

Enslaved

Samuel Crowther (1809 - 1891), was born in Yorubaland (modern Western Nigeria). Along with his mother, brother and entire village, he was captured by Muslim Fulani slave raiders and sold to a Portuguese trader for transport across the Atlantic.

Freed

Samuel was rescued by a British naval squadron and put ashore at Freetown in 1822. This West-African country of Sierra Leone had been established by British Evangelicals to serve as a haven for freed slaves.

Converted

In Sierra Leone, 1825, Crowther was converted to Christ. *“About the third year of my liberation from the slavery of man, I was convinced of another worse state of slavery, that of sin and satan. I was admitted into the visible Church of Christ here on earth as a soldier to fight manfully under His banner against spiritual enemies.”*

He received an education both in Sierra Leone and in England. At his baptism he took the name Samuel Crowther from a pioneer missionary of the London Missionary Society.

Called

In 1843, he was ordained as a Church of England minister for service with the Church Missionary Society (CMS).

Impact

Crowther was one of the leaders of a successful missionary venture that took him and several other former slaves back to their native Yorubaland, where a vigorous Christianity soon developed. Yoruba Christian worship was distinctly Protestant and Evangelical in the Church of England style. Crowther led converts in burying or destroying their traditional charms, fetishes and idols. Samuel established a Mission base in Abeokuta (Orun state, Nigeria) and began translating the Bible into Yoruba.

Crusade Against Slavery

In 1864, Crowther was ordained as the first African Anglican Bishop, in an overflowing Canterbury Cathedral, and directed to undertake a mission along the Niger River. This was to follow up on the Niger expedition of 1841, which was led by William Wilberforce's successor, Foxwell Buxton. T. Foxwell Buxton was an Evangelical leader in Parliament and an anti-slavery crusader. His expedition up the Niger River Valley of West Africa was to overcome the ravages of the slave industry still entrenched there. Of the 145 Europeans on that expedition, 130 were struck down with Malaria, and 40 died.

Transformation

Yet, the expedition succeeded in establishing a Missionary Centre at Fourah Bay for training liberated slaves to evangelise West Africa. It was built on the very place where a slave market had once stood. The rafters of its roof were made almost entirely from the masts of old slave ships.

Winning Muslims to Christ

Samuel laboured diligently to bring the Gospel to the diverse tribes along the Niger River, producing Biblical tracts and Scripture texts dealing with witchcraft and charms. He also dealt with the common ground between the Qur'an and the Scriptures, and produced Gospel presentations for Muslims founded entirely on Biblical quotations.

Teaching God's Book

Crowther wrote in 1854 of his contact with King Ogara of Panda: *"I asked if he would like his people to be taught God's Book, and how to worship God as we do in the white man's country, for it was these two things together which made England great, and that they would bring peace and prosperity to any country who received and embraced them ...he replied ...that he was very desirous that war should cease, that his people might trade and be taught God's Book; he wished us many blessings..."*

Enduring Fruit

Bishop Crowther worked effectively at indigenising an Evangelical Anglicanism, which was truly African. Today there are over 20 million Anglicans in Nigeria, the largest active Anglican population in the world.

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." □ Galatians 5:1