the more tangible and visible. The age of discoveries was finally yielding its vast treasures and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would showcase further this technological advancement. The industrial revolution was creating creative space for thinkers, for scientists, and opening wide the doors for path-breaking inventions, from electricity to the telephone, from the motorcar to the airplane.

These progressive epiphanies of the material culture of the western civilization translated into an unprecedented cultural pride and triumphalism among the citizens. The missionaries were no exception. The feeling of cultural superiority ran deep and high. In Great Britain, for example, the Victorian era was at the peak of its glorious achievements in the arts, in architecture and in technical progress. The expansion and consolidation of the British Empire could not have had a better period, after the down turn of the loss of its American colonies. In France the consolidation of the gains of the French Revolution, the triumph of the masses and the ethos of liberty, equality and freedom, was a source of deep pride for the vast majority of French citizens.

In general, Europe was in a buoyant mood and understandably excited by its cultural and material achievements. European missionaries generally participated in this buoyancy and cultural pride and went to the missions walking as on heels. It is therefore not surprising that the missionaries fully embraced the idea of a "civilizing mission", the idea of being heirs of a culturally superior people going out to share the riches and glories of their culture with people from cultures they generally assumed to be inferior to their own. Indeed some of the rivalry between the various missionary groups working in the same missionary territories in Africa were hinged on cultural battles, namely, who was the more superior as a distinct civilization: the French? Or the German? Or the English? Or the Irish?[363]

Apart (London: Heinemann, 1958), 130-135; Chinua Achebe, Arrow *of God* (London: Heinemann, 1964, 1974), 46-54.

[363] The ousting of the French Catholic Missionaries in Eastern Nigeria, the Holy Ghost Fathers, in 1905 from the territory by the British and their replacement by the Irish province of the Holy Ghost Fathers was occasioned as much by the fact that the French were perceived as political threats and by the fact that they were also perceived as a threat to the cultural hegemony of the British in the Nigerian colonial territory. See Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise*, pp. 73f & 98ff. See also J. McGlade, "The Missions:

The missionaries were therefore in general imbued with a spirit and attitude of cultural superiority as they embarked on the mission to Africa.

On the positive side, this predisposition fired the missionary zeal, for they saw themselves as pioneers and harbingers of a new and far superior civilization. They also saw themselves as ambassadors of their "glorious country". Carrying the flag both of their particular denominations and of their countries, the missionaries had a passion to etch their visions on the missions, to leave imprints of their culture and values, to reproduce the children in the missions after the mould of their distinct European civilizational heritage. The mission schools in particular gave them ample scope to embark on this self-imposed challenge in the civilizing mission.

On the other hand, this cultural predisposition created, under the vast majority of the missionaries, a negative attitude towards the cultures and values that they met. Again there was very little space for dialogue, for sifting through what they beheld and for comparing cultural notes with objectivity. Where cultural comparisons took place at all, these were lopsided and loaded in favor of the culture of the missionaries. Indeed the schools were centers of cultural immersion for the natives, immersion into European cultures and values. It was a centre where the children of the natives were weaned away from their own cultures, were consciously taught to despise their own language, their own cultural values and ethos.[364] European cultures were uncritically presumed to be *the* Christian culture and deliberate efforts were made by European missionaries in Africa to educate and socialize the children in the mission territories into it using the space and facilities richly offered by the mission schools.

V. Social and Psychological Background

Scholars are beginning to pay closer attention to the social class of missionaries *prior* to their going overseas for mission.[365] The work of the Comaroffs, for example, highlights the social background of missionaries in such a way as to enable us to gain an insight into the extra forces that

Africa and the Orient", in P.J. Corish (ed.), *A History of Irish Catholicism,* VI (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1967), 12f.

[364] See e.g., C.C. Agu, *Secularization in Igboland* (Frankfurt: Verlag Peter Lang, 1989), 257.

[365] We lay emphasis on the social class of the missionary before his or her entry into the "mission field", because the mission field often has a profound impact in changing the social class of the missionary. The mission field tends to *elevate* the missionary not only in the mission but even more so at home, where he or she often becomes a hero/heroine, and is enabled to climb up the ladder of his or her social class.

motivated and fired their work in the mission, and affected their relations with the people they fondly called "natives".[366] In general, the vast majority of European missionaries came from the rural and lower classes of European society, with a smaller segment coming from the middle class. Understandably, the percentage of the presence of the nobility in the missionary class is negligible, partly because they already had careers cut out for them in their families and in the political arena of their society.[367]

This rural and poor social background of missionaries made them people not just on adventure, with very little at home to look back to, but indeed as a group of people in search for name and fame. Carving out a respectable identity for themselves was therefore a powerful motivation for embarking on missionary work in places like Africa. In such places, the poor missionary had the chance of a lifetime to make history, to etch his or her name in the sands of time. The mission provided the poor missionary with the space to shine and flourish, the space to be creative, the space to be in charge and in authority in a way that could possibly never have been available to him or her at home. In this way the mission land was for the missionary a virgin land, a land of personal hope, a land of promise, a unique space to prove themselves.[368] The mission land was not exactly Australia, for the missionaries were not on penal exile, but it was close to it as a frontier of self-re-invention.[369]

It might be far fetched to say that a great majority of the missionaries from such rural backgrounds, logged a heavy baggage of inferiority complex as they left for the missions, for they were also conscious of the

[366] Jean COMAROFF & John COMAROFF, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Vol. I. (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[367] The mission, like vassal territory, was after all seen much as the periphery of the center, as outlying posts of the heart of the churches. Outposts are very often not manned by the ruling class but by their delegated subjects. The former remain at home to call the shots and pull the strings of authority.

[368] Njoku and Lamberigts have underscored that this fact, the positive role which the mission land played in the upgrading of the missionary, may have been largely responsible for the legendary intimate tie that often developed between missionaries and the people in the missions, making many missionaries survive some of the harsh realities of the mission territory and indeed sometimes opt to be interred among the people they have so labored and from whom they had gained so great a sense of fulfillment. Cf. Chukwudi Anthony NJOKU and Mathijs LAMBERIGTS, "Vatican II: The Vota of the Anglo-phone West African Bishops Concerning the Sacred Liturgy, in *Questiones Liturgiques* 81 (2000), 89-121, 119-120.

[369] See e.g., Edward W. SAID, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), xv –xviii.

rich cultural heritage into which they had been born and bred. However, that they did not belong fully to sharing the material riches of the Western cultural achievement, as the nobility did, provided an added incentive for making a success of the mission. The mission was, therefore, in many ways an opportunity for re-writing the missionary's place in the social body and many missionaries not only penetrated this vivifying insight but grasped the opportunity with both hands.[370]

The "mission fields" were also divided and scaled according to categories and classifications ranging from the most important and priced in the eyes of the particular missionary society to the least important and the ones considered dangerous. In this ranking, the Far East and India were top on the list of the most important missionary outposts, while Africa and central America were lower in that categorization. Even in Africa there were further breakdowns of the different parts, with a place like the West Coast of Africa being rather blacklisted, because of the havoc the mosquito was causing and the high mortality of missionaries who were sent there. In sending forth missionaries to different parts of the world, the missionary societies took account of this categorization of the vast and differentiated mission fields, and were strategic in their deployment of the pool of missionaries at their disposal. Very often, therefore, the best of this pool, in terms of giftedness and promise, were sent to missionary fields that were strategically important for the people sending them, for a variety of reasons and the rest, in descending order of priority, were sent to regions considered less important and more dangerous. This calculation in the deployment of missionaries meant that certain regions received missionary personnel, who were not only poor and rural, but not as gifted as their

[370] David Livingstone is without doubt an outstanding example in this regard. From a rather obscure and unpromising background, Livingstone became in the course of his missionary engagement a cultural institution celebrated up till the present time in expanding tomes of literature. See e.g., The National Portrait Gallery, *David Livingstone and the Victorian Encounter with Africa* (London, 1996), 14-17. The bibliography on Livingstone at the end of this same publication (228-237) is quite telling in this regard. On the Catholic side, Bishop Shanahan of Southeastern Nigeria comes readily to mind. Sent away on mission by the Holy Ghost Fathers almost as a way of getting rid of a nuisance, he so rehabilitated himself in the Nigerian mission that he became a shining example and model of Catholic Irish Missionary endeavor, re-created in legendary proportions by a growing army of admirers and critics. See e.g., Desmond FORRISTAL, *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan* (Dublin: Veritas, 1990); John JORDAN, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria* (Dublin: Dublin Echo Press Ltd, 1949); Sean FARRAGHER, *Bishop Joseph Shanahan CSSp. Selected Studies* (Dublin: Paraclete Press, 2002).

counterparts sent to regions on which the missionary societies placed greater value and store. This kind of "investment" and "planting" of missionary personnel left its imprints on the administrative style and over all missionary strategy employed in different regions of the missionary field.

A further fall out from the social background of missionaries to Africa needs to be highlighted, namely, their zealous piety. The most telling manifestation of this zeal was the belief in heaven and hell. Whatever could be said of "the street wisdom" and ideological rootedness of the missionaries, it is difficult to down play the fact that these simple men and women sincerely believed in the Christian ethos, in the reality of the after life as described in the Christian narratives. In the face of the rivalry that existed between the various missionary groups, there is a danger to read too much intrigue in the rush to baptise new converts. That rush, that anxiety, that zeal to baptise as many people as possible into the faith, might very well point to the depth of faith the missionaries had in the sanctifying role of the sacrament of baptism to "wash away sins" and to bring the converts "into communion with God."[371] Among the Catholic missionaries the priority given to "sick calls", the seriousness attached to the sacrament of "confession" (now referred to as the "sacrament of reconciliation"), can further be flagged up as powerful indicators of this fundamental belief in the reality and efficacy of the sacraments they were professing.[372] There is hardly any other way to explain the rush, the anxiety and the sense of fulfillment that most missionaries derived from accomplishing these basic religious duties. Missionaries to Africa were, in general, men and women of simple faith. Certainly, the vast majority of them *were not* schoolmen, academic theologians or outstanding intellectuals. Missionaries were essentially *believers* who came to the mission to share their faith and religious values. They may have been intolerant and arrogant in the styles they employed to present their faith in the religious and cultural

[371] The official reports which missionaries sent back to their administrative centers in Europe very often contain statistics of the "growth of the church", sometimes detailing the number of converts who have received baptism, confirmation, or the sacrament of Matrimony. While the role of these statistics as an administrative and campaigning tool cannot be relegated, its echo of similar acts in the Acts of the Apostles, namely, "the counting of new members" to the faith and the attendant spiritual joy this event brings to the Christian community, cannot be side-stepped.

[372] It is difficult to read some of the biographies and autobiographies of the veteran missionaries and miss the touching personal attachment to the accomplishment of these basic religious duties. See e.g., John JORDAN, *Autobiography of a Missionary* (Dublin: 1992), 49-51.

environment of their mission posts, they may have been jealous of the success of their colleagues in other Christian denominations or even over zealous and paternalistic, but it is hard to diminish the importance they attached personally to their Christian faith.

VI. MINISTERIAL FORMATION

In sketching the social background of the missionaries, some hints about the basic preparations that went into their training for the missions are imperative. Here, as elsewhere, there is no monolithic picture. Among the Catholic missionaries, for example, the recommendations of the Council of Trent, particularly its provision for a seminary, a noviciate as a formal place for training candidates for the priestly and religious life, considerably created institutions devoted specifically for training men and women called to either the priestly or the religious life in the Catholic Church.[373] Gone was the informality and apprenticeship model that dominated the career path of future priests and nuns in the period prior to the Council of Trent.

Missionary congregations, often dedicated to extending the faith to new contexts, to sharpening seemingly hidden or neglected dimensions of the Catholic faith and ethos, and to caring for borders outside the strict confines of sedentary dioceses in the church, benefited from this new formal educational structure in their recruitment of new candidates for the mission. There was, therefore, a more or less formalized and hierarchically graded approach to educating Catholic missionaries. Missionary congregations also extensively used the relatively uniform *theological manuals* from the mandate of the Council of Trent to standardize the curricula in the training of priests and the religious in the universal church and in its liturgical practice. This uniformity of formation curricula and ethos gave considerable consistency to the message of the Catholic missionaries in their missions.

In spite of these convergences, differences in emphasis and outlooks among different Catholic missionaries were evident. These differences are principally traceable to the unique thrust and "charism" of specific Catholic religious congregations, often referred to as "the spirit of their founder".[374] They are also partly accounted for by the organizational and devotional

[373] Cf. MULLET, *The Catholic Reformation*, pp. 63-65.

[374] For an examination of the influence of "the spirit of the Father Founder" in the case of the Holy Ghost Fathers Congregation, see KOREN, *To the Ends of the Earth*, pp. 247-264.

trappings and markers of "the national character" of various Catholic faith traditions, as when one says, "the *French* Catholic Church", "the *German* Catholic Church", "the *Irish* Catholic Church" and so on. Missionaries who came from these nations carried with them the unique traditions of their home countries and contexts, and brought them to bear on their style and work in the missionary context. Finally, the individual character, temperaments and creativity of the individual missionaries also accounted for certain differences, especially regarding the effects of the personalities of those individuals who held leadership positions, and therefore, to some extent, "policy-making" positions in the missions.

Varied experiences of missionaries were recycled into the formation process of future missionaries. For example, basic education in tropical medicine and hygiene came into sharp focus following the high mortality rate of missionaries who went to the tropical regions.[375] Pre-mission education of future missionaries in the language and culture of the people to whom they were destined to be sent increasingly became the rule rather than the exception as a way of smoothing the process of integration of the missionary into the new context. Institutions like the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) London were set up primarily to attend to such needs by colonial administrators, and catered also for prospective missionaries departing from the United Kingdom for overseas mission.[376]

Beyond the strictly religious education of the missionaries, there is what could loosely be called their "secular socialization" and informal education. In this sense, missionaries, even those in "enclosed orders", *were not* quarantined from the realities of their culture, their society, their

[375] The London School of Tropical Medicine started as a center for preparing colonial administrators and missionaries for mission to the Tropics. The same can be said of the School of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, Belgium. University College Dublin offered six-week courses in Tropical Medicine for the same reasons. In these institutions, the colonial projects shared facilities and concerns with the missionary projects. While in the first instance the training in tropical health was for the health and safety of the missionaries themselves, with time, this "tropical health knowledge" was transformed into a veritable instrument for mission work. See EKECHI, *Missionary Enterprise*, pp. 74-78; and I.R.A. OZIGBO, "An Evaluation of Christian Pioneering techniques with particular reference to Nigeria," in *The Nigerian Journal of Theology,* 8, 1 (1994), 43-62, 50-51. These centers have undergone further qualitative transformations and become important centers for scientific research in tropical medicine.

[376] Cf. Cyril PHILIPS, *A History of SOAS, 1917–67,* in David ARNOLD & Christopher SCHACKLE, (eds), *SOAS Since the Sixties* (London: SOAS, 2003), 21-43, 21-23.

arts, their literature and the dominant media of the time.[377] They shared the same tastes, prejudices, social gossips and social vocabulary as the vast majority of their people. They were also subject to influence by both deep thinkers in their society and popular writers and authors. It seems rather banal to say this, but it deserves to be underlined that missionaries were no angels but were in a variety of ways children of their time, children of their context and children of their age by virtue of their birth, immersion and socialization in their given culture and context. The significance of this "cultural education" and socialization should not be diminished merely because of its informal nature. If anything, on account of its subtle power, its permeation and subtle determination of the cultural and social reflexes of the missionary, in much the same way as a background undercurrent force, it deserves to be flagged up as a critically important dimension of the education of the missionary. This underscoring saves one the huge disappointment in *failed expectations* that tends to come from simplistically assuming that the missionary is merely a product of the seminary, the noviciate or the missionary school. These formal centers were merely fragments of the numerous schools and influences to which the missionary is, in varying degrees, subject to and student of.

There is a paradoxical endowment unique to the missionaries. On the one hand, missionaries represented in many ways the "fundamentalist arms" of the church, understood in the sense of giving the basic faith education/the teachings of the fundamental elements of the faith to converts to the Christian faith. In this role, they had to be as faithful to the magisterium, the teaching authority of their church as possible, almost as

[377]In contemporary times, the radio, the television, and more recently the internet have come to stand out as the vocal and outstanding media for sharing and transmitting knowledge, almost threatening to jettison the relevance of the print medium. This recency should not make us forget that for centuries the print media was the dominant medium for sharing and conveying ideas in the West. Writers, especially gifted ones, therefore enjoyed a monopoly of audience, particularly in the area of the imaginative space, which even the new media, in spite of their profound presence and power of outreach, hardly can boast about. It is therefore easy to see that writers had such an incredible influence over people in their contexts, and for the same reason some of their critics have their finger right on target when they charge writers of the period before the advent and dominance of the new media with both credit and responsibility for shaping the minds, cultural, religious and political reflexes of their people. See in this connection, SAID, *Culture and Imperialism,* xi-xiii. Chinua Achebe's reasons for critically taking on Conrad hinges on similar reasons. Cf. Chinua ACHEBE, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*", in Chinua ACHEBE, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 1-20, esp. 3. See also Chinua ACHEBE, *Home and Exile* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), 40-41.

core conservatives. In the case of Catholics, the missionaries were very often the "active carriers" of the triumphalism and pride of the faith of the church.

Yet the missionary represented the frontiersmen and women of the church, the growing tip of the church, the eyes and ears with which the church encountered new experiences, new cultural and religious frontiers, new ecclesial communities, new languages, new liturgical and ritual circumstances. They were therefore also the vanguard for appropriating changes in church life and practice. They were located in that criss-cross between the traditional and the new, between the taken-for-granted and the space of new, challenging, and sometimes disturbing, questions about "things taken for granted" by the "sedentary church." In this role that came to them as people on a journey, physically and mentally, as hybrids, as "amphibians", the missionaries also carried seeds of the newness, renewal, reformation and transformation of the church to which they belong. They played the role of "the look out," bearing both the "good news" and "warnings of danger", embedded in the unique experiences that came to them as people on the way. Perhaps more than the established church, seen incarnated in the dioceses, the missionary was the pilgrim church per excellence, the church on wheels as it were, the church in motion, the dynamic segment of the church.[378]

From a linguistic point of view, this meant that while the post-reformation churches were fast making capital of the many previously neglected vernaculars of various nations, the Catholic Church stuck to its guns with Latin as its official language and the official language for educating its priests and religious. This also meant that the celebration of the Mass/the Eucharist and the other sacraments in the Catholic Church were carried out in Latin. This was the situation right up to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) when the Council permitted an exceptional use of the vernacular in the church.[379] It is small wonder that in the

[378] In another work we have highlighted the creative role, which the missionary church, on account of its ceaseless youthfulness and footloose character can play in supplying theology with unusual insights, and challenge it to grow. Cf. Chukwudi Anthony NJOKU, *A Study of the Wishes of the Catholic Bishops of Anglophone West Africa (1959–1960) for the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council* (Licentiate Thesis, Faculty of Theology, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium, 1998), 196-197.

[379] Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), no. 36.2 & no. 63, 4th December, 1963, in Austin FLANNERY (ed), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents,* Revised Edition (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1988), 13. It was an exception that, however, became the rule. Latin remains the official language of the Catholic Church but such was the popularity of the

missions, this basic training and orientation of the Catholic missionaries marked them out from their Protestant counterparts, and made the language issue a critically important one in the fortunes of the missionaries vis-à-vis the varying perceptions of the importance and role of languages among the people they worked with.[380] In general, while the Protestant missionaries made investment in the local language a prime aspect of their missionary work and achievement, their Catholic counterparts often lagged behind in mastering the language of the local people, for the simple reason that they had less incentive to do so due to their linguistic orientation and formation.[381] In terms of the diplomatic potentials of language in the missionary campaigns, the Catholic missionaries did make up for their general lack of interest in the vernacular by being the champions of the cultivation and learning of the colonial language, whether this was English or French or Portuguese, an issue that created recurring anxiety for their Protestant counterparts. Protestant missionaries quickly realized that in chasing their ideal of enabling the local people to appropriate their own linguistic and conceptual tool by investing their energy in developing their mother tongues, they were losing out to their Catholic counterparts! For paradoxically, the local people, at that early stage in their encounter with "the white man", saw acquisition and mastery of the colonial language as the way forward, anyone who was teaching them in their mother tongues was dragging them backwards![382]

VII. Missionary Methods and Techniques for Conversion

Conversion of the people they met in the mission lands to the Christian faith was the main business of Christian missionaries in Africa. However, as we have labored to underline, after the reformation "the Christian Church" was no longer one but many and each denomination felt it was *the* home and *the* custodian of "the Christian Truth". In this enduring rivalry to

demand for the use of the vernacular that its use spread like wildfire, leaving Latin largely an impotent official language of the Catholic Church.

[380] This linguistic dimension of the missionary encounter has received considerable attention in the work of Lamin Sanneh. Cf. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message. The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989).

[381] Chukwudi Anthony Njoku, *Vatican II and the Process of its Reception in the Igbo Speaking Church of Southeast Nigeria: 1959–1995* (Doctoral Dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium, 2002), 68-71.

[382] See e.g., Felix K. Ekechi, "The Missionary Career of the Venerable T.J. Dennis in West Africa, 1893 – 1917" in *Journal of Religion in Africa,* Vol. IX, fasc. 1, (1978), 1-26, esp. 20.

capture and consolidate missionary territory the main battle line was drawn between Catholic missionaries and missionaries from the Protestant churches.[383] The struggle for territory was acute when it involved these two broad divisions. Elizabeth Isichei notes that there were no alliances made between the rival two, namely, the Catholic missionaries and their Protestant counterparts, in the mission field.[384] Unlike the colonial powers, missionaries lacked the brute force to arrogate specific and exclusive territories to themselves. Bereft of such powers of excising and controlling territories, missionaries of various denominations who found themselves struggling for the same territory, had to invoke other means to put down their trademark on the territories they desired.

Some of these means were far from holy. Elizabeth Isichei recounts that in Togo the church was referred to by the locals as "the house of battle," possibly echoing the truth they perceived about the intense struggle between the various denominations.[385] This struggle for self-assertion, in particular mission territories, took various forms. They included trading insults, casting aspersions on one another, defamation of one another, inferiorization of rival denominations through derogatory songs, dramas, tracts, leaflets and sermons, much as rival housewives in polygamous families.

Courting the attention and support of the incumbent colonial power in specific territories was also another important avenue used by missionary groups to consolidate and retain missionary territory. Each of the big two seemed to maximize its diplomatic advantages and leverages to edge out its rival or at least to reduce its influence in order to consolidate missionary territory.

However, within each big camp, there were indeed territorial alliances, more so, among the Catholics than among the Protestants. Fragmentation was the rule rather than the exception in the Protestant camp, with each church autonomous and often nationalized and therefore interested in relatively differentiated agendas. Among the Catholic missionaries, on the other hand, the common reference to the authority of Rome was a major source of stabilization of the inherent tendency to struggle for territory

[383] During the Colonial era, the Pentecostals and Charismatics were yet to make their presence felt in Africa, and therefore were not prominent in the rivalry scenario of the time.

[384] ISICHEI, *A History of Christianity in Africa,* p. 266.

[385] ISICHEI, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, p. 266.

among the various Catholic religious congregations.[386] They therefore had something like "spheres of interest and control" in the mission territory. Thus Society of African Missions (SMA) Fathers, for example, could only be found in certain territories and not in others. The same was applicable to other congregations such as Society of Divine Word (SVD), The Holy Ghost Fathers (CSSP), and so on.[387] The same was applicable to the women religious, the nuns.

This division of territory or indeed division of labor made good administrative sense and created a stimulus for progress. Each religious congregation could therefore measure its progress and success. There was also greater chance of concentrated work and continuity in method, in programs and in ongoing appraisal of missionary activity. The division also reduced clashes of interest and created room for maximizing the potentials for evangelization in a given missionary territory. However, while enhancing the flourishing creativity of gifted missionaries, these divisions seemed to entrench weaknesses of particular missionary congregations, following the unspoken rule of "non-interference". Evidence suggests that there were occasional meetings and collaborations between missionaries of different religious congregations that shared geographical borders.[388] This kind of collaboration, however, did not extend to policy matters and other core administrative issues in the mission.

1. Doctrinal approaches to conversion

At the heart of the complex package embedded in conversion was indoctrination of new members. Through this process converts were inducted into the ethos, the doctrinal heritage, the way of life and core values of the new faith they were embracing. The missionaries were in this sense first and foremost preachers. They used several avenues to make the people they met in the missions turn around to the faith they brought. Initially, direct preaching was employed.

[386] Each religious congregation had ambitions to grow and expand! There was even an internal competition among the religious congregations.

[387] See e.g., NJOKU & LAMBERIGTS, "Vatican II", pp. 120-121.

[388] Fr. John Jordan CSSP, member of the Holy Ghost Fathers stationed in Southeastern Nigeria, indicates that they received help from the German Catholic missionaries stationed in the Northern part of Nigeria, particularly with regard to technical matters, such as embarking on construction of churches or repairs of equipment, which arose now and again in the mission. Cf. JORDAN, *Autobiography of a Missionary,* pp. 71-73.

This ran into immediate problems because of difficulties of communication arising principally from the inability of the pioneer missionaries to speak the language of the local people. The need for and use of interpreters quite early in the missionary enterprise was therefore the rule rather than the exception. Indigenous converts in Sierra Leone, the home of many displaced resettled returnee slaves, provided a helpful reservoir of willing and capable interpreters of a number of indigenous languages such as Yoruba and Igbo. Among the more famous in this regard, includes Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. These became the middlemen as it were, who not only functioned fully as pioneer missionaries in their own right, but also acted as powerful catalysts in the effort to reduce the indigenous languages to the written form, to develop dictionaries, grammars and primers for the study of various vernaculars. This active role is very often downplayed, and credit for such linguistic efforts given to their European missionary counterparts, whose names eventually appear as sole authors and translators.[389] Beyond the problems of communication posed by the language and cultural barrier, preaching by European missionaries, with the intention to persuade the people rationally to abandon the faith of their ancestors and embrace the Christian faith, was at best a stalemate, but in general failed to convince the adult population. The areas of convergence in beliefs, namely, the places where the Christian doctrines echoed the traditional values and beliefs merely re-enforced the conviction of the elders about what they already new and firmly believed in. The areas of "doctrinal differences", which should have influenced the persuasion effort, often seemed to produce jarring notes in the ears and religious sensibilities of the custodians of the traditional religious heritage. Some Christian doctrines were, in the eyes of the adult representatives of the traditional religion, simply illogical and even nonsensical.[390] From painful and frustrating experience, veteran missionaries realized that conversion by direct appeal to doctrinal logic and even to the threats of heaven and hell, just did not produce the kind of result they hoped for. On account of the failure of these earlier attempts at critical dialogue with the

[389] There are a few liberating exceptions to this practice of giving sole credit to the European missionary counterparts in the linguistic endeavor of the missionaries. John Jordan, for example, makes it clear that even though he wrote the "English versions" of some catechetical texts, Joseph Nwanegbo, an indigenous priest from Igboland, did the actual translation of the text into Igbo Language. Cf. JORDAN, *Autobiography of a Missionary*, p. 76.

[390] Some of these earlier attempts at critical dialogue with custodians of the traditional religion are re-constructed and re-presented in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* and *Arrow of God.*

local people, the turn to other tools and techniques for enhanced "conversion" was invoked quite early in the missionary enterprise.

2. Deploying Extra-Doctrinal Techniques for Conversion

One of the most powerful extra-doctrinal techniques adopted in virtually every Christian mission, was the introduction of Western style education.[391] Nothing in the complex baggage of the missionaries appealed more to the dreams, aspirations, fears and reason of the people in the mission territories than did the introduction of Western style education. Western style education seemed to have a magical hold over the people in spite of their acute awareness of its inherent ambiguity and dangers.[392] The unspeakable humiliation brought upon them by the colonial enterprise, by the distressing fact of arrogant foreign domination, seemed to have rubbed in the importance of acquiring mastery over the ability *to read and write*. In the midst of their powerlessness before their oppressors, the elders perceived, even if vaguely, that perhaps their hope for eventual survival and triumph lay in the strange paradox of embracing, understudying and mastering the power and knowledge of their oppressors. Nothing seemed to separate the two, the oppressed and the oppressor, more than orality and literacy. There was a sharp perception that in the *"uli that never fades",* in the ability to read and write, the key to unlocking the hidden knowledge and powers of the "white man" lay embedded.[393] It has to be noted that Western education became increasingly popular with the consolidation of

[391] See for example, OZIGBO, "An evaluation of Christian pioneering techniques", pp. 43-62.

[392] The Novelist Cheik Hamidou Kane captures these dangers in his Ambiguous *Adventure.* Cf. C.H. KANE, *Ambiguous Adventure* (René Juillard 1962, trans. from the French by Katherine WOODS, New York: Collier, 1963). In *Arrow of God,* Chinua Achebe powerfully visits the anxiety of the elders as they struggled with the idea of allowing their children to go to the mission schools.

[393]In Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God,* when Ezeulu, the chief priest of the deity Ulu, returns from the great humiliation of detention and exile from Okperi, he set about passionately urging his son Oduche to go and learn the Whiteman's knowledge. Recounting his experience he says, "When I was in Okperi I saw a young white man who was able to write his book with the left hand. From his actions I could see that he had very little sense. But he had power; he could shout in my face; he could do what he liked. Why? Because he could write with his left hand. That is why I have called you. I want you to learn and master this man's knowledge so much that if you are suddenly woken up from sleep and asked what it is you will reply. You must learn it until you can write it with your left hand. That is all I want to tell you." Cf. ACHEBE, *Arrow of God,* pp. 189-190.

the colonial enterprise at the turn of the century, when colonialism had acquired a raw visibility, with the interference of colonial administrators, district officers and so on, in increasingly disruptive ways, in the affairs of the local people. Between 1900 and the early 1930s, the so-called "pacification expeditions", carried out by the colonial military forces with decisive cruelty, were becoming increasingly successful in setting up colonial dictatorships even in the hinterlands.[394] Across the continent, challenges to colonial regimes were breeding and spreading with vigor, with the springing up of nationalist activities among the oppressed peoples of Africa. In the wake of the Second World War, this response would gain heightened consciousness and become more focused and strategic.

The introduction of Western style education as a tool for missionary evangelization radically changed the fortunes of the Christian missionaries in Africa. In the first place, the school created a creative framework for proselytizing work, for it was one space in the territory that the missionaries fully controlled. Prior to the construction of separate buildings for school and church activities, the school building doubled as church over the weekends. This practice was wide-spread. Secondly, the school enabled the missionaries to reach out to the children and considerably cut off the voice and influence of the adult populations.

By strategically reaching out to the children, the missionaries were making an investment in the future generations that would, with time, take over control of local affairs. Success in converting the children therefore meant success in converting future generations of the local people to the Christian faith. The school was therefore in many ways the *locus classicus* of missionary conversion efforts. The mission school was the nerve center of "the civilizing mission" of the Christian missionaries, the place to teach their new values, to re-produce young Africans in the mould of European civilization. "Mission education" was a loaded mix of religious, cultural and secular knowledge, principally aimed at comprehensive "*conversion*" of the pupils; religiously, culturally and socially.[395] It was in the mission schools that the inferiorization of the local culture was largely carried out

[394] See for example, Eyo O. EYO, *The Story of Old Calabar. A Guide to the National Museum at the Old Residency, Calabar* (Lagos, 1986). Se also, Adiele E. AFIGBO, *The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria 1891-1929* (London: Humanities Atlantic Highlands, 1972).

[395] See e.g., AGU, *Secularization in Igboland,* 257ff. See also, M.A. ONWUEJEOGWU, *Evolutionary trends in the history of the development of the Igbo civilization in the culture theatre of Igboland in Southern Nigeria, 1987 Ahiajoku Lecture* (Owerri: Ministry of Information, 1987), 57-69.

in a structured and sustained manner. It was in the mission schools that Western Culture was advertised and marketed on all fours by the missionaries as the superior culture, with superior values and social mannerisms. It was through the schools that western tastes, dressing styles, language and accent were injected into the local minds of the younger generation of Africans.

As a principal recruiting ground for new converts, the school became another center of rivalry between the missionaries of various Christian denominations, and could be said to have been the principal avenue for passionately inducting impressionable young Africans into the lingering jealousies and battles of the reformation. The rivalry ingredient bore important positive fruits since it led to what has been called the "race for schools",[396] as the various missionary groups sought to establish and run as many schools as possible in a given mission territory. It also created a capillary for excellence in the schools so established, since the various rival missionary denominations sought to compete with one another, to raise the profiles of the schools they ran, and to push the frontiers of the academic excellence and popularity of these schools among the people.

During the colonial era, the introduction of western style Medicare in the mission territories belongs to one of the most attractive extra-doctrinal techniques developed by the missionaries. European missionaries to Africa were harbingers of the advances in medical science and technology already bearing fruits in Medicare in the West. Compared with the potency of the traditional Medicare, what the missionaries had in their clinics and maternities seemed to be working "miracles" and had great appeal among the local populations. In many missions the development of the medical arms of the missionary endeavor was an integral aspect of conversion. It "softened" the hearts of the people, created a sense of awe,[397] and therefore predisposed people for conversion. Nothing demonstrated the "compassionate hearts" of the missionaries more than their medical apostolate. It is perhaps important to underline that the medical apostolate appealed heavily to adults, particularly to women, for whose needs and roles as mothers, the maternities and other health care centers seemed to cater more than to the men.

[396]Cf. Anon., "The Race for Schools" in *Africa* 18 (1956), 1. See also Thomas KIGGINS, *Maynooth Mission to Africa. The Story of St. Patrick's Kiltegan* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1991), 217-218.

[397] In Igboland, this sense of awe is encapsulated in the common saying "*Bekee wu agbara*" [The white man is a spirit].

Perhaps one of the most important avenues through which the missionaries enhanced their work of evangelization in the missions lay in the recruitment of local hands in the missionary project. We have already referred to the active involvement of the black missionaries as part of the vanguard of pioneer missionaries to various parts of Africa. The second movement in the active involvement of indigenous personnel in the mission was even more prodigious in its effect on the fortunes of the missionaries. These included interpreters, catechists, teachers and domestic hands. It is now being acknowledged that the success of the Christian mission to Africa depended heavily on the enormous work carried out by this extensive network of local participants.[398] They knew the terrain very well and therefore were in the best position to serve as guides and "compass" for the foreign missionaries. They knew the local language, culture, customs and traditional religious heritage, and therefore were better suited to know how best to convey the message of the Christian missionaries to their own people; they knew where the "dangers" lay, where the red lines in the two faiths, the two cultures, lay.

These advantages were put at the disposal of the missionary project sometimes with great success in terms of the response of the people. Local church leaders and animators vastly outnumbered the foreign missionaries and were located and deployed in the remotest parts of a given mission territory, where they did sustained and difficult spade work introducing their own people to the Christian faith, teaching catechisms, conducting Sunday schools, preparing converts for the reception of the various sacraments, leading worship "in season and out of season" and staying on to continue on-going Christian formation of their people.

However, the process and rate of creation of indigenous clergy in the missions differed from one missionary denominational group to another. In general, the Protestant missionaries were faster in incorporating local clergy into the band of missionaries than were their Catholic counterparts.[399] For decades, rather than work consciously towards the

[398] Recognition of the vast contribution of catechists in particular is gaining currency. See e.g., A. SHORTER, "Developing Roles of the Catechists", in A. SHORTER & E. KATAZA, (eds), *Missionaries to Yourselves. African Catechists Today* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972), 62. See also J. BALZER, "The Catechist," in *African Ecclesiastical Review,* 6 (1964), 1, 49-55, 49-51; J. BALZER, "The Role of the Catechist in the Missions," in HATTON (ed.), *Missiology in Africa Today. Thought Provoking Essays by Modern Missionaries* (Dublin, 1961), 76-84.

[399] Already by the late 1930s, some of the indigenous Anglican clergy, sent to further their studies at Cambridge University, were returning home to contribute to the missionary effort. See e.g., Francis ANYIKA, "Church Missionary Society (C.M.S)

creation of indigenous clergy, the Catholic missionaries spent great energy campaigning for and recruiting vocations at home into the mission in Africa.[400] This trend would continue even though the official representatives of the Vatican, the papal nuncios stationed in Africa, ceaselessly urged the Catholic missionaries to invest in recruiting indigenous clergy.[401]

At the heart of these delays in raising indigenous clergy lay the vexed issue of the transfer of power from the European missionaries to the indigenous church leaders. Leadership of the Christian churches did not lie with the laity but with the clergy. Admittance to the clerical state did not merely create "more hands" in the cultic and sacramental work of the missionaries but indeed created potential leaders of the church from among the indigenous community. However gifted a catechist was as a preacher or teacher, however excellent he was in administration, in spite of his numerous advantages over the foreign missionary, he was still subordinate in hierarchy and in the administrative ladder of the church to the missionary who was a cleric.

Besides color, the clerical state was one of the principal things that separated the European missionary from the indigenous Christian leader. The clerical state put the European missionary squarely in the center of things, on account of a certain indispensability it carried with it in the legitimacy and validity of a whole range of cultic and sacramental activities. Admitting indigenous vocations into the clerical state were unavoidably granting them equality to European missionaries, and thereby endowing them with equal powers and privileges, which the missionaries hitherto monopolized. On account of this deeper core to admittance to the clerical state, missionaries, who felt comfortable in their positions and the

Ministerial Formation on the Niger: Reverend V.N. Umunna as a pioneer", in *Nigeria Heritage: Journal of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments,* 4 (1995), 133-145, 140. The pioneer Catholic indigenous clergy from the same region, the late Bishops Anthony Nwedo and Mark Unegbu, would only be setting off for further studies in Dublin, for example, in the 1947.

[400] In the case of Bishop Shanahan, see e.g., KIGGINS, *Maynooth Mission to Africa,* pp. 7-18.

[401] Archbishop Mathews, the papal nuncio to British West Africa, was particularly outstanding in his efforts to argue for incorporation of indigenous clergy, and indeed of handing over to them the reigns of leadership of the local church. See e.g., KIGGINS, *Maynooth Mission to Africa,* pp. 221-222.

many privileges that came with it, genuinely felt threatened by the quest of indigenous hands to be admitted to the clerical state.[402]

VIII. The Padre and the Commissar in Africa

The colonial and Christian missionary enterprises in Africa occurred side by side, and mutually impacted on one another's programs, orientation, and indeed survival in what was after all foreign territory for both groups. The concentration of our analysis here is on the impact of colonialism on the Christian missionary enterprise. We examine the structural, the administrative and the moral impact of colonialism on the Christian missionary enterprise in Africa.

Prior to the consolidation of colonialism in Africa from 1885 onwards, missionary enterprise was carried out with trepidation and largely in a spirit of adventure. The consolidation of the colonial enterprise provided enormous stability and territorial form to the missionary enterprise. Indeed, the gradual nationalization of the missionary enterprise began in full swing during the colonial enterprise, with missionaries following the trajectory of the routes traversed by their country's colonial flags, and, indeed, sometimes preceding the advance of their country's colonial flags, in much the same way as did traders and treasure hunters.

The Berlin conference divisions were unspoken boundaries and borders also for the various Christian missionaries who went to Africa. Among Catholic missionaries, for example, diplomatic efforts were made to ensure that religious congregations that were sent to particular mission territories were, to use a modern phrasing, "politically correct". The linguistic and national divisions of religious congregations seemed to be natural compartments for meeting this requirement of "political correctness". Consequently, missionaries from French Provinces of particular religious congregations were sent to French colonial territories. In the same way, missionaries from German Provinces of religious congregations were sent to German controlled colonial territories until after 1918, when they pulled out or were forced out, following Germany's loss of its colonial territories in the wake of their defeat by the League of

[402] Njoku and Lamberigts have noted, "in spite of the many hardships which the missionaries faced in the mission lands, the level of reverence in which they were held by the indigenous populations is unspeakable. Their word was Law. And in the missions they had ample room for exercising their creativity and imagination and their pioneer status gave them manifold chance to chart new directions. Each step they took seems to have had clearly historic proportions." Cf. Njoku & Lamberigts, "Vatican II", p. 119.

Nations in the First Great European War. Belgian missionaries would, in similar fashion, be sent to the Belgian Congo and the outlying Rwanda. Togo and Cameroon in particular showcase the change of missionary hands in order to be in line with the changing incumbency of different colonial powers, from the German to the French and from the French to the English respectively.

The underlying logic of this matching of the colonial powers to "fitting" missionary groups lay in the need for a stable framework for the work of the missionaries. The colonial framework, therefore, created a powerful sense of security and protection and a psychological sense of at-homeness for the Christian missionaries. The very aura of power, which the colonial machine established through its ruthless campaigns in the *mission-colonial* territory, was capital for the missionaries. As they traversed the hinterlands, "in search of souls", missionaries could confidently be assured of the protective shield of the color of their skin, and its identification of them everywhere they went as brothers and sisters, if not exactly as allies and collaborators, of the colonial administrators. In order to appreciate the immense power of this association of the missionaries with the colonial administrators, and therefore the administration's role as a veritable protective shield, one has only to recall the incredible ruthlessness with which the British—but particularly the French and Belgian colonial forces—installed fear and terror into their colonial subjects. No one in his or her right minds dared challenge a group who exuded such cruel meanness in asserting their authority.[403] It is doubtful if the missionaries would have exhibited the level of confidence, sometimes bordering dangerously on arrogance, which they demonstrated in Africa, if they did

[403] See for example, M. CROWTHER, "The Administration of French West Africa", in *Tarikh, France in Africa,* 8, Vol. II, no. 4, Essex, 1969, 1981, 59-71, esp. 59-60; M. CROWTHER, "Indirect Rule – French and British Style," in *Africa* 34 (1964), 3, 197-205, 197, 'Ladipo ADAMOLEKUN, "The Road to Independence in French Tropical Africa", in *Tarikh, France in Africa,* 8, Vol. 2, no. 4, Essex, 1969, 72-85, 84. In *Things Fall Apart,* the novelist Chinua Achebe underlines the effect of the terrible fate of the people of Abame in softening the grounds for the relatively smooth advent of the missionaries to Umuofia *Obodo dike.* Cf. ACHEBE, *Things Fall Apart,* pp. 97-99. In *Arrow of God,* Achebe re-visits that painful memory to indicate its lingering power in the fractured consciousness of subsequent generations. Through the recollections of the memory of Unachukwu, Achebe tells us, " In his youth he (Unachukwu) had been conscripted to carry the loads of the soldiers who were sent to destroy Abame as a reprisal for the killing of a white man. What Unachukwu saw during that punitive expedition taught him that the white man was not a thing of fun." Cf. ACHEBE, *Arrow of God,* p. 47.

not have the protective umbrella of the colonial forces behind them, at least tacitly, if not always explicitly.

The colonial enterprise provided a kind of "structural and moral legitimacy" to the missionary enterprise. Even though it is noteworthy that some of the missionaries opposed some of the policies of the colonial regimes in-charge, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that there were great convergences in both projects. One of the most outstanding of these convergences of expressed motives is the idea of the "civilizing mission". Colonial propaganda engaged recurrently in a rhetoric of the black man as the "white man's burden", and painted a rosy picture of themselves as "Samaritans" going to rescue Africans from their assumed "darkness" and "primitivity".[404] Missionaries shared deeply in this project of a "civilizing mission" and could therefore be said to have had all the makings of a charitable arm of the colonial mission. As the "legitimate" authority in the territories they controlled, colonial administrators were in a position to confer authority and legitimacy to the work of the missionaries in "their" territories. For example, in order for the acquisition of land for erection of churches, schools and hospitals to be legal, the endorsement of relevant colonial authorities had to be received.

The colonial structures also considerably aided the logistics of the work of the missionaries, especially regarding transportation and communication. As is well known, the colonial administration very often contributed financially to some aspects of the work of the missionaries, even if as token subsidies. This was the case with respect to the setting up and running of schools and sometimes hospitals, seen as social services in which the missionaries and the colonial administration collaborated considerably.

The self-erected authority of the colonial administration as final secular reference points in the colonial territory, especially in arbitration matters, served as a rudder stabilizing the relations between the various rival missionary groups, and therefore helped to cushion some of the negative effects of rivalry among the missionaries. In some cases, such as

[404] Colonial anthropologists were powerfully recruited into this propaganda and used their skill, their "field researches" to expand creatively on this image of the colonial mission. See e.g., Chukwudi Anthony NJOKU, *Violent Research: Ethics and effects of Negative Representation of the other in Missionary and Anthropological Research* (paper presented at the International conference on *Reconciling Mission: Overcoming Violence,* British and Irish association for Mission Studies (BIAMS), Edinburgh, 23rd to 26th June 2003).

in northern Nigeria, colonial policy stood vehemently in the way of territorial advance of the Christian missionaries.[405]

Particularly with regard to social services such as schools and hospitals, the colonial administration in given territories enabled the creation of standards and controls for the setting up and actual operation of some of the extra-doctrinal ventures of the missionaries in the territories they controlled. By taking charge of approval and certification of schools, for example, colonial regimes raised the bars of excellence in terms of quality of staff and curricula. This stabilizing role meant that some schools set up in a hurry by over zealous missionaries were forced to close down until the conditions set were met.[406]

Sometimes there was rivalry between the missionaries and the colonial state, especially in their differing ideas, ideals, ambitions and interests in a given territory. For example, the French missionaries were perceived as a threat to the British interests in Nigeria at the turn of the century, not just religiously, but indeed culturally, economically, linguistically and politically! And the French missionaries therefore had to be negotiated out of the territory by the British traders and colonial administrators then working in Nigeria.[407]

The psychological boost which missionaries received from the colonial structures, tended in some cases to raise the temptations and real dangers of missionary nationalism—namely, of the missionaries gradually warming into and latching themselves to the colonial project. This was certainly very often the case with nationalized churches, such as the Church of England and churches that identified very closely with the state, as was largely the case with Belgian Catholic Church. In these instances it was difficult to mark rigid borders between the national loyalty and loyalty to the missionary ethos, strictly speaking. The French colonial administration

[405] Concerning the issue of colonial policy in Northern Nigeria as hindrance for missionary advance in the territory, see, C.N. UBAH, "Problems of Christian Missionaries in the Muslim Emirates of Nigeria, 1900–1928", in *Journal of African Studies,* 3 (1976), 351-371; M.H. KUKAH, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria,* (Lagos: Spectrum, 1993), 4.; J.S. TRIMINGHAM, *The Christian Church and Islam in West Africa* (London: SCM Press, 1955), 25 and Emefie Ikenga METUH, "Muslim Resistance to Missionary Penetration of Northern Nigeria, 1857–1960: A Missiological Interpretation," in *Mission Studies,* Vol. III, 2 (1986), 28-39, 29.

[406] On the moderating influence of colonial administration on the social services set up by missionaries, see e.g., N.I. OMENKA, *The School in the Service of Evangelization. The Catholic Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria 1886–1950* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 70-100, 218-230.

[407] Cf. EKECHI, *Missionary Enterprise*, pp. 73ff.

displayed interesting relations with French missionaries in the colonial-mission field. While at home, the consolidation of the ethos of the French Revolution had driven the Catholic Church in France to the margins of the French society, while in the colonial-missionary outpost, the French missionaries formed a major plank in the implementation of the French colonial policy of assimilation.[408]

In some other cases, the sour relations that existed on the home front between the missionaries and the incumbent colonial powers, tended to replay itself in the mission-colonial territory. The case of the Irish missionaries and the British colonial administration is a classic example. At home, the Irish were under the British Crown until 1916, when Ireland gained Independence from the British colonial regime.[409] The gaining of independence did not wipe away over night the painful memory, both from personal experience and from family stories, the Irish—missionary or not—harbored. This memory contained many violent and violating dimensions of being under colonial bondage passed down the generational line.[410]

Under the British colonial regime, Catholics in Ireland, as indeed in other parts of the United Kingdom, including Scotland, Wales and even England, had a raw deal. The post-reformation ascendancy of Protestantism in England, the seat of power in Britain, to the status of state religion, systematically outlawed Catholicism, seen as lingering instrument of the imperial Roman Empire. Catholics in the United Kingdom effectively became second class citizens and were treated as rebels and saboteurs of the British Empire. They were dispossessed of their property, particularly land, which was in turn redistributed as incentives and rewards to faithful

[408] This perceived close identification between the French missionaries and the French colonial administration was partly responsible for the determination by the British colonial agents and traders to oust them from Southern Nigeria at the turn of the century. The Irish Catholic missionaries took their place by 1905. Cf. EKECHI, *Missionary Enterprise*.

[409] Northern Ireland, however, remained attached to the United Kingdom and constituted in its own way a lingering source of sour relations between the British and the "Irish", a term which in Northern Ireland deserves to be nuanced and indeed further categorized into "Loyalists" or "Republicans", and "Protestants" and "Catholics", due to its charged connotations.

[410] The memory of the Irish experience as colony of Britain lingered several decades after Irish independence in 1916. Bishop McGettrick, writing in 1988, recalls some of these events with a painful freshness. Cf. Thomas MCGETTRICK, *Memoirs of Bishop T. McGettrick* (Enugu, 1988), see esp. 9-45. See also M.N.G. PHADRAIG, "Ireland: The Exception that Proves Two Rules", in T.M. GANNON, (ed.), *World Catholicism in Transition* (New York: MacMillan, 1988), 205-217, esp. 206.

servants of the British Empire, who clearly professed the state religion. Catholics in the Kingdom were not allowed to fill certain political offices except if they renounced their Catholic faith and embraced Protestantism. On account of this sectarian persecution, Catholicism gradually became not just a religion but an identity marker for the vast majority of the Irish.[411] These charged memories and sour relations found varied expression in the relations between Irish Catholic missionaries, in particular, and the British colonial administrators.

Of particular note is the development of polarisation in the relations between the church and state in these instances. In general, Irish Catholic missionaries kept their distance from close ties with the British colonial regime in the African territories. This also meant discouraging their converts and members from active participation in the civil service of the colonial regime, and running what seems like a parallel, relatively self-sufficient "quasi-government" in the areas where they had control. Here they set up networks of functional schools and hospitals, run along the lines of the Irish grassroots model with parish priests as managers.

Their Protestant counterparts in the British mission-colonial territories had no such prominent complexes and indeed encouraged their promising and educated converts to take up positions in the colonial civil service. As long as the colonial regime was in power, it was difficult to see the cracks in the wisdom of the Irish Catholic missionaries in adopting this distance from the corridors of secular power in the territory. Indeed, in eastern Nigeria, there was among the Catholic missionaries a powerful, even if short-lived sense of being the stronger in the rivalry. But the advent of nationalism and the process of decolonization illuminated rather sharply the unconscious disadvantage into which the Catholic missionaries had thrown their vast indigenous membership, who then, at a rather late stage in the transfer of power from the colonial regime to the indigenous populations, had to start learning the political ropes. Their secure enclosure in the seemingly powerful and resourceful institutions set up by the Irish Catholic missionaries was found to be grossly inadequate in the re-configuration of power following the decolonization process.

In the first place, these institutions did not automatically guarantee political power for Catholics who had been weaned away from the corridors of secular power by their missionary mentors. Secondly, the

[411] See e.g., PHADRAIG, "Ireland", pp. 206-207. See also Sean FARRAGHER, *Dev and His Alma Mater. Eamon de Valera's Lifelong Association with Blackrock College 1898–1975* (Dublin & London: Paraclete Press 1984), 9-14 and JORDAN, *Autobiography of a Missionary,* pp. 9-11.

survival and flourishing of those very institutions were themselves subject to and largely dependent on the whims and caprices of those who held political power. The seemingly ingrained political shyness, even naivety, of Catholics in certain regions of Africa derived in a large part from this polarisation practiced by missionary groups—like the Irish missionaries, who allowed their sour relations to affect their perception of the bigger picture of the political landscape of the *mission-colonial* territory.[412]

The creation of urban centers by the colonial regimes indirectly affected the location of the administrative centers of the various missionary churches. While the original centers from which the missionaries operated in a given territorial radius remain symbolically powerful, the actual current centers of church administration were moved to the urban centers and the centers of the political administration, with very few exceptions.

Finally, the close identification between some of the missionaries and the colonial regimes considerably secularized the missionary project and tended to compromise the high ethics and integrity expected of the missions by virtue of their professed gospel orientation. It is therefore not surprising that critics of the colonial affront have not spared the missionaries seen as allies and collaborators.[413]

IX. Stock-Taking:

Missionary Enterprise in Colonial Africa

Christian missionaries have made important contributions to the religious and cultural landscape of Africa. The primary legacy of course was the introduction of the Christian faith to parts previously untouched by the new faith. As is well known, North Africa and Ethiopia were active participants in the development of Christian theology and practice, right from the earliest days of the founding of the faith. However, other parts of the continent, such as West Africa and central Africa, had to wait until the fifteenth century for the first pioneer effort to introduce the Christian faith to their shores. The nineteenth and twentieth century missionaries vastly succeeded where other efforts failed in this mission.

In concrete terms, this meant advertising and recruiting membership to seemingly new ideas of God, new forms of worship, new and sometimes contrasting worldviews, especially new conceptions and images of the

[412] For a closer exploration of this issue see, Njoku, *Vatican II and the Process of its Reception*, pp. 112-113, 404.

[413] Cf. W. Buhlmann, *Missions on Trial* (Slough, 1978).

after-life, as well as new vocabularies to understand this new worldview—like the terms heaven and hell. It also meant the introduction of new religious ethos and practices, new religious calendars, new liturgical and ritual practices and costumes/vestments as well as the introduction of new sacraments, sacramentals and new devotional practices. It also meant the introduction of new hymns and music and new liturgical language/s.

Side by side with these were the many tools developed to share and transmit these faith creations, such as the Bible, the prime tool of the missionaries, and the catechism, through which the tenets of the churches were broken down for the consumption of the faithful. These material and immaterial paraphernalia of the Christian religion were of course intimately tied to the many cultures that had hitherto used and woven the core values of the Christian faith into the reality of their daily lives, their own cultural values and peculiar modes of expressing those values, their own linguistic and cultural genius as well as the cycle of the seasons in their own peculiar environment. Having dwelt in the Mediterranean and in Europe for close to 1,500 years before its introduction to certain parts of Africa, the Christianity that came to Africa was wrapped tightly in European and Mediterranean cultural garb and philosophical orientations.[414] All that baggage was tied together and parceled to the converts through the European missionaries.

The Christian missionaries were, more than the colonial administrators, the major agents for the introduction of Western style education and literacy style into the mission territories. Two problems seemed to hinder the colonial regimes from making greater input into the effort to introduce western style education into the territories they governed. First, colonial staff were spread quite thinly, and could hardly meet the demands that the vast populations clamoring for education made on their slender staff strength. Secondly, the colonial administrators saw education as strategic and key to changing the consciousness of the people. They projected that an educated class would be very problematic to govern, at the very least, and would have the capacity to jeopardize their continued

[414] Cecil McGarry has in this regard written insightfully, "The union of Christianity with the Mediterranean culture was so successful, so complete and so long-lasting that we often forget that we have received Christianity in this cultural matrix. Too often we tend to identify this culturally conditioned expression of our faith in Jesus Christ simply with Christianity as such. We forget that "Christianity as such" does not exist. The faith is not a culture, but it can only find expression and live within cultures;" Cf. Cecil MCGARRY, "Preface", to John WALLIGO et al, *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency* (Kampala: St. Pauls' Publications, 1986), 8.

stay in the territories. On account of this, colonial regimes, like slave masters of old, were very reluctant to introduce Western style education into the territories they governed. Indeed, using various techniques, they tried to discourage the missionaries from doing so, until this campaign against education became increasingly untenable and impractical on their part.

Various forms of writing were in existence in Africa. These were restricted in their use to cults and, possibly on account of the secrecy that surrounded them, they were poorly exercised and therefore poorly developed.[415] Through the mission schools, European missionaries were in the vanguard of the democratization of writing in Africa. In particular, through the mission schools the scripts and languages of the various colonial powers that dominated Africa during the period, namely, the English, the French and the Portuguese languages, were introduced into Africa.[416] The linguistic empowerment of the products of mission schools in this way gave them unprecedented access to the knowledge bank of the West stored in these scripts and languages. Armed with this key to the Western knowledge store, they could penetrate the logic of the texts, begin to have an illuminating window into the Western world, its philosophy, its theology, its artistic, cultural and technological heritage. Eventually this linguistic empowerment would translate into an ability to speak back, to dialogue, to re-visit and re-articulate their own hitherto denigrated cultural genius. Linguistic empowerment contained in its very womb the seeds of the recovery of self-identity and self-esteem of the mission school boys and girls consciously estranged from their own cultural roots. With it they would also begin the huge work of transcribing their own cultural and civilizational heritage previously locked in oral banks into the relative permanence of the written documentation.

The effort of the missionaries to translate the principal Christian literature, such as the Bible and the catechism, into the vernaculars triggered the reduction of the vernaculars into writing and the gradual development of standard orthographies. Of course the preferential choice of

[415] See e.g., M.A. ONWUEJEOGWU, *Evolutionary Trends*, 57-69. See also O. ELUYEMI, "African Systems of Contact and Communication", in *Nigeria Magazine,* Vol 55, no. 2, April–June 1987, 36-49.

[416]The introduction of the German language, even though spirited while it lasted, was stillborn following the very early exit of the German missionaries from Africa in the wake of the loss of the German colonial territories in Africa at the end of the 1914-1917 Great War. While remnants of German church architecture survived, the language they tried to pass on to their converts was one of the first casualties once missionaries of other tongues took over control of these territories.

particular local languages and dialects over others for pastoral and translation uses by the missionaries, created its own problems for the traditional linguistic landscapes.[417]

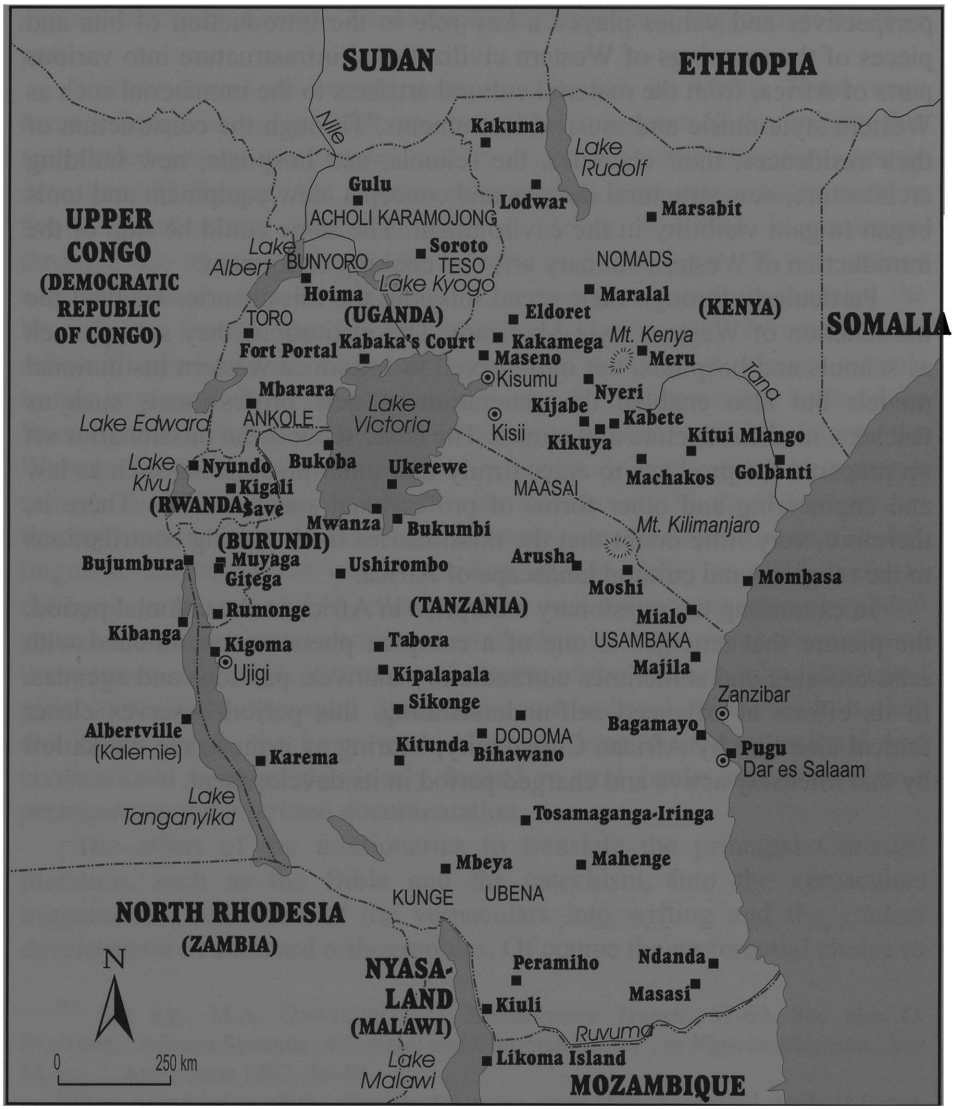
The European missionaries as harbingers of Western cultural perspectives and values played a key role in the introduction of bits and pieces of the trappings of Western civilizational infrastructure into various parts of Africa, from the material cultural artifacts to the immaterial such as Western style music and musical instruments. Through the construction of their residences, their churches, the schools, and hospitals, new building architecture, new structural designs and concepts, new equipment and tools began to gain visibility in the environment. The same could be said of the introduction of Western culinary arts and cooking equipment.

Particularly through their social mission, the missionaries enabled the introduction of Western style Medicare. The institutions they set up, such as schools and hospitals, not only served to introduce western institutional models but also enabled the generation of new professionals such as teachers, medical doctors and nurses. The basic schools the missionaries set up prepared the products to enter firmly into other professions such as law and engineering and other forms of professional specialization. There is, therefore, very little doubt that the missionaries made lasting contributions to the religious and cultural landscape of Africa.

In examining the missionary enterprise in Africa in the colonial period, the picture that emerges is one of a complex phenomenon, imbued with criss-crossing and sometimes contradictory motives, passions and agendas. In its efforts at balanced self-understanding, this period deserves closer critical attention by African Christianity, bearing as it must, the marks left by that intensely active and charged period in its development.

[417] Hans Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana,* (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1967), 343. See also ISICHEI, *A History of Christianity in* Africa, 169ff, 268, 294; E.A. DAHUNSI, "The Problem of Translating the Bible into African Languages", in E. MVENG & J.Z. Werblowsky (eds), *The Jerusalem Congress on Black Africa and the Bible* (Jerusalem, 1972), 117-120.

7. Early missions in East Africa



8. Early missions in Southern Africa (1790's - 1860's)