

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE AFROCENTRIC AND EUROCENTRIC
INTERPRETATION OF THE EPISCOPACY OF BISHOP SAMUEL AJAYI
CROWTHER IN MISSION AND EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The history of Church Fathers has been interpreted and examined from different perspectives in historiography. Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther has been examined by different eminent scholars from Afrocentric and Europeanised angles. Therefore, this research interpreted his ministry from both ways. The methodology adopted was historical. The primary and secondary methods of research were adopted. The findings indicate that some African scholars and elite saw him as a missionary who rose from grass to grace, a slave boy, who was captured in his village of Osogun, near Iseyin Oyo State. He was sold into slavery and landed in Sierra-Leone. He became a Christian and educated in Fourah Bay College. He was ordained into the Holy Order of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S). He became a bishop in 1864 and died on 31st December 1891. His episcopacy as a bishop was shrouded in controversy by the work of some scholars, depending on interest and loyalty to the C.M.S. Of course, the Nigerian scholars saw him as an African personality that succeeded in mission work and in the field of education. Many churches were established by him in Lokoja area of Northern Nigeria, Niger Delta and Yorubaland. Whereas some white missionaries who were his contemporaries did not appreciate his contributions to evangelism and education because of racial discrimination. However, the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) has shown much interest in his mission and educational achievements which were neglected for decades. The research concluded that Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther was a man of great achievements in the area of mission and education.

Introduction

The history of Christianity in Africa particularly the Nigerian society has a long existing tradition in the transatlantic slave trade rooted in the 14th and 15th to the mid-17th and early 18th centuries, marked by diverse upheavals, cultural differences and the quest for territorial expansion escalated into human trafficking and manhandling within the African society and

outside its shore. This was a dark period for a striving society with a promising future yet confused by political imbalances, selfish interests and power tussles among monarchs in the African society. It is to be noted that the early European visit was prompted as a result of economic expansion and the propagation of Christianity in the region of Benin and Warri. Thus, early Europeans did not invaded Africa society through force or war rather employed persuasive means with promising economic future and evangelical intent.

This disorder was undoubtedly perceived as a curse during its early formation period. However, the transformation of this ideology was ushered as a result of the unexpected return of the captured slave boy at Osogun near Iseyin Oyo State –Samuel Ajayi, who was initially displaced from his hometown but was miraculously saved during the transatlantic movement, rescued by a group of British Royal Naval Officers who were acting in accordance to the British Acts of Parliament enacted in 1807.¹ Chinedu Nnatuanya cited Oslen that despite the slavers' lack of authority over the seas, Britain, acting on an anti-slavery statute passed the year Ajayi was born, stopped the slave trade, seized the Portuguese slave ship that was carrying the captives, and returned the young Ajayi to Freetown.² Thus, “the unimaginable scenario became an undeniable encounter” as Samuel returned to Nigeria with a group of European missionaries for the propagation of Christianity. This was indeed an “unimaginable scenario” for one who was captured and forced into slavery to return alive with an exceptional ability to teach the Bible and preach to his people in an “unimaginable” way, therefore this encounter is “undeniable” since people who knew Samuel Ajayi were still alive, including his family and his ability to speak the indigenous language of the Yoruba made him an exceptional missionary among the group of Europeans missionaries who had been sent to the interior of Africa.

It is no gainsaying that one of the strategies employed by the early missionaries was the use education. Education was a point of contact to the natives of Africa with the intention to civilise and evangelise the African society. However, the rise to the episcopacy cadre of church leadership of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther was seen by Africans as a blessing to Africanhood, particularly the Yorubaland, whereas this was considered as inappropriate by some white missionaries who were beclouded by racial discrimination and the feeling of superiority over the blacks. It is expedient to say that the rise of Samuel Ajayi Crowther fit into Nathanael’s statement “can anything good come out of Nazareth?” This can be viewed

¹ Andrew F. Walls, “Crowther, Samuel Ajayi,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1998), 160.

² Chinedu, T. Nnatuanya, “Samuel Ajayi Crowther: Bishop of the Niger or West Africa Equatorial Diocese – a Critical Investigation”, in *OCHENDO: An African Journal of Innovative Studies*. VOL. 4 NO. 1, 2023, 15-16.

in relation to the attitudes such as hostility, disapproval, accusations, hatred and rejection of the whites towards the blacks when Samuel Ajayi became a Bishop in 1864.

The convergence and divergence in the Afrocentric and Eurocentric interpretations has necessitated great discourse in among scholars on the immense contributions of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther to Christianity in general and to the Anglican Communion. Thus, is it right to say that Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther was unworthy of the episcopal authority as claimed by the early European missionaries? Was his Bishopric title a blessing to the Christian community and particularly the Anglican Communion? How can we address the issue of the divergences in the Afrocentric and Eurocentric interpretations? These questions are the research questions which this study sets to discuss. The study is further divided into definition of terms, transition from a slave boy title to bishop title, contributions of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther to Christianity, an Afrocentric and a Eurocentric interpretations of Bishop Samuel Ajayi episcopacy: convergence or divergence and conclusion.

Definition of Terms

1. *Afrocentric*: The Afrocentric perspective of a phenomenon implies the study, examination, view and submission from an African point of view while considering African history, culture, tradition, belief and experience. Afrocentric means “African centeredness”, according to which Africans should be given their intellectual pride as the originators of civilisation.³It refers to the critical examination and understanding of culture, politics, economics, history, language, philosophy, and society through a theoretical, conceptual, and methodological framework that emphasizes Africa and values the agency of Africans and people of African heritage.⁴According to MK Asante Afrocentric is a way of thinking and behaving where African interests, values, and viewpoints are central. He went on to say that adopting an Afrocentric viewpoint is an intellectual exercise and a fresh take on history.⁵ Its emphasis value to African history, culture, characters and heritages as opposed European perspective on African culture, leadership and belief system.

³ Early G., Moses W. J., Wilson, L., & Lefkowitz, M. R. “Symposium: Historical roots of Afrocentrism”, *Academic Questions*, 7(2), 1994, 44-54.

⁴Samuel Burbanks, Afrocentricity Published in the Encyclopaedia of Identity, in Ronald L Jackson II. *Encyclopedia of Identity*, Sage Publications 2010, 13.

⁵ MK Asante, *Afrocentricity: The theory of social change* (Chicago, Peoples Publishing Group, 2001), p. 3; JC Chukwuokolo, *Afrocentrism or Eurocentrism: The dilemma of African development*, New Journal of African Studies, 2009, p. 32. Asante is constantly acknowledged as the originator of the concept “Afrocentricity” and the one who introduced it as an academic concept. Other pioneers of the Afrocentric ideas include William Dubois, GGM James, Anta Diop, and Martin Bernal.

Thus, Afrocentric is act of seeking freedom through concentration on what is African based as different from the beliefs of the whites. It can be seen as an act of decolonising European culture, ideology and definition from African society. The study provided a clear-cut interpretation on the episcopacy of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther through the African lens of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion).

2. *Eurocentric*: The term implies a European view as against an African perspective on a particular phenomenon. It is a philosophy, intellectual framework, or collection of empirical views that present Europe as the main force behind world history, the embodiment of universal principles and logic, the epitome of progress and development, has been variously characterized as Eurocentrism. European societies enjoy a high standard of living, and advancements in economic and political systems, technology, and other areas demonstrate Europe's dominance in these domains.⁶ Eurocentric puts Europe at the forefront of every sphere, thus emphasising European dominance in interpretation, culture, ideology, leadership and even in religious domains of the people in the world. It gives room for an evaluation process independent of European perspective. It centred on Europe or the Europeans, especially by reflecting a tendency to interpret the world in terms of European or Anglo-American values and experiences.⁷ The study pays keen attention to argument raised by the early Europeans upon the confirmation of Samuel Ajayi Crowther as the first African Bishop.
3. *Episcopacy*: The term episcopacy is derived from the Greek term *episkopos*, which can be rendered as superintendent, supervisor, or bishop, is the source of the English word episcopacy. It refers to a bishop-led system of church governance that is widely seen as Christ's continuation of the Apostolate institution.⁸ Episcopacy refers to the office of a bishop in the Church of God. An 'episcopal' church is one which includes the office of bishop within its structures and its understanding of the nature of ordained ministry.⁹ The government of a church by a bishop. The word comes (in the mid-17th century) from ecclesiastical Latin *episcopatus* 'episcopate, the office of a bishop', on the pattern of prelacy.¹⁰ The concept of bishop within the scope of this

⁶ Sundberg, J. "Eurocentrism" in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, 2009

⁷ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "Eurocentric," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Eurocentric>, accessed May 25, 2024.

⁸ Samson Fatokun, "Episcopacy" in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, 2011, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313990070_Episcopacy, accessed 25 May, 2024.

⁹ Cloudfront.net, "Episcopacy". https://d1yuutt686hfi0.cloudfront.net/media/documents/fo-statement-episcopacy-1998_2fidvJH.pdf, accessed 25 April, 2024.

¹⁰ Oxford Reference, Episcopacy <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095755101>, accessed 25 May, 2024.

study referred to the title conferred on Samuel Ajayi Crowther for his meritorious service during the Niger expedition of the 18th century and his contributions to its expansion to the interiors of Africa (Nigeria).

Transition from a Slave Boy Title to Bishopric Title

Ade-Ajayi asserted that in the Western Region of Nigeria, in the town of Osogun, Yorubaland (now in the Iseyin Local Government of Oyo State) is the birthplace of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Osogun was reportedly home to over 3,000 people and had a circumference of four miles.¹¹ Ajayi was born in around 1807 in the village of Osogun in Yorubaland, in what is now Western Nigeria.¹² He was graced with the name ‘Ajayi’ as a symbol of importance by his parent at birth. They also consulted the ifa oracle to find out which of the four hundred traditional deities he would grow to worship, this process in among the Yoruba is referred to as *àkosèjayé* which literarily means ‘prying into the future’. According to Olaleye Samuel, “*àkosèjayé* is an enquiry in totality through Ifá into the future of a child born or about to be born into the world. It is an enquiry into everything (from the beginning to the end) which a child will become in life, or what a child came to the world to accomplish”.¹³ This process usually takes place third day after the birth of the child and it holds a pride of importance in the Yoruba community since it gives the parents the insight of what will become of the child in the future. Instead of the usual response, they were warned by the Ifa priest against dedicating him to any idol, having foreseen that he would worship the Almighty God.¹⁴ In 1821 Fulani from the north invaded Oshogun during the Owu wars (the Yoruba Civil Wars) of 1821–1829.¹⁵ Ajayi further writes on his experience that:

In about 1821 a young boy named Ajai was captured along with members of his families from his home in Osogun in Yoruba and, now in western Nigeria. He was sold and resold several times and separated from his family and eventually sold to Portuguese slave traders

¹¹Ade-Ajayi, J. F. “Ajayi Crowther,” in *Four Nineteenth-Century Nigerians*, 83; J. F. Ade-Ajayi, *A Patriot to the Core* (Ibadan: University Press, 1992) 23-25.

¹²Andrew F. Walls, 15.

¹³ Olaleye K. Samuel, “*Àkòsèjáyé*: Trend and Status in Yoruba Communities of South Western Nigeria”, *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies, (IJOURELS)* Vol.4 No.1, 2014, 84.

¹⁴ Joseph O. Akinfenwa and Ezekiel K. Akano, *Christian Influence and Ministerial Succession in Bishop Ajayi Crowther’s Family: Challenges for Contemporary Christian Ministers*, in Samuel P. Ango and Olusayo B. Oladejo (eds.), *The Development of Christian Higher Education in Africa Essays in Honour of Professor Joseph Abiodun Ilori* (Ogbomoso: Baptist Press Limited, 2014), 58.

¹⁵Aribidesi Usman and Toyin Falola, “Yorubaland in the Nineteenth Century: the Height of Trouble,” in *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 161–76, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107587656>.

on the coast. He was “recaptured” by a British naval ship and landed at Free Town which had been established as a colony by the British to receive and educate freed slaves. The first settlers were slaves from America that had been promised freedom by the British during America’s war of independence. After slavery was outlawed by the British in 1807 it became a place to settle slaves freed from the slave trade.¹⁶

Joseph Akinfewa and Ezekiel Akano sharply noted that after the capturing of Ajayi with his family, he was exchanged for a horse and became separated from his mother.¹⁷ There is no doubt that during this period, Ajayi faced great tribulation that pictures suffering, agony and the real threat of freedom experienced during the slavery era in African society. The testimony of Samuel Ajayi Crowther himself arose the consciousness of a real human which include sympathy and empathy as a result of the agony, pain, sorrow and fear of uncertainty experienced by Samuel Ajayi Crowther during the slavery period. Pamela Stevens opined that after the rescue Samuel Ajayi was taken to Freetown in Sierra Leone. Ajayi was brought there by Anglican missionaries, who also baptised and schooled him. After his baptism, the boy took on the name of an English missionary, Samuel Crowther. Samuel Ajayi Crowther developed into a bilingual, bicultural Christian adult. He studied hard and showed himself to be an excellent student.¹⁸

Apparently, in 1825, Samuel Ajayi named himself after the Vicar of Christ’s Church, Newgate, London –Samuel Crowther, who was one of the pioneers of Church Missionary Society (CMS).¹⁹ After Ajayi Crowther was resettled in Sierra-Leone, he was trained at Fourah Bay College, Freetown and this prepared him to joined J. F. Schön as a CMS representative on T.F. Buxton’s Niger Expedition of 1841.²⁰ Sierra Leone marked a great turnaround in the life of Ajayi as he his spiritual life was enhanced and he was also opportune to have formal education which prepared him for the task ahead. Mazabane admits that “Crowther’s missionary career without doubt started in 1841 through his participation in the Niger Expedition, led by James Schön. Crowther’s linguistic skills contributed significantly to the success of the mission. Hence, the CMS was convinced that

¹⁶ George Mason University, “The Life of the 19th Century Bishop Samuel Ajai Crowther”, <https://olli.gmu.edu/docstore/600docs/1506-603-Crowther%27s%20testimony.pdf>, 25 May, 2024.

¹⁷ Joseph O. AKinfenwa and Ezekiel K. Akano, 59.

¹⁸ Pamela Stevens, *Interfaith Engagement as a Threat to Colonialism: Recovered Narratives of the Last Days and Legacy of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther (ca. 1807–1891)*, *Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology* Volume 8, Issue 1, 2023, 71.

¹⁹ Anderson, G. H. et al. (eds), “Samuel Ajayi Crowther: Foremost African Christian of the Nineteenth Century”, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 16, Issue 1, 15.

²⁰ Chinedu, T. Nnatuanya, 16.

any successful evangelisation of inland Africa must be carried out by Africans speaking African languages.”²¹

The Niger Mission, under the leadership of Rev. Samuel Crowther, was rapidly expanding in the early 1860s in the history of the CMS Mission in West Africa because of the friendly hospitality the missionaries received from the Niger River's inhabitants. The Niger Mission, led by Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, was growing and becoming more powerful, and within seven years of her arrival, Henry Venn recognized the urgency and necessity of giving the mission episcopal oversight. This does not mean that the Yoruba Mission is more progressive than the Niger Mission.²² Agitations set in after numerous successes recorded about Samuel Ajayi Crowther's and upon his recommendation to the council for the post of a Bishop. Oshitelu opines that the British believed in white supremacy over blacks. In fact, the crude manner in which the CMS allowed the racist theory not only to influence but take control of the Canon law was pathetic.²³

However, Deji Ayegboyin and Ishola cited Wilbert Shank on Henry Venn that:

It has been our constant aim and prayer that we might be enabled to train up a body of Native teachers to whom we may turn over the pastoral charge of those of your countrymen who have embraced the Gospel of Christ....He further told the teachers that they were those upon whom the hopes of an African church are fixed.²⁴

Oshitelu affirmed that in 1864, the most dynamic, distinguished, and well-liked African clergyman, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, was called to London and installed as the Bishop of the West African Diocese with the goal of directing a team of African operatives in the Niger Delta Expedition. Among other places in the Delta, Crowther and his African agents set up stations at Lokoja, Bonny, and Calabar.²⁵ This transformation in the life of Ajayi Crowther was undeniably a movement from grass to grace. It must be stated here that the appointment of Ajayi serve as a fundamental basis for African Christianity and leadership and thus, inspires more Africans to be hopeful regardless their situation.

²¹ Mazambe, N. (2020). Samuel Ajayi Crowther // Christianity In Africa, in Christian History TCG edition of DECEMBER 2. <https://africa.thegospelcoalition.org/article/samuel-ajayicrowther-christianity-in-africa/>

²² Chinedu, T. Nnatuanya, 18.

²³ Oshitelu, G. A. History of the Aladura (Independent) Churches 1918-1940: An Interpretation, (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2007), 2.

²⁴ Deji I. Ayegboyin and Ademola S. Ishola, African Indigenous Churches An Historical Perspective, (Plateau: Africa Christian Textbook, 2013), 12.

²⁵ Oshitelu, G. A., 2.

Contributions of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther to Christianity

The contribution of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther to Christianity is interestingly encompassing since it affords African Christianity a light of existence and understanding through his early missionary endeavours and in his burning efforts to liberate African from European concentrated ideology through the bricks of education. The following are the contributions of Ajayi Crowther to Christianity:

Evangelism through Missionary Activities

Ajayi's missionary enterprises became the precedent for several other evangelistic campaigns to Nigeria. It opens the way for other European missionaries to gain access to the natives of Africa. His missionary campaign started in the Niger expedition 1842 where he performed excellent to reach out to the people of Niger in the bid to expand the gospel. He subsequently established a new mission in Yorubaland, headquartered in Abeokuta, which was by this point the home of Crowther's Egba people, alongside Henry Townsend and C.A. Gollmer. There, he found some close relatives and assisted his mother and sister in becoming Christians.²⁶ Crowther was the main weapon used by Townsend for evangelisation. His presence alone infused confidence in the listeners.²⁷ Samuel Crowther's missionary activities and attempts to "civilise" African peoples were part of a larger abolitionist movement that was occurring at the time among Anglican Protestants and Quakers. Crowther always delivered a strong anti-slavery message.²⁸

Translation of the Bible

Bible is a particular Scripture of the Christian that contains the Gospel of Christ that was mainly used for the purpose of evangelism. It was initially written in English language which is difficult for the natives of Africa to understanding. Thus, the act of translation of the Bible from the English language to the Yoruba language was first carried out by Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Emmanuel Egbunu writes:

²⁶Boston University, "Crowther, Samuel Adjai (or Ajayi) (c. 1807-1891) African missionary and bishop", <https://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/c-d/crowther-samuel-adjai-or-ajayi-c-1807-1891/#:~:text=The%20entire%20staff%20was%20African,Crowther%20pioneered%20an%20early%20form>, accessed on 25 May 2024.

²⁷Dictionary of African Christian Biography, Crowther, Samuel Ajayi (E) 1810-1891, <https://dacb.org/stories/nigeria/crowther4-samajayi/>, accessed 25 May 2024.

²⁸Alys Beverton, Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther (1809-1891), 2009, <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/people-global-african-history/crowther-bishop-samuel-adjai-1809-1891/>, accessed 25 May 2024.

Bishop Ajayi Crowther did considerable translation work and was a firm believer in the power that comes when the message of the gospel comes across in the native tongue to those for whom that was the first language. He could indeed be called the Tyndale of Africa, for he studied both the biblical languages and the indigenous languages to ensure as much accuracy in translation as possible. This covers Yoruba, Igbo, Nupe, Ijaw. He was quite a linguist. His influence as a native speaker on the Yoruba translation is immeasurable since the missionaries had previously relied on informants and guides.²⁹

The translation no doubt paved the way for several others to think outside the box of English language to see the need to translate the Bible into several other languages to enhance the expansion the Gospel. Crowther also authored the first book on Igbo, and asked Schon who had previously accompanied him but was currently working for an English parish, to finish the Hausa dictionary he had started.³⁰ His key contributions to the development of Christian-Muslim relations in the Upper and Middle Niger regions were his translations into Yoruba of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. Among his greatest achievements was the translation of the Bible into Yoruba. He went above and beyond, producing excellent work in compiling Yoruba translations of dictionaries and vocabularies.³¹

Establishment of Schools

The contribution of Samuel Ajayi Crowther can also be seen in the educational development of Nigeria and particular the in the spread of Christianity. Babs Fafunwa noted that the history of formal education in the Nigerian society can be traced to the efforts of the early European missionaries from around 24th September 1842.³² Ade-Ajayi noted that the missionaries established and manage the early schools in Nigeria. They also designed the curriculum for such schools and devoted their meagre resources to the opening of schools for young Nigerians. He further confirmed that all missionaries who came to Nigeria combined evangelical and educational work together.³³ Similarly, In all of his missions, Crowther brought adopted the techniques of establishing schools. In fact, Ajayi founded

²⁹Emmanuel Egbunu, "Sustaining the Missionary Legacy of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther: The Role of Nigerians in Diaspora", Lecture delivered by the Most Rev Dr Emmanuel A.S. Egbunu, Bishop of Lokoja on 27th July, 2021, 6.

³⁰Emmanuel Egbunu, 6.

³¹Chinedu, T. Nnatuanya, 21.

³²Babs Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria*, (London: George Allen and Union Ltd., 1974), 92.

³³Ade-Ajayi J. F., "The Development of Secondary Grammar School Education in Nigeria", *JHSN*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1963, 40.

both the Holy Trinity church in Lokoja (my church) and the oldest school in northern Nigeria in 1865.³⁴

He Fostered Interfaith Dialogue

For Africa, Crowther established an early model of Christian-Muslim interaction in the upper and middle areas of Niger. In addition to overseeing J.C. Taylor's groundbreaking work in Igboland, he handled the Niger Delta's evangelizing, which produced remarkable outcomes at locations like Bonny.³⁵ Another quotation from Crowther's journal presents his approach to persons of the Islamic faith. It states:

On Lord's Day morning the Mohammedan headman in the neighbourhood, of Foorah Bay sent four men to Bathurst, about seven miles distant, to ask after my health and to learn for certainty whether I was going to the Yoruba country. On Monday I saw him. He is a clever Yoruba man, a very strict Mohammedan, and has a very great influence over those who profess Mohammedanism. He speaks Hausa like a native. I told him and his people who were present, in the Yoruba language of the influence of Christianity on the people of England, referred them to the proceeding of the Friends of Africa in the late Niger expedition, and remarked that it was the religion of Christ which taught them to love all men and to do them all the good they could...that the Bible had been translated into many languages and also into the Arabic, a copy of which I gave him some years ago.... I did not raise any objections to their faith nor attack it, but endeavoured to show them the great blessings Christianity bestowed on mankind wherever it was embraced.³⁶

From the above quotation, Samuel Ajayi employed a very crucial technique in the interfaith dialogue that helped to discourage any form of misunderstanding and conflict. He employed Religious tolerance, thus, the statement, "...I did not raise any objections to their faith nor attack it..." Samuel Ajayi meticulous act is an indication that Christianity can coexist with other religions while maintaining peace and unity, tolerance, showing love and detailed explanation void of particularity or superiority to avoid any form of misunderstanding.

³⁴Emmanuel Egbunu, 7.

³⁵Boston University, "Crowther, Samuel Adjai (or Ajayi) (c. 1807-1891) African missionary and bishop", <https://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/c-d/crowther-samuel-adjai-or-ajayi-c-1807-1891/#:~:text=The%20entire%20staff%20was%20African,Crowther%20pioneered%20an%20early%20form,> accessed on 25 May 2024.

³⁶George Mason University, "The Life of the 19th Century Bishop Samuel Ajai Crowther", <https://olli.gmu.edu/docstore/600docs/1506-603-Crowther%27s%20testimony.pdf>, 25 May, 2024.

Economic Contribution

In addition to being a missionary and gospel preacher, Samuel Ajayi Crowther was also an economist and a social activist. He advocated for the social welfare of the people he was preaching to by using his position and connections. He was worried about their socialization in addition to their salvation. It makes sense that someone said Ajayi Crowther was a helpful friend and supporter of his people. Ajayi Crowther encouraged them in the cotton civilization, where there seemed to be a wonderful opening in the way of trade," and taught them handicrafts.³⁷

Indigenisation

The indigenisation of Christianity in Africa began with the ordination of Samuel Ajayi Crowther as the Bishop of the Niger and his appointment as a clergyman. Africa has not yet internalized Christianity; instead, Christianity has Christianized Africa up to this point. With his episcopal and sacerdotal elevation, it was now clear that Africans can head the African church. Therefore, the refusal to appoint an African successor to Ajayi Crowther after his death, despite the availability of outstanding African clergy, marks an important point in the history and beginning of African Independent churches, one of which I belong to.³⁸

An Afrocentric and Eurocentric interpretations of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Episcopacy

Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther is a soaring icon in the history of African Christianity, notable for his role as the first African Anglican bishop in Nigeria. His episcopacy has been construed through different lenses, primarily Afrocentric and Eurocentric, which offer contrasting perspectives on his life and work.

Afrocentric Interpretation

The Afrocentric perspective emphasizes the significance of Crowther's cultural identity and his contributions to African self-determination within the context of colonial subjugation. From this viewpoint, Crowther is seen as a pioneering figure who navigated the complexities of his dual identity as both an African and a Christian leader in a colonial framework.

³⁷ Page, J., Samuel Ajayi Crowther: The slave boy who became bishop of the Niger, (London: S.W. Partridge & Co., 1892), 72.

³⁸ Olusegun Martins, "Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1807-1891): The Root, Faith, Mission & Legacy", A Paper Presented at The Nigerian Council of Elders Annual Independence Lecture at Rhode Island State House in Providence, Held on October 8, 2011, 10

1. *The Appreciation of African Culture and Language:* African languages and cultural heritage have been maintained and promoted by Crowther's significant achievements, which include his translation of the Bible into Yoruba and his work on a Yoruba dictionary. This work is seen as a crucial step in affirming African intellectual capacity and fighting cultural imperialism. Olusegun Martins further asserts that “it will never be an overstatement if I call Samuel Ajayi Crowther the Martin Luther of Africa. Just as Martin Luther, the German reformer, believed that everybody must have and read the bible in his/her native language, so did Samuel Ajayi Crowther”.³⁹ He provides translations of the Bible and the Anglican Book of Common Prayer into African languages, including his native Yoruba.
2. *Liberation for Africans and Africans Leaders:* It is believed that Crowther's leadership is evidence of African agency. Even though he worked in an Anglican Church organization that was primarily Eurocentric, he used his position to promote African leadership and self-governance in affairs of the church. For many Africans, his founding of mission schools and advocacy of education serve as a means of achieving self-determination. He became a Bishop in 1864 and he set another phase for the expansion of the Gospel.
3. *Patriotism:* Samuel Ajayi Crowther's sense of patriotism can never be overestimated. Even though he was forcefully taken away from his home town as a slave, he did not allow the trauma of his early life to affect his concern for his country, town, and people. He became a free man in Sierra Leone and was always thinking about the freedom of his people.⁴⁰ Scholars who are afrocentric frequently draw attention to Crowther's nuanced opposition to colonial ideas. Despite operating within the framework of a colonial church, his advocacy for African clergy and his belief in the need for civil discourse between European missionaries and African populations are regarded as acts of defiance against colonial dominance.

Eurocentric Interpretation

Crowther is frequently placed into the larger context of Christian missionary endeavors and imperial expansion by the Eurocentric viewpoint. This point of view usually concentrates on Crowther's contribution to the European Christian mission of civilization. Several European assertions about the person, works and contributions have been read as follows:

1. *He is a Tool for Evangelism:* The narrative about the origin of Christianity is not completed without mention Samuel Ajayi Crowther. He is frequently presented as a

³⁹Olusegun Martins, 10.

⁴⁰ Olusegun Martins, 10.

triumphant outcome of missionary endeavors that enabled the dissemination of Christianity throughout Africa. His own experience of being converted from a life of slavery to a bishopric serves as an example of how Christianity and missionary work may change people. Samuel Ajayi Crowther was a passionate, devoted, and hardworking missionary to Nigeria and other parts of West Africa. He was unafraid to assist those in his community who were experiencing physical, social, political, or spiritual hardship.⁴¹

2. *Blending into Colonial Frameworks:* Views influenced by Europe can highlight Crowther's contribution to the assimilation of African populations inside the colonial framework. His work has occasionally been seen as supporting the objectives of the British Empire, helping to establish social and ecclesiastical order in colonial areas. Despite that the bible was written in purely English, Ajayi studied for self-understanding and his to be able to utilise it in his teaching. It was rightly observed that Ajayi promptly blended with the Christian body in Sierra Leone thus shows effort that was unfair.

Conclusion

The study has examined critically the story of a slave boy who became a Bishop to the West African showcasing the perception of 'from grass to grace'. His name was Samuel Ajayi who was forced into slavery with his family at age twelve (12). It would seem almost impossible for him at that time to picture a glorious future where he was a notable pioneer of Christian faith to Nigeria. However, there was a change in tides, as the Almighty God who is the 'Architect and Director-General' brought the seemingly evil to become good for the expansion of Christianity in Africa, particularly the Nigerian society. It is expedient to say that Samuel Ajayi Crowther life was that of a rigid and unbalanced one as he moved from one slave master to the other until he was finally sold outside the country in the mega slave market of the transatlantic voyage. His rescue no doubt would have echoed another form of uncertainty to him as he was unaware of the place he was and how he could make his back to his home and be reunited. However, Samuel Ajayi Crowther navigated all these uncertainties and challenges encountered into a step to a glorious beginning. His understanding was profound as he quickly learnt the English language and even became a teacher to others in Sierra Leone. His first engagement back to Nigeria was first in the Niger expedition of where he took some leadership initiatives by actively involved in teaching the natives in their local language and being an African, was able to overcome the environmental hazards and malaria which had previously claimed the lives of many whites. His major contributions such as the translation of the Bible into Yoruba and other

⁴¹ Olusegun Martins, 9.

languages, the establishment of school, his missionary campaigns, strategies of interfaith dialogue among several others became the starting point for African Christianity. The Afrocentric and Eurocentric interpretations depict the views of Africans concerning Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Africans see the rise of Samuel Ajayi into the episcopal office as a blessing, liberation, recognition and acceptance, alignment of Africans into the Christian faith which was predominantly European. There is no doubt that in the Anglican Communion, Bishop Samuel Ajayi is seen as a “light to the darkness” through his holistic approach to the gospel. Contrarily, the Europeans though appreciated Samuel Ajayi’s efforts yet were against his episcopacy due to their racial discrimination. The ideology of Africans or blacks as “a means to an end and not an end in themselves”, geared the discord between some factions of the whites with Samuel Ajayi. However, Henry Venn stood different to reiterate his position on a black man leadership and encouraged the committee to view Africans as equal by giving them the right to lead the church. Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther’s died on 31st December 1891 after a brief illness.

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