

# WORLD CHRISTIANITY



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# *The Retransmission of Evangelical Christianity in Nigeria: The Legacy and Lessons from Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther's Life and Ministry (1810–1891)<sup>1</sup>*

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Crowther's time in mission in Africa was a day of small things, so small it was trodden under foot ... Yet, it is time for a generation to take Crowther as her hero, to get inside that life, seek out his neglected written works, republish and distribute them.

—Andrew Walls<sup>2</sup>

## **Introduction**

Ajayi Crowther's contribution to the growth of the Christian faith in Nigeria is an amazing story. He pioneered evangelical Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa, and in particular Nigeria, forever changing this part of the world which makes his story a vital contribution to World Christianity.<sup>3</sup> His evangelical<sup>4</sup> convictions, more than any other factor, shaped his gospel retransmission<sup>5</sup> impact across cultural boundaries. It explains his motivation

<sup>1</sup>Olayemi Olusola Talabi Fatusi, "Crowther Goes to Canterbury: A Historical Analysis Of Ajayi Crowther's (1810–1891) Missiological Practices and the Anglican Decade of Evangelism (1990–1999)" (Ph.D diss. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017). Most of the material in this article were adapted from my original doctoral dissertation submitted to the Roy Fish School of Evangelism and Mission, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas USA.

<sup>2</sup>Andrew Walls, "Do not Despise the Days of Small Things," interview by Gareth Sturdy. *CMS Yes Magazine* (May–August, 2007).

<sup>3</sup>Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 155.

<sup>4</sup>The term "Evangelical" is used in this paper in line with David W. Bebbington four primary distinctive of Evangelicals in his book, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1996). It is used in this work to describe Christians who hold the Bible as the highest authority for life and faith with an absolute conviction and commitment to Jesus Christ as the only Savior of lost humanity.

<sup>5</sup>The term "Retransmission" is used and understood in the light of World Christian Study themes from an evangelical perspective. It rests on the understanding of the inherent

and strength to preach the gospel to the unsaved heathen and Muslims in an era when evangelical Christianity was not popular even among Europeans. It was an era when many treated the black man as having no mind and virtually denied him a soul.<sup>6</sup>

The goal of this article is to point out the importance of Crowther's pioneering evangelical Christianity in Nigeria primarily within Anglican Christianity. Hence, the article examines his contribution to the horizon of non-western Christianity, his Christian convictions, gospel retransmission encounters, and approaches to ministry. Undoubtedly, Crowther's story is vital for the evaluation, understanding, and appreciation of African evangelical Christianity because of his Bible- and Christ-centered gospel retransmission. The context of Crowther's story is the non-western hemisphere, a region once considered a mission field that has now become a hub for world Christianity and missionary effort. A glimpse of the factors that impacted this horizon will first be considered.

### **The Horizon of Non-Western Christianity**

The horizon of non-western Christianity dates back to the first century of the Christian faith. Since the beginning of Christianity converts of African descent were present. Luke, the writer of Acts, seems to suggest that the Christian faith has never left out the non-westerners. Though this movement has continued serially in nature,<sup>7</sup> the history of the Christian faith could correctly be denominated by the dominant culture, which serves as its primary expression during a particular period in history. The Christian faith entered into Western culture and shared in its global, western, historic influence and explorations of the African continent. By the perception of Africans, western exploration and colonization were virtually presented as inseparable twins of Western Christianity.

Undeniably, Western Christianity provided the way for Africans to discover the true God—who already existed in their cultural milieu. As John S. Mbiti put it in Bediako's book; "the westerners did not bring God; rather God brought them, so that Jesus Christ might be known and, therefore, through Christ, the aspiration to reach out for the transcendent God

nature of the gospel to move from one context to another through human recipients. Andrew Walls indicates the gospel's ability to permeate a host cultures through human agents. In other words, it is a conversion movement through which the transmission of the Christian faith occurs. Hence, retransmission means all human agents' effort to participate in the conversion movement by communicating the received gospel to another person or context. The first gospel transmission took place between Jesus Christ and his disciples; every other participation is, therefore, a retransmission. Therefore, retransmission stands for gospel proclamation by those who had received it, transformed by it and motivated by it. It represents and can be used in place of Christian witnessing, evangelism, and gospel sharing.

<sup>6</sup>Jesse Page, *Samuel Crowther: The Slave Boy who became Bishop of the Niger* (London: S.W. Partridge and Co., 1892), 3.

<sup>7</sup>Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 23.

embedded in African religion was realized, and the meaning of the African religiosity made complete.”<sup>8</sup>

Hence, the encounter between western Christianity and non-western culture is essentially the encounter of Africans with the gospel message. In other words, God sought Africans using the available vessels of westerners. Therefore, the horizon of non-western Christianity is not necessarily dependent on westerners, but is dependent on the inherent nature of the Christian faith, which is expressed in its attributes of transmission, translation, transformation, and retransmission across cultural frontiers.

Historically, Sub-Sahara Africa in a domain and frontier that the Christian faith has entered and remained seemingly at home. The indigenization of Christianity in sub-Sahara Africa predates the coming of Western missionaries, as evidence by the Sierra Leone experience.<sup>9</sup> The case of Christianity in Nigeria is not exactly as in Sierra Leone where Christianity existed before the Europeans arrived. Christianity in Nigeria was borne by Sierra Leone’s returning slaves and Western missionary efforts. Nigeria’s Christianity was initiated by emancipated African slaves of different ethnic backgrounds. In other words, the African natives and indigenous leadership played significant roles in sub-Saharan African Christian faith expansion.<sup>10</sup> Among these Samuel Ajayi Crowther was chief.

In the last century significant changes in the spread of the Christian faith have taken place as a result of several factors, but an overarching factor is the indigenization of Christianity and ownership of the Scriptures in the language of the people. The message of the gospel—the power of God unto salvation and the means of evangelization of the non-Christian people—ceased to be termed “their message” or the “message of the stranger” but God’s gift of a voice for life expression.<sup>11</sup> The history of biblical interpretation and Christian doctrine availability in Nigerian languages will never be complete without mentioning Crowther’s contribution.

Historically, nothing can compare to the exuberating knowledge that God can speak one’s language—it penetrates the heart like no other. Beyond this exuberating experience, is the unanticipated oppugn of the non-westerners to some Christian perspectives of westerners who disciplined them.<sup>12</sup> This oppugn emanates from notable African insight, leadership, cultural perspective, and biblical insight gained from listening to the voice of Scrip-

<sup>8</sup>John S. Mbiti, “Translatability Seen in Mbiti’s Writings,” in *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* ed. Kwame Bediako (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1995), 116.

<sup>9</sup>See, Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian*, 18.

<sup>10</sup>Akinyele Omoyajowo, *Makers of the Church in Nigeria* (Lagos: CSS Bookshop, 1995), 36.

<sup>11</sup>Lamin Sanneh, “World Christianity and the New Historiography,” in *Enlarging the Story: Perspective on Writing World Christian History*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 107.

<sup>12</sup>Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 41.

ture in their heart languages. This availability of Scripture has contributed immensely to their sense of ownership of the Christian faith, which is a reiteration of Sanneh's view. The non-westerners have come to realize that the Christian faith is more akin to their culture than those from whom they received the faith. Yet, the question is how did Crowther come to embrace Christianity?

### **Crowther's Introduction to Westernization and Western Religion**

The Christians and the form of Christianity Crowther first intimately interacted with were evangelicals.<sup>13</sup> After being rescued by the British Naval Myrmidon in 1822, Crowther was resettled along with other 187 slaves in Freetown.<sup>14</sup> Freetown was a portion of land purchased with support from the Clapham Sect, a group of Christians who were products of the Great Awakening of Britain. These evangelical Christians took advantage of the prevailing social need to engage in Christian service, which included support of the free slaves and an on-going antislavery fight at the time.<sup>15</sup> Freetown<sup>16</sup> in Sierra Leone became the place of Crowther's first contact with Christianity. By this time a unique characteristic Christian faith had emerged that was driven "by the spirit of adventure and insatiable curiosity, and the motive of spreading the gospel."<sup>17</sup>

Freetown soon became the first missionary hub and missions' laboratory in Africa. Walls argues that the Christianity of Freetown did not only have a life of its own much before the European missionaries' arrived but a missionary zeal of its own.<sup>18</sup> These resettled slaves hailed from various parts of the African continent and, in time, formed pillars of education, community governance, trade, and evangelization across Africa.

It was in these circumstances that Crowther came to know and appreciate Europeans and Christianity. Crowther soon became noticed and began the journey to becoming an unrivaled early pioneer of Christian faith indigenization in sub-Saharan Africa. Crowther's connection with missionary clergies like School, Townsend, John Raban, and, later, Henry Venn, pro-

<sup>13</sup>See, John Samuel Pobee, *The Anglican Story in Ghana: From Mission beginnings to Province of Ghana* (Accra, Ghana: Amanza Ltd, 2009), 109.

<sup>14</sup>Jesse Page, *The Black Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1908), 30.

<sup>15</sup>Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, Its Men, and Its Work* (Salisbury, London: Church Missionary Society, 1809), 457.

<sup>16</sup>Stock that the move to relocate the free slaves in Britain was not primarily necessitated by the desire to return the free slaves to their home country as truly free people but rather to alleviate the increasing economic and security burden emanating from the increased number of homeless and jobless people roaming the street of Britain. Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, 457.

<sup>17</sup>Kenneth Scott LaTourette, *A History of Christianity*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), 1310.

<sup>18</sup>Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 95.

vided motivation for his evangelical persuasion and the future evangelization of the African people.

The birth of Ajayi was around the year 1810, though the exact date is unknown.<sup>19</sup> Osogun was his birthplace in the southwest of Nigeria with about 3,000 people at the time. He derived his name Ajayi from his birth experience of being born face down. As was customary in those days among the Yoruba people, whenever a child is born, a diviner is consulted. In his case, the diviner had predicted he would serve the Supreme Transcendent Being and not any deity. Crowther came to the knowledge of this prediction when he was reunited with his mother after a painful separation due to his enslavement of 25 years.<sup>20</sup> He had a natural talent for craft and the use of his hands, which he learned from his father and was courageous from childhood.<sup>21</sup>

The benefit of this courage was evident in his vast and obviously hazardous gospel retransmission ministry as the first African Anglican Bishop. In 1821, Fulani raiders in collaboration with some Yoruba Muslims captured Ajayi and his siblings in their hometown. Walls writes of Crowther's rescue and transfer from six different owners before being sold to the Portuguese.<sup>22</sup> Of importance, as Omoyajowo notes, is that these transfers were a consequence of his suicide attempts due to the frustration of slavery under fellow black owners, who were mostly Muslim. His experiences with his Muslim owners were not all cruel as he recalled some pleasant experiences with some of them which could have contributed to his tolerance of Muslims.

Admiral Henry J. Leeke, the captain of the British naval ship *Myrmidon* that rescued him, recounted his encounter with him with much freshness at his consecration in Canterbury Cathedral in June 1864. The Admiral was present in full naval uniform at his consecration in the front row of the service with much resplendence.<sup>23</sup> Crowther had the privilege of attending the newly-established Church Missionary Society (CMS) Fourah Bay College, where he learned how to read and write the English language using the New Testament as a textbook for English learning. This introduction to education with the Bible would later become Crowther's pattern. He knew too well the joy and dignity of labor over the boredom of joblessness, a virtue he found very useful as a strategy for empowering his workers and their wives in the Niger mission by encouraging entrepreneurship for some of his clergies.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Jeanne Decorvet and Emmanuel Oladipo, *Samuel Ajayi Crowther* (Lagos: CSS Bookshop, 2006), 58.

<sup>20</sup>Decorvet and Oladipo *Samuel Ajayi Crowther*, 58.

<sup>21</sup>Omoyajowo, *Makers of the Church in Nigeria 1842–1947*, 31.

<sup>22</sup>Andrew F. Walls, "The Legacy of Samuel Ajayi Crowther," in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 16 no. 1 (January 1992): 15–21.

<sup>23</sup>Jeanne and Oladipo, "*Samuel Ajayi Crowther*" 104.

<sup>24</sup>Jeanne and Oladipo, "*Samuel Ajayi Crowther*" 104.

Crowther was introduced to the various tribal languages of the freed slaves who hailed from all over Africa. His giftedness in learning languages at Freetown set him apart. It was this ability that got him on the nineteenth-century British expeditions along the River Niger. He earned the respect of the Europeans on board with him for his insight and forthrightness. The route of this journey on the River Niger later became his regular route for evangelization into the hinterland.

### **Crowther's Connection and Root in Evangelical Christian Faith**

Crowther wrote of his experience of the liberation of his soul from sin:

About the third year of my liberation from the slavery of man, I was convinced of another worse state of slavery, namely, that of sin and Satan. It pleased the Lord to open my heart ... I was admitted into the visible Church of Christ here on earth as a soldier to fight manfully under his banner against our spiritual enemies.<sup>25</sup>

This experience typifies a strong indication of his acceptance of the evangelical tradition, perspective and convictions of conversion and personal faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. The influence of the connections of Crowther's experience of salvation by grace and the liberation of his soul from sin at Freetown, his family background, and his personal virtue of courage is profoundly evident in the churches he planted and led.

Jesse Page, the famous biographer of the CMS, wrote of Crowther's excellent knowledge of the Christian faith and his ability to effectively communicate it to the natives. Crowther is never deterred by adverse circumstances but remained optimistic of God's help and provision. For Crowther, the Bible was God's message of love and transformation of humanity. "Though poor, he made many rich," seemed to be his motto. He held the Scriptures in utmost esteem. Page acclaimed Crowther's Christian leadership praxis when he cited the Chief Justice of Sierra Leone's statement: In 1822 the Lord Chief Justice publicly stated that in a population of 10,000 there were only six cases for trial and not one from any village under the superintendence of a village schoolmaster. This gratifying fact was noted at the very time when the future Bishop of the Niger, then a little-liberated slave-boy, had been landed at the place.<sup>26</sup>

Crowther exhibited humility, dutifulness, and consistency in the Christian faith. It was noticed by the CMS leadership in England, particularly by Henry Venn, the CMS secretary. Venn encouraged, with everything at his disposal, the nomination and consecration of Crowther to the Bishopric throne of the Niger Diocese. This was to the disapproval of many Europeans

<sup>25</sup>Gareth Sturdy, "Do not Despise day of Small Things."

<sup>26</sup>Jesse Page, *The Black Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther*, 12.

including missionary leaders like Henry Townsend. Townsend, like many Europeans of his day, could not imagine the submission of a European to a non-westerner. In retrospect, and with the realities of the twenty-first century Anglican Church, such racial blindness, is regrettable.

### **Ajayi Crowther: A Christian Crossing Frontiers of Culture**

The experiences of some African Christians' encounters with the Triune God and his redemptive work through Jesus Christ have changed many cultures in Nigeria. The point is that Crowther's faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ and the conviction to give other unsaved people the opportunity to trust him as their Savior propels his gospel retransmission exploit. The Christian faith propels its followers to cross-cultural frontiers.<sup>27</sup> This frontier-crossing stirs creative movements and strategic openings for the growth of the Christian faith in places where it has not been embraced, thus resulting in a high cultural diversity within the contemporary Church.

### **Crowther's Encounters in Gospel Retransmission: An Evaluative Platform**

In the *Journal of World Christianity*<sup>28</sup> Dale Irvin established the historical roots of world Christianity as a field of study in the discipline of missions, ecumenism, and world religions. He put forward three encounters that he believes have continued to define the dynamics of world Christianity. These are, first, encounters across confession or communion designated as Ecumenism. Second, encounters across non-Christian faiths which he designated as Interfaith, and lastly, encounters across cultures designated as Missions. The life and ministry of Crowther will be presented along these three encounters.

### **Crowther's Ecumenical Encounters**

In thinking of world Christianity, one must consider the many parts that make up the body of Christ. The church was born into a diverse world. It

<sup>27</sup>See Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 72 for detailed discussion on the concept of the Ephesian moment at a crossroads in Christian History.

<sup>28</sup>The editors, Dale T. Irvin and Patrick Provost-Smith of *Journal of World Christianity* introduced the new journal as a "collaborative effort of scholars who first met at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University with the aim of devising an academic journal that is collaborative. And, built upon a network of professional relationships that is international and diverse, and which depends on for its success upon the integration of the journal with the questions and concerns faced by different local Christian communities." The mission of the journal is to advance the understanding of Christianity in its various dimensions on six continents in both its local and global expressions. As a scholarly publication, the *Journal of World Christianity* seeks to meet the highest standards of academic excellence. The *Journal of World Christianity* takes as its point of departure that "World Christianity" is not synonymous with "Third World Christianity" or other such euphemisms. Nevertheless, the journal is particularly concerned with under-represented and marginalized Christian communities, and this will necessarily result in a greater degree of attention on Asian, African, and Latin American contexts, and the experience of women globally." <http://journalofworldchristianity.org>.

has to be diverse and also appreciate diversity.<sup>29</sup> Ecumenism and its nuances wrestle with the diversities in world Christianity. Modern ecumenism can be traced to the 1910 World Missionary Conference with the vision of Christian unity sternly pushed by the conference leadership of John R. Mott. Today two models of ecumenism are evident; both of these could claim legitimate heir-ship of the 1910 World Missionary Conference.<sup>30</sup>

As a benefactor of the CMS in England Crowther naturally followed its ecumenical cooperative model. It was in this spirit that Crowther led the CMS Yoruba mission in the eighteenth century to open its door of fellowship and cooperation with Methodist missionaries' in language training. As early as the mid-nineteen century Crowther already had begun to live in this reality, thereby setting a pathway for an evangelical ecumenical agenda for the Church of Nigeria.

A typical example of this is found at the Baptist Seminary at Ogbomosho where Crowther and American Baptist missionaries and their native converts at Ogbomosho met during one of Crowther's interior land travels. Crowther encouraged healthy relationships with missionaries of other denominations. The use of the Baptist minister, Mr. Radillo, as an interpreter by Rev. John Christopher Taylor, one of Crowther's close associates, attests to the fact that it is not just about him but a principle he authorized and exemplified.<sup>31</sup>

The development of this evangelical ecumenical policy took a new turn in the mid-twentieth century CMS missionary service in Northern Nigeria. At the time, the CMS had two mission stations in northern Nigeria—the Zaria Mission and the Bauchi Mission Stations. The CMS relinquished the Bauchi Mission to the Sudan United Mission (SUM) in the spirit of evangelical ecumenical partnership in missions in order to consolidate the Hausa missions headquartered at the Zaria Mission station. Crowther's evangelical ecumenical principle was one that was driven by missions and had a faithfulness to the Scriptures.

### **Crowther's Interfaith Encounters**

The twenty-first century church can learn much from Crowther's approach to other faiths, particularly Islam. Crowther's usage of interfaith dialogue can be seen in these three components: non-confrontational (not to be confused with non-engagement), Bible-based, and usage of a vernacular translation.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 77.

<sup>30</sup>The Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 was a decisive moment in missions from the Western world to the rest of the world. Much has been written about this conference. It suffices to state in line with Kenneth Scott Latourette submission in *A History of Christianity* that, "Edinburgh 1910 was the culmination of growing protestants missionary gatherings at the time. More importantly, it remained a landmark in the ecumenical movement that had over half a century profound influence on global missionary thinking."

<sup>31</sup>Decorvet and Oladipo, *Samuel Ajayi Crowther*, 108.

<sup>32</sup>"Samuel Ajayi Crowther: Engaging Islam in West Africa," *Evangelical InterFaith*

Crowther's experiences at Nupe, where the Muslim authority jailed him, attest to his engagement of people of other faiths with the gospel. He encouraged sensitivity to the environment in the pragmatic engagement of non-Christians with the Scriptures. Crowther encouraged tolerance in relating with people of other faiths. By tolerance, Crowther speaks of listening and seeking adequate opportunity to present the gospel, even to the Muslims. Crowther's engagement with non-Christians using Scriptures was intentional and it attested to his evangelical conviction.

### **Crowther's Missions Encounter**

The sphere of culture remains a domain Christianity will continue to engage in as it seeks to transmit the "faith once delivered to the saints," a faith McGavran speaks of as 'known only through the words revealed by God.'<sup>33</sup> How then could a faith solely revealed in the Scriptures in transmission effectively engage diverse cultures? In the first pastoral charge of Crowther delivered in 1866 as the pioneer native missionary Bishop of the Niger area, he made a clarion call for faithfulness to the Scriptures as the authentic impetus for the growth of Christianity among tribal people.

Crowther decried the danger of planting a church on the foundations of cultural convenience instead of first trusting in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible. He wrote, "it is judicious to introduce at first among the people God's word as necessary for their salvation."<sup>34</sup> Conversion is the "great adventure of Christian faith" in gospel retransmission into a new culture, this point on the centrality of conversion stands out in Crowther ministry.

As the CMS launched out of Europe into non-western cultures with the gospel in the eighteenth century, it dragged along the British Anglicanism of "Christendom's form of Christianity"<sup>35</sup> Burrows observed that this form of Christianity seemed to neglect the centrality of conversion in the Christian faith with a possible loss of its evangelical identity. Thankfully, what was lacking in the British Anglicanism of the eighteenth century was supplied with the conservative, Basel evangelical missionaries who emphasized individual and societal conversion. Crowther is evidently a fruit of this evangelical emphasis on conversion.

Crowther's ministry was remarkable in the sense of its commitment to the idea of individual and societal conversion. For example, he took a courageous step at the risk of his life to halt pagans from human sacrifice at Onitsha Abor, where he went to ordain a new priest. The motive of Crowther's

Dialogue Series, accessed 9 April 2019, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/samuel-ajayi-crowther-engaging-islam-in-west-africa/>.

<sup>33</sup>Donald Anderson McGavran, "The Biblical Base from Which Adjustments Are Made" in *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?* ed. Tetsunao Yamamori and Charles R. Taber (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1975), 38.

<sup>34</sup>For a detailed copy of this Pastoral Charge delivered at the Banks of the River Niger in West Africa see, Fatusi, "Crowther goes to Canturbury," Appendix 3.

<sup>35</sup>William R. Burrows, *Understanding World Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 111.

action was two-fold: to uphold the scriptural condemnation of this practice and to orient the people culturally by calling them to God's purposes for human creation. This event created a tremendous opportunity for expansion of the Christian faith in these new communities. It could rightly be posited that Crowther's approaches in the context of these encounters mark the outset of a departure from the western form of Christianity transmitted by western missionaries in Nigeria. Crowther's approach has remained a characteristic feature of non-western Christianity, pointing to the Nigerian Anglican Church as a citadel of orthodox Christian faith within the worldwide Anglican Communion, noteworthy in the contemporary history of world Christianity.

This unique evangelical approach to African cultural ills and orientations set him apart from the default Anglican European missionary method. Scholars have pointed out the impact of this unique global evangelistic ministry and its departure from western to non-western Christianity that is now in its full form today, which has been attributed to Crowther.<sup>36</sup> Again, Crowther's emphasis on the capacity of human development and the harnessing of resources for the purpose of gospel retransmission explains the institutionalization of his name in many quarters in Nigeria today.<sup>37</sup>

An evaluation of Crowther's nineteenth century missionary practices will be grossly incomplete without highlighting his educational and entrepreneur mission strategies. Omoyajowo states that "the main weapon of Bishop Crowther's evangelization was the school,"<sup>38</sup> which affirms the prominent role of education and entrepreneur skills in Crowther's gospel retransmission. As a child Crowther grew up as a peasant farmer and was introduced to skill acquisition and formal learning at Sierra Leone where he "add[ed] carpentry to his traditional weaving and agricultural skills."<sup>39</sup> Later he was one of the first students, and the foremost in many respects, at Fourah Bay College which was established to offer higher education for the settled slaves in Sierra Leone. Crowther did not shirk from promoting education as a true companion of his newly planted churches where possible. This accounts for the heritage of the Church as the center of learning in Nigeria. The Church, therefore, becomes the center of life in the community.

It was clear that education was a significant strategy in Crowther's gospel retransmission. This confirmed the consistency at which the strategy was employed in his gospel venture. It is noteworthy to mention the short-lived Preparandi, a polytechnic institution, established by Crowther at Lokoja on

<sup>36</sup>Gareth Sturdy, "Do not Despise the Day of Small Things."

<sup>37</sup>The Anglican Church worldwide in particular Nigeria, today has continued to celebrate Crowther by naming several national projects after him. These include the Crowther University, Crowther Diocese, Crowther Radio, and Crowther Graduate School.

<sup>38</sup>Omoyajowo, *Makers of the Church in Nigeria 1842-1947*, 42.

<sup>39</sup>Walls, "The Legacy of Samuel Ajayi Crowther," 15-21.

21 September 1886. The institution was, thus, a significant factor in the expansion of Christianity among the natives.<sup>40</sup>

Eugene Stocks, the CMS historian, wrote on the integration of entrepreneurial and gospel retransmission as a veritable strategy that squelches the social menace of slavery at the root among the natives.<sup>41</sup> One significant impact of this integration is the empowerment of lay members of the Church to support the local development of churches.

The inception of Crowther's missionary service in the hinterland is connected to his participation in the Niger River expeditions of 1841, 1854, and 1857. There is no doubt that the British Expeditions of the nineteenth century on the Niger River opened up the hinterland of Nigeria and created the watershed platform for the exposure to western civilization and Christianity. The participation of Crowther and his contribution has been well documented.<sup>42</sup> During the hazardous expeditions in which Crowther and Rev. Schon survived, Crowther was noted to have observed with keen interest the religious state and practices of the interior natives around the Niger River.<sup>43</sup> His motivation for gaining this information was to seek opportunities to share his faith and thereby retransmit the gospel. He corroborated and analyzed the integrity of his information so that he could accomplish his evangelical desire—to transmit the gospel to the different people groups located along the river so that “truly God has not left himself

<sup>40</sup>Bishop Crowther had officially opened the Preparandi Institution on 21 September 1886. From its inception in 1883, it catered to six students, all Igbo from Onitsha, who graduated in 1887, five qualifying as teachers and preachers employed to the south of the confluence, with one of them a printer. By that year, also, a new batch of six students were admitted. The institution was, thus, a vital element for missionary and educational expansion, and an early start in promoting technological instruction and producing technical manpower. The new leaders shutdown the school in 1889 and sold off its two-story building. The new policy of the Sudan Party, which swept Crowther's men out of power, was designed to revolutionize evangelical mission and education.

<sup>41</sup>Eugene Stocks, *The History of The Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, Its Men, and Its Work* (Cleekwell, London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1899), 94.

<sup>42</sup>A Bibliographic search of the expeditions of the Niger River in the 1840s. Although the literature on the subject is numerous, the author is aware of the contentious arguments between the perceived merits and demerits of the expeditions to Africa. The fundamental purpose of the expeditions as stated in the *Historical Dictionary of the British Empire (K-Z)*, (ed. James S. Olson and Robert Shadle [Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996], 868), is “this expedition was to establish British trading posts along the Niger and to see if it was navigable from the Sea.” It was Church Missionary Society (CMS) cardinal strategy and policy of using the gospel, commerce, and civilization to open up the country that got them on board the expeditions according to Eugene Stocks. The choice of J.F Schon and Samuel Adjai Crowther as CMS representative was providence for the future of Christianity in Nigeria.

<sup>43</sup>The scrutiny and integrity of Crowther's findings documented on the people groups along the Niger River found in his personal journal. James Fredrick Schon and Samuel Ajayi Crowther, *Journals*, 2nd ed. (London Frank Cass, 1970), 144. Cited by Lamin Sanneh in “The CMS and the African Transformation: Samuel Ajayi Crowther and the Opening of Nigeria,” in *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799–1999* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 179.

without a witness” among Africans.<sup>44</sup> Crowther was grateful for the potential impact in the region and resolved to teach the Bible for godliness and salvation and confront what he judged was heretical by biblical standards.<sup>45</sup>

Second, the expedition brought forward the missionary potential of Crowther that led to his going to England for education and ordination, which marks the beginning of the fruitful indigenous ministry in Nigeria.<sup>46</sup>

Unfortunately, by the later part of Crowther’s life, the blissful Niger Mission had succumbed to setbacks by the time of his death. Crowther’s missionary labor was halted, eventually dismantled, and his authority stifled by visiting evangelical pietistic youth. Some native clergy—including Crowther’s son, Archdeacon Dandeson Crowther—were not pleased with the humiliation of Bishop Crowther and protested and dissociated themselves from the CMS. They, like many other movements in the Anglican Church at the time,<sup>47</sup> became an independent native church within the Anglican Communion.<sup>48</sup> After this time the Anglican Church in Nigeria suffered many spiritual setbacks.

### Lessons for the 21st Century Global Church

It is important to recognize several vital lessons the life and ministry of Samuel Ajayi Crowther presents to our generation, particularly to the practitioners and observers of the retransmission of the gospel today. The process of retransmission is not a one man show or a display of human ability, rather it is a collective effort of individuals who rely not on their own strength but on God. Samuel Ajayi Crowther did not work alone, he had a team.

The twenty-first century global church must decry the danger of planting and operating churches on the foundations of cultural convenience or orientation; rather, primary place must be given to faith resting upon God’s word, which leads to genuine trust in the Savior Jesus Christ. Today, the church is being dragged into the mud of sexual orientation and is pressured to alter historic, biblical faith, submission to the authority of God’s word, and the transformational power of the gospel. Sound doctrine is being jettisoned on the altar of convenience and personal orientation is birthing endless arguments. Like Crowther, it is time to exalt the Word of God above all else—in teaching, preaching, and living.

Methods may change but the essential content of the gospel must be sacrosanct in all ages. The enormous choices of technology available to us

<sup>44</sup>Schon and Crowther, *Journals*, 5.

<sup>45</sup>Sanneh in “The CMS and the African Transformation,” 181.

<sup>46</sup>The author is aware that Samuel Ajayi Crowther is not the first African man from West Africa to be ordained as an Anglican priest by an European Bishop in London. This is well stated in Page, *The Black Bishop*, 52.

<sup>47</sup>David B. Barret, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 141.

<sup>48</sup>Sanneh, “The CMS and the African Transformation”, 194.

today should never confuse us as to the relevance of the gospel for all humanity in every region of the world. The gospel remains the power of God unto salvation—this truth demands our commitment. Every generation of believers in Christ must make new commitments to retransmit the gospel to the next generation.

Indigenous Christians are most suited to reach indigenous people. Samuel Ajayi Crowther exemplified this well. Even though there were many western missionaries who were his contemporaries in the retransmission of the gospel in Africa, his language and cultural affinity catalyzed his efforts and stirred his incarnational ministry passion.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this article has attempted to establish the evangelical root and persuasion of Ajayi Crowther that perspicuously points to his missiological praxis. It equally shows that the nineteenth century pioneering evangelical antecedents of Crowther's ministry was a foundation upon which the twenty-first-century Christian faith expansion and movements in the Anglican Communion in Nigeria was cast. The contemporary manifestation of the evangelical movement in the Church of Nigeria today still points to Crowther's evangelical convictions on the Scriptures, the need for conversion of sinners in missions, and the need for collaborating efforts in mission-driven ecumenism. Indeed, the historic growth and expansion that places the Anglican Church in Nigeria on the pedestal of global leadership within the global Anglican Church today can be traced back to Crowther's principles and strategies in gospel retransmission.

