

The Contributions of Simon Jonas and J. C. Taylor to the spread of Christianity in Igbo Land

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Abstract

Christianity has become dominant in Igbo land yet the contributions of J. C. Taylor and Simon Jonas has not receive enough academic attention, the role of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) not withstanding; J. C. Taylor and Simon Jonas weathered the hash climatic condition which took the lives of many European missionaries. Theattention and discovery ofIgbo land as potential and fertile ground for the gospel by other missionary societies is due to their missionary ruggedness and doggedness that galvanized the interest in Christianization, commerce and colonization of Igbo land. The missionary historiography was not fair to the contributions of these two freed slaves who became thespring board to evangelizing Igbo nation and success of cutting off Islamizationof this part of West Africa. The seemingly neglect to acknowledge the contributions of Simon Jonas and J. C. Taylor – the able lefteaunantsto S. A Crwother is an academic aberration that raises questions in scholarship and points to the complexities and challenges inherent in missionary historiography. It underscores the necessity for this study and also a deliberate effort to motivate further research work into the historical roots and evolution of Christianity in Igbo land. This study investigates the contributions of Simon Jonas and J. C. Taylor to the spread of Christianity in Igbo land. The study uses a descriptive approach for data analysis and a qualitative phenomenological research methodology. Datawere collected through library materials, like textbooks, articles, magazines, news sources, The study observed that that Taylor Simon certainly were the most remarkable contributors in the nineteenth century missionary endeavour while Taylor contributed immensely to the literature and study of the Igbo language; a position which he enjoyed without rivalry until Archdeacon T. J. Dennis work appeared in the first decades.

Key words: contributions, spread of Christianity, Igbo land.

Introduction:

The phenomenal rise of Christianity in Igbo land during the nineteenth century; stands today as one of the most transformative religious and cultural shifts in West African history. Yet, much of the historiography has been filtered through a predominantly Eurocentric lens, often diminishing or overlooking the critical contributions of African agents in this sacred enterprise. This study seeks to reorient the narrative by foregrounding the remarkable roles played by Simon Jonas and Rev. John Christopher Taylor, two emancipated Igbo ex-slaves who became pioneers and architects of the Christian faith in their ancestral homeland. Far from being peripheral assistants to European missionaries, Jonas and Taylor were at the epicenter of the missionary enterprise in Igbo land. Their fluency in the language, familiarity with the socio-cultural intricacies of the Igbo worldview, and unyielding commitment to the Christian mission uniquely positioned them as bridges between foreign theology and indigenous spirituality. They did not merely disseminate religious doctrine—they indigenized it. In doing so, they

catalyzed a religious transformation that would outlive colonial structures and reshape the religious identity of a people.

Simon Jonas, through his involvement in the 1841, 1854, and 1857 Niger expeditions, emerged as the first indigenous resident evangelist in Igbo land. His role as interpreter, catechist, and cultural mediator was instrumental in establishing trust with local communities, particularly at Aboh, where his efforts laid the groundwork for enduring Christian engagement. His strategic use of vernacular language in evangelism and education proved to be a turning point in the reception of the Gospel among the Igbo. Likewise, Rev. J. C. Taylor's monumental work in translation, education, and pastoral ministry marked a new era in the development of indigenous Christianity. His pioneering translation of the Scriptures and Christian liturgy into the Izuama dialect of Igbo not only preserved the linguistic integrity of the people but also facilitated a deeper, more personal understanding of Christian theology. As the first Igbo clergyman to lead the Onitsha mission, Taylor's educational initiatives and linguistic contributions made the Christian faith intelligible, relevant, and accessible to his people.

This paper therefore argues that the missionary success in Igbo land cannot be fully appreciated without a deliberate and critical examination of the foundational contributions of Jonas and Taylor. Their pioneering efforts not only preceded and prepared the ground for European missionary successes but also laid the intellectual, linguistic, and spiritual infrastructure upon which later missions were built. Employing a qualitative, descriptive, and phenomenological methodology, this research aims to restore historical balance by situating African agency—particularly that of Jonas and Taylor—at the center of the Christianization of Igbo land. In doing so, it invites a broader reconsideration of the dynamics of mission history and the often-unspoken genius of African missionaries in shaping the religious trajectory of the continent.

Contribution: According to Allen (2010), contribution is a noun, which means to share in effecting result. This study will refer to contribution to mean how Simon Jonas and John Christopher Taylor shared in effecting the result of spreading Christianity in Igbo Land.

Spread: Allen (2010) described spread as to open or unfold to full width, extent. It also mean to extend over a period of time, to make more widely known, active, promulgate or diffuse, to be extended or expanded; increase in size, with the act of spreading especially spread the gospel. The study hence refers spread to mean to open, to mean to extend over a period of time to promulgate.

Christianity: Christianity according to the Oxford University Press Dictionaries (2012) refers to the religion based on the person and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, or its beliefs and practices ... It originated among the Jewish followers of Jesus of Nazareth, who believed that he was the promised Messiah (*'Christ'*). Most Christians believe in one God in three Persons (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) and that Jesus is the Son of God who rose from the dead after being crucified; a Christian hopes to attain eternal life after death through faith in Jesus Christ ..." Geering (2002, p.21) writes: "The word Christianity is derived from the Medieval Latin *Christianitas*. It was originally a synonym for Christendom, meaning the geographical domain where Christ ruled ..." The reference to Christianity as the geographical domain where Christ ruled gave Christendom its more transcendental status. It is therefore not surprising that Christianity was once the primary context for a number of communities

(Geering 2002, p.19). Christianity is a monotheistic religion based on the teachings and life of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament. The Jews were the first to be converted to Christianity before anyone else. Christianity was firstly introduced through missionary work and colonization in the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and parts of India, and then it was disseminated throughout the entire world.

Christians hold that Jesus was the promised Messiah, sent by God to rule and save humanity, and that his arrival fulfilled the Old Testament's messianic predictions. Many people consider the theology of the Trinity to be fundamental to traditional Christianity. According to the Nicene Creed, the Holy Trinity is one God who exists in three equally powerful Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Wainwright (2000) opines that Christianity has grown to be the most prevalent religion in the world and the one with the greatest geographic dispersion. The goal of Christianity in Nigeria was to proselytize the people. Christian missionaries in Africa labored assiduously to replace African Traditional Religion (ATR) with Christianity in order to achieve this goal. Religious conversation, enculturation, or acculturation was not intended. According to Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004), ATR was disparagingly characterized as native, pagan, heathen, juju, fetish, animism, idolatry, primitive, and polytheistic in order to explain their goal. It had a negative connotation and was linked to things like witchcraft, ghosts, hobgoblins, charms, superstitions, bad omens, sorcery, etc. The gospel and the society it were intended to reach were at odds because to the missionaries' dialectical strategy, which excluded any kind of conversation with the people about their ethos, socioeconomic status, and religious beliefs.

The Christian message is believed to be a universal gospel for man's redemption and can only be effectively communicated and rooted into the culture of the people by missionaries using the immediate language of the people. It is not enough to learn how to speak the language but also to translate the content of the gospel as contained in the Bible into the people's language. This is how Christianity became a lifestyle, and this is especially true in sub-Saharan Africa especially Igbo nation. This influence is undoubtedly the result of the phenomenal growth of Christianity experienced in Igbo Land. In the same vein, many Christian scholars have predicted that by the twentieth century, Christianity has indeed spread like wild fires in Igbo Land; in the corresponding period in spite of the pessimistic reception amongst earlier contact. The missionary enterprise in Igbo Land during the nineteenth century was indeed a resounding success. This massive Christian expansion defied even the most gruesome experience and its initial discouragements. Hence, the growth of Christianity in Igbo Land could be said to be a surprising reality compared to the two initial failed explorations and its success during twentieth-century and beyond.

Igbo land: Igbo land is one of the major tribes in Nigeria comprising majorly of the present five south eastern states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. There is enough presence of Igbo speaking people in Delta and Rivers states. Bendo-Samuel cited in Igboanusi (2006) asserted that "Igbo belong to the 'new' Benue-Congo or the west Benue-Congo language families" (p.157). According to Afigbo (1981),

It was mostly the Igbo who occupied the hinter land of the Bight of Biafra. The 1906 population estimate put the Igbo among the most numerous ethnic nationalities in Negro

Africa. The Igbo society and culture enjoyed a basic uniformity of pattern and of cosmological and social ideas. Igbo land lay outside the areas traversed by early travelers, Arab and European, until a little over a century ago (p.1).

According to Ijeoma (2002), the Igbo are surrounded by the Edo to the west, the Ijo, Urhobo and Isoko to the south and south west. To the east are the Efik/Ibibio groups and to the north are the Igala, Idoma and the Tiv. Oparanozie (2019), opined that Igbo is both a language and the name of an ethnic group or tribe in Nigeria. Onuh (1991, p.54) posits that there is an etymological and lexical complexity surrounding the meaning of the term “Igbo”. For Ekwunu (2009,), it is very difficult to arrive at the real etymological and semantic clarity of the word “Igbo” (p.66). According to him, the meaning can be traced in the imprecise nature of the history of the Igbo people. Afigbo (1975, p.12) conjects, that Igbo history can be described as terra incognita. For him, Igbo people are not indifferent to the crisis of identity. Uzozie (1991) observes that “to date, there is no agreement among ethnographers, missionaries, anthropologists, historians, geographers and politicians on the definition and geographical limits of the territory” (p.16). For Ekwunu (2009, p.66), any attempt to introduce who the Igbo are poses a lot of problems in all aspects of its academic conceptualizations. In all these conjunctions, it remains that the Igbo belongs to the southeastern part of Nigeria, West Africa who speak the language Igbo. It is pertinent to note that according to Tasie (1996) Taylor’s, Definition of Igbo land extended to and included from the River Bonny to the confines of Calabar, as far as the back of Idda, from Abo, Asaba to the confines of the kingdom of Benin, on the right bank of the Niger. His definition, however, makes more sense of Igbo in a cultural and a national sense than in strictly tribal sense (p.68).

It is therefore evident, that from Taylor’s definition of Igbo Land his field of missionary enterprise enclave extends to his definition of Igbo Land. Taylor unlike his white missionaries contemporary understood and delineated the boundaries between the Igbo cultural value and norms and religious worships; the 1841 Niger Expedition proposed by Thomas Fowell Buxton. Dike (1957) has this to say:

Missionary activities in Nigeria cannot, of course be viewed apart from the general European invasion to the west African territories from the advent of the Portuguese . . . the Christian priest invariably travelled with the traders either to check the advance of Islam - at the time the hereditary foe of Christendom –or to extend the Christian message to unknown lands. . . . These Christian outposts were short-lived and the reasons for their virtual disappearance towards the end of the seventeenth century are many and various (p.1).

The 1841, 1854, and 1857 expeditions were instrumental to the missionary enterprise and obviously the spread of Christianity in Igbo land. Underneath this enduring legacy are the evangelical Great Awakening of the 18th century and the abolition of the slave trade. Profoundly, the spiritual revival which started in America like the harmattan fire spread to England and Germany and other European nations. Concern to reach other world with the gospel became the springboard to establishment of missionary institutions of which the Church Missionary Society was one of such missionary institutions. The anti-slavery campaign led to

the founding of Sierra Leone settlement where many of the freed slaves who were already Christians later became the voice of the gospel in their native countries. Amongst these great gospellers were Simon Jonas and John Christopher Taylor the Igbo land apostles. Anyabuiké (1996) writing about the 1841 expedition observed that:

The Expedition was an attempt to move to West Africa and create a better alternative to the slave trade. And as a necessary concomitant, Christianity was to be introduced to bring up the moral and spiritual regeneration of the African (p.22).

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) which was founded in 1799 for the purpose of going to spread the gospel message overseas; move to Nigeria when Henry Venn was made the CMS Secretary (1841-1872). The society's formation included the extinction of slave trade & civilization of Africa brought together in Great Britain those who were interested in Africa & acted as pressure group to the Government; they came together in Christian faith and communion as merchants of the Gospel to be called Church Missionary Society they were predominantly white men and women some died natural deaths, while some were cannibalized; African weather and climate did not help matters rather and their missionary expeditions suffered great setbacks and hazards until some young African ex-slaves were included and introduced to join the team.

Missionary giants of 1841, 1854 and 1857 expeditions:

Simon Jonas an Igbo ex-slave was amongst the first expedition team of 1841 and 1854; the 1857 expedition included Rev J. C. Taylor, Simon Jonas, who were converted and trained in Sierra Leone. Both were the men on the ground, who laid the foundation of Christianity and planted the gospel seeds amongst Igbo land, in the very language and manner they understood; notwithstanding, their contributions in the spread of Christianity in Igbo land have suffered obscurity and rather much credit has been given to their contemporaries in most publications. However, the remote origins to the spread of Christianity in Igbo land are really provoked by the endeavours of both Simon Jonas and John Christopher Taylor. They are better described as missionary giants in the story of Christian missions in Igbo land upon which other missionaries both of the CMS and other missionary institutions laid their bricks to the spreading of Christianity in Igbo nation. Kalu (1978) has this to say: "for the first thirty years of missionary activities in Igbo land these men (*referring to Simon Jonas, Augustus Radillo and J.C. Taylor*) provided the leadership under the supervision of Crowther" (p.309). It is not a gain saying to assert that the mission under these liberated Igbo slaves founded eleven out-stations. These periods were characterized with fighting for survival against adherents of traditional religion and against mercenary traders.

Simon Jonas contributions to the spread of Christianity in Igbo land:

Simon Jonas was the first African of Igbo origin and a member of the CMS that accompanied the 1841 expedition which laid the foundation for two subsequent expeditions to Igbo territory; Ekechi, (1971) observed that Simon Jonas was, an Igbo liberated slave from Sierra Leone of Igbo parentage a Catechist of CMS and a contingent/party to 1841 expedition to Aboh. Simon Jonas served as an interpreter and his role established a genuine relationship with the King of Aboh, The Catechist and Interpreter during the 1841, 1854 and 1857 was amongst the Niger

Expeditions which landed at Aboh, which has been described as tortuous and painful following the huge loss 1841. Rowbory (2009) described Simon in these words:

Simon Jonas was an Igbo freed slave, who had been living in Sierra Leon. He was a competent mother-tongue speaker and was one of those who accompanied Schon and Crowther on the 1841 expedition into Igbo land (p.4).

Schon cited in Ekechi (1971) wrote:

You must stop with me, you must teach me and my people. The white people can go up the river without you: they may leave you here until they return, or until other people come (p.2).

The Church Missionary Society selected Rev. James Fredrick Schon and Mr. Samuel Ajai Crowther to Christianize and learn the indigenous language; Rev. James F. Schon a linguist embarked on the expedition; also ex-slaves who had learnt to speak English were used as interpreters, amongst them was Simon Jonas, an ex-slave of Igbo parentage. According to Kalu (2003):

On the Christianization of Igbo land, Baikie had recruited a certain Igbo man Simon Jonas, who was serving s Constable in Fernando Po, as an interpreter; Jonas stayed back as a bible teacher as the party move to Asaba in October 1854. (p. 82).

Ekechi further explained that Jonas made a favourable impression at Abo during his stay; he taught children Bible and this brought about the first impression and initial breakthrough in the spreading of Christianity in Igbo land. The response definitely convinced the missionaries to propose for a repeat and also of the importance of Africans for Africa. When the CMS returned again at Aboh in 1854, Kalu (1978) remarked that Simon Jonas stayed back as a Bible teacher as the party moved to Asaba in October 1854. To further elucidate on Simon Jonas' contribution to spreading of Christianity in Igbo land, Okeke (2006) acknowledged that Simon Jonas assisted other members of the CMS while they travelled through the Igbo portions of the lower Niger basin. Though, the Igbo were responsive and receptive to the new religion; nevertheless, the fact remains that had the expedition team came alone the reception would have been different and difficult, hence, this study make bold posit that the game changer was Simon.

Simon invested much time teaching Obi Ossai and his people the gospel in vernacular; hence, making Aboh people to be highly interested in the gospel. Okpalike and Nwadiolor (2014), affirms that Jonas made a remarkable missionary progress in forming a nucleus Christian congregation/group among the people. It is not a gainsaying that Simon Jonas' impressive contributions to the 1841 and 1854 expeditions, especially in terms of interpretation for effective communication of the gospel to the indigenous which cannot be overemphasized as contributive to the third and final voyage to the Banks of the Niger in 1857 expedition; subsequently other missionaries nursed and grew the seed of Christianity already sown in Igboland around 1841. It is also expedient to note that Simon Jonas played a vital role in assisting Ajayi Crowther in the production of the first Igbo primer which they came with,

during the 1857 expedition at Onitsha. At the 1857 expedition embarked at Onitsha, Simon Jonas' interpretation of the Bible became the material used to spread the gospel. One can argue that though Simon Jonas was not directly engaged in translation of the Bible into Igbo language, nevertheless, his early contribution to the interpretation of the gospel message into the indigenous language of the host community however set the foundation for the need for Igbo Bible translation. Tasie (1996) observed that, "Crowther confessed he depended, for his sources, mainly on the colony-born whose parents were known to be good Igbo speakers" (p. 63).

It would be recalled that the CMS mission to Igbo land was conceived distinctly as a response to the possibilities both in terms of communication and willingness of the Igbo people at Freetown to take the gospel to their kinsmen. Dike cited in Anyabuikwe, (1996), wrote:

On arrival at the King's house, the missionaries explained the purpose of their mission and preached the Gospel message. At the end they presented two Bibles, one in English and the other in Arabic. King Obi could neither read nor write. Obi was astounded that an Igbo could equally read and write like the English. The Obi made special request for Simon Jones to remain behind as the others went elsewhere. Jones remained at Aboh preaching and expounding the word of God, while the others proceeded to Idah (p.23).

Simon Jonas's involvement in this mission would rightly be viewed as contributive to evangelizing benighted Igbo land, his countrymen. Ekechi cited in Nwadiolor (2010) submitted that: It was indeed at Obi's insistence that Simon Jonas was left at Aboh and expounded the mysteries of the written word, while the rest of the expedition proceeded to Idah (p.92). The superiority of Jonas made the Obi of Aboh to insist that Simon Jonas to be left behind at Aboh where he remained to preach the gospel and expound the mysteries of the written word. Schon cited in Dike (1957) proposed that;

Not only demonstrate to us, that the designs for which the expedition has been chiefly undertaken will, in the course of events, be carried out by natives (of Africa); the inhabitants of the African interior acknowledged the superiority over themselves of their own country people who had received instruction at the white man's hand. These educated Africans, mainly resident in Sierra Leone, should be sent back as missionaries to their own countrymen (p.4).

Furthermore, Nwadiolor (2010) wrote that:

It was discovered that Jonas had done good introductory work and secured friendship of the people who were anxious to retain him. The Aboh chiefs offered a site for a mission station and it was definitely marked off (p.95).

Simon Jonas' presence was soothing on arrival at Abo; his interpretations and his account on the orgies of slave trade paved way for the Obi's interest not only on giving up slavery but also Jonas presence allays a number of suspicions. Jonas was instrumental to the Obi's proclamation to the end of the slave trade. Simon Jonas was the first missionary apostle resident in Igbo land. Crowther cited in Kalu (1978) observed that:

Had not Simon Jonas been with us, who was well known to Obi and his sons, we should have had some difficulty in gaining the confidence of the people at Abo. . . . It takes great effect when a returning liberated Christian sits down with his heathen countrymen and invites them, in his own language, with refined Christian feelings and sympathy, not to be expressed in words but evidenced in an exemplary Christian life (p.356).

The qualities enumerated above explain in greater volume the contributions of Simon Jonas as the indigenous preacher in his country home and the exemplary Christian virtue observable by his supervisor – Crowther. Jonas intervened to avert a human sacrifice at Abo. But the implications of Jonas' dual missionary expedition (1841 and 1854) to Igbo land is that the subsequent missionary enterprises in Igbo land were momentous because they now saw and agreed to Crowther's suggestion to use ex-slave Christians from Sierra Leone in order to actualize Sir Thomas Buxton advocate to replace the illegitimate slave trade by introducing Christianity and legitimate trade into the interior of Africa. To further elucidate the contribution by Simon Jonas in Christianizing the Igbo Anglican missionary enterprise, Okeke (2006) observed further that:

Simon Jonas assisted them while they travelled through the Igbo portions of the lower Niger basin. Jonas was sent back to Abo, where he continued his evangelistic dialogue with Obi Ossai, King of Aboh, and his people. As soon as the Expedition moved into the non-Igbo speaking area, he continued his missionary work until the party returned (p. 6).

Suffice it to observe, that Simon Jonas's contributions to the spread of Christianity amongst the Aboh people on 1841 and 1854 expeditions, on interpretation for effective communication, he became the pioneer missionary teacher to the Igbo children that were brought to him. His inclusion in the 1857 expedition offered him firm ground for opening a missionary base in Igbo land. Anyabuikie (1996) added that; the expedition was significant for the history of Christianity in Igbo land, which cause the increase in the number of Igbo ex-slaves – (included Rev. J. C. Taylor, Simon Jones and Augutus Raddillo)" (p.24).

Simon Jonas and other Igbo ex-slaves certify Henry Venn's missionary dream in accomplishing the CMS' policy of developing a native Church that would be self-supporting, self-expanding and self-governing. It is not a gain saying that Simon Jones was greatly involved in the Bible translation effort, his interpretations during the first and second expeditions gave a message of possibility in the interpretations achievements of the Bible into the language of the people. Suffice it to assert that he pioneered the need for Igbo Bible translation. The excitement of Obi Ossai of Aboh when Igbo man (Simon Jonas) could hear and communicate the message of the new faith in English and Igbo was like magic to the palace.

Taylor cited in Kalu (1978) reported: I am thankful that I have a suitable person to aid me as interpreter, teacher, preacher and organizer, he served loyally and faithfully. Simon Jonas took ill in November 1858 and died and was buried on November 10th. Simon Jonas has been described as a remarkable man, plainly modest, a man of warm friendship, grateful for that which he received, and eager to serve and help others. He may not have been an outstanding

leader, however, had plenty of initiative; a man of exemplary character and full of faith. Nwokolo (2023) referred to Simon Jonas as scripture reader and it is not gain a saying that he became the first man to interpret Bible passage to Igbo language. One of the earliest converts took up the name Simon Jonas Mbanugo probably to remember Simon Jonas' outstanding contributions to evangelistic enterprise.

Rev J. C Taylor's contributions to the spread of Christianity in Igbo land

According to Ogunewu (2010), he was born around the year 1815 in Sierra Leone of Ibo parents who were later rescued and were settled with other slaves in Sierra Leone. The parents were an Isuama father and an Arochukwu mother; sold into slavery from the Igbo country of present Nigeria, but were later rescued and settled with other freed slaves in Sierra Leone. Taylor studied at the Charlotte primary school and at Fourah Bay College, Freetown. Taylor's early Christian virtue was tremendously influenced by its Christian environment which eventually culminated into his desire to becoming a clergy and was ordained into the ministry of the Anglican Church Missionary Society. He served first as an Anglican catechist in the Temne mission, and later as Pastor of Bathurst Church, Freetown sixteen years, and was subsequently ordained as a priest by the Bishop of London in 1859. J. C. Taylor was appointed to sail together with others during the 1857 expedition.

According to Ekechi (1971), the CMS came to Onitsha on July 26, 1857 and started a mission at Onitsha under an African Bishop, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, and to be assisted by Rev. J. C. Taylor. However, Crowther's departure to Rabba, the Nupeland capital in Northern Nigeria; left Taylor to head the Onitsha mission. Accompanying Taylor was Simon Jonas, an expert in expeditions in 1841 and 1854, and was called *the first apostle of the Igbo mission* because of his missionary achievements in Aboh. Dike (1957) did observe that Reverend J. C. Taylor kept himself busy preaching, teaching, visiting, building, healing, settling quarrels, studying the language and writing journals which eventually brought him to the limelight and the front-page of Igbo missionary history.

There is hardly any doubt to say that Taylor's early successful records afforded him the missionary enterprise of the CMS on the Niger, it is pertinent to note that Crowther during the third expedition of 1857 preferred Onitsha to Abo where the first and the second expeditions had been given mission station. Notwithstanding, it is not a gain saying that "in missionary endeavours, Taylor has been relegated to obscurity by the image of his colleague, Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther" (Tasie, 1996, p.53). Fergusson enumerated Crowther's eleven points for success given to Taylor as follows:

One, cultivate friendship with all the people as much as possible. Two, private conversation will be of more importance than public worship. Three, be patient and forbearing. Four, develop the study of Ibo vocabulary and grammar, and its best reduction to writing, and make as many translations as possible. Five, improve the geographical knowledge of the area. Six, don't be disappointed if you find the people do not keep their engagements, and in paid employment, make small advances to develop this. Seven, the first building must be temporary, but should be good and comfortable; Onitsha must be the main centre, but houses should be built at Abo and Ossamare. Eight, (relates to Crowther's own movements, but tells Taylor to

keep in touch with the parent committee). Nine keep regular journals. Ten, if funds run out, credit of twenty-five pounds is possible with the trading station (“factory”). Eleven, should anyone arrive from the society without a specific task, station him at Abo.

During the missionary enterprise at Onitsha, Jonas became Taylor’s assistance; it is not a gain saying that Jonas who served majorly as interpreter must have assisted Taylor linguistic analysis of Igbo. Though Taylor takes orders from Bishop Crowther on the Niger, however, he was the man in charge of the day affairs in the entire Niger Mission. Kalu (2003) posits that between “the period 1857-70 was dominated by J. C. Taylor’s leadership (p.83). Anagwu cited in Egwuonwu and Alokwu (2024) opined that Rev. J.C Taylor laid the foundation of the first Church in Igbo land in 1867. As reviewed from his diary, one of the services held by Taylor, as Dike (1957) expresses Taylor’s surprise on the number of people, about 500 to 600 souls, that turned up for the afternoon service and the orderly conduct of the adults. Taylor later opened a school as one of the important tasks in his mission and a week after, twelve children enrolled in the school.

In the words of Okeke (2006), for the C.M.S. represented by Taylor, nothing short of a comprehensive education was advocated and contemplated. The curriculum produced by Taylor and the responses by the Igbo were dictated by the contingencies of need and opportunity. J. C. Taylor made sure that in the mission schools and church activities, vernacular was used in teaching the students, preaching and teaching catechism for deeper understanding hence, it could be argued that the Church missionary’s method of teaching with vernacular was initiated by Taylor. It further gave sense of belonging to the indigenous peoples. The British system of education introduced by the CMS under the leadership of Taylor, no doubt resulted to the evangelization and civilization of the indigenous people. The result was that it produced a literate Christian laity who in turn served the missionaries and colonial masters as catechists, teachers and clerks in colonial offices. Indigenous people, who were educated, got employed and this improved their standard of living.

Furthermore, Taylor’s contribution gave the indigenous people opportunity to have unrestricted access in studying the Bible. Rev. J. C. Taylor, who was the first Igbo Bible translator; translated the Gospels, Acts, and some Epistles of Paul between 1860 and 1868, it is not a gain saying that in terms of translation, Taylor was outstandingly exceptional; he translated portions of the New Testament, the Liturgy, a primer for Igbo at Akassa in the Niger Delta, Dr. Watt’s First Catechism, some prayers and hymns, the Ten Commandments and an extensive Igbo vocabulary in the Isuama dialect. Okeke (2006) asserts that Taylor’s labours in translation introduced the Igbo to the art of reading. This in turn enabled them to master English language and opened up for them the immense wealth in literacy. Tasie (1996) posits that the attention now being paid to the languages of the Upper and Lower Niger Delta especially Igbo language as a subject for serious academic study and research was in a sense pioneered by Taylor.

It is indubitable that following his linguistic sagacity on a primer for Igbo language which was monumental and attributed to Crowther’s choice of Taylor in 1857 expedition.

Tasie (1996) acknowledged that “Taylor’s other most outstanding significance can be seen in his missionary pioneer work, especially his vision about the Christian mission and its inevitable encounter with traditional culture. This is to say that Taylor bore the earliest wrath of Igbo traditional encounter with Christianity. He saw the grass root of Christianity and had the rear opportunity to become the one to open the Onitsha mission on 26th July, 1857; hence, becoming the first Christian missionary to experiment in the whole of Igbo land thereby contributing to making Igbo land now virtually a Christian nation. Tasie (1996) wrote:

The successful missionary enterprise of the CMS in the Niger in general and Onitsha in particular, owes a great deal to Taylor, the attention now paid since the last couple of decades to languages of the upper and lower Niger Delta, especially Igbo language, as a subject for serious academic study and research, was in a sense pioneered by Taylor: the now near proverbial Igbo nationalist consciousness are some of the areas in which Taylor many years ago sowed the seed (p.53).

It is also worthy of note that Taylor took a missionary exploration tours into the interior, as far as about two to three hundred miles from the coast of the River. His tours must have created awareness to the new religion. Furthermore, Tasie (1996) has this to say:

Taylor was a pioneer missionary, second-in-command only to Bishop Crowther on the Niger mission, one time evangelist in Akassa itself while he had to wait for a boat to go up the Niger. . . . Taylor’s wider missionary constituency included Akassa as well as his immediate field (p.61).

When the mission station at Akassa was opened, Taylor’s missionary constituency now included Akassa and Igbo land missionary enterprise. Taylor in proper considerations pioneered the spread of Christianity in Igbo land. Taylor did not only spearhead the spread of Christianity in Igbo land by participation but also wherever else Taylor met his Igbo compatriots, in Fernando Po or Liberia, he urged them to support by financial contributions and in any other ways possible the Christian missionary enterprise to be extended to Igbo Land and also through his personal journals and private letters he often emphasized the needs of the Igbo mission. Taylor cited in Tasie (1996) posited that:

As the Ibo district at present is so encouraging, I would urge the committee to send out humble pious and devoted natives of that nation. . . . At least a dozen or more men would do well for the Ibo country (p.59).

It is not to overemphasize the fact that Taylor was a true compatriot of Igbo nation. It is pertinent to note that, the resident clergyman in Onitsha was the Rev. J. C. Taylor which placed upon him the task to pioneering the work in the Niger with Jonas and other ex-slaves that constitute the team. Taylor’s monumental contributions to the development of Igbo literacy and vocabulary cannot be over emphasized. Okeke (2006) observes that the gigantic task of reducing Igbo sounds into syllables, words and sentences was entrusted to him (p.173). In fact; he translated he gave a wholehearted involvement in the translation, evangelistic, and formal education, and demonstrated his conviction that the mission belonged to him; and accepted the mission as a duty he owed to his countrymen. Taylor cited in Okeke, (2003) exclaimed!

Oh for more strength in these mental exercise! How often is one obliged to rack his brain for the derivation of words, and the construction of sounds especially in the nasalization with which the Ibo language abounds. Nevertheless, it is a delightful work; it has the highest aim to convey the wonders of redeeming love to mankind. With this thought we go cheerfully to work and wait in patience for its accomplishment (p. 38).

According to (Okeke 2003, p.130), critics may have variously criticize Taylor's translations as belonging to a second generation Igbo and have used interpreters, however, critics forget to appreciate his primary source and the diversity of dialects in Igbo language. Tasie (1996) observed that "for nearly fifty years after the beginning of missionary work in Igbo land, the Igbo Christians had available to them in the vernacular only parts of the Bible" (p.84). But, having referred to J. C. Taylor as the "Apostle to Iboland", Okeke(2006) has this to say:

For the C.M.S. represented by Taylor, nothing short of a comprehensive education was advocated and contemplated . . . The curriculum produced by Taylor and the responses by the Igbo were dictated by the contingencies of need and opportunity. To think of Christianity in Igbo land without Taylor may be similar to thinking of Christianity of the apostolic times without Paul (p.89).

Taylor's Igbo nationalistic prominence became obvious in his deliberate determination in facing squarely the challenge that Africa must be regenerated by Africans themselves including people of African descent like himself, According to Tasie (1996),

Taylor would recommend that, wherever and whenever possible, an African should be deployed to serve in his native area in order to eliminate unnecessary language, psychological and emotional problems (p. 57).

Okeke (2006) stressed further that:

Between the exit of J. C. Taylor towards the end of 1869 and 1872, the Igbo language work was halted. The agents began to use interpreters. What was done brought more prominently the wide difference between Onitsha dialect and Isuama, to which most of the Freetown agents were introduced (p. 140).

In the history of Igbo nationalism Taylor and Jonas contributions set them apart because of their motivation in the matter of Igbo language for effective communication in missionary expansion. Taylor believed that since it was his mother tongue, he had a better advantage to judge the correctness of nature of Igbo language than Schon. Taylor cited in Tasie (1996) argued:

I maintain that my learned friend Mr. Schon cannot do better in the language than I who have actually been at the spot and have advantage of acquiring it from the lips of my parents. I cannot correct him in his native language, however perfect I might be in the German language (p. 66).

This and other obvious issues led to Taylor's early exit from the Igbo mission in 1870, Okeke (2006) opined that:

Taylor's greatest legacy to his fatherland was his translation enterprise, his ability to reduce many Igbo sounds, proverbs, ideas and culture into letters, words and sentences. Between 1864 and 1866, he completed the remaining portion of the Gospel, the Book of Acts, and a greater portion of the Epistles. Taylor's labours in translation introduced the Igbo to the art of reading. This in turn enabled them to master English language and opened up for them the immense wealth in literacy (pp.87, 88).

The contributions of J. C. Taylor to the development of Igbo literacy and vocabulary cannot be relegated to the background. Okeke (2006) observes that the gigantic task of reducing Igbo sounds into syllables, words and sentences was entrusted to him. Taylor's translation of some parts of the Bible into Igbo language played vital role in the development and preservation of Igbo language. Taylor's evangelistic works spread across other towns in Igbo land, Taylor wisely concentrated on his pastoral works and made numerous successes. He applied effective missionary strategies such as respect for others, tolerance, love and care which yielded the desired result. Scholars has posited that the "Union Igbo" which consists of the amalgamation of the different Igbo dialects, accomplished later under Archdeacon T. J. Dennis, is borrowed from J. C. Taylor's initiatives. Taylor's contribution to missionary enterprise in Igbo land has been described in the words of his Onitsha congregation as referred in extensor cited in Tasie (1996):

We do not know how to return our gratitude to the CMS in sending you here as their missionary to teach us the way to heaven and we rejoice for the light of the Gospel we enjoyed. We follow you with our prayers. Tell our fellow Christians in your country that you have had the privilege of baptizing 160 persons present at the opening of the new Church which you had laboured hard to accomplished. Yes Rev. Sir, we shall never forget you and long will your name be handed down to posterities yet unborn and we also thank you for your unreserved exertions in attending us in times of sickness and administering medicines to us. The God Jacob blesses you, for we have never found anything to say against you during these twelve years you have been with us (pp 70, 71).

1869 exist of Taylor did not close the chapter of his contributions to the spread of Christianity in Igbo land, because back at Sierra Leone, Taylor taught Igbo language at Fourah Bay College to missionaries going out to the Niger and he continued in his translation work in Igbo. The words of Tasie (1996) speak volume of Taylor's place in contributing to the spread of Christianity in Igbo land in particular and Africa in general;

By comparison, with most of his African colleagues, there is no gainsaying that Taylor was certainly a significant nineteenth century African pioneer missionary and progenitor of Igbo nationalist consciousness, evidently the most outstanding indigenous missionary of his time in the entirely African Niger mission. . . . If Taylor is not celebrated for his achievements in missionary work he ought to be noted a bit more

seriously as one who helped to lay many important foundations which posterity has since built upon (pp 72, 73).

Describing Taylors contributions, the CMS described him aptly as “crutch which should be dispensed with at the earliest opportunity” (cited in Egwuonwu & Alokwu, 2024). Tasie (1996) wrote:

For his part Taylor devoted considerable attention to the study of the Igbo language and as this is one of the areas in which he made his greatest contributions. . . . Taylor thus becomes the earliest known attempt to produce an amalgam of the dialects (pp 62, 64).

Crowther and Taylor cited in Ekechi (1971) asserts:

It was of special joy to them that Taylor was to be the first Igbo, and the first black man for that matter, ‘to break open the fallow-ground, and to sow the seed of a future bountiful harvest among the people of his fatherland (p.5).

Taylor cited in Ekechi (1971) made a prophetic statement that it is evident today as thus: “it is no wild enthusiasm to hope, to believe, that the day is coming when Christianity shall triumph in the hearts of the Ibos” (p.11).

Conclusion:

It is not a gain saying therefore, that Taylor certainly was the most remarkable single contributor in the nineteenth century to the literature and study of the Igbo language; a position which he enjoyed without rivalry until Archdeacon T. J. Dennis work appeared in the first decades of the present century. The remote origins to the spread of Christianity in Igbo land are really provoked by the endeavours of both Simon Jonas and John Christopher Taylor. They are better described as missionary giants in the story of Christian missions in Igbo land upon which other missionaries both of the CMS and other missionary institutions laid their bricks to the spreading of Christianity in Igbo nation.

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