

13th INAUGURAL LECTURE

Topic:

**THE POET-PROPHETIC VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS OF OUR TIME:
AN ORAL, LITERARY AND BIBLICAL PROGNOSIS**

By

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**BENSON IDAHOSA UNIVERSITY, BENIN CITY,
NIGERIA**

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PROTOCOL

- The Chancellor and Archbishop of the Church of God Mission
- The President, Benson Idahosa University
- The Vice President, Benson Idahosa University
- The Pro-Chancellor
- The Vice Chancellor
- The Deputy Vice-Chancellor
- The Registrar
- The Bursar
- The University Librarian
- Deans of Faculties and Directors
- Professors
- Heads of Department/Units
- Members of Senate and Congregation
- Distinguished Guests from other Universities
- Members of the NOLA
- Members of UIAA
- Institute for Benin Studies
- My family Members
- Members of Staff of the Faculty of Arts and Education, Benson Idahosa University
- Distinguished Students of the Faculty of Arts and Education, Benson Idahosa University
- All other staff and students of Benson Idahosa University
- My Lords Spiritual
- Members of Church of God Mission Int'l Inc.
- Benin Pastors Association (BPA)
- Empowered Christian Men Fellowship International (ECMFI)
- Mighty Men of Valour
- Gentlemen of the Press
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Fulfilment of Prophecy

Between July 27, 2010 and today, November 8, 2022, there were twelve inaugural lectures delivered by twelve Professors of note from this University. Out of these, two of the lectures were from the Department of English Studies, namely, “Language: A Complimentarity of Being” delivered by Professor R. A. Masagbor on April 17, 2012, and “Because “War is much too serious to be left to the military”, Corpus linguistics is a thing and it is a very useful thing too,” delivered by Professor Alexandra Esimaje on October 18, 2022.

Today, it is a prophecy fulfilled and a rare privilege to join my esteemed colleagues in the Department who have performed similar rituals before me to deliver the third inaugural lecture with the title, “The Poet- Prophetic Voice in the Wilderness of Our Time: An Oral, Literary and Biblical Prognosis.”

For those of you who attach value to numbers, three is used very symbolically in the Bible to represent the resurrection day, the day of power manifestation and the performance day of prophecy. Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, when Jesus was crucified on the first day, some of his detractors thought that the end had come, they celebrated his burial on the second day, but on the third day, He, who was dead, came alive! The prophecy that He would rise again, was performed. Technically speaking, the story of the inaugural lecturer today is not different from that of Jesus Christ, It is my prayer that at the end of this lecture, every prophecy from God, that every member of this esteemed audience has received before now, will find expression in Jesus' name.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, let me begin by saying that the lecturer of today is a product of prophecy, a child of destiny, who is constantly guided through grace, by divine covenant between him and his God Almighty. So it is and has been, and will be, that very many factors, events, circumstances and people have contributed in many ways and degree to making me what and who I am today. To the glory of God, everything has worked together for my good. This inaugural lecture is indeed a fulfilment and a performance of prophecy.

The Beginnings...

I recall, that growing up as a child, and gradually evolving into the teenage bracket, I was always fulfilled staying in the circles of my seniors and playing with them. I would ask questions and they would gladly respond. Their desire was to unravel any child-like mystery that I was presenting to them. They were encouraged by the strength of my posser and the commanding confidence with which I made my points.

I can never forget in a hurry the three to four instances when I made my way into the team play sessions of my elder brother, Pastor Sotar Osahon Aiyowie – Ighile then in the later part of his teenage years. On such occasions, I would make all of them sit and I would stand and start telling Bibles Stories. As strong as the narrations were, it was the dramaturgy and the aesthetic embellishments that were always the reference points.

My oral presentation of the story of the Good Samaritan is so vivid to me. I remember pacing from one side to the other, playing the roles of different characters at different times as I would dramatize John 10: 30 -37 of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible:

30 "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, 34. and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' 36. Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37. He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

I would stretch my hands to my senior brother and his friends and tell them to, “*Go and do likewise.*” They will stand and clap for me with excitement. Little did I know that the journey to Oral Poetics, Performance Criticism and Biblical Literature was about to start.

My Journey into the Field of Oral and Biblical Literature

As an undergraduate of the University of Ibadan in the late 1980s, I was always looking forward to the long vacation when I would see my parents and embark on a few holiday jobs. On one of such journeys, just before I travelled, I decided to inform my Head of Department and lecturer, Professor Isidore Okpewho of my intention to go to Benin. It was in the process of the interaction that he informed me of an upcoming conference at the University of Benin that he planned to attend. Because the event coincided with my scheduled visit to Benin, he then invited me to join him in his Brown Mercedes Benz. It was in the course of the journey that he began to open my eyes to the possibilities of Oral Performance and Folklore Studies. He then drew my attention to the relative dearth of Benin oral literature and what value my contributions would make in that regard. The three-hour pleasure ride session with Professor Okpewho significantly influenced my research interest and the choice of my long essay’s topic which I worked on, “The Myth and Poetry in the Igue (Ehema) festival of Orio-Ozolua Bendel State.” The Igue festival, a major cultural phenomenon among the Edo people, later became the subject and object of some of my academic publications.

The experience at the undergraduate research with particular reference to the poetic-performance segment of the festival, in which I took active part, deepened my interest in oral literary studies. In the course of my postgraduate research in Edo studies, I came in contact with one of the finest historians in Africa, currently in the diaspora, Professor Uyilawa Usuanlele, who, quite impressed with the creative work I did on Igue Festival, drew my attention to the research reservoir in Egogo Alagiebo, a famous blind minstrel in Benin City.

For some decades, the man, Egogo Alagiebo, played his traditional flute at the popular Airport Road Post Office, Benin City. With the help of my father, Evbavba Damian Aiyowieren Ighile, I was able to conduct several interviews with the musician, and in 1994, I came out with an original work that attracted official commendation by the Department of English, University of Ibadan. The dissertation entitled, “The Song and Poetry of Egogo Alagiebo: The Blind Minstrel of Benin,” has since become an intellectual background for an academic journey in oral literary studies.

When I returned to the Department of English, University of Ibadan in 2005/2006 session to pursue a PhD programme, after my sojourn in journalism at Sketch Press Limited Ibadan, where I rose to the position of Features Editor and member of the Editorial Board, and later a full time pastoring career as National Pastor, Training and Manpower Development at Livingspring Chapel Ibadan, Professor Nelson Fashina, a distinguished scholar and a minister of the gospel himself, fascinated by my impressive performance in oral literary studies and pastoring ministry, counselled me on the need to pursue an academic career that would blend my oral literary background and exposure with my ministerial inclination as a pastor and teacher of the Bible. He further observed that not much work has been done on the literary stylistic analysis of the Bible and other sacred texts and noted that I would make all the difference as a scholar if I also explored some folkloric features in the Bible.

In encouraging and guiding me into the field of Bible as literature, he took a step further by asking me to teach his Bible as literature course at the University of Ibadan, and by 2011, he had successfully completed the supervision of my doctoral thesis entitled, “**A Literary Analysis of the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes,**” the choice of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes was to further buttress the relationship between oral literary studies and biblical criticism that the researcher is deeply rooted in.

Meanwhile, on August 1, 2006, I got a teaching appointment as a lecturer in the Department of English, College of Humanities at the Redeemer’s University, Redemption City. By 2007/2008 session, I had already introduced three courses to the undergraduate programme in my Department, namely, Introduction to Bible as Literature, Bible as Literature and Christian Biographical Literature. These courses, I volunteered to teach, in addition to other English and Oral literature courses.

In 2010, I attended two international conferences in Kenya on Oral literature and Bible as a literary Text. The first conference which held in Mombasa was organized by the International Society for Oral literatures in Africa. It was themed, “Indigenous Knowledges in the Age of Globalization.” Professors G. G. Darah, Nereus Y. Tadi, Leticia Nyitse Mbaiver, Okey Okwechime and yours sincerely, among other scholars, were in attendance. The second conference which I attended styled, “Power, Politics and Prayer” was organized by the African International University in conjunction with PANAFSTRAG and International Society for the Study of Religions, Culture and Society took place in Kenya.

When we returned from the Mombasa conference, we decided to have our own Nigerian version of the International Society for Oral Literatures in Africa, and between the 6th and 9th December, 2010 we held the inaugural conference of the Nigerian Oral Literature Association at Kayriott Hotel and Suites, Effurun-Warri, Delta State with the following as pioneer national officers of the professional body: Professors G.G. Darah – President, Prof Nereus Y. Tadi - VP North, Prof Felicia Ohwovoriele - VP South, Prof Mark Osama Ighile - Administrative Secretary, Dr. Peter Omoko - Membership Secretary, Prof. Okey Okwechime – Treasurer, Prof Segun Adekoya- Journal Editor, Prof Iyabode Omolara Nwabueze - Deputy Admin Secretary, Prof Toyin Jegede - Financial Secretary, Prof Leticia Nyitse Mbaiver – Archivist, Prof Mobolanle Sotunsa - Deputy Archivist, Anote Ajuolorou - Publicity Secretary and Evelyn Osagie - Deputy Publicity Secretary. I served in the capacity of Administrative Secretary of Nigerian Oral Literature Association for 10 years.

In 2013, at Redeemer’s University, I got two appointments that boosted my profile career and validated my scholarly growth in oral literature and Bible as a literary text. The first was my appointment by the Vice Chancellor as the Take-Off Coordinator and later Pioneer Ag. Head, Department of Christian Religious Studies. The second was the appointment by my HOD, Professor Edmund Bamiro, as the supervisor of the first two Master’s Degree students in the Department of English, College of Humanities. When I was leaving Redeemer’s University in October 2014, I had just completed the supervision of the first two postgraduate students, namely, Egbeyemi, Ifeoluwa with her dissertation entitled, *The Poetry of Pastor Adeboye’s Praise Songs* and Etti, Mary Emmanuel who wrote on, *Society and Audience in the Songs of Uko Akpan*.

The first major assignment that welcomed me to Benson Idahosa University in November 2014, was my active participation in the National Universities Commission resource

verification exercise for Post Graduate programmes in my department. With the successful outcome of the NUC visitation, we have been producing quality scholars in English and Literature. I am grateful to God for making me strategic to this great move in the department, either as Head of the Literature Unit, as Director of Academic Planning or as Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Education. This month, we are expecting another resource verification visitation. This time, for our PhD programmes. I have over the years enjoyed the privilege of mentoring and coaching students and younger colleagues in the disciplines of oral literature and biblical literary criticism.

I salute Professors Akinjide Osuntokun, Funso Akere, Edmund Bamiro, Lekan Oyegoke, Adebola Adebileje, Ahmed Yerima, Ademola Dasyilva, Richard Masagbor, Greg Nwoye, Sarah Shokpeka, Innocent Umejesi, Alexandra Esimaje and Dr. Charisa Dada, who have all served as my Deans and Heads of Departments at Redeemer's University and Benson Idahosa University respectively. You all contributed to the sharpening of my sword that now has a voice. To those who have passed on to glory, continue to rest in the bosom of the Lord.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, permit me to pontificate by saying that the inaugural lecture of today will be delivered by an expert in the field of oral and biblical literature, having been actively involved in research, teaching and training in the field for over sixteen years consistently. Today's inaugural lecturer is a full oral performer, a folklorist, a poet, a musician, a story teller and a literary Bible scholar.

The Dynamics of an Inaugural Lecture

It was Professor Aderemi Raji Oyelade who once asked a set of rhetorical questions in a similar context like the one we are having this afternoon. According to him, "For what is the spirit of an inaugural lecture if it is not the dare and confessions of work done and yet to be done? What is an inaugural lecture if not the exercise of decimal contribution to scholarship, and what is an inaugural lecture if not the unfurling of challenges and triumphs, testaments and appreciation of collaborations and other forms of support?"¹ Mr. Vice Chancellor, inaugural lectures are nothing but the ceremony of arrival and returns, inaugural lectures can also be described as rights of endings only if such endings are seen as the provocative turn of new departures, because each sense of completion is indeed an entry into another beginning. Inaugural lectures are glamorous festivals of pontifications and the amplifications of silent and tedious moments of study before a critical audience who, unfortunately cannot ask questions.

For us at Benson Idahosa University, there is now a structure that is not only predictable but commendable, a roaster has been prepared for all the Professors who are yet to present theirs to do so. Mr. Vice Chancellor, I want to specially raise a cap of applause for this tradition that you have established and I am immensely grateful for the opportunity given to me to deliver mine today. I want to respectfully urge all the Professors on the list to do same, so that this initiative can be deeply rooted as one of the legacies of Professor Sam Guobadia. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, please join me to appreciate and celebrate our enviable Vice Chancellor,

¹ Reference to his inaugural lecture entitled *Fluent In{ter}ventions: webs of the literary Discipline*

whose main desire is to change the narrative and transform Benson Idahosa University into a world class institution.

The Lecture

In the next couple of minutes, I shall be taking you through an epic journey into what I profess and that which has been the focus of my teaching and research. I will be highlighting, through songs, poetry, performance, proverbs and aspects of the Bible, my contribution to scholarship in my field of specialization, African literature, oral poetics and Bible as a literary text for over two decades. In the process, I will be situating my teaching and research experience within the context of our socio-political environment with a view to exploring how, through learning and commitment to the academic discipline, the society can be a better place. Again, my lecture is entitled, “The Poet-Prophetic Voice in the Wilderness of our Time: An Oral, Literary and Biblical Prognosis.”

Mr. Vice Chancellor, I like to begin by having recourse to a biblical reference and two poems from my published collection entitled, *Strangled Seasons* that capture the spirit of the lecture and are pronounced on the direction of my research interests:

In John Chapter 1: 21 – 23 of the New King James version of the Bible, scripture says:

21. And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.

“Are you the Prophet?”

And he answered, “No.”

22. Then they said to him, “Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?”

23. He said: “I *am*”

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord,” as the prophet Isaiah said.”

Song of the Fence

*I shall sing a song
here at the crossroads
where flower breeds
and decision fights.*

*The wit of life
pushes emotions away
to the pit of reason
and all that sings
is the road*

to the crossroads,

*The cross roads of human frame
The human frame of the crossroads
That charms me here.*

*Yea, I shall sing a song
and my song shall wake the dead*

My Story

*My story...
Wrapped up in the cotton
Of many towns and villages
Across the sages of the sage*

*My story...
Enveloped in the womb
Of discoveries and experimentation
Across the different forests of books*

*My story
Sealed in the saintly breasts
Where angels like desk officer's dance
Across the ritual lines of prophecy*

*My story
Here comes my story.²*

From the quoted scripture, it is clear that I am here to say something about myself and the environment in which I am located. I am here as a voice, equipped, not only to establish the truth that we are in a wilderness of some sort, but also, to explore ways of escape and progress. The first poem buttresses the fact that I have been singing in diverse ways, from the beginning of my career till now, and beyond and that this, in a sense, is a song with a voice. The second poem reveals that I am here to tell a story, wrapped in the cotton of poetry, performance, songs and proverbs that emanate from discoveries and folkloric experimentations across the different forest of books. This story is not only captured in poems, songs, proverbs, but also in the saintly breast of the Bible and the Church, where prophecy finds full expression in pronouncements and declarations.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, there are two broad families that encapsulate the dimensions and intricacies of this lecture, namely, literature and the Bible. I would like to briefly reflect on them in the light of the routes I have taken to achieving a certain kind of scholarship. After which, I will zero on the specifics that make up the title and the essence of this discourse.

Understanding Literature

² Ighile, M.O. (2018). *Strangled Seasons: Collection of Poems*. Mindex Publishing Company Limited. Benin. (ISBN 978-978-8534-32-7).

My research into literature generally reveals that this phenomenon is a representation of human lives, activities and all the aspects of human nature through the conventional and non-conventional categorization. Literature has over the years grown beyond the written text industry, its significance extends to the domain of performance, and just as literature exists in performance, so does performance have to do with literature and literary theory (Finnegan 2005). Literature constructs a representation of activities already in existence by means of words. We can know our world through literature, and literature can also represent it to ourselves; representation in this context is the most fundamental to all human activities.

Other notable scholars have attempted to give a comprehensive definition of literature but such efforts have ended up producing more questions than answers. This perhaps explains why Ellis (1977) wonders whether the question will ever be answered. Adams (1969) admits that the definition of literature is rather difficult as important as it may be, and observes that there is hardly any book that does. Hough (1966) believes that we all know what literature means even if we cannot articulate it in definitive terms. However, there have been quite a number of attempts at definition. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* explains literature as a general term which, in default of a peak definition, may stand for the best expression of the best thought reduced to writing. But then, this does not also say much. Hirsch (1978)³ defines literature as any text worthy to be taught to students by teachers of literature, when these texts are not being taught to students in other departments of a school or university. McFadden (1978)⁴ sees literature as a canon which consists of those works in language by which a community defines itself through the course of its history. It includes works which are primarily artistic and also those whose aesthetic qualities are only secondary. The self-defining activity of the community is conducted in the light of such works, as its members have come to read them (or conceive them).

Examining the literary concept from a multi-faceted nature, Ryken (1974)⁵ argues that literature does not, for example, discuss virtue but instead shows a virtuous person acting.” Literature does not only present experience but interprets it. Literature is an interpretive presentation of experience in an artistic form.” A working definition of literature then, is that it is an interpretive presentation in an artistic form. The approach of Sartre (2005)⁶ to the definition of literature is rather instructive. While placing literature within the operational contexts of history and society, he presents a definitive proposal for the phenomenology of reading. He then goes further to present a fascinating illustration of how to write a history of literature that takes ideology and institutions into account. Three fundamental questions are central to Sartre’s investigation of literature. These include: What is writing? Why write? For whom does one write? Essentially, the author chooses to discuss prose, rather than poetry. He posits that prose has the potential of a purposeful reflection of the world, whereas poetry is an

³ From Hirsh, E. D. 1978. What isn’t literature? *What is Literature*. P. Hemadi. Ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Chapter 2:24-34

⁴ Mcfadden, 1078

⁵ Ryken , 1974

⁶ Sarte, 2005

end in itself. In prose, words signify, they describe men, situations and objects. In the case of poetry, the words are ends in themselves.

While Sartre's watertight distinctions may not be entirely tenable, the differences are there. Although criticism of a poem must pay close attention to its structure of words and symbols, it is obvious that the reader enters the poem through word association and references which are linked, however, indirectly to everyday significative language. What appears to be critical to Sartre's understanding of the functions and dynamics of literature is that if it is properly utilised, literature can be a powerful means of liberating the reader from the kind of alienation which develop in particular situation. By the same token, the writer also frees himself and overcomes his own alienation. Sartre argues that literature is alienated when it forgets or ignores its autonomy and places itself at the service of the temporal power. It is the responsibility of the writer to dispel ignorance, prejudice, and false emotion.

Meyer (1997)⁷ pushes the discussion by admitting that understanding exactly what literature is has been truly challenging and that pinning down a definition has proven to be tedious. Quite often, one seems to be reduced to saying, "I know it when I see it" or perhaps, "Anything is literature if you want to read it that way". Perhaps in a bold attempt to find solution to the challenge of defining literature, Meyer presents two different approaches. These are the critical approach and the prototype approach. While the critical approach entails the usual style of defining a word in English by providing a list of criteria which must be met, the prototype approach on the other hand, gives a unique dimension to the meaning of words which does not focus on a list of criteria which must be met by each example, but on an established prototype, a particular good example of the word, to which other example of the word bear some resemblance.

Working from the prototype approach to word meaning, Meyer tries to develop an answer to the question, "What is Literature?" by suggesting that prototypical literary works are: written texts, marked by careful use of language including features such as creative metaphors, hell turned phrases, elegant syntax, rhyme, alliteration and meter, in a literary genre (poetry, prose fiction or drama), read aesthetically, intended by the author to be read aesthetically and contain many weak implications (are deliberately somewhat open in interpretation).

Mr. Vice Chancellor, as seemingly complex as the conceptual implications of literature may be, its nature and functions are quite glaring and relevant to this lecture. As it has also been observed elsewhere, "the primary function of literature derives from its nature."⁸ Therefore, a discussion of the nature of literature has implication for its functions. Literature is an art made realisable in imaginative expression or a special use of language. One of the important values possessed by literature is that it helps to preserve the precision and therefore the vitality of language. Whatever may be the analytical tool of literature, deliberate 'manipulation of language for aesthetic effect' is its essence⁹. The strategic place of language in literary

⁷ Meyer, 1997

⁸ Adebayo on the nature and function of Literature

⁹ Egudu

experience cannot be overemphasised. Research has also shown that literature is the second cultural imperative after language.

Literature is born when language gives creative expression to experience. Literature is a by-product of language and is in many respects similarly characterised. It is a form of expression. It communicates, instructs and entertains. It opens vistas of human life and experience to an audience or reader. It serves to expand the limits of language. The great languages of history produced great literature which was an essential basis of their greatness. Literature is far more productive “hatchery for new lexicographical, semantic, and grammatical linguistic additions than the conversational medium can afford language for its growth and expression”¹⁰. Wellek and Warren (1970) push the discussion by holding the view that language is the material of literature as stone is of sculpture, paint is of picture and sound is of music. Hence, according to them, it seems best to consider as literature only works in which the aesthetic function is dominant, while we can recognize that there are aesthetic elements such as style and composition in works which have non-aesthetic purpose such as scientific treatise, philosophical dissertation, political pamphlets and sermons to mention just a few.

While it is crucial to acknowledge that literature has other functions such as educating and correcting through satire and other forms, the fact still remains that its primary purpose is to be an aesthetically satisfying organization of words.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, there exists a working relationship between “literature and philosophy from the perspective of ‘worldview’ and critical discourse.”¹¹ In other words, philosophy and literature are both social phenomena and forms of social consciousness. Social, not just in the sense that they are produced by people who are “beings– in – society”, but perhaps more importantly in two respects. First, even when philosophy and literature spring from the experience of an individual or treat very abstract matters, they still constitute a reflection on the phenomena of life (Here it should be noted that personal experience, the experience of the individual, is still human experience and human experience is essentially social – a product of our interaction, not just with nature but also with ourselves). Second, philosophy and literature are products of the intellectual and practical needs of society and the individuals and classes compromising it. Whichever tool of analysis we use in describing or assessing literature, its relevance cannot be a work for its own sake. It either tries to present an experience of human relevance or attempts to repackage or remodel the personality of the individual in society. In performing any of these roles, literature operates within “some context of ideas which provide an anchor point for the web of descriptions, facts, constructions and evaluations” which it contains¹².

Mr. Vice Chancellor, we can also appreciate literature within a socio-ideological context. Whether a product of an individual’s creative imagination, critical intelligence or as the shared collective product of a state, literature manifests observable traits and relates in terms of “its

¹⁰ Wellek and Warren 1970

¹¹ Oladipo on Philosophy and Literature

¹² Ibid

themes, total landscape and tendencies to the social, political, cultural and physical environment characteristic of its enabling state".¹³

By nature, literature is generally a highly manoeuvrable art form. It creates and posits possibilities for social order without necessarily fragmenting entities. Literature is an exportable commodity and has a trans-territorial status that lends it universal applicability. However, even in that trans-contextual state, literature maintains a distinctiveness which it does not, and cannot, negotiate or compromise. It creates its own myths and mytho-poetic hegemonies. It recognizes its own geography and negotiates its own space. Literature shares basically the same sociological concerns. Studies have revealed that literature, like sociology, is a discipline preeminently concerned with man's social world, his adaptation to it, and his desire to change it. The literary forms in prose, poetry or drama, attempt to recreate the social world of man's relation with his family, with politics, with the state in its economic or religious constructs.

Literature delineates the role of man in the environment, as well as the conflicts and tension within groups and social classes. Literature and Sociology are therefore, technically speaking, best of friends, no matter the operational differences in their method of talking about society. Literature in its aesthetic form creates a fictional universe where there is a possible verification of reality at the experiential level of man living in a society. It is arguable that imaginative literature is a re-construction of the world seen from a particular point of view which we may refer to as the abstract idealism of the author or the hero. While the writer may be aware of literary tradition, it is the unconscious re-working of experience fused with his definition of a situation and his own values that produce the fictional universe which the sociology of literature may be concerned to explore.

The Practice of Literary Criticism

While it is true that a major driving force for the reading of literature is pleasure or entertainment, it is not the overriding factor. Sooner than later, the reader begins to realize that he enjoys some things more than others, and some reading experiences are positively distasteful while others become more and more deeply absorbing. One way of explaining this would be to say that he begins to develop a taste for some things rather than for others. But this is even not the point. The real issue is that he begins the process of discriminating, of appreciating, and of feeling the difference between what is really important, really first-class or what is trivial or easily dispensable. As the reader begins to gain experience in the art of discrimination, in comparing his discrimination with other people's, particularly more experienced people, and as he reflects upon his literary actions and discovers the principles or guidelines on which they are based, he comes towards a state of mind in which he feels a capacity for judgment, that is, for delivering an opinion about the rights and wrongs of a situation, an expression or a problem which other people may accept or agree to, which is not subsequently overturned and which forms the best basis for many kinds of practical actions. The critical reading of a work of

¹³ Asein on the relationship between Literature and the State

literature is a demanding discipline. But then the beauty of literary appreciation and criticism lies in the fact the reader ultimately does not have anything to rely upon in making his choice but himself.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, in order to appreciate literature and put it in its proper place in the critical enterprise, the reader or critic must understand the underlying theory that literature as well as other arts can best be thought of, as a process of communication between the writer or the artist and his public. This understanding makes the critic to assess any piece of writing using two test-questions: Do we receive the impression that the particular poem or piece of prose effectively communicates what it sets out to do? Does the ideal picture, character or situation communicate itself of any value to us? Neither of these questions can be answered easily or automatically. Each of them requires us to read carefully, reflect and compare impression received from one thing with those received from others. The essence of literary criticism among other things, on the thinking that the substance of a writer's achievement can only be strongly felt and assessed by responding to the way he uses words and that the capacity to make such a response can be formed or greatly enhanced by a training in literary appreciation and criticism. The literary critic is the voice and, to some extent defender of the creative enterprise. No literary work is great in itself. Every outstanding work of literature is so referred to by disciplined affirmation. In other words, while it is true that there are generally accepted codes for measuring good and bad, there is no peculiar intrinsic value placed on any work of art. What a literary critic does is give us, as completely as clearly as he can, his response to a writer, a play, a poem, a novel and so help us to a fuller enjoyment and understanding of the experience in and behind the writing.

Alternatively, the critic can also reveal, by examining a piece of writing in detail, the elements in the writing which combine to make its particular quality. The mature critic who is conscious of the fact that his account and evaluation of an author must depend on the actual words written by the author, supports his remarks and judgment with pieces (no matter how little) of examined text, the text out of which his conclusions come. To do anything contrary would be tantamount to biased assessment, which in itself is antithetical to the critical discipline. It has been observed that literary criticism can be no more than a "reasoned account of the feeling produced upon the critic by the book he is criticizing"¹⁴. Criticism is not exactly science. It is in the first place, very personal and second, it is concerned with values that science ignores. The critic judges a work of art by its effect on his emotion more than anything else. All the critical nuances about style and form and all the classifications and analytical tools of conventional assessment are products of the emotion. It therefore, follows that a critic must be able to feel the impact of a work of art in all its complexity and force. To do so, he must be a man of complexity himself. A man with a superficial and indolent nature will never come out with anything but paltry comment. Criticism is not only an examination of the context but also a tacit investigation of the totality of the critic himself. Whatever comes out of the critic, either by way of what he says or commits to paper, is a faithful reflection of who he is. Besides, an artistically and emotionally mature man must also be a person of good faith. In other words, he should be courageous enough to admit what he feels as well as the flexibility to know what he feels. So

¹⁴ D. H. Lawrence (in Combes 1993: 8)

it is possible for a critic to be brilliant and not honest, to be emotionally sound and yet manipulates feelings. A dependable critic must be emotionally alive, intellectually capable and skilful in basic logic, and morally upright.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, the possibility of the critic being wary about how he exerts extraneous knowledge on the author's intention cannot be ruled out because intentions are not particularly striking in arts, except as realised, and the test of realisation are standard and can hardly be manipulated. They are applied in the operation of the critic's sensibility; they are a matter of his sense, derived from his literary experience of what the living thing feels like. The tests may well reveal in the final analysis that the deep-rooted intention is something quite different from the intention the author would declare.

The relationship between the creative writer and the literary critic can be well located. This is because there are several ways in which criticism and the making of a literary work can be regarded as two sides of the same coin. In the first type of cooperation, the creative talent and the critical faculty co-exist in the same person and may be regarded as identical. It is this type of thinking that has been advanced as a foundation for modern African criticism in which the poet is also a critic.

However, there is also a sense in which criticism exists as a seemingly independent activity practised by more or less professional critics. Here, a division of labour takes place between the critic and the writer. Although in Africa, hostility has often broken out between a writer and his reviewer, review criticism remains part of the creative act. The influence of criticism on the final shape of the literary work is a general one because even in the published form the literary product still depends largely on the work of criticism for establishing its importance or its place in the tradition, for criticism, as it been observed, is often responsible for "bringing the work to the public; it might reduce the esteem it already enjoys with the reading public or it might help build up a tradition by creating a taste for similar literature, it might bring out the importance of a work by discovering in it new meanings not noticed before by the public, and thus give the work a new form and a new importance, perhaps over and above what was originally intended or thought of by the author".¹⁵ No doubt the power which criticism has in influencing literary traditions was recognized and exploited early enough by modern African critics. Such exploitation can be said to have taken two forms. In this case, the writer attempts to create taste for his own type of literary composition. The impression is always erroneously generated that there is a secret process which would when mastered make understanding literature easy, but a good reader of literature is not one who has a series of categories to fit poetry (or prose) into, or a special vocabulary to describe them.

He does not go about with an apparatus of terminologies and method in his head. He is a good reader and critic partly because he can respond to the unfamiliar, for which there has been no previously worked out critical account. There is no knowing beforehand with literature just

¹⁵ Izevbaye, D. 1971. Criticism and literature in Africa. *Perspectives on African Literature*. C. Heywood. Ed. London: Heinemann. Chapter 3:25-30.

how we should be expected to respond and the demand for an alternative component systematic procedure is one that practical criticism can never properly meet.; In practice, the compilation of these are infinitely various-- we cannot tell beforehand just how we will have to respond, there can be no adequate previously learned formula to tell us, and we may have to do any number of things to find the answers. But with some points, these general questions must translate into more practical questions such as: what is gained by this effect?

Does this detail seem successful? Does it relate meaningfully to a general effect? What precisely is the intention here? In other words, to discover where our real preferences lie often involves a searching, exacting appraisal of everything that makes up the total effect of a poem. A young critic, when first asked to say what he thinks of a poem, if he has read it curiously, usually falls into –“I like this” , “this appeals to me” and so on. But we haven’t really read a poem until we know what we like about it more fully than this. Reflecting on a poem, deciding just where we stand in relation to it and finding the right language to express ourselves about it are essential part of reading the poem. The work of art comes home to you when you respond to it realising exactly what you like about it and having a vivid description of the work as part of the realization. If we are moved by the literature and the spirit of the criticism, we should be able to find a sharper, more strongly felt description, “I will like this”, and until we find a description that satisfies us, we know we have not finally grasped it.

The Bible and its Literary Features and Forms

Mr. Vice Chancellor, I dare say that the Bible is central to the understanding of any literature. There is perhaps no other text that enjoys the same universal significance as the Bible. The Bible is a text whose interpretation and criticism, whether, literary, cultural or historical, has elicited composite behaviour from people of different races, thereby making biblical subjects have global structure and contextualisation. The biblical text has been appreciated for a long time by readers and scholars as “literally manifested- book format with theological orientation”¹⁶. This biblically-oriented theological movement which has focused on the religious meanings of particular historical events and lessons to be drawn from such interpretations, has not given much for scholarly and cultural examination of biblical text. Mr, Vice Chancellor, a significant aspect of my focus, in the last couple of years, has been to interrogate such movements and then explore the literary –cultural value of the Bible.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, for a clear understanding of the literary content and possibilities of the Bible and to a very large extent, this lecture, it is important to highlight some of its features and literary forms/genres. This is because the extent to which the Bible can be said to be a unique book is open to argument. It should, therefore, be noted that the Bible’s literary forms function in the same way that these forms function beyond the Bible. A story is a story, whether

¹⁶ Gitay, Y. 2006. Literary criticism versus public criticism: Further thoughts on the matter of biblical scholarship. *OTS 19.2*: 633-640.,

in the Bible or beyond it. A metaphor is a metaphor. Nonetheless, it is possible to make generalisations about the characteristic literary features of the Bible, as it has been also been done by a few other scholars, with no implication that these features do not exist elsewhere. Some of these literary qualities or literary techniques often found in the Bible include the following:

1. A unifying story line

Although the overall genre of the Bible is the anthology of individual books and passages, the Bible possesses a unity far beyond that of other literary anthologies. In the Bible, the narrative is the story of salvation history — the events by which God worked out His plan to redeem humanity and the creation after they fell from original innocence. This story of salvation history focuses ultimately on the sacrifice and atonement of Christ on the cross and His resurrection from death. The unifying storyline of the Bible is a U-shaped story that moves from the creation of a perfect world, through the fall of that world into sin, then through fallen human history as it slowly and painfully makes its way toward consummation and arrives at the final destruction of evil and the eternal triumph of good.

2. The presence of a central character

All stories have a central character or protagonist, and in the overarching story of the Bible, God is the Protagonist. He is the unifying presence from the beginning of the Bible to the end. All creatures interact with this central and ultimate Being. All events are related to Him. The story of human history unfolds within the broader story of what God does. The result is a sense of ultimacy that comes through as we read the pages of the Bible

3. Religious orientation

The subject of literature is human experience, and this is true of the Bible, too, but a distinctive feature of the Bible is that it overwhelmingly presents human experience in a religious and moral light. Events that other writers might treat in a purely human and natural light — sunrises, battles, a birth, a journey — are presented by the authors of the Bible within a moral or spiritual framework. Part of this moral and spiritual framework is the assumption of the biblical authors that a great conflict between good and evil is going on in our world and, further, that people are continually confronted with the need to choose between good and evil, between working for God's kingdom and going against God.

4. A Variety of genres and styles

Every literary anthology of the Bible's magnitude displays a range of literary forms, but the Bible's range may well top them all. We need to be alert to this, because the

religious uses to which we put the Bible can easily lull us into assuming that the Bible is all one type of writing. The list of individual forms, if we include such specific motifs as the homecoming story or trickster or love poem, keeps expanding. The variety that we find in the Bible stems partly from the large categories that cover — history, theology, and literature, for example, or prose and poetry, realism and fantasy, past and future, God and people.

5. Preference for the concrete over the abstract

While the New Testament contains a great deal of theological writing, the general preference of biblical authors is for concrete vocabulary. This is especially true of the Hebrew language of the Old Testament. In the Bible, God is portrayed as light and rock and thunder. Slander is a sharp knife. Living the godly life is like putting on a garment or suit of armor. Heaven is a landscape of jewels. To read the Bible well, we need to read with the “right side” of the brain — the part that is activated by sensory data.

6. Realism

The prophetic and apocalyptic parts of the Bible give us a steady diet of fantasy (flying scrolls, for example, and red horses), but the general tendency of the Bible is toward everyday realism. The Bible displays the flaws of even its best characters. Samson for instance, was not exonerated. Neither was Moses. Although the Bible does not delineate the sordid experiences of life in the extreme detail that modern literary realism does, it nonetheless covers the same real experiences, such as violence, murder, sexuality, death, suffering and famine. Of course, the Bible differs from modern realism by showing us that there is a realism of grace as well as a realism of carnality. In other words, the Bible is not content to portray the degradation of a world that has fallen into sin without also portraying the redemptive possibilities of a world that has been visited by the grace of God and is destined for glory.

7. Simplicity

Although the Bible is certainly not devoid of examples of the high style, especially in the poetic parts, its overall orientation is toward the simple. The prevailing narrative style is plain, unembellished, matter-of-fact prose. Shakespeare’s vocabulary is approximately twenty thousand words, Milton’s thirteen thousand, and English translations of the Bible six thousand. Biblical writers often work with such simplified dichotomies as good and evil, light and darkness, heroes and villains. Of course, there is a simplicity that diminishes and a simplicity that enlarges. The simplicity of the Bible paradoxically produces an effect of majesty and authority.

8. Preference for the brief unit

Linked with this simplicity is a marked preference for the brief literary unit. Biblical poets tend to write brief lyrics, for example, not long narrative poems. Most long narratives in the Bible such as the story of Abraham or the Gospels are actually cycles

of stories in which the individual episodes are briefer and more self-contained than what we find in a novel. The prophetic books are actually anthologies of self-contained oracles and snatches of narrative. Other familiar biblical genres reinforce this tendency toward simplicity — proverb or saying, parable, lists of individual commands or rules, summaries of what various kings did, occasional letters (epistles) in which the author responds to a list of questions that have been asked or a crisis that has arisen in a local church.

9. Elemental quality

The Bible is a book of universal human experience. It is filled with experiences and images that are the common human lot in all places and times. The Bible embraces the commonplace and repeatedly shows ordinary people engaged in the customary activities of life — planting, building, baking, fighting, worrying, celebrating, praying. The world that biblical characters inhabit is likewise stripped and elemental, consisting of such natural settings as day and night, field and desert, sky and earth. Even occupations have an elemental quality — king, priest, shepherd, and homemaker, missionary.

10. Oral style

Even though the Bible that we read is a written book, in its original form much of it existed orally. This is true because ancient cultures were predominantly oral cultures in which information circulated chiefly by word of mouth. The literary forms of the Bible show this rootedness in an oral culture. The prevalence of dialogue (directly quoted speeches) in the Bible is without parallel in literature generally until we come to the novel. Everywhere we turn in the Bible, we hear voices speaking and replying. The spare, unembellished narrative style of the Bible arises from the situation of oral circulation of the stories. Additionally, many of the non-narrative parts of the Bible show signs of oral speech — the prophetic discourses and oracles, the psalms (which were sung in temple worship), the epistles (which were read aloud in churches), and the Gospels (where the words of Jesus are a leading ingredient).

11. Aphoristic quality

The Bible is the most aphoristic book of the Western world. It is filled with sayings that are part of the common storehouse of proverbs and idioms: “pride goes before destruction” (Prov. 16:18); seeing “eye to eye” (Isa. 52:8); a “house divided against itself” (Matt. 12:25). This quality is present not only in the wisdom literature of the Bible but in all parts of the Bible and most notably in the sayings of Jesus.

12. The literature of confrontation

When we read Shakespeare or Dickens, we find ourselves moved to agreement or disagreement, but we do not ordinarily feel that we have been confronted by someone or something that requires us to make a choice. By contrast, when we assimilate the

Bible we feel as though we have been personally confronted with something that requires a response. While this choice is ultimately for or against God, the ideas of the Bible, too, require us to believe or disbelieve them. The Bible displays a vivid consciousness of values — of the difference between good and evil — with the result that it is virtually impossible to remain neutral about the ideas that confront us as we read the Bible¹⁷

Mr. Vice Chancellor, our research shows that there is no meaning without the form in which a piece of writing is expressed. In other words, when we read the Bible, literary considerations are not optional features to which we might attend only if we have an interest in literary matters. We need to pay attention to the *how* of a Bible passage as preliminary to understanding *what* is being said. It is not out of place to observe that many biblical writers have submerged their individuality into their chosen literary form and make no effort to give the result a personal stamp. Even writers who speak out of personal feelings tend to disappear as persons. Psalms 22:1-2 is illustrative of this discourse:

*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
Why art thou so far from helping me
And from the words of my roaring?
Oh my God, I cry in the day time but thou hearest not
And in the night season, and am not silent*

Here the poetic persona must have written this out of a personal crisis, probably a serious sickness. But the author's feelings of estrangement and despair are nevertheless traditionally expressed utilizing a form known as the "lament". Lament Psalms follow a stereotyped pattern. The speakers make God empathize, describe their trouble and assert confidence in God, petition for help (i.e. offering a vow) and thanking God for a possible act of rescue.

Psalm 13 is another example:

*1. How long will thou forget me, O Lord? for ever?
How long will thou hide thy face from me?
2. How long shall I take counsel in my soul?
Having sorrow in my heart daily
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
3. Consider and hear me, O Lord, my God
Lighten mine eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death*

¹⁷ Ryken and Ryken 2001

The above poem, a less famous lament, offers in a rather small but strategic way a clear specimen of the form.

In one of my publications, I noted how most of the poems in the book of Psalms were used in ceremonies at the Second Temple – either sung or chanted. The Bible is a mixture of genres, many of which are literary in nature. The major literary genres in the Bible are narrative or story, poetry and proverbs. The Bible is also profound in figurative language and rhetorical or artistic patterning. Other literary genres of note in the Bible include epic, tragedy, satire, pastoral, wedding poems of love and elegy (funeral poems).

A study of genres is crucial to any literary approach to the Bible because every genre has its own conventions, expectations and corresponding rules of interpretation and if the Bible must be understood and placed in its proper perspective, its literary genres must first be determined. It is this literary task of “determining genre(s) that sets the mood from which the entire work can be seen”¹⁸. Literary genres of the Bible require us to approach them in terms of the convention or procedure they possess. Literature uses distinctive resources of language. This is most evident in poetry. Poets for instance think in images and figures of speech. God is a shepherd, people are sheep, the tongue is a fire. It is fascinating how much of the Bible is poetic, especially books obviously dominated by literary qualities and materials such as Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Songs of Solomon and some of the prophets. The entire spectrum of figurative language is central to the consideration of the Bible as literature. Figurative language in the Bible includes metaphor, simile, symbolism, hyperbole, apostrophe, personification, paradox, pun and irony, to mention just a few. These resources of language, though not limited to poetry, pervade the entire Bible.

The importance of genre to biblical interpretation is that genres have their own methods of procedure and rules of interpretation. An awareness of genre should programme our encounter with a text, alerting us to what we can expect to find. For example, the most prevalent of all literary forms is narrative or story. To make adequate sense of a story, we need to know that it consists of plot or action, setting, and characters. These, in turn, constitute the basic grid through which we assimilate the story and talk about it. In view of how many literary genres are present in the Bible, it is obvious that the overall literary form of the Bible is the anthology. As an anthology, the Bible possesses the same kind of unity that other anthologies exhibit: multiple authorship (approximately three dozen authors); diverse genres; a rationale for the assembling of this particular collection of materials (a unifying religious viewpoint and story of salvation history, as well as the fact that all the books except Luke and Acts were written by Jews); comprehensiveness; and an identifiable strategy of organization (a combination of historical chronology and groupings by genre). With belief in the inspiration of the Bible as a foundational premise, we can say that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate editor of the anthology that we know as the Bible. Literature is identifiable by its subject matter. It is differentiated from expository (informational) writing by the way in which it presents concrete human experience. Instead of stating abstract propositions, logical arguments, or bare facts, literature embodies what literary authors often call “the stuff of real life.” We can profitably think of

¹⁸ Ighile on the Literary analysis of the Book of Proverbs in the Bible

biblical writing as existing on a continuum, with abstract propositional discourse on one end and concrete presentation of human experience on the other. The more thoroughly a piece of writing falls on the experiential end of the spectrum, the more literary it is. To illustrate, the command “you shall not murder” is an example of expository discourse. The story of Cain and Abel embodies the same truth in the form of characters in concrete settings performing physical and mental actions. Expository writing gives us the precept; literature gives us the example. “God’s provision extends to all of our life” is a thematic summary of Psalm 23; the psalm, however, eschews such abstraction and incarnates the truth about providence in a pastoral poem that images the daily routine of a shepherd and his sheep. The subject of literature is human experience rendered as concretely as possible. The result is that it possesses a universal quality. Whereas history and the daily news tell us what *happened*, literature tells us what *happens*—what is true for all people in all places and times. A text can be both, but the literary dimension of a text resides in its embodiment of recognizable human experience. While we rightly think of the Bible as revelatory (God’s supernatural revelation of truth), the literary parts of the Bible are at the same time the human race’s testimony to its own experience

The goal of literature is to prompt a reader to share or relive an experience. The truth that literature imparts is not simply ideas that are true but *truthfulness to human experience*. The implication for interpretation is that Bible readers, teachers, and expositors need to be active in re-creating experiences in their imagination, identifying the recognizable human experiences in a text (thereby building bridges to life in the modern world), and resisting the impulse immediately to reduce a biblical passage to a set of theological ideas.

Also central to the literary form and genres are archetypes and motifs. An archetype is a plot motif (such as initiation or quest), character type (such as the villain or trickster), or image (such as light or water) that recurs throughout literature and life. The presence of archetypes in a text signals a literary quality. When we read literature, we are continuously aware of such archetypes as the temptation motif, the dangerous valley, or the hero, whereas with other types of writing we are rarely aware of archetypes. Archetypes are the building blocks of literature. Writers could not avoid them even if they tried. The Bible is the most complete repository of archetypes in the Western world, and this makes the Bible a universal and primeval book (reaching down to bedrock human experience). Awareness of archetypes helps us to see the unity of the Bible (since we keep relating one instance of an archetype to other instances), the connections between the Bible and other literature, and the connections between the Bible and life.

Literature uses distinctive resources of language that set it apart from ordinary expository discourse. The most obvious example is poetry. Poets speak a language all their own, consisting of images and figures of speech. The most important of the special resources of language that push a text into the category of literature include the following: imagery, metaphor, simile, symbol, allusion, irony, wordplay, hyperbole, apostrophe (direct address to someone or something absent as though present), personification, paradox, and pun. The most concentrated repository of such language in the Bible is the books that are poetic in their basic format — the prophetic books, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes (a book of prose poems), Song of

Solomon, Revelation. But literary resources of language are not limited to the obviously poetic books of the Bible. They appear on virtually every page of the Bible beyond the poetic books—most obviously in the discourses of Jesus and in the Epistles, but also, though less pervasively, in the narratives of the Bible. A related literary phenomenon is rhetoric — arrangement of content in patterned ways and employment of conventional literary techniques or formulas. Parallelism of sentence elements, for example, is an instance of stylized rhetoric. Patterns of repetition — of words, phrases, or content units — are a distinguishing feature of the Bible. So are the aphoristic conciseness and memorability that continuously raise the Bible to a literary realm of eloquence far above everyday discourse. A specimen page from a New Testament epistle might include the presence of rhetorical questions, question-and-answer constructions, direct addresses to real or imaginary respondents, and repeated words or phrases within a passage, and we can depend on it that famous aphorisms will appear in abundance.

Literature is an art form in which beauty of expression, craftsmanship, and verbal virtuosity is valued as rewarding and as an enhancement of effective communication. The one writer of the Bible to state his philosophy of composition portrays himself as, among other things, a self-conscious stylist and wordsmith who arranged his material, “with great care” and who “sought to find words of delight” (Eccles. 12:9–10). Surely our impression is that the other writers of the Bible did the same. The standard elements of artistic form include unity, theme-and-variation, pattern, design, progression, contrast, balance, recurrence, coherence, and symmetry. Authors cultivate artistry like this because it is important for their effect and intention. The Bible is an aesthetic as well as a utilitarian book, and we need to experience it as such, both for our understanding and for our enjoyment.

Orality and the Bible

Mr. Vice Chancellor, language is an oral phenomenon and human beings communicate in countless ways, making use of all their senses of touch, taste, smell and especially sight as well as hearing. Language is central, not only to communication but thought itself and relates in an altogether special way with sound. Wherever human beings exist, they have a language and in every instance, a language that exists as spoken and heard in the world of sound. Despite the richness of gestures, elaborate sign languages are only substitutes for speech and dependent on the oral speech system. Language is so overwhelmingly oral that of all the many thousands of languages, possibly tens of thousands, spoken in the course of human history, very few have been committed to writing to a degree sufficient enough to have produced literature and many have never been written at all. It is still difficult to calculate how many languages have disappeared or been transmuted into other languages before writing came. Even presently, it is possible to observe that hundreds of languages in active use are never written at all, and no one appears to have worked out an effective way of writing them. In other words, the basic orality of language remains permanent.¹⁹

¹⁹ ¹⁹Ong. cf Ong

In some of my publications, I have created the basis for the need to draw attention to the oral character of language. This is with a view to x-raying the implications of the contrast between orality and writing on the one hand, and on the other, to explore the oral values of biblical texts. It should be noted that while anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists have reported on fieldwork in oral societies, cultural historians have done a lot of research on prehistory, that is human existence before writing made verbalized record possible. In our research, we noted Ferdinand de Saussure's call for attention to the primacy of oral speech which underpins all verbal communication as well as to the persistent tendency to think of writing as the basic form of language. While noting that writing simultaneously has usefulness, shortcomings and dangers, it is also a kind of complement to oral speech, the sound of speech, and not necessarily as a transformer of verbalization. It should be observed however, that despite the attention to the sound of speech, not much has been done to ways in which primary orality, the orality of cultures untouched by literacy contrast with literacy.

Attempts have been made to apply some of the books of the Bible to the features of the orally based thought and expression articulated by Walter Ong.²⁰ He explains, for instance, that the refrain "for his mercy endureth forever" in Psalm 136 stands as a mnemonic device and a formulaic styling to keep the thought flowing in the course of recitation as in:

*O give thanks unto the Lord: for he is good:
For his mercy endureth for ever.
O give thanks unto the God of gods:
For his mercy endureth for ever.
O give thanks to the Lord of lords:
For his mercy endureth for ever. (KJV)*

In explaining how the oral cultures avoid complex "subordinate clauses", there is a comparison of the King James Bible (KJV) with the New International Version (NIV) noting the basic additive pattern, as in:

Genesis 1:

1. *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*
2. *And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*
3. *And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.*
4. *And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.*
5. *And God called the light Day and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. (KJV 1611)*

Genesis 1:

1. *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*
2. *Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

²⁰ 2002, Walter Ong

3. *And God said “Let there be light; and there was light*
4. *God saw that the light was good; and he separated the light from the darkness.*
5. *God called the light “day” and the darkness he called “night”. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. (NIV 1973)*

It should be clearly observed that there is copious use of the additive “and” in the KJV than the NIV, and this function is a formula for remembering and structuring thoughts, because of the spontaneity in the nature of the delivery.²¹ The use of the conjunction “and” in the text helps to structure thoughts. The implication of this is that the oral text has a tendency towards pragmatics. Moreover, these additives suggest that for the first day of creation (verse 2), God’s activities were a continuous and uninterrupted process. Hence, the conjunction “and” is used here to stress or emphasize continuity and to introduce statements that continue or add weight to the first statement.

They must be understood in terms of the interaction between a performer and an audience and the web of discourse and experience that binds them together in a given place and time. This is somewhat tasking in itself for biblical scholars, because we can only appreciate the performer, audience and context described by the location through reconstructions based on elements of literary and material constructs. Furthermore, to understand a word as spoken is to recognize that it references an immediate social context described by the location of a performer, and audience in a specified space and time. Then there is the issue of performance itself.

Literature, the Bible and the African Cultural Setting

Culture is the pattern of behavior that people living in social groups learn, create and share, and that it is a distinguishing factor that separates one human group from another. A people’s culture includes their beliefs, rules of behaviour, language, rituals, arts, technology, styles of dress and ways of producing and cooking food, religion, political and economic system. Culture is the study of all aspects of human life, past and present. It is instructive to note that people have culture essentially because of their desire to communicate with and understand symbols. Symbols allow people to develop complex thoughts and to exchange their thoughts with others.

It is instructive to consider some of the ways in which the application of studies in oral tradition to biblical studies can encourage us to appreciate biblical texts in relation to their oral-aural contexts and by considering how these oral-aural texts functioned in the ancient world. It is possible to observe that over the years biblical scholars have developed a much greater appreciation of the close relationship between oral and written texts. The close relationship can be seen as arising from what has been described as the “rhetorical culture” of the ancient world,

²¹ Olowookere, 2001

a culture based in the art of recitation.²² Rhetorical culture uses both written and oral languages as well as written and oral sources and traditions interactively. This is with the expectation that oral traditions appear in written texts and written traditions are heard in oral texts. The distinction between the two in terms of content and structure is not blurred nor can any sequence of “first oral, then written” for instance, be discerned. In essence, rhetorical culture presupposes that the oral and the written text are intricately bound together in a dynamic relationship. The implication of this rhetorical and cultural insight is profound. It counters any notion of a clear distinction between an oral phase and a written one in the transmission of the biblical text.

The other interpretative possibility, which is perhaps more disruptive to the canon of biblical scholarship, is the possibility that the relationship between the Gospel rests in performance rather than the written texts. This performance-driven difference has been illustrated by the explanation that, “Mathew and Luke knew their (oral) versions of the story and drew on them primarily or as well Alternatively it could be that they followed Mark in oral mode as a storyteller would”²³ The possibility that the similarities between the Gospel rest not on literary dependence but on shared tradition transmitted as oral text offers an additional insight to biblical discourse. In other words, the oral-aural nature of the biblical texts underscores their existence in performance.

The debate among scholars on the intricate relationship between literature, biblical hermeneutics and the African culture has been on-going. I have asserted with a few other scholars that an expression of the African cultural heritage, language and literature have certain implications for theological reflections in Africa. We have argued that in any biblical passage, it is possible to find a message that addresses itself to an African audience, adding that African oral literary forms such as folklore, which is composed of traditional legends, beliefs, customs and fables, have functional relevance in the Bible.²⁴ In biblical tradition, folk stories are short narratives with some etiological significance of the history of Israel and her heroes which people could easily memorize and from which they invented aphoristic clichés uttered from time to time. On the significance of oral texts in Africa vis-à-vis biblical scholarship, No doubt, African has in its culture an oral literature, history, folklore, etiology, poems, songs and talks, transmitting values which could and should have been used as pedagogical aids to introduce Africans to the literary genres of the Bible.

My research reveals that it is this contextualization of the biblical discourse within the framework of African cultural essence and application that is referred to as, “inculturation hermeneutics”. This approach to biblical interpretation seeks to make the African, and for that matter, any socio-cultural context, the subject of interpretation. To make a specific socio-cultural context the subject of interpretation means that the conceptual framework, its methodology and the personal import of the interpreter are consciously informed by the world view of, and the life experience, within that culture. In other words, literary and religious forms

²² 35, Robbins 1993

²³ Dunn, 2000, 302

²⁴ Martey, E. 1993. *African theology, inculturation and liberation*. New York: Orbis Books and Manus, C.O. 1998. The use and the role of the Bible. *Three New Religious Movements in Nigeria: Lessons for slovenian Christian culture, Proceedings, Interpretations of the Bible (Ljubijana)*. J Krasover et al .eds

do not arise from and live in a vacuum. “Peoples’ experiences shape what appears in their literature.²⁵ Scholars are also in agreement that the Bible is enmeshed in the society in which it is located.²⁶ The politicians use it, the lawyers quote from it.

Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to state where religion begins and where it ends. Attempts have been made to see ways African traditional culture in chieftaincy titles has influenced attempts at indigenizing Christianity in Africa. What this implies is the fact that the African experience is crucial to an understanding of biblical texts. The perceived gap between African culture and the western packaging of the Christian gospel necessitate reflection on the possibility of meaningful and enriching dialogue between facets of African culture and biblical texts. In interpreting the Bible across cultural lines, therefore, it is important to ask some questions: is culture a thing created by God? Or is it entirely a human device? Is there anything in a people’s culture which can be said to be sacred? Is there any aspect of culture which may be considered essential to a people? What is the role of religion in culture?²⁷

When God created man, he endowed man with certain innate abilities, among them the ability to create a culture of its own. And as it has been observed “there is not now or ever has been a human being who is not totally immersed in and pervasively affected by some culture”²⁸. It is possible to argue that after God has created the first man and woman, the Bible account states that he put them in a garden to tend. Since such tending of the environment is not found among animals, it is arguable that God made man as a cultural and culture producing being. Virtually all the scholars who have undertaken to study the African religious consciousness have reached one conclusion, namely, that the idea of God, or rather of the Supreme Being, is not foreign to Africans.

Mr. Vice Chancellor that is the oral poet cum cultural element in me. Fortunately, the church–pulpit dimension to the scholarly personality will soon come to the front burner, also in the course of this lecture

Dialogue between African Proverbs and the Books of Proverbs

My choice of the Book of Proverbs in the Bible as one of my texts in my doctoral work was borne out of the need to have a biblical content that would easily interact or engage with my first love, folklore, and in this case, the cultural marker or identity of proverbs.

Virtually everywhere in Africa, proverbs are not rare. They are often short and popular among groups of people. While many of the proverbs are anonymous because the authors are not known, the tide has since turned. Orators, sages and oral poets are increasingly being credited with originating a proverb. Proverbs are at the heart of most cultures, they beautify words and contextualise linguistic materials within specific situations and circumstances. The observation has been made on proverbs rather poetically:

²⁵ J. S. Ukpong, 1995

²⁶ Barret, 1999

²⁷ Cf. Etuk, 2002

²⁸ Kraft, 1979: 103

In many African countries a feeling for language, for imagery and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs.²⁹

The socio-linguistic and traditional essence of a people enjoys significant flavouring with proverbial application. This also brings to light the contextual place of proverbs. Proverbs are appreciated in the social settings where they are easily used.

The essential thing about a proverb is its meaning. The meaning of a proverb is made clear only when side by side with the translation is given a full account of the accompanying social situation – the reason for its use, its effects, and its significance in speech.³⁰

The point being made here is that a clear meaning of a proverb can be appreciated when the social situation of its use is considered. Proverbs are indomitable expression or quotation embodying some form of truth and wisdom used in speech to support or summarize points. And though some scholars ascribe shortness or brevity to the quality of proverbs, this does not obtain in all the cases.

Research shows that proverbs have many uses in African societies, they express an eternal truth. They serve as warning against foolish acts or a guide to good conduct. They may also bring special meanings to certain situations and may even solve particular problems. The relationship between proverbs and truth is an intricate one. In other words, whether proverbial expressions are true or false is not an easy position to take. Proverbs are “culture markers in that they tell in rather brief and intense terms so much about the history and psychology of the people and communities from which they emanate”.³¹ In other words, proverbs are indicators of the cultural essence of a people. It is:

A collection of proverbs of a community or nation is in a real sense an ethnography of the people which if systematized can give a penetrating picture of the people’s way of life, their philosophy, their moral truths and social value.³²

²⁹ Ruth Finnegan, 1970,

³⁰ Firth, 1926,

³¹ Raji Oyelade on post proverbials,

³² ³²Akporobaro, 2001, 105

Proverbs constitute a vibrant aspect of the traditional communicative system of a people. Through proverbs, messages are passed across, recovered and adequate feedback given. They remain the artistic medium through which a given people express their ideology, thoughts and value systems. Proverbs can be legitimately treated as autonomous statements with extensional meanings that can fit into various forms of human discourse. That this is so, is attested to by the fact that the rightness or wrongness of their application depends entirely on the interaction and blend between their application and the context in which they are applied. That this is so, is attested to by the fact that the rightness or wrongness of their application depends entirely on the interaction and blend between their application and the context in which they are applied.

Some of the African wise sayings and philosophical worldview correspond thematically and to some extent stylistically with the proverbs of Solomon. This is so because proverbs and other philosophical sayings occur virtually everywhere. Suffice it to say that the correspondence being explained can go beyond philosophical worldview.

Examples of some correspondences:

African Proverb:	Those who lean on God never fall to the ground.
Proverbs 3:5:	Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct thy paths.
African Proverb:	The day a good wife is found, life has just begun.
Proverbs 18:2	Whosoever findeth a wife findeth a good thing and obtaineth favour of the Lord
African Proverb:	A good name is better than wealth
Proverbs 22:1:	A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.
African Proverb:	Show me your friends and I will describe who you are
Proverbs 13:20:	He that walketh with the wise will be wise, But a companion of fools shall be destroyed

Some scholars have used the narrative metaphor to justify their emphasis on enculturation theology in Africa and to explain why the oral literature of African should be a part of an enculturation theology. According to them, the dialogue between African oral literature and biblical texts is part of an on-going African journey of inculturation and contextualization—rooting the gospel in local African cultures and societies. The guides on this journey are African proverbs, sayings, riddles, stories etc. Some scholars have also underlined the difference between Africanising Christianity and Christianizing Africa and argued that it is not a matter of taking the traditional customs of African culture and making the best ones fit into Christianity. It is not also about African cultural values being mediated through Western culture

and thought pattern. Rather it is to start from the reality of the African context and see how the story of the gospel can become a haven for it³³.

This dynamic relationship implies that an active dialogue involves a mutual two-way challenge and enrichment. The African culture challenges the Christian faith to be truly universal. This means being faithful to the gospel as good news to all people and all cultures. At the same time, the Christian faith challenges and illuminates African culture and tradition.

The reflective quality of Africa on literature and the Bible comes to the front burner in the functional relationship between African cultural values and biblical texts. It is possible to observe, as it has been done elsewhere that dialogue is not only about similarities and differences in wording imagery, content and so on but that these features are inherent in the proverbs and Bible texts themselves.³⁴ While it is true that the juxtaposition of Bible texts and African proverbs already elicit a proverbial meaning and therefore create space for dialogue, it should be noted that this dialogue comes only comes to life in real life situation. It is therefore important to draw attention to the African proverbs and biblical texts that affirm one other, those that have matching ideas and motifs, the African proverb that illustrate biblical passages, and biblical texts that share literary features. A few of such examples would suffice.

African Proverbs and Biblical texts affirming one other

African: People do not build a house on top of water.

Biblical: And everyone who hears the words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who builds his house on sand. (Matthew 7:26-27).

African: The one who loves is not afraid.

Biblical: There is no fear in love, but perfect love cast out fear, for fear has to do with punishment and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love (1John 4:18)

Biblical: For God has not given us the spirit of fear but of power, of love and of sound mind. (2Tim 1:7)

When an African Proverb and a Biblical text have matching ideas or motifs

African: One becomes a baby once.

Biblical: Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?

(John 3:4).

African: Do not wait for the visitor to ask for food before you oblige.

³³ Hearley and Sybert, 1996, 13,

³⁴ Heerden 2006, pgs 433-436

Biblical: If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them 'Go in peace, keep warm and eat fill' and yet you do not supply their body needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, it has no works, is dead. James (2:15-17)

When an African Proverb illustrates a Biblical passage

African: The left hand washes the right and vice versa

When a Biblical passage illustrates an African Proverb

African; If God gives something, he gives life with it.

Biblical: The creation narrative of Genesis 1

African: You cannot escape God. You will meet him in foreign lands.

Biblical: The Jonah narrative

Africa: Do not say you are what you are not.

Biblical: The story of David and Goliath, especially 1 Samuel 17:38-39, 45-46, 48-49)

African Proverbs and biblical texts extend each other

a.) *An African Proverb extends a biblical text*

The following proverbs extend the biblical text:

- Whoever loves a parent has an extended affection for the child.
- You cannot love me and hate my dog.
- Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves the child. (1 John 5:1).
- You do not pursue a disobedient child into the devouring mouth of the tiger.
- So he [the prodigal son who admitted that he had sinned against heaven and before his father] set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. (Luke 15:20).

b.) *A biblical text extends an African Proverb*

- A cow cannot be spared instead of a man.
- For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16; cf. Romans 3:23-26).

African Proverbs and Biblical texts contradict one other

Sometimes, proverbs and biblical texts contradict one other. The following two examples are about favouritism and fatalism respectively.

- The antelope's back does not get wet.
(The evil doings of an elder or important personality do not easily leak out.)

And

- One who farms by the path does not plough a crooked farm.
(A wealthy person is never guilty)

While the Bible supports respect for the elderly and the noble (1 Timothy 5:1-2; 1 Peter 2:17), it teaches fair, just and equal treatment for all. (Acts 10:34; James 2:1-13)

- There is always blood in the head of a tsetse fly.

(This proverb can be used to caution people when dealing with a person known to have done some evil. This caution has been taken to suggest that people can never change from bad to good: once bad, always bad) the Bible has shown this view to be mistaken, for:

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

African Proverbs use or comment on the Bible

- a.) An African proverb comments specifically on the Bible
 - He who does not believe what the elders say, will not believe the sayings of the Book (the Bible); and he who does not believe the sayings of the Book will not believe what the Lord says.
- b.) An African Proverb is based on a biblical text/motif
 - He has a stick, but he is not Moses.
The Stick of Moses: Exodus 9:23; 10:13; 14:16; 17:5-6)
 - The paradise of the poor man is the home of his Father-in-law.
The Paradise motif: Luke 23:43)
 - The priest with whom God was angry sold his prayer book and bought a donkey
 - The motif of a priest with whom God was angry: Amos 7:10-17)

African proverbs and Biblical texts sharing literary features

A proverb and a biblical text may share the same stylistic features that pose certain interpretive challenges, for example the literary use of paradox.

- The hare says: "Walking slowly leads to death". The chameleon says: 'walking quickly leads to death'.
- Do not answer fools according to their folly, or you will be a fool yourself.
- Answer fools according to their folly, or they will be wise in their own eyes.
(Proverbs 26:4-5)

African proverbs commenting on situations (similar to those) in which the Bible is often used

Many proverbs comment on the kind of situation in which the Bible is often used (e.g. missionary situations).

- The old woman looks after the child to grow its teeth and the young one in turn looks after the old woman when she loses her teeth.
(This proverb has been used to point out that the ‘daughter churches’ of Africa at this point in time can offer the ailing “mother churches” of Europe support and advice.).
- A person jumps into a discussion or a situation with his/her long, uncombed hair.
(This proverb can be used with reference to the insensitive ways in which people sometimes confront others with the gospel.)

Mr. Vice Chancellor, having looked at the broad areas of my discipline, I like to now focus on some specific aspects of this lecture:

The Potency of Poetry

Poetry is conceived in this lecture within the context of folklore – that is proverbs, songs, folktales, chants, incantations, prayers, having no regular rhyme scheme and dealing with the verbal aspects of literature. This kind of poetry which some scholars refer to as ‘traditional oral poetry’³⁵ is transmitted primarily by word of mouth and learnt by imitation or example. Meriam expands the thematic and linguistic focus of the kind of poetry by observing that “not only do music and language of text tend to take special forms, one would expect that the language or text has a special significance’ (P. 190)³⁶

Okpewho, on his part, advises that we must abandon the false impressions that poetry necessarily has to do with words or the order in which they are arranged. According to him:

A group of measured lines which describes a situation is simply verse and may have very little that is poetic in it. On the other hand, it is possible for a combination of music and movement (dance) in a performance that has no word at all to be described as a very poetic, due to the sheer force we feel while observing it (pg 7)³⁷

The essence of true poetry lies in its power to appeal strikingly to our appreciation and to some degree, lift us up. As it has been quite agreed, there are at least two fundamental ways in which a poem can appeal to us. One is by touching us emotionally so that we feel either pain or pleasure, the other is by stirring our mind deeply so that we reflect on some aspects or life or some significant ideas.

³⁵ Emovon, 1981, p. 265

³⁶ Merriam, P. 190

³⁷ Okpewho, 1984: 7

Mr. Vice Chancellor, the poet before you is a musician, a performer, a raconteur. In the course of my research, I have tried, not only to draw the relationship between poetry and song, poetry and proverbs but have also gone ahead to situate these folkloric and biblical resources at the base of our national transformation.

In an earlier research on the poetic and performance value of Igue song texts,³⁸ we have stressed, somewhat similar to the views of other scholars like Schechner,³⁹ that theater and performance still have a lot to show of their original mysteries, dynamism as reflected in the structures, ceremonies, rhythms that are embellished in conventions and ritual forms. To properly understand Igue songs and their context, I stressed the need to locate them in actual performance bearing in mind the ceremonial and ritualistic implications. These songs are not written to be read but are chanted openly to an audience (whether limited or large) to appreciate with their eyes and their ears. The public performance or the Igue songs readily come to mind. From the dawn to the dusk of the particular day, different kinds of songs are performed. For instance, the youths who come with the ceremonial *Ewere leaves* move from one house to another. As they approach a house, they sing:

Ebe ewere o' rre emwan na o

Ebe ewere o' rre emwan na o

Ebe ewere o' rre emwan na o

Igue ne erha gue o' rokhoro no

Igue ne iye gue o' rokhoro no

Igue ne omo gue o' rokhoro no

Igue ne Edo gue o' rokhoro no

The leaves of Ewere are here already

The leaves of Ewere are here already

The leaves of Ewere are here already

Igue that the father celebrates is that of peace

Igue that the mother celebrates is that of peace

Igue that the children celebrate is that of peace

Igue that the Binis celebrate is that of peace

It is important to stress that the poet (or poets as the case may be) can at the scene of performance, deliberately change the details of a poem in order to satisfy his (their) desires. The Edo oral poet for instance, who, having performed the above in a particular setting and discovers that the inhabitants are not ready to reciprocate in cash or kind can decide to use his poetry as a weapon of attack on the ungenerous household, in order to launch this attack, the

³⁸ Ighile on the poetry of Igue festival

³⁹ Schechner, R. 1998. Performance Theory London and New York: Routledge

poet singer has at least two possibilities. He may either change the tone of his voice to an elegiac one or with a fast dramatic movement of the hands and feet, sing:

Kpoko ya kan khere khere

Emwin da omwan

Khere Khere

Kpoko ya kan khere khere

Emwin da omwan

Khere khere

The stingy one, little by little,
should one be stingy,

Little by little.

The stingy one, little by little,

should one be stingy,

Little by little

In other words, the poet can decide to vary, not only the poem, but also the ways they are performed, Olajubu (1981) explains this kind of poetic liberty when he says that:

The oral performance impose on its text elements or variability, inaccuracies and inconsistencies arising from a number of factors governing its performance. First the poet – singer... can deliberately alter the details of poetry to suit his whines and caprices.⁴⁰

This validates the on – going scholarly discourse that the performance of oral poetry is vital to the full realization of the poem itself. Apart from the fact that performance underscores the relationship between a “speech art” and “a doing art” it also illuminates the major events which take place in a ritual ceremony (Finnegan, 1970.)⁴¹ These major events include songs, dances, impersonation of mythical being and definite and prescribed series of manipulations.

The Prophet and the Prophetic Voice

A prophet according to Eddy (as Quoted) in Gooding (2015)⁴² is “a spiritual seer”. A spiritual seer is someone who sees beyond what the five senses tell him. Ancient prophets saw a world beyond what material vision presented. Elisha was one of the greatest prophets of God. The

⁴⁰ Olajubu 1970

⁴¹ Finnegan

⁴² Eddy (as Quoted) in Gooding, 2015

Bible records that, when alerted by his servant that he was in great danger and was surrounded by his enemies, he (Elisha) prayed as captured in 2Kings 6:17 thus:

Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw: and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha.

This implies that he saw something invisible to other's view. This confirms the fact that being a prophet or spiritual seer is having the ability to see something that doesn't at a first glance appear to be there. It is having the inner eyes to visualize the invisible, to discern something beyond what our five senses are telling us. A prophet is also conceived as the one who utters divinely inspired revelations. The one gifted with more than ordinary spiritual moral insight; especially a poet. He is the one who foretells future events/ a predictor, an effective or leading spokesman for a cause, doctrine, or group (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>).

A prophet is a man called by God to be His representative on earth. When a prophet speaks for God, it is as if God has spoken. Relatedly, Amos 3:7 affirms, "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets". In the same chapter verse, 8 explains further the power of the prophet by saying that "the lion has roared, who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken, who can but prophesy? The voice of God is usually revealed by His prophets through prophecies. In the context of this inaugural, a prophet is a crier, crying for peace and against abnormalities, corruption, poor governance (bleeding poverty, banditry, kidnapping, addiction, and cremation of human bodies) unemployment, and religious conflicts, among others.

Extrapolating from the above, we arrived at the conceptualization of a prophetic voice. The prophetic voice is that voice that tells us about the future. According to Thorn (2009)⁴³ the prophetic voice is the confrontational call to faith and repentance, in a particular area of life that comes with authority. This lecture approaches the prophetic voice from the biblical perspective. It argues that the prophetic voice is the voice of God sent through His prophet-servant with the hope of reviving the human mind/thought for the progress and development of human society and God's Kingdom.

The prophetic voice plays an important role in the community. The voice was, still is, the spiritual and moral compass that help keep the community focused on God's plan (Caluag, 2018).⁴⁴ A prophetic voice has a lot of indicators. However, for this inaugural, only four indicators are isolated and interrogated because of their centrality to the subject under review. These include:

- i. Confrontation- The prophetic voice is not spoken to please anybody irrespective of his/her status. It is usually confrontational. It is not soft-spoken like the calming words of a Counselor. It rather challenges us to look unto God/ the gospel or the good news and adjust our ways.

⁴³ Olajubu

⁴⁴ Finnegan, 1970

- ii. A charge to faith and repentance- A prophetic voice is always a call/charge to repentance and belief in the gospel. When God's prophets speak into the lives of people, they issue a call of faith and repentance. There is grace to be found in God who forgives.
- iii. Specificity- The prophetic voice always speaks with precision. It avoids the generalization of God's will or intention. When the Old Testament prophets spoke, they spoke directly into the life of Israel. Men were specifically confronted concerning the ungodly manner they treated their wives, their lack of generosity, and so forth. Spiritual leaders were confronted for their lack of care in teaching, their lack of integrity, and their lack of love for God's people. The prophetic voice addresses us with precision so that we know what we need to do in coming out of the wilderness.
- iv. The prophetic voice accompanied the authority of the Lord- The prophetic voice must come with the authority of "thus says the Lord" and this has nothing to do with tone, conviction, or earnestness.
It comes from a radical reliance on and a clear reflection of scripture. It speaks of God's words and ways and not men's.

The Wilderness of our Times: A General Perspective

Najman (2004)⁴⁵ describes wilderness as a desert, isolation, exile, suffering, humiliation, mourning, recollection, death, and even martyrdom. It can also signify stages on road to purification and even revelation. It can be a period when there is a response to suffering and humiliation and self-reflection, where wilderness itself becomes a narrative of purification through self-reflection and a reaction to suffering. Wilderness can also be approached as a place of transformation through vision, revelation, and divine conversation- an achievement in preparation towards a becoming of the self, and further approximation towards fulfilling the call to become a nation, a subject. But it can also be about being lost or refusing life or resisting any narrative about recovery; therefore, wallowing in the wilderness. The state of the nation in Nigeria today can best be described as a dramaturgy of the wilderness experience

Mr. Vice-chancellor, Nigeria is in a near- pitch darkness where confusion occupies the platform of attention and attraction. The dignity of mankind has been heavily compromised in all aspects of human life. However, in the context of this lecture, emphasis is laid on the political, socio- economic, and religious implications of our national malady.

Politically, Nigeria celebrated her euphoria of gaining independence from the British Colonialists but soon after, the military intervened in the politics of the country. During military rule, the Nigerian citizenry complained of maladministration, corruption, human suffering, and

⁴⁵ Eddy (as Quoted) in Gooding, 2015

injustice, among others. To corroborate the above, Ityonzughul and Kertyo (2022)⁴⁶ espoused that:

Nigeria reverted to a democratic government on 29th May 1999, after a long, tortuous period of military rule, which lasted for almost sixteen years (1983-1999). On 29th May 2015, the country celebrated **sixteen** years of uninterrupted democracy for the first time in its political history since it attained political independence. Within this period the country experienced grievous challenges which include socio-political and economic challenges including electoral violence.

The above indentation is not an exhaustive electoral challenge that turned Nigeria's political scene into the wilderness. To back up this point, Anao (2022)⁴⁷ argues that Nigeria's politics has become a monetary affair, the wealthiest is usually the winner in the electoral poll. The mentality of "it is our turn to eat" made matters worse in Nigerian politics. He emphasized that to a common Nigerian, politics is "you chop, I chop" and this negates the aspect of accountability and negatively affects the process of nation-building.

Socially, relationship between people of diverse regions in the country has become a crises. This is because the world is becoming more insecure, day by day. Different terrorist groups engulfed Nigeria ranging from Boko Haram to the Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP). These groups in addition to bandits, kidnappers, and abductors, among others, are roaming tirelessly like a hungry and angry lion looking for travelers and other victims to devour. Because of the atmosphere of terror created; many travelers turn to air journeys/trips. However, the criminal elements also responded to the antics of those traveling by flight. A quote reads "Eneke the bird says that since man has learned to shoot without missing, he has learned to fly without perching" (Achebe, 2009). In this wise, the perpetrator also targets those traveling by air: hence both civilians and army officers are victims from one point to another. In recent times, the state security architecture has become a soft target for Boko haram, kidnappers, abductors, and unknown gunmen and bandits among others.

The rising tide of banditry in Nigeria has become a source of concern to all and sundry. However, Northern Nigeria is the stronghold of banditry.

Additionally, the Nigerian government at all levels is not doing sufficiently well in the aspect of employment. In this respect, a lot of private institutions, including Benson Idahosa University, have emerged and stabilized over the years. Every year, the country produces a lot of graduates but engaging them in gainful employment has been a daunting challenge.

⁴⁶ Ityonzughul and Kethro 2022

⁴⁷ Anao, A.R. (2022). "Accountability and Ethics in Nation Building: The Role of the Citizen. A Public Lecture was delivered at the Faculty of Arts and Education, Benson Idahosa University, Benin City on Friday, June 17.

Agreeing on this matter, statistics from World Bank (WB) are deployed to give a specific level of unemployment in the country as presented in table 1.

Table 1: Unemployment in Nigeria, 1996-2022

Year	Unemployment Rate	Year	Unemployment Rate
1996	3.769999981	2008	3.539000034
1997	3.760999918	2009	3.721999884
1998	3.757999897	2010	3.76699996
1999	3.792999983	2011	3.769999981
2000	3.779999971	2012	3.734999895
2001	3.778000116	2013	3.703000069
2002	3.816999912	2014	4.561999798
2003	3.821000099	2015	4.31099987
2004	3.786000013	2016	7.059999943
2005	3.74000001	2017	8.388999939
2006	3.645999908	2018	8.243000031
2007	3.565000057	2019	8.095999718
		2020	7.960000038

Source: World Bank’s World Development Indicators, 2020

The preceding table shows that for over two decades, unemployment has been one of the major challenges in Nigeria. The level of unemployment fluctuates over the years but it is generally high. From 1996 to 2013, the increment was marginal through progressive. From 2014 to 2015 it increased but not significantly. However, there was astronomical inflation between 2016 and 2019. In 2020 the level of unemployment partially reduced but high enough to create a fertile atmosphere for the threats of wilderness to flourish.

Economically, the country has been heavily challenged. The Nigerian economy that used to be stable and predictable has become an illusion of itself. The failure of the Nigerian economy has been attributed to a lot of factors, such as leadership failure, neglect of agriculture and over-dependence on the oil sector, insecurity, and closure of companies and other gainful businesses, etc. the most excruciating spillover effect is the loss of capital and finance. Ukase (2015)⁴⁸ captures the extent of loss/damage in the following words:

For instance, a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) indicated that Nigeria lost more than 935 of its human capital between 2009 and 2012. In terms of finance and investment, direct and indirect loss are unquantifiable, a World Investment Report (WIR) of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), estimated that the domestic economy lost a whopping N1.33 trillion Foreign Direct

⁴⁸ Ukase, P.I. (2015). “Rethinking Nigeria’s Security System for Sustainable Development: Consideration of New Options and Strategies”, in *Review of History and Political Science*. Vol. 3, No. 1.

Investment (FDI) owing to activities of a terrorist group callede Boko Haram.

Ukase, (2015)⁴⁹ further postulates that:

FDI flows to Nigeria fell to 6.1 billion (N933.3 billion) in 2010, a decline of about 29 percent from \$8.65 billion (N1.33 trillion) realized in the 2009 fiscal year. The report further revealed that the sharp decline of FDI in the country was compounded in the affairs of the global financial crisis. Also, statistics obtained from the 2010 annual report by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) showed that the total foreign capital inflow into the Nigerian economy in 2010 was \$5.99 billion. The record shows that FDI represented a 78.1 percent drop from \$ 3.31 billion in 2009.

The loss and decline signify economic retardation accompanied by human sufferings, which is an ultimate indicator of wilderness that needs a poetic and prophetic voice for rescue/the way forward. It is only the prophetic voice that can direct the footpath of the Nigerian in the wilderness for liberation and more meaningful life ahead.

Generally, Nigerians practise two major religions: Christianity and Islam. Besides, there is the African Traditional Religion (ATR). The aforementioned two religions have dominant members whose relationship has become sour. Efforts are made to strengthen the cord of unity between members of these two religions but nothing much has been achieved. The result of this sored relationship is the protracted Christian-Muslim conflicts in Nigeria with their ravaging effects on the citizenry and the state. This has gone to the extent that people have stopped seeking God's Will; they are so concerned with defending God and religion, instead of allowing God, the Chief Protector/Guard to defend them. There are a lot of killings in the name of Christian-Muslim violent conflicts in the country. These have no doubt thrown Nigeria into the wilderness, hence the need for the intervention of a poetic and prophetic voice from oral, literary, and biblical perspectives.

The Wilderness of our Times: An Oral, Literary and Biblical Perspective

Mr. Vice Chancellor, permit me to beam searchlight on a poem entitled, *The Casualties*,⁵⁰ This poem, which formed a strategic part of one of my publications, is critical to this lecture By foregrounding the historicity of the text and relating it to the configurations of power, society and ideology in a given time, the researcher is able to explore, not just the literary and artistic quality of the work, but perhaps more importantly, its prophetic value, as it relates to the civil war period of 6th July 1967-15th January 1970 and contemporary times

The Casualties

The casualties are not only those who are dead;

⁴⁹ Ibid. on the same issue

⁵⁰ A poem written by J. P. Clark Bekederemo

They are well out of it.
The casualties are not only those who are wounded,
Though they await burial by installment
The casualties are not only those who have lost
Person or property, hard as it is
To grieve for a touch that some
May not know is not there
The casualties are not those led away by night;
The cell is a cruel place, sometimes a heaven,
Nowhere as absolute as the grave
The casualties are not those who started
A fire and now cannot put it out. Thousands
Are burning that had no say in the matter.
The casualties are not only those who escaping
The shattered shell become prisoners in
A fortress of falling walls.

The casualties are many, and a good number well
Outside the scene of ravage and wreck;
They are the emissaries of rift,
So smug in smoke-room they haunt abroad,
They do not see the funeral piles
At home eating up the forests.
They are wandering minstrels who, beating on
The drum of human heart, draw the world
Into a dance with rites it does not know

The drums overwhelm the guns...
Caught in the clash of counter claims and charges
When not in the niche others have left,
We fall.
All casualties of war,
Because we cannot hear other speak,
Because eyes have ceased to see the face from the crowd,
Because whether we know or
Do not know the extent of wrong on all sides,
We are characters now other than before
The war began, the stay- at- home unsettled
By taxes and rumor, the looter for office
And wares, fearful every day the owners may return,
We are all casualties,
All sagging as are
The case celebrated for kwashiorkor,

Some lines in the poem are key to the appreciation of this work of art. They include the following: Line 1: Casualties: This refers to number of people killed or wounded in an accident or a war. Line 4: Though they await burial by installment. This refers to people fatally wounded in battle who are given treatment in a determined attempt to save lives. Line 17: A fortress of falling walls. This is a place that is strongly protected by fortification. In artistic phraseology, any place that provides or seems to ensure safety is referred to as a fortress. Line 20: Emissaries of rift. These are indicative of the messengers of dissention and division. One of the public relations acts of the two sides engaged in the civil war was to send delegations overseas and other African countries to canvass for military and diplomatic support. Line 24: Wandering minstrel: Literally, this means a singer who performs from place to place. The poet, in this context, is referring to the writers who were sent out by both sides to plead the cause of their various governments. Line 27: The drums overwhelm the guns...The word “overwhelm” is functional here. It is a continuation of the image of the drum. The poet seems to be saying that the emotional appeals made by both sides trying to win support abroad have become so clamorous that the physical war going on at home seems less important.

The Poem in Historical Context

The Casualties is a post-mortem of the Nigeria civil war. The operational subject is that we are all casualties of the war and not only those who died while fighting the war. It is the position of the poet that all categories of Nigerians were originators, facilitators and victims of the national tragedy. The creative writer expresses his disgust and disappointment in a rather subtle and subdued tone, thereby heightening the poetic quality of a work referred to by some scholars as predominantly prosaic. The poet creatively begins by eliminating the obvious cases from the list of the casualties, and goes ahead to categorically state those he believes to be victims, taking time to digress on the propagandist role played by agents of both sides using the telling image of people beating on “the drums of the human hearts”. He goes ahead to give reasons why the casualty rate is all-inclusive. The last line of the poem seems to expand the bounds of the poem and make accomplice of non-Nigerians. This is an obvious reference to the global dimensions of the war.

Poet- Prophetic Value of *the Casualties* in Contemporary Nigerian Realities.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, what is striking here is not just the contemporary nature of a poem that is over five decades of existence, but perhaps more importantly, the prophetic nature of the creative work. It establishes the fact that the literary person, in this case the poet, beyond being a language expert, is substantially a seer, who can project into the future and pontificate accurately. To a very large extent, some of the issues raised by the contending forces of the Nigerian civil war episode are still finding expression in the socio-political structure of the country today. A close x-ray of the national terrain in the last fifteen years (2007-2022) would validate this submission.

It is instructive to note that in 1970 when John Pepper Clark - Bekederemo, the Ijaw- born poet wrote the poem, *The Casualties*, it was to the many casualties of the Nigerian civil war. However, a dispassionate observation of the various elections after that event explain how true the poet was! The casualties of these elections were so many and widespread that the families

of the policemen and civilians killed in the run-off to, during and after the elections, merit special condolences. It is certainly not out of place to add here that the Nigerian nation and its quest for democratic rule were also casualties. While most Nigerians thought they were making progress in their democratic development, the various elections and other happenings have been rude awakening to the flip side of a somewhat collective delusion. Similarly, within the context of J.P. Clark's *The Casualties*, and the current tides, it is possible to agree with Dickson (2011)⁵¹, that there is no clear blueprint for addressing the developmental and poverty issues such as security, education, water, agriculture, health-care, desertification, Niger river dredging, jobs, housing, etc in the Northern and Southern Nigeria.

While lives are cut short by senseless orgy of killings, there is still no form or developed system of injecting some accountability mechanism / process that will make all States and Local Governments answerable on budgetary implementation and on stamping out excessive corruption and abuses. People have continued to do the same thing over and over again and yet still expecting different results. That's absolutely irreconcilable.

It is quite clear that those who boasted of making Nigeria ungovernable if they didn't get what they anticipated are now overwhelmed by the unprecedented socio- political and economic crises presently plaguing Nigeria. Those political gladiators obviously got more than their outburst. They are the contemporary war mongers who, like J P Clark puts it, started the fire they could not extinguish. Those selfish politicians precipitated the violence and then went into hiding. The bold ones among them are now playing the sage instead of leaving the stage.

Today, people are caught up in a frenzied drama of hatred. Citizens who once lived together in peace and love have suddenly become bitter and malicious enemies. We are all casualties of the war. For most sections of the country, night is no longer a time of rest and peace. It has become a season of mass massacre. Statistics of the activities of the terrorists in their various forms in the last couple of years show that the political arrangement in Nigeria is a very fragile one.

The phenomenon of Boko Haram is becoming, not just a threat to the continued existence of the Nigerian state, but indeed, a time bomb. This gang of faceless criminals has succeeded, not only in painting the country black in international affairs, but also in making the entire nation a shadow of her former self. In a situation where a religious sect, an ethnic group, or even a political clan, is holding the entire nation to ransom, in a country where those who produce the resources do not have access to them, in a context where families now live in fear, not knowing what might happen next, we have all gradually become casualties of a kind of war.

To What Extent can Oral Literature and Folklore Heal the Land?

Mr. Vice Chancellor, at the levels of oral literary and biblical criticism, I have tried to reflect and explore how my scholarship can benefit the outside community, the external reality. Literature and folklore must transform the society. The Bible and the pulpit must change the land. When these are done, in my view, the scholar, the performing artist or the poet-prophet

⁵¹ Dickson 2011

will have changed the wilderness into a green land, and the desert-voice will have a song, a melody of healing.

In a research that we carried out,⁵² we observed that in a continent like Africa, that is riddled with socio-economic and religious disequilibrium--a social context that is characterized by diverse forms of poverty and leadership dislocations, there is an urgent need for policy makers and stakeholders to have recourse to aspects of African ideology and spirituality on the one hand, and on the other, the Bible, and indeed, the essence of Christian religion. Sustainable development is synonymous with wisdom, and that this dynamic quality is pronounced in the African experience and the Bible. Our leaders need to listen and act, not on emotional and situational outburst, but on words of wisdom, which these two worldviews produce. In other words, there must be an active dialogue between the Bible and African ideology, particularly as articulated in its folklore and proverb. While the African ideology challenges the Christian faith to be truly universal, the Christian faith challenges and illuminates African ideology and spirituality. When these blocs blend, development becomes a natural phenomenon.

Apart from the research we carried out on women and the storytelling tradition⁵³, another study was conducted to examine the role of storytelling in the moral upbringing of the Nigerian youth.⁵⁴ We observed that storytelling is one of the important subgenres of the prose form of oral literature. Being a verbal art used in traditional African society for entertainment and didacticism, its usefulness in inculcating in children values, mores and cosmological beliefs of traditional African societies cannot be downplayed. In recent times, however, the art seems to have suffered atrophy since it is rarely told by parents to their children. One factor responsible for this is the creeping pace of the poor economic climate currently ravaging many African countries. Suffice it to state that, a poor economy has continually forced many parents to scout for the fleeting means of survival which prevents them from spending quality time with their children. As it appears presently, storytelling seems to be threatened in Nigeria, and by extension the entire Africa, by the overbearing influence of the cyber age. Undoubtedly, the cyber culture heralds the age of technological revolution which manifests in the overwhelming use of the Internet and social media. However, the age has witnessed the evolution of several devices that ostensibly render the art of storytelling preposterous.

Nevertheless, while social media is fast spreading a subversion of African traditions, it becomes increasingly important to counterbalance this trend with the art of storytelling. Consequently, this study was conducted with a view to reiterating the significance of storytelling as a veritable conduit for moral regeneration of youth and children in the quest for national development. Some traditionally oriented Yoruba and Bini communities acclaimed for their folkloristic enterprises, were chosen for the study. Given their cultural inclinations, the choice of these communities was informed by the need to re-evaluate the practice or otherwise of the storytelling art there.

⁵² Ighile, 2012 on developing Africa through ideology, spirituality and the literary tradition

⁵³ Ighile and Olowookere on women and story-telling tradition

⁵⁴ Akingbe A, Ighile M.O. & Adeniyi E. (2020) "Resuscitating the African Oral Artistic Tradition: Towards A Re-enactment of Storytelling for Moral Rebirth among the Nigerian Youth

The study was anchored on structuralism to explain that cultural elements operate in an interrelated manner. Interestingly, we found out that oral narrative (storytelling) is ostensibly declining among most Nigerians, though some people understand its usefulness and want it to be resuscitated.

We examined the significance of storytelling in the quest for the moral upbringing of the Nigerian youth. While a drive for moral regeneration certainly qualifies a revival of the art of storytelling, we acknowledged the capability of the cyber culture, manifested through the outlets of mass media, computer games, mobile phones, the Internet and various computer applications, to have negatively impacted on the art of storytelling in the communities where the research was carried out. Because the African oral artistic tradition is grounded almost solely on the participation of a communal gathering, the article has further reiterated that the privileged position the art of storytelling used to enjoy in the past has been ostensibly hijacked by various mobile devices and apps. Sadly, despite the importance of the oral artistic tradition and its utilitarian functions, it was discovered that both adults and the youth have turned away from such storytelling performances and embraced other means of entertainment and instruction, although this behaviour is more prevalent among youths than adults.

Unarguably, it was also discovered that the moral laxity and permissiveness that characterise today's Nigeria could be traced to the inability of parents to instill moral education in their children and wards. One of the major vehicles through which this education could be taught to children or the younger ones is oral narratives. The study submits that the pervasiveness of moral laxity among youths in the country may not be unconnected with the loss of this traditional tool of moral education, hence the need for its revitalisation. As a matter of fact, it goes without saying that its atrophy automatically results in the breakdown of moral education. To address this anomaly, we recommended that oral arts, especially storytelling, should be revived and given adequate attention to counterbalance the growing influence of the cyberculture. It is exhilarating to note that the majority of the respondents desire that it should be regenerated for the sake of re-enacting dialectics of moral consciousness among the youth towards building a healthy society devoid of moral bankruptcy.

In another research we carried out on the poetic, proverbial and spiritual content of "*Erhumwun Oba*," a collection of songs by Ivie Betty Ehimwenma Erhahon,⁵⁵ we noted the timeless relevance and the super-heroic status of the Oba of Benin and we found this critical to the study because they help to locate, within the folkloric genre, the argument that the Benin monarch's uniqueness has implications for the overall wellbeing of his people and ultimately, the present and future development of Nigeria and indeed Africa. The unique place of the Oba in the kingdom is all-encompassing. The Oba is highly revered and his word is vehemently enforced in the communal interactions of the people.

That the supremacy of the Oba among mortals is reflected in the panegyrics and proverbs of the people authenticates the fact that the respect and honour for him are crucial in the lives of the Bini. Praise poetry and proverb, thus, constitute the veritable means of social and cultural reflections, commentaries and artistic creations. We concluded in our study that Nigeria and indeed the whole of Africa's development will experience a radical and pragmatic twist if monarchical institutions, like the Benin example that we have briefly considered, are accorded their rightful place in governance. It is clear that the development and existence of the African people are coterminous with the respect and recognition given to the traditional institutions on the continent. *Specifically*, in Nigeria, attempt should be made to revive the positive aura and

⁵⁵ Ighile and Omorogbe reflect on the collection of songs on the immediate past Oba of Benin by Ivie. Erhahon

influence inherent in traditional administration, for as the saying goes, "the clan is the last hope of the African."

Towards an Integration Theory

Kaduna and Fwashishak (113)⁵⁶ have observed that the relationship between folk literature in general on the one hand, and modern civilisation on the other, is a very complex one.

The concept of the "folk" in itself, suggests common people of not just rural origin but also a people lacking in the sophistication that a capitalist city and an urban economy provides. Seen from a comparative point of view, the city or modern civilisation develops out of preying on and exploiting the labour and resources of the folks. In this sense, literature can be considered as having borrowed from developed out of the richness and originality of the folk culture of a people. While it is safe to argue that modern art and literature borrowed a lot from oral tradition, the same cannot be said of oral literature. This is because all aspects of modern civilisation, out of which modern art evolved are rooted in folk cultures.

I drew attention in one of my publications to the gradual decline in popularity of the folk-songs and festival in Benin Kingdom. I attributed this development to migration to the urban areas, growth of science and technology which has reduced reliance on traditional forms and myths for socio-economic development, as well as the rise of the Christian and Islamic religions. Also, the traditional roots or family affiliation, as well as showing respect for elders, is being fast replaced by the English modes. Annual masquerading often meant for entertainment by young boys and girls are fast disappearing. The gong man is off the streets, except in a few remote villages. However, some organs of traditional communication remain. The institution of kingship or village headship is the strongest pointer to the continuous use of the multi-step flow in rural area communication. Also, groups such as market women, hunters and farmers will remain for a long time to come. Certain masquerades will continue to stay. Several festivals are still being observed. This then points to a realistic union of both the traditional and the modern, to ensure maximisation of both, for the good and growth of society.

The way out therefore, is that a proper understanding of what has always existed will guide any structuring of a mixed system. It is apparent that the communication system, especially with regard to the rural areas, will benefit from a combination of both the modern and the traditional. There is no doubt that modern communication and information technology have come to stay; they can only be improved upon rather than abolished. Traditional communication is in a more precarious position. Television and radio are ready answers to the gong man under the Trado-Modern mass communication model. The mass media have enhanced our knowledge of traditional societies. Their coverage of festivals have added colour to the phenomenon. Folklore, drama, dances chieftaincy installation, etc would continue to remain useful within the traditional order with a blend of the modern communication dynamics. These events can even be recorded on video tapes and sold to other societies or

⁵⁶ Kaduna, H. and Fwashishak, D. 2009. "The Art of Story-Telling Among the Longuda and the Challenge of Globalisation" *Journal of the Black and African Arts and Civilisation*. 3: 1 :105-121

played back for viewing pleasure. Such recordings have proved useful in the study of the historical and cultural past of different societies.

The Transformational Power of the Bible and Church in the Society

Social change or transformation is essentially a sociological term for alterations in basic structures of a social group or society. Transformation is an ever present phenomenon in social life. It has always constituted a striking force in the personal and collective experience of mankind. It should be noted that it is not all the time that change is a welcome phenomenon. Sometimes it is embraced, at other times, it is resisted. All over the world, changes have been evolving in different forms and shapes – ranging from the economic and political to the moral and spiritual. While some of these transformations have had their injurious implications, others have not been totally negative. Some of these changes have brought many socio-political advantages. The technological explosion and increase in knowledge, the progressively liberal mindset on hitherto sensitive issues such as politics, ethnicity, and the dignity of womanhood are indices of this positive occurrence. Within the overriding atmosphere of the social transformation and chaos exists in the Church. The Church discovers sooner than later that in spite of its tendencies to stay aloof and afloat, it cannot totally evade the societal incursions and influences. White (1984)⁵⁷ in his description of the post-Reformation and Renaissance world of Western Europe which is also applicable to us today observes that:

The world has changed almost beyond recognition. The coming of industrialization, scientific inventiveness, materialist, humanist, and secularist fashions of thought, and social revolution. New problems constantly challenged old principles, and found scripture inadequate...

Moreover, another subject that is becoming a matter of anxiety is how the Church ought to cope with the increasingly complex societal disequilibrium. How can the Church change the outlook and practice and still continue to be relevant, while remaining the same essentially? In other words, how can the Church uphold the fundamental doctrines and practices of the faith and sustain its significance in a changing world? In the face of globalization, high tensioned corruption, national decay and rot, how has the Church been coping in Nigeria? Has the Church lost its relevance?

Has the Church remained the light of the world or has it gone into a shadow of its ancient self? Has the preoccupation of the Church with personal gain and wealth created a materialistic group with itching ears, heaping on itself leaders who would blend their greed with imbalance teaching, concentrating on what the congregation would want to hear rather than what they need to hear? Where are the ancient landmarks of honesty and integrity, of selfless

⁵⁷ White, 1984

service, of righteousness and holiness, of godly values and true leadership?

Adefarasin (2010)⁵⁸ has traced the root cause of the nation's moral laxity and decay to the catastrophic loss of values. He observes that life itself has become worthless in our present day society. No wonder "we strive to gain mastery over each other in the work place, we have neglected the training of our children, and family life is not what it used to be. Corruption is endemic and the list is endless". This dilemma brings to light the need to situate a dynamic and pragmatic relationship between what are true or enduring ideals and changing situations. It may also not be out of place to locate the dual nature of the Christian who, though is in the world but is not of the world. Situating the dual possibility in a sense, the dual nature of the Church within the conservative and liberal thought, Morberg (1965:94) notes that:

The Christian ideally is both a conservative who tries to conserve all that is true, honest, just, pure, lovely and gracious in society and liberal who tries to liberate mankind by changing the conditions of society that violate those criteria of excellence.⁵⁹

The dilemma raises a lot of issues. For instance, how did the early Church respond to the social change? How has the response been through the centuries? What roles has biblical hermeneutics played in the evolving social order? What is, and should be, the relationship between Christians and non-Christians in the society? How can a proper understanding of the dynamics of the Church help in social restructuring and leadership orientation?

We have argued in an earlier research (2007)⁶⁰ that the Church-based pulpit, or the performed Bible, while it shares some structural features with the conventional theatre, is a potent instrument of leadership development and social transformation. Just as the traditional theatre functions as a form of communication, mirrors life and society, educates, entertains, and gives employment to people, so does the pulpit; in a special way. The pulpit is an elevated platform for dramatizing the beauty of good and the ugliness of evil. It is not exactly a designer's construct for entertainment; rather, it is a developed structure for training, enlightenment and instructions. While using biblical standards in analysing contemporary issues, it proffers solutions to the challenges in the society. The pulpit is particularly not symbolic of a money-generating venture; it is not a business enterprise. However, when the lead actor plays well his part, the empowered audience rises up to its responsibility of ensuring that the performer does not die on stage, that the light does not fade out and that the play goes on. It is sad to admit however that the pulpit is fast becoming more materialistic than the conventional secular theatre. This is both unfortunate and a

⁵⁸ Adefarasin, W. (2010). 'The Ancient Landmark' Valedictory Lecture of the Redeemed Christian Bible College, Redemption City

⁵⁹ Moberg, 1965: 94

⁶⁰ Ighile and Olowookere in 2007 in the literary analysis of the Bible and implication on leadership

monumental crisis.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, the pulpit can best be appreciated in its strategic and symbolic nature. It is positioned in a vantage area, and in most cases, on a raised stage-like platform. The reason for this theatrical structure of the pulpit is not far to seek. The pulpit is expected to be at an angle, not only of easy view to the audience, but also capable of commanding attention. There is also the symbolic dimension to the phenomenon of pulpit. It is not just a tool of communication, it is also indicative of empowerment. Whoever is on stage is assumed to have been called by God and approved to speak. His speech, persuasion and conviction are therefore, not seen as mere intelligence, but appreciated in the context of a supernatural engineering. This assumption constitutes modes of influence on the people. Whatever comes from the pulpit is taken seriously. The pulpit has a magnetic force of attraction. When it is used appropriately to explore the dynamics of leadership and social transformation, it generates a pulling effect. There is a way in which the platform of the pulpit can be used to cause Christian to do what is scripturally acceptable. Leadership in practice simply means the art of getting someone else to do something that you want done because he wants to do it. And the pulpit provides the forum for this subtle exploitation. The pulpit symbolizes popularity. Leaders who may not have been known or respected by the people in the first instance are impressed on them by the force of the pulpit. The pulpit gives authority, identification and fame to its users. People tend to listen to the pulpiter, follow what he says and even want to be like him.

The pulpit is a platform for motivating people to be the best that they can. It is a stage of mentoring and multiplication of value. The pulpit-man moves to the platform with a number of questions in his mind: How do I bring out the best in the people who have value for me and my words? What are their challenges and how do I make them turn these into stepping stones to their greatness? How do I stir up the giants in them? How do I make them accountable for the decisions and choices they make? Am I a good example to follow? Is my relevance noticeable beyond the pulpit?

Healing Power of the Bible-Church for Contemporary Nigerian Society

Mr. Vice Chancellor, I make bold to say that here is an urgent need for the Church to stand focused and distinct. The practitioners of the church must stand out in character, appearance, speech and action. The reason for the display of quality lifestyle is not far to seek: those who must lead and transform the society must be light in literal and symbolic forms. As the light of the world, they are to give direction with their lifestyle and as the salt of the earth; they are to add flavour to the world. However, if the Church is to make meaningful progress in effective mentoring, there must be a strategic blend of Christians and non-Christians whose daily experience of specific problems can help in understanding them better. In other words, there must be a functional use of the Bible for the world of men. The creative and productive exposition of the Bible must have a contemporary packaging for effectiveness. In addition, there is the need to carefully study the process of interpreting and applying scriptural texts to actual social situations and issues. The Bible can indeed be relevant to the

Society. What all these lead to, is the need for exemplary leadership, accountability and a return to fatherhood. The Church must lead by example. The leaders must show the world how best to do things. The restoration of fatherhood is a precondition for revival. God would want the men to demonstrate the true heart of the father. This would break the chains of bondage and oppression and facilitate the emergence of a God-fearing and a God-serving generation.

A Peep into my Teaching and Research Experience in Oral, and Biblical Literature

Mr. Vice Chancellor, permit me to share, as briefly as possible, my teaching and research experience in oral and Biblical literature.

The first picture that hit me was that the status of oral literature, as a course of study in higher institutions, still needs to be enhanced. While some of us have established its relevance and equality, in relation to other subjects in the humanities, others have continued to wonder whether it should be fully integrated into the mainstream literary department. But perhaps crucial to the promotion of oral literary teaching and research in Africa, is the need to stress the importance of fieldwork. This emphasis will not only keep alive oral literature, but will also re-awaken the consciousness of our young scholars and students to the foundation of their traditional heritage. Quite an appreciable number of students believe that oral literature can be taught, and research carried out, without necessarily having recourse to the oral artists in their locality. While some claim that they have never had any interaction with a performer or artist, others have expressed fear about the adverse religious implication of such cultural contacts. Some undergraduate students of Oral literature at Redeemer's University and Benson Idahosa University did not hide their feelings. In one of our lecture series, a student expressed herself:

Sir, I cannot see myself going to the village to conduct interview with a medicine man or a masquerade in the name of carrying out research. What if he decides to initiate me into his diabolical cult? Or how do I attend and cover a traditional funeral ceremony without really knowing the unwritten rules guiding such cultural events? I trust my parents. They will not even allow me go into such delicate adventure.

But over the years, we have tried to locate the fulfillment of oral literary scholarship in the healthy relationship between the researcher (in this case, the students, and at some points, the lecturer and the students) and the oral artists. Several lecture periods have been converted to meeting sessions with some traditional poets, musicians and performers. The outcome has been quite rewarding. This, in a way, explains why Wasamba⁶¹ (2005) advocates for a participatory research in oral literature in which the researcher, the audience, and the artists actually discuss and learn from each other. It is a situation where all actors grow as the performance process unfolds and progresses. A truly participatory oral literature research activity is enriched with

⁶¹ Wasamba, 2015

indigenous knowledge and strives to empower the source community to reflect on their performances in order to improve on them.

Similar to the experience of Wasamba⁶², some of the research visits we conducted in rural and urban communities, reveal that the decline in the popularity of oral literature in contemporary society is occasioned by the ever-widening gaps between the oral artists, the audience and the teacher/researcher. In other words, while the oral artist is deemed to be quaint, traditional and therefore, irrelevant, the audience is perceived to be mean, sophisticated and too demanding, and the teacher/researcher is dismissed as a stranger detached and verbose. We have observed that this situation creates a dispirited triangle in oral literature composition, performance and scholarship, which in turn, dilutes the transactional nature of the art. In this context, a teacher/researcher is expected to build bridges of understanding to ensure harmony between the artist, the scholar and the audience.

Anene-Boyle, who has conducted several research works on the Niger-Delta artists of Nigeria, shares significantly, the same position. He believes that for oral literary scholarship to make sense and have a future, the age-long distrust between the artist and the researcher must be removed. His fear is that the:

Artists do not regard the researcher as part of them. In spite of trying to put them at ease by giving financial incentives among other strategies, they do not treat the researcher as a native. The result is that because of the communication gap, they would not be inclined to trust the stranger with intimate aspects of their tradition. (44).⁶³

Besides, there is the need for the scholar/researcher to be closer home and integrate with his people. Mr. Vice Chancellor, this explains, in part, my reason for coming back home eight years ago, after being away for 27 years. There are several advantages of carrying out research work in a place as near as possible to one's culture.

To begin with, the feeling of intimacy and welcome can be very overwhelming and encouraging. There is also the joy of realizing that one is helping to keep the cherished tradition of one's own people alive. Also one is bound to have great respect rather than contempt when appreciating the level of skill and sophistication in the way of expression. In addition, the folks themselves would be excited at the fact that their poor and rural life mean a lot to the educated elite and so give full co-operation.

This was exactly my experience when I did a research on the myth and poetry of Igue (Ehema) festival, in Orio-Ozolua, a growing town at the outskirts of Benin City.⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Anene-Boyle, 44

⁶⁴ Ighile, in an early research on Igue (Ehema) festival

Mr. Vice Chancellor, be that as it may, the challenges facing oral literary teaching and research in Africa are still numerous. Quite a number of African languages do not have published documentation of oral literature, thereby giving the erroneous impression of total absence of literary materials. So far, however, no society in Africa or anywhere else has been discovered, which, after thorough research, has been found to lack literature. The myth of a society without any literature, either oral or written remains a myth indeed.

Clement Okafor (1980)⁶⁵ was not far from the truth in his observation that “by using African literature merely as illustration of various anthropological theories, the scholars in the area inadvertently created a climate which brought about the stunted growth of scholarly interest in African oral literature”. That oral literary scholarship is still passing through a growing process, is an indication of the fact that “Africans relished in their oral literature without thinking of it as a subject or discipline and that the Europeans who introduced modern scholarship did not know at first that Africans had their own oral literature”.

In spite of teaching the subject for several decades, and the volume of writings that have poured into Africa on oral literature, academics appear reluctant to accord (for a long time until recently) the status of literature to it.

It must be pointed out that the western world influenced this trend because of their long tradition of literate culture. Even after independence, the recognition did not come for a long time. For instance in Nigeria, until the early 1970s when the University of Ibadan started offering courses in oral literature in the Department of English, no higher institution in Nigeria did so. Since then however, the number of African universities where oral literatures are researched into and taught as academic subjects has increased tremendously.

Another challenge facing oral literary teaching and research in Africa is the string of complexities in the definition of its boundaries. The oral literary materials are essentially the same for anthropology, folklore, oral history, traditional music and other components of oral tradition. It can be argued that oral literature’s interdisciplinary existence has further compounded the problem of working out a set of critical criteria that would help to distinguish it from other studies. In a spirited attempt at ensuring that oral literary scholarship takes its proper place, Ikiddeh⁶⁶ quotes Kunene as urging the critic of oral literature to purge himself of western material for the criticism of African oral literature and embrace new tools. He explains that:

A figure of speech is a term of avoidance...
His (the poet’s) use of figures of speech is in the artist’s tradition.
Factual reporting is the scientific way. But what the poet loses in
scientific exactitude, he gains in aesthetic excellence. (136)

⁶⁵ Clement Okafor, 1980

⁶⁶ Ikiddeh quoting Kunene on the need for critics to purge themselves of Western materials of criticism

In spite of all the challenges, there is hope. While making a case for the survival of orality and oral literary research Finnegan (2005) posits that there is not just one relation between the “performed oral” and the “textual written” neither is there a clear distinction between them” (168)⁶⁷ She argues that writing can interact with oral performance in many different ways. Such possibilities of interaction include dictated transcription, performance score, memory cue, hearing aid, notes for a speech, printed version of a memorized poem, tool for helping audiences understand a performance as it develops, and script for recreating and remembering a past performance, among others. This multi-dimensional twist to the pursuit of oral scholarship makes Hearon’s submission to the discourse significantly all-embracing. More so that it brings to light the indispensable place of oral studies in biblical discourse. According to him:

What began some sixty years ago as an exploration of the oral tradition in the biblical text has brought us to a point where we now see our written remains as evidence of our oral-aural culture in which written and oral text and tradition were bound together in a dynamic relationship. This offers us opportunities to see and hear our written text in new ways: as patterns of sound beat in the task of persuasion in particular social historical contexts where performer and audience entered the world of the text in order to give meaning and power to a way of life 2004⁶⁸

It is the submission of Wasamba (2005)⁶⁹ that creates a safe landing for our optimism. According to him:

Oral literature in Africa continues to attract interest of researchers and scholars because of its enduring aesthetic appeal and relevance. It reflects community life, the spirit of our ancestors and the process of development in our society. The texts come from the hearts, minds and memories of individual artists who are not just in touch with rural realities in their communities, but also the changing dynamics in the modern society. We know that some important traditional information or knowledge is not available in the classrooms and books .It is embedded in the hearts, minds and mouths of oral artists, traditional healers and community leaders, waiting to be reactivated, performed, recorded, studied and perpetuated. The more we record, study and learn our oral literature, the more we understand ourselves and the less we are likely to recklessly ape foreign cultures. (1)

⁶⁷ Finnegan 2005 (168) while making a case for the survival of orality and oral literary research

⁶⁸ ⁶⁸Hearon 2004

⁶⁹ Wasamba (2005)

Mr. Vice Chancellor, my experience as a teacher and researcher in biblical literature has been quite fulfilling and engaging. It has made me a better pastor, a more knowledgeable student of the Bible, with greater skills in the application of the scriptures to present-day realities.

My doctoral thesis entitled, “A Literary Analysis of the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes,” was inspired by the apparent inadequacies I observed in the literary and stylistic analysis of the Bible. The devotion to the sacredness of the biblical text has short-circuited the needed attention for a proper literary critique of the narrative. My research is a close critique that foregrounds the literariness of the Bible. Thus, it goes beyond the works of scholars such as Alter, Kermode, Norton, Damrosch, Gardiner and others which have only focused on biblical intertextuality, theological and socio-historical interpretations of the Bible.

Literary stylistic approach from the perspective of Formalism and New Criticism was adopted for the research. The approach was used to examine the literary resources, literary forms and functions of the selected texts within the framework of the Bible as a literary piece,

The Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes draw upon a knowledge of philosophy, history, orature, sociology and culture. The literary stylistic approach proves an effective way of making the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes meaningful to their users and also establishes the credibility and relevance of literary biblical studies as different from doctrinal biblical studies. The development of a literary theory such as Bible as Literature, Formalism and New Criticism enable us to look at the Bible from the perspective of its literary elements. Instead of emphasising the Bible solely as a sacred text, the study enables us to acknowledge it as a literary text with literary features. The study shows a recurrent pattern in the theme, imagery, structure and style of the selected text. The figurative devices employed advance the persuasiveness of the style. Without ignoring their essential religious contexts, the research shows the conscious literary framework that shapes meaning and interpretation in the selected texts and intensifies their degree of literary appreciation

However, Mr. Vice Chancellor, my research in biblical literature has not been without its own challenges. To begin with, a literary approach to the Bible is a tedious task because of its diverse interpretative dimensions and also due to the mixed nature of biblical writings. I observed that at least three impulses and three corresponding types of material exist side by side in the Bible: a didactic or theological impulse to teach religious truth, the historical impulse to record or interpret historical events and the aesthetic impulse to recreate experiences. This combination of religious documentary and literary interest in the Bible has made the literary study of the Bible different from the study of other literature. Unlike other writings that tend towards abstraction, what literature does is to re-create an experience as tangibly as possible. Literature takes human experience rather than abstract thought as the subject and puts a reader through an experience instead of appealing primarily to a group of ideas. The truth that literature presents is the truthfulness to human experience. Biblical writing as a whole exists in a continuum along the lines of the expository and the literary or between proposition and image (including character and events). But the literary impulse to incarnate meanings -- to image experience probably dominates.

On the rather encouraging side, contrary to fears expressed by some scholars, for instance, that literary interpretation of the Bible amounts to treating the sacred text essentially as a human literary artifact, suitable only for teaching in public schools and universities, and nothing else, a literary study of the Bible is seen as a necessary remedy to the narrow agenda of traditional biblical scholarship. It involves a paradigm shift in interpretation, replacing the traditional critical methods that excavate the text for its sources—a move towards a literary analysis and away from a historical analysis.

There is also a rather interesting interplay between ‘literature’ and ‘sacred text’ At present, academics explore the literary quality of the Bible, religious leaders and politicians proclaim its principles, novelists use it to launch their own stories, film makers make it into box-office hits and pop-singers mine it for their lyrics. It remains to be seen what its future will be— either as a human classic or as a divine revelation. It is quite obvious however, that more possibilities of the sacred text are in the pipeline.

Contribution to Scholarship in African, Oral and Biblical Literature

Mr. Vice Chancellor, African and Biblical literature are faced with at least two basic problems: scarcity of relevant reading materials and the fact that most available works and documentations especially those authored by critics who have commanding orientations towards Western theories or proponents of Western theories and their African adherents are believed by many to be fraught with contestable assumptions. To some degree, like Ademola Dasylva⁷⁰ and a few others, I do share this sentiment too. The apparent growing concerns foreground some of my critical works on African, Oral and Biblical literature. They are modest efforts at correcting apparent wrong assumptions.

Contribution to knowledge is, at least, a two way process: capacity to break new grounds in one’s area of specialization and the ability to facilitate accessibility through published scholarly works. I have consistently drawn attention, through my publications, to the poetics and the vitality of our indigenous cultural expression, the literary value of the Bible and how African experience interact and interrogate sacred texts with a view to making our society better than it has always been.

Apart from the specific contributions made at the Redeemer’s University to the development of Bible as Literature curricular and the eventual setting up of the Department of Christian Religious studies, and at Benson Idahosa University, particularly in the coordination of the Literature unit of the Department of English Studies and the advancement of the post graduate studies, it has also been a privilege for me to be one of those very few that were strategic to the setting up of the Benson Idahosa University Centre for Edo Studies. The recent publication of a book entitled *Ikemwin Edesima: Counting in Edo* written by Dr. Orhue Isibor on behalf of

⁷⁰ Dasylva, A. O. 2017. *Culture Matters: African Literary Traditions, Organic Ontologies and Epistemological Roots. Inaugural Lecture Series 2016/2017 of the University of Ibadan.* Ibadan: Ibadan University Press

Benson Idahosa University Centre for Edo Studies, is a living testament to the ideals, principles and collective wisdom of the Centre.

It is my prayer that the Centre will continue to grow from strength to strength. In this regard, I like to pay glowing tributes to the immediate past Vice Chancellor of the University, Prof. Ernest B. Izevbigie, the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Sam Guobadia, the immediate past Chairman of the Governing Council, Dr. Orhue Isibor, the Chairman of the take-off committee, Late Prof. Igbafe, the pioneer Director of the Centre, Prof Esohe Omoregbe and others for making the dream of the Centre a reality.

Three years after we formed the Nigerian Oral Literature Association, we came out with the first issue of Nigerian Journal of Oral Literatures, with Professor G. G. Darah as the Editor-in-Chief, Professor Segun Adekoya as the Editor and a few of us as Deputy Editors. It is a thing of deep satisfaction for me to see the journal emerging as a voice to be reckoned with in oral literary studies.

I am also full of joy to see the Institute for Benin Studies rise to becoming one of the major platforms for cultural studies in Nigeria today. The institute, with the pioneering leadership of Professor Uyilawa Usuanlele and Aiko Obobaifo, and currently being coordinated by Princess Ivie Uwa-Igbinoba, with some of us in the executive council, has continued to grow in leaps and bounds. The international journal of the institute, *Umewaen: Journal of Benin Studies* that I am honoured to be its Reviews Editor, is a major boost to the development of Benin and Edo history, literature and folklore.

Recommendations

Mr. Vice Chancellor, it would not be out of place to make some recommendations in this lecture. From the discussions so far, the following recommendations are presented with a sense of responsibility

1. There is the need for all stakeholders to have a round-table conference to discuss the future of the Nigerian state and the critical place of the minorities. We cannot shy away from the contending issues and expect peace to reign. This is perhaps the only way to avert a recurrence of the bloody Nigerian civil war.
2. In resuscitating the African oral artistic tradition in contemporary Nigeria, there is need for the traditional rulers/titular heads in their capacities as custodians of tradition to, as a matter of urgency encourage the revival of oral narratives in different forms in their respective domains and communities.
3. The government at both state and local levels should see to the revitalization of the art of storytelling by incorporating oral delivery of traditional tales and stories into the school curricular.
4. Professional storytellers can also be commissioned to go round the schools, especially at the primary level, to narrate important tales to pupils in these schools with a view to producing morally strong future leaders so that we do not stay too long in the wilderness.

5. There is an urgent need for policy makers and stakeholders to have recourse to aspects of African ideology and spirituality on the one hand, and on the other, the Bible, and indeed, the essence of Christian religion. Sustainable development is synonymous with wisdom, and that this dynamic quality is pronounced in the African experience and the Bible.
6. There is the need for active dialogue between the Bible and African ideology, particularly as articulated in its folklore and proverb. While the African ideology challenges the Christian faith to be truly universal, the Christian faith challenges and illuminates African ideology and spirituality. When these blocs blend, development becomes a natural phenomenon.
7. There is the need for governments and corporate organisations at both state and national levels, to give adequate recognition to the oral artists in our environment. Such recognition and validation, will not only give the impetus and drive required for self-development, but will also help to strengthen and spread the message of morality, discipline, hard work and patriotism which our ambassadors communicate through the medium of folk technology.
8. As a way of strengthening the value of biblical education, students of the humanities should be encouraged to take Bible Knowledge as a course of study at the secondary and post-secondary levels.
9. There is the need to explore the possibility of situating literary studies within the context of moral instruction. Teachers of literature should show more interest in the relationship between moral instruction and literary studies.
10. There is the need for all stakeholders to draw attention to the fact that literature and religion are crucial parts of the culture of a given people. There should be a reawakening of the cultural heritage of contemporary Nigerian society.
11. Literature, Philosophy, Sociology and Bible teachers should work closely together with publishers to come out with textbooks that will be mutually complementary of the four disciplines.
12. Further research can also be done in the area of correspondence between biblical texts and their counterparts in traditional settings. Such detailed interaction has implications for the future of literary, biblical, cultural, and indeed, humanistic studies.
13. There is growing assumption that some books are not strictly vital parts of the Bible. There is therefore the need for publishers and educationists to organise workshops aimed at sensitising the populace, not only on the centrality of all books to the Bible, but also on their literary qualities.

Conclusion

Mr. Vice Chancellor, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, It is time for me to begin to wrap up. I have tried to account for my activities as a construct of the literary discipline,

with special interest in oral literature, folklore studies and Bible as a literary text. I have, from the standpoint of the poetic and the prophetic, and by extension, oral, literary and biblical criticism, been able to share a few thoughts in my area of specialisation and as it affects our contemporary society.

The message of the lecture is unambiguous: We are in a wilderness of socio-political dislocation, a slippery platform of economic disequilibrium, a near-combustible cubicle of religious intolerance, a theatre of moral decadence and value crisis, among others. In the midst of this chaotic environment is the poet-prophetic voice of hope, the declaration of assurance and the proclamation of a certain prognosis for the current overwhelming dilemma we have found ourselves in. This healing voice is in our cultural values, it is in our folkloric essence and in the proper aesthetic application of the Bible. The secret is in the resuscitation and appropriate contextualisation of our cultural songs, salutations, poems, stories, festivals and the church. As a progressive stride from the institutional link between literature, orality and the sacred text is the crucial place of African ideology and spirituality. There is a critical sense in which African traditional institutions and oral narrative and philosophy can be harmonized with the Bible in such a way as to precipitate national and continental transformation. Until this is done, the wilderness season will continue to sing a desert-song in a terrain that was once familiar, but has now, gradually, become a strange land.

I sincerely thank God for what He has turned me out to be: a scholar-poet of a prophetic kind, a folklorist with an orientation in biblical criticism, an oral performer with a dimension of pulpit dynamism, a mediator between the cultural ethos of African ideology and theatrics of developmental spirituality, a literary stylistician and a critic of the multi-disciplinary brand, all rolled into one, to become, in a very significant sense, one of the priceless creatures that Professor Ayo Banjo⁷¹ in his 1981 inaugural lecture, predicted for products of the Department of English, University of Ibadan. Thankfully. I am a proud ambassador of the Department.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, please permit me to end with a few stanzas from one of my favourite songs, which incidentally, is in line with one of the opening poems of this lecture. Because I am essentially a poet, I will present the song poetically:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine;
Oh what a foretaste of glory Divine.
Heir of salvation, purchased of God;
Born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

Perfect submission, all is at rest,
And in my Saviour I'm happy and Blessed,
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

⁷¹ Reference to Ayo Banjo's inaugural lecture as quoted by Remi Raji-Oyelade

This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour, all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour, all the day long.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for listening. My prayer for you is that on the day of your celebration, you will be alive and present in Jesus Name. God bless you all.

Acknowledgements

Mr. Vice Chancellor, how do I begin my song of gratitude and the melody of my appreciation? How do I begin to write a poem of acknowledgments for those who did not only give me the ink and the pen but also taught me what to say, how to say and then what to write? My appreciation is like an autobiographical story-line.

Behold an embodiment of grace, a personification of favour and a valid specimen of mercy. Right from infancy, the hand of God has been heavy upon my life. Even before I knew Him as my Lord and personal Saviour in my teenage years, His love for me had been visible. He has been there, with me, through thick and thin.

I give the Almighty God thanks, praise, honour and adoration- for who He is and for who He has been to me.

I pay glowing tributes to our father and founder, Archbishop of Church of God Mission International, the Most Rev. Prof. Benson Andrew Idahosa. Thank you Daddy for obeying the heavenly voice and grasping the clear vision of this great Institution that we are all flourishing in today. I cannot forget in a hurry when you came to Edo College to minister life to us in the mid-1980s. As an HSC student, I remember vividly the content of the tract and the memory of the encounter lives on.

I want to appreciate our mother in the Lord, the Presiding Archbishop and Chancellor of Benson Idahosa University, the Most Rev. Dr. Margret Benson Idahosa JP, OON for the love and the confidence reposed in me. Mummy, from the day you asked me to come to the altar of the International headquarters of Church of God Mission international, to start sitting with you, my life has never remained the same again. May you continue to live in good health and sound mind.

My appreciation also goes to the President and Head of Cabinet, Rt Rev. Dr. Faith Emmanuel Benson Idahosa II (Ph.D) and his wife, Rev. Mrs. Laurie Idahosa for the show of love and the various platforms and opportunities created for me. Thank you so much.

I want to appreciate God for the lives of my parents, Evbavba Damian Aiyowieren Ighile and my sweet mother, Mrs. Catherine Maria Ighile. Both of whom have gone ahead of us. Thank you for the sacrifices you made to bring out the best in me. I recall with nostalgia, how my mother would sit close to me to give the much needed moral support, as a teenager, reading far into the night. My father would always insist that without a Ph.D, there was no education. You are both not here today physically but your legacies are speaking.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, I can easily write a book on you, the apostle of ‘doability’ and the exponent of the driving spree. Thank you for the validation, thank you for the endorsements. Thank you for the strategic guidelines necessary to navigate difficult terrains. Thank you for driving me to the domain of greatness with your constant melodious accolade: “The Greatest.” Thank you for the private and public encouragement. Thank you for the push and the assignments that have pushed me away from the corridor of asylum. Thank you for you.

I thank the Vice President of Benson Idahosa University, former DVC Admin (UNIBEN) and former Resident Pastor, Faith Arena. You have been a blessing to my family. Thank you for your silent and quick interventions when they were needed.

I want to appreciate the principal officers of the University – The Deputy Vice Chancellor- Prof. Johnson Oyedeji. (The First Inaugural Lecturer of this institution, the Registrar- Mr. Vinton-Okoedo Itoya, “I can’t miss your inaugural for anything,” the Bursar- Dr. Gladday Igweagbara and the Librarian- Mr. Henry Okosun. I am also grateful to all the members of the University’s Governing Council and Senate. The first time I met Professor Pat Utomi, our Council Chairman was in 2012, when I read his citation as the Convocation Lecturer at the Redeemer’s University. God is faithful.

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to His Royal Majesty, Omo N’Oba NÉdo, Uku Akpolokpolo, Oba Ewaure 11 for his love for me, and for his support and generosity towards the advancement of folklore studies and the promotion of Benin literature, language and history. I appreciate the Iyase of Benin, Chief Sam Igbe for opening his doors any time for cultural discourse. I also appreciate Chief Oseni Elamah, the Okanobiore of Benin, Chief Osaro Idah, the Obazelu of Benin and Prince Aghatise Erediauwa for hands of fellowship.

I want to thank my Senior of 20 years bracket from the Department of English, University of Ibadan and former University Librarian, Mrs. Grace Sanni, Prof MacDonald Idu, Prof. Ernest Izevbogie (former Vice Chancellor of Benson Idahosa University and bossom friend), Mr. T.M.E. Dogun II, Dr. Mike Okagbare (former Registrars of Benson Idahosa University), Mrs. Eunice Nwokike and Mr. Joseph Ogbeide (former Ag. Registrars) for their warmest encouragement, support and drive. Dr. Mike Okagbare once asked If I was going to invite the entire world to my inaugural lecture. I told him that for logistic reasons, I would minimize the invitation. I celebrate our distinguished Professors- Professor Bamidele Sanni, Prof. E. J. Nwabuzor, Prof. Andrew Oronsaye, Prof. Fred Edeko, Prof Eddy Erhagbe and Prof. R. Anao. Thank you all for the encouragement.

This paragraph is like an elegy in honour of three of our Professors in the Faculty of Arts and Education, who have gone to be with the Lord. Three great men, who added value to my life. Three great men, who made me taller than I have ever been. First on the list is Professor Richard Masagbor. I cannot forget the frequent telephone calls he made when I was at Redeemer’s University, encouraging me to come to Benson Idahosa University. How he felt relieved when I finally came. He accommodated me in his office, as Head of Department, before I finally got mine. Soft spoken but profound. Second is Professor Innocent Umejesi, the lively Faculty Dean. A great man who knew how well to carry his colleagues along. A human relations practitioner of the finest breed. And then, Professor Philip Igbafe (MFR). An awesome

personality. Before 7:30am, he would be in his office and on many occasions, we would have useful discussions before 8:00am. He would personally come to the Director of Academic Planning Office to collect the Class Attendance document and followed the details meticulously. Even when we all pleaded with him to still take the citation on Rev. Dr. Chris Oyakhilome in 2015, he was confident that I would not let the University down. He took the risk and he celebrated me later for the action he took. When I became the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Education in 2020, he offered to deliver a paper on faculty administration which is a microcosm of the entire University. Incidentally, that was his last major outing before he passed onto glory.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, permit me to recognise the immense contributions of my Post Graduate Supervisors, Professor Emevwo Biakolo and Professor Nelson Fashina, for mentoring and giving me the highly desired intellectual background in Oral Literary and Folklore Studies on the one hand and on the other, Literary Stylistics and Bible as an oral and literary text. I remember vividly the role played by my lecturers and senior colleagues at the University of Ibadan during my Masters and Ph.D programmes. I want to specially thank Professors Dan Izerbaye, Niyi Osundare, Ademola Dasylva, Lekan Oyeleye, Hope Eghagha, Femi Osofisan, Remi Raji-Oyelade, Obobodimma Oha, Emmanuel Omobowale, Kunle Dada, Samson Fatokun. I also want to express my gratitude to Professors Eghosa Osaghae, Benson Osadolor, Ibie Owens, Jude Agho, Asomwan Adagbonyi, and Benjamin Egede for their noble and definite roles in the development of my academic career.

I also want to document the roles played by Professors Remi Oriaku, Yinka Laninhun, Tayo Lamidi, Ayo Kehinde, Ayo Ogunsiji, Gbemisola Adeoti, Adekunle Akinjobi, Yinka Egbokhare, Bola Sotunsa, Diran Ademiju-Bepo and Drs. Henri Oripeloye and Akin Oriola.

Posthumously, Professors Dapo Adelugba, Sam Asein, Bayo Ogunjimi, Egbe Ifie, Harry Garuba and Babatunde Folarin are acknowledged for their deep-rooted interest in my career while their lamps lasted. Professor Babatunde Folarin was a sweet spirit. Even though he was my lecturer at the University of Ibadan in the late 1980s, he submitted himself to the classroom setting in the Bible College at Ibadan in 1998, under my leadership. Dr. Godwin Shoki will never be forgotten, for making his personal library an open book shelf for me. And then, my colleagues and friends in academics and Christian communication, Rev. Mrs. Stella Ekeoba, Mrs. Chidinma Mbamalu, Mrs. Julius-Adeoye. Revds. Ayo Ezekiel and Debo Odewumi. Two angels in the form of men. Rotimi Jegede and Solomon Iguanre, I miss you dearly. May you all continue to rest in the bosom of the Lord.

I want to appreciate the Redeemer's University Staff and Students for their various contributions to my sweet story. They include the Pioneer Vice Chancellor, Prof. Oyewale Tomori and his wife, Pst. Mrs. Remi Tomori for their love and care. I recall how, as a Lecturer II staff, Professor Tomori taught me the basics of university administration. Even though I did not understand the details of his tutorials then, I think I do now. I also thank Professor Debo Adeyewa, the second Vice Chancellor, and my friends in the Faculty of Humanities at a time in history, Professors Adebola Adebileje, Idowu Odebode, Niyi Akingbe, Drs. John Iwuh, Eunice Adeighon Uwadinma, Sola Ogunbayo Unuabonah, Ekpe.

The Redeemer's University Chapel, of which I was privileged to be one of the Associate Chaplains, was a major blessing to me. How wonderful it was to be ministering and once in a while, see the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Pastor E. A. Adeboye walk in and take a seat. I want to acknowledge Pastors Olugbenga Akosile and Oluseyi Alakija, for their leadership. I celebrate my students, who were part of the Chapel then but now have become my colleagues and friends; Segun Aluya, Jimi Folashade, Philip Olabisi, Kobah Lar and Ayodele Ezekiel.

When I came to Benson Idahosa University in October 2014, it was with mixed feelings. Even though I knew that I needed to be here for, "such a time as this", it was still an assignment settling down. Apart from the Faculty of Arts and Education and specifically the Department of English Studies that provided the umbrella of support, I want to place on record the strategic roles played by a few of my colleagues in giving me a safe and fulfilling landing in the university. First on the list is Professor Godwin Oboh. Professor Oboh as VC Representative at Faculty of Arts and Education Appointments and Promotions Committee, painted for me a glorious picture and my place in it. I am sure he is proud of his friend and brother today.

Few days after my resumption, Professor Richard Masagbor, suggested that we visit Professor Osondu Akoma, who was at that time, the Director of Academic Planning. We exchanged pleasantries. When he mentioned "Akoma", I then told him about a senior professional colleague and friend, Professor Chiji Akoma. I narrated how Chiji Akoma came for his Master's degree at the Department of English, University of Ibadan, when I was in my final year as an undergraduate student in the same institution and department. I told him how he became the President of our Association, International Society for Oral Literatures of Africa (ISOLA) and how we met in Kenya and reactivated our relationship and bonds of friendship. When I was done with my story-telling, Professor Akoma exclaimed: "That is my elder Brother!" We hugged, and what followed since then till now is better experienced than imagined.

Professor Kingsley Obahiagbon, with his musical echo of "Otenwnen" is a jolly fellow to flow with. He would come to my office and share quality fellowship. Professor Emmanuel Obasohan really struck a chord in me. He knew how to create an aura of warmth and grace. Thank you, Professor W. A. Mollindo for those soft moments. It is well with you wherever you are now. I thank Professor Mrs. Ruth Urhoghide for her comradeship, advice and support. Always willing to offer a hand of assistance. Prof Mrs. Paulina Urhoghide will always look at me and smile. No dull moment with Professor Stephen Enabulele. A truly servant-leader. Tell him what you want done and he will go ahead and get it done for you. Dr. Michael Oisamoje is my "twin brother" indeed. With the age difference of nearly two decades notwithstanding, he would come to my level and strengthen me. I recall that when I was Director of Academic Planning and himself Dean of Students, we were always strategizing with the context of ownership mentality and how to move the university forward.

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CITATION ON PROFESSOR MARK OSAMAGBE IGHILE

Professor Mark Osamagbe Ighile was born on the 13th day of July 1968 in Benin City, Edo State to the family of Late Mr. Damian Aiyowieren Ighile of Orio-Ozolua in Uhunmwode Local Government Area, Edo State and Late Mrs. Catherine Maria Ighile Nee Enadeghe of Igun-Eronmwon in Oredo Local Government Area, Edo State. He started his primary education in Ikaladerhan Primary School, Okada before transferring to Siluko Primary School, Siluko from 1975 – 1979. He proceeded to Siluko Grammar School, Siluko where he spent one year before his father, who was then Headmaster/Higher Education Officer, was transferred to Iguobazuwa in Ovia South West Local Government Area, Edo State. He continued his secondary education at Iguobazuwa Grammar School (now Edo National College) which he successfully completed. Having cleared his papers at a sitting in the West African Examination Council, he proceeded to Edo College, Benin City for his Higher School Certificate, from 1985 – 1987.

He got admission to read English in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, and in 1991, he emerged as the best graduating student in Literature. Upon completion of his degree programme, he proceeded to his National Youth Service Corps in Katsina State and was posted to Women Teachers College, Kabomo. At the college, he distinguished himself, not only in teaching and in acting capacity as Head of the English Department, but also in the facilitation of the maiden production of the school magazine, and in the successful participation of the college in state activities. No wonder he received a state award during the NYSC period.

Upon the completion of his youth service in 1992, he went back to the University of Ibadan for his Master's degree, and in the 1994/ 95 session, he graduated, again top in the class - in the Literature category, with a departmental commendation on his dissertation entitled: *The Song and Poetry of Egogo: The Blind Minstrel of Benin*. Meanwhile, as a master's degree student, he secured a job with Sketch Press Limited, Ibadan as a Features Writer, and rose through the ranks to become the Features Editor and Member, Editorial Board of the organization before he resigned in 2000. It is instructive that it was during his active years in journalism that Professor Osama Ighile became a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations and Executive Secretary, Association of West African Book Editors. Within the same period, he earned a Diploma in Ministries from Christ International College of Ministries, Ibadan, a Diploma in Journalism from the prestigious International Institute of Journalism, Abuja and several other professional certificates in features writing and investigative journalism.

In December, 2001, Professor Mark Ighile was ordained a Pastor in Livingsring Chapel, Ibadan, and he became a full-time pastor in the ministry, serving as National Pastor, Training and Manpower Development. Part of the schedule of his office was the coordination of the Bible College, organization of leadership summit for ministers and leaders (including ordination procedures) and replication of the Bible College and Leadership Training Centres in the different branches of the ministry across the country.

On August 1, 2006, he took up an academic appointment as a lecturer in the Department of English, Redeemer's University, Redemption City. In the same year, he applied to the University of Ibadan for his PhD programme. His application was accepted and he was supervised by Professor Nelson Fashina. Although his PhD programme was completed in 2011, the defense was stalled due to ASUU- strike. He finally defended in May, 2012.

At Redeemer's University, Professor Mark Ighile distinguished himself in many ways: Apart from being the University Orator and inaugurating the Dynamic Orators Group and Mentoring Institute with the bi-annual Strategic Leadership Summits, he was instrumental in the introduction of some departmental courses such as Bible as Literature and Christian Biographical Studies to the school curriculum. He also pioneered the efforts that led to the establishment of the Department of Christian Religious Studies in the College of Humanities. At the Department of English, he enjoyed the rare academic privilege of being the supervisor of the first two MA students namely, Egbeyemi Ifeoluwa with the dissertation entitled: "The Poetry of Pastor Adeboye's Praise Songs" and Etti Mary Emmanuel with a dissertation entitled: "Society and Audience in the Songs of Uko Akpan".

In July 2010, while still at Redeemer's University, Professor Mark Ighile attended a conference on indigenous knowledges in the age of globalization in Nairobi, Kenya. It was organized by the International Society for Oral Literatures in Africa (ISOLA) where he delivered a paper entitled *Bini Folklore in the Eyes of the World*. At the end of that conference, Professor G. G. Darah, who was also in attendance, suggested the need for a Nigerian version of ISOLA. In December of that same year, the Nigerian Oral Literature Association was inaugurated with Professor G.G. Darah as the pioneer President and Professor Ighile as the pioneer Administrative Secretary.

To his credit, Professor Osamagbe Ighile has over 40 publications, including books, chapters in books and journal articles most of which are foreign. He has served as external assessor for senior appointments in some universities. He is the current external examiner to the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Ambrose Alli University. He belongs to the following professional and academic associations- Nigerian Folklore Society, Literary Society of Nigeria, English Language Teachers Association of Nigeria, Institute of Policy Management and Development, American Folklore Society, African Literature Association, Nigerian Oral Literature Association, International Society for Oral Literatures in Africa, Society of Biblical Literature, Institute for Benin Studies and Association of Nigerian Authors.

When you talk of grace and favour at work in the life of an individual for distinction, Professor Mark Ighile is one of those that readily come to mind. In his eight years of sojourn at Benson Idahosa University, he has been in management and in the membership of senate. Apart from being the University Orator, he has served as Director of Academic Planning, Director of Consultancy, Coordinator of IJMB, Director of JUPEP and Dean, Faculty of Arts and Education. He is currently the Director of Part-Time and Sandwich Programmes of the University.

Professor Ighile whose areas of specialisation and research interest include cultural communication and performance criticism, African and oral literature, folklore and biographical studies, literary stylistics and criticism and creative writing and Bible as a literary

text, is Reviews Editor, *Umewaen: Journal of Benin Studies*, Canada, Deputy Editor, *Nigerian Journal of Oral Literatures*, Director, Mentoring Cubicle and Director, Above Only Press, under the chairmanship of Bishop Wale Ajayi.

Professor Mark Osamagbe Ighile is gracefully married to Rev. Mrs. Sharon Titilope Ighile (Head of Publications at CGMI Global Office) and the marriage is blessed with choicest children:- Majesty Efosa, Renny Reigns, Dunamis Osaretin and Adoration Maria.

BENSON IDAHOSA UNIVERSITY

PREVIOUS INAUGURAL LECTURES AND THE TOPICS TREATED

1. Professor Johnson Olajide Oyedeki, "Bricks with Little Straws: How Efficient are the Meat of Egg Type Chicken", July 27th 2010.
2. Professor R. A. Masagbor, "Language: A Complimentarity of Being", April 17th 2012.
3. Professor A. A. Borokini, "Female Genital Mutilation: The Nexus between Anthropology, Law and Medicine", May 19th 2015.
4. Professor Ernest B. Izevbigie, "From Growth Biology to HIV Associated Neuropathy to the Discovery of Anti-Cancer Agents: Economic Implication", December 8th 2015.
5. Professor Andrew O. Oronsaye, "The Anatomy of Nigerian Federalism and Physiological Imperatives for Sustainable Development", March 22nd 2016.
6. Professor Rex O. Aruofor, "Economic-Poverty, Unemployment and Underdevelopment: A Quest for Solution and Imperative for Developing the Nigerian Economy", March 6th 2017.
7. Professor Sam Guobadia, "It's the Environment", October 19th 2017.
8. Professor (Mrs.) Clara Igeleke, "Microbes, the Good the Bad and the Fascinating: Man the Effective Manager", November 26th 2019.
9. Professor Onyero Norah Omoregie, "Educational Administration and the Quality of Products of School System", April 8th 2021.
10. Professor Duze, Chinelo Ogoamaka, "Nigeria's Legacy in Education, Nigeria's Education System and Sustainable National Development: Thought for Food". July 13 2022.
11. Professor Theresa Uzoamaka Akpoghome, "Taming The Beast: IHL in a Bleeding Environment" July 26th 2022.
12. Professor Alexandra Esimaje, "Because" War is much too serious to be left to the military," Corpus linguistics is a thing, and it is a very useful thing too", October 18th 2022.