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## **"Mission and Empire: The Ambiguous Mandate of Bishop Crowther"**

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### **Lecture III: Crowther and Trade on the Niger**

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## Legitimate Trade

In his Lecture of January 23, 1888, to which we have already referred, R. N. Cust declared :

Civilisation is incidental, not the primary object of a Mission. It is wrong to expect that civilisation must precede evangelisation: it may accompany it. Christianity can adapt itself to every phase and epoch of Human culture ... What has a particular stage of Human culture to do with the Everlasting Gospel?

The debate had been going on since the publication of Buxton's *African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* as to the correct sequence of Christianity, Commerce and Civilisation. Most people evaded the issue by saying that they were 'inseparable companions', and had to go together. In practical reality, the merchant adventurer usually had to go first, and assure the missionary the means of getting to the Mission field. Apostle Paul relied on traders to provide shipping for his missionary sea journeys.

In addition to passage for personnel and luggage, traders also provided some banking services, so that the missionary could collect goods and issue bills which the ship's captain could exchange for cash at the Mission's headquarters. It was a major breakthrough in West Africa when in 1853 Macgregor Laird, in competition against Liverpool traders, won the contract for operating monthly mail boats. He won because of his emphasis on providing passage for small traders, especially the Sierra Leoneans. In 1854, on the same basis, he won a subsidy for the Niger Expedition, to explore up the Niger to the confluence, and up the Benue - still known as the Tshada because of confusion with Lake Chad - as far as the ship could go. In 1857, he negotiated for ships to go annually to the Niger for five years. That was the premise that encouraged the CMS to start the Niger Mission in that year. But the ships proved very irregular. The *Dayspring* that went in 1857 ran aground near Jebba, and returned only in 1858. In 1859, Crowther and others had to travel back to Lagos overland. To complicate matters, armed escort was deemed necessary to accompany the ships because of the hostility of the Brass people who were determined to protect their middlemen position. Thus, when Crowther gathered a party of 65 people and a lot of equipment for the Niger Mission at Akassa, no ship showed up and the party had to disperse after waiting in vain for four months. Macgregor Laird died in 1861. The responsibility then fell on the CMS and Crowther to ensure the trade that would ensure regular traffic on the Niger.

The anti-slavery movement had a precise definition of legitimate trade that would be effective in extinguishing the slave trade at source. The President of the CMS in a letter he wrote on behalf of the Queen to the chiefs of Abeokuta said: "The commerce between nations in exchanging the fruits of the earth is blessed by God" (Stocks, ii, 114). To qualify as 'fruits of the earth', it had to be the produce of the labour of independent farmers. It also had to be processed by educated Christians acting as agents of civilisation. That was the kind of commerce blessed by God, the kind that the Mission tried to promote in Abeokuta, as opposed to the type that prevailed in Lagos. That was the kind of commerce that Buxton was prepared to extend into the interior, by force if necessary:

Slaving and lawful trade could not live together; to increase the second must be to cut down the first; legitimate commerce should be encouraged, therefore, and enforced upon the African; the coastal middlemen should be bypassed as hopelessly depraved cases; and efforts should be made to penetrate to the hinterland tribes, and to induce them to take up lawful trade.

The slave trade had been conducted on the basis of what was called the Trust system. European supercargoes came, moored their ships and dealt with coastal chiefs as middlemen. They brought trade goods - ammunition, liquor, manillas - which they entrusted to their customers among the chiefs. The chiefs went into the interior to procure slaves which they exchanged for the trade goods. The Trust system was inherited by Liverpool merchants who, in response to the need of British industries for lubrication and vegetable oils, developed the palm oil trade. By the 1840s, the trade was profitable enough to attract rival groups of traders. The Liverpool merchants of the Niger Coast and Delta sought various ways to protect their monopoly and make it difficult for others to get into it. This earned them a bad reputation. However, Hope Waddell, the pioneer Scottish Presbyterian missionary said on arrival that the Efik and Ijo chiefs could also be used as agents of civilisation. He said that some of the chiefs were educated, keeping diaries in pidgin English, and having children who had learnt to keep books of accounts. He said the chiefs were not landed gentry anxious to develop agriculture for the fruits of the land. Rather, they were middle class traders. For them, trade, not agriculture was the civilising force. Hope Waddell had to disband the group of would-be farmers that he brought from the West Indies, saying that what the chiefs needed was skilled artisans and machines to manufacture goods like sugar, paper etc.

Thomas Clegg, the Manchester merchant followed Crowther up the Niger. Together, they tried to reproduce the Industrial Institution at Onitsha to promote cotton cultivation as an alternative source of cotton for Manchester during the American Civil War. They also tried to grow arrowroot, coffee, indigo, tobacco, etc. They brought saw gins, and set up workshops for carpentry, sawyering, brickmaking, etc. However, as at Abeokuta, the trade did not flourish. The sighting of two French ships at the mouth of the river in 1863 made it necessary to turn to the Government. The Consul was instructed to extend the anti-slavery Treaty system to Aboh and Onitsha, thus opening the possibility of inviting the gunboat to protect 'anti-slavery' traders and missionaries. As at Abeokuta, it was

the Mission that invited Empire to follow up the 1841 Expedition by setting up an Informal Empire up on the Niger. However, it was not Townsend but Crowther and Native Agency that led the way.

In the same year, 1863, Thomas Clegg with a few other 'Friends of Africa' established the West African Company with the intention of seeking for a renewal of Laird's government subsidy. The CMS bought some shares in the Company in Crowther's name, and Josiah, his son, also bought some. One of Laird's executors also established a Company of African Merchants, with an even larger capital than WAC's, to compete for the government subsidy, but the Government offered neither company a subsidy. After a while, the Company of African Merchants concentrated on trying to enter the Delta trade. It was therefore left to the WAC to pioneer the Niger trade by itself. Its main strategy was to encourage small traders from Lagos, Cape Coast and Freetown to live all the year round on the river and act as purchasing agents seeking marketable goods, and bringing them to the Company's depots. In that way, the Company began to discover that Onitsha and Idah provided palm produce, more like an extension of the Delta trade. More produce was coming from the Benue valley and the Nupe country, especially after Masaba was able to consolidate his rule and establish a stable peace at the confluence.

Crowther made the acquaintance of the Nupe ruler, the Etsu Nupe, in 1857-8 when the *Dayspring* ran aground at Rabba. Nupe had been locked into a succession struggle from the beginning of the century. Mallam Dendo, a Fulani jihaddist entered Nupe politics by playing the rival claimants to the throne, one against the other, until he succeeded in gathering power into his own hands. When he died, his own sons resumed the struggle, especially Usman Zaki by a Fulani wife, and Masaba by a Nupe wife. Then a Hausa adventurer tried to seize power from both of them, pushing the rivals into exile, Usman Zaki to Gwandu, Masaba to Ilorin. It was from Ilorin that Masaba became involved in Yoruba politics such that an Ibadan army went to fight on his side. [Remember that Nupe used to be part of the Oyo Empire.] Eventually, in 1857, Usman Zaki and Masaba came together to drive the Hausa adventurer away. They resolved to work together: Usman Zaki to assume rule at Bida as the new capital, and Masaba to stay at Rabba the old capital on the river, and wait for his turn on the death of his older brother Usman Zaki. Thus, Masaba was like a crown prince when Crowther encountered him. It appeared that he granted Crowther land, but as soon as Crowther left, he ordered the huts of the 'Christian outpost' to be destroyed. Masaba moved to Bida on the death of Usman Zaki in 1859. His effort to consolidate his rule in the Benue valley was also not favourable to the Mission. The flourishing mission station at Igbebe had to be evacuated to Lairdstown [later known as Lokoja] where William Baikie was operating as Consul. By 1866, Crowther came to the conclusion that he had to recognise the authority of Masaba over the confluence area and work with him because of the peace and stability that he was able to provide. That meant that he had to shift allegiance, in that he had formerly recognised the Attah of Igalla as the overlord of the confluence area, and it was from the Attah that the land for the Model Farm was obtained in 1841. Now, Crowther drafted a constitution for Lokoja and, with Masaba's approval, appointed Joseph Meheux, a Nupe recaptive from Sierra Leone, as political agent to administer the settlement. That shift of allegiance nearly cost Crowther his life in 1867. The bishop and his son Dandeson were

travelling by canoe from Onitsha to Lokoja. One of the Attah's chiefs on the river, who had hitherto been his friend, was becoming increasingly hostile as he watched him bypass Igalla and direct traders to Nupe. The chief kidnapped both bishop and son, and asked for a large ransom. After a week in captivity, the Consul came to negotiate for his release. When he could not come to terms, he suggested that they should make a run for it into the rescue boat. The Consul was hit by a poisoned arrow, and died in the boat. The Government appointed another Consul. It appeared that he did not have much to do. He was lonely and he took to drink. The Government decided to close down the Consulate at Lokoja. It was then that the growing alliance between the Bishop and the Etsu Nupe was formalised. The Etsu undertook to protect British traders and mission agents on the river. Crowther was recognised as unofficial Consul, who ascended the river on the gunboat once a year and, at a formal ceremony in Bida, presented greetings, gifts and other messages from the Government to the Etsu, and the Etsu reciprocated. The Government had thus discovered that Native Agency could be cheaper and more effective than the official British Consul.

In that way, Crowther realised the Buxton dream of making contact with the Sokoto Caliphate. It soon made a substantial difference to the volume and profitability of the trade on the Niger. But it was not the kind of legitimate trade that Buxton had hoped for. The principal items of trade were ivory, sheabutter and potash in exchange for European manufactured goods, the most important of which was arms and ammunition for the unending jihad wars. The insatiable demand for ammunition was the engine that drove the rapid increase of trade on the river. The wars yielded more and more slaves to collect and transport the ivory, sheabutter and potash. The benefit of the local people was limited. If anything, it reduced internal productivity, and local trade. An example was the Nupe cloth industry that both Crowther and Baikie praised. Baikie took samples to the British Museum for British textile manufacturers to copy. A few years later, the industry had dwindled, as the men into the more lucrative 'domestic' slave trading.

The trade did benefit Sierra Leonean and Yoruba traders from Lagos and Abeokuta, if only in the short run. They in turn were prominent lay members of the Mission on the river, and promoting self-support among the Churches in Freetown and Lagos. A few of them came to own vessels and exported their goods directly to Europe. The WAC and other companies began to imitate the Government's example of Native Agency. They withdrew European officials except as ship captains and engineers, and relied on Africans as General Managers and Chief Purchasers who kept the trading depots open all the year round. Thus, Josiah Crowther became the Agent-General of WAC and Samuel, his elder brother, one of the principal purchasers. Their brother-in-law [with their sister, his wife] was Manager of the Onitsha depot. Their eldest sister, married to the Principal of the Lagos Grammar School, occasionally visited the river, especially after the death of her husband in 1878. It was the golden age of Native Agency on the river.

## Absentee Bishop

On January 5, 1864, Henry Townsend wrote to his friend, Thomas Champness, the Methodist colleague in Abeokuta who was on leave in Britain:

It is reported here that we are to have a black bishop, a Bishop Crowther, a bishop of the Niger to reside at Lagos and to have nothing to do with us. He will be a non-resident bishop. I believe it will be done if C.M.S. can do it, but it will be a let-down.

It is still a puzzle why Venn allowed Crowther to be placed in that invidious position only to give Townsend a chance to sneer at an absentee bishop. I don't think it was because there was such an opposition against the elevation of Crowther within the CMS Parent Committee or in the circle around the Archbishop that had to be conciliated. The main opposition that had to be conciliated was Townsend and those he was able to lobby to express a reservation about Crowther's appointment. He certainly lobbied colleagues like Hinderer and Gollmer who were not keen on episcopal authority. And their basic reservation was whether Crowther would enjoy among his own people the authority and respect that white people claimed and enjoyed. They were judging by the lukewarm attitude of Egba chiefs towards him, not the warmth of the appreciation of the rulers of Lagos. Townsend also lobbied the Bishop of Sierra Leone who did not want his diocese and privileges reduced, even when he was not able to ensure adequate episcopal functioning in Lagos and the Yoruba country.

The legal instrument governing the new Bishopric was the "Minute on the Constitution of the Anglican Native Bishopric on the West African Coast (1864) signed by the Archbishop. It cited 26 Geo. III and 5 Vict. as the Acts of Parliament under which the appointment was made. The diocese was defined in Article 3 as "the countries of Western Africa beyond the limits of [the Queen's] dominions....

There are however existing missions of the Church Missionary Society comprised in these limits which the Bishops of Sierra Leone have been accustomed to superintend, such as Timneh Mission near Sierra Leone, and Abeokuta near Lagos, respecting which an arrangement must be made by the two Bishops as to the time and circumstances of transfer.

It appears that this was included as a late amendment, because it seems to contradict Article 9 which envisaged the new Bishop presiding over the Yoruba Mission:

In all settled congregations of Native Christians within the new Diocese such as those which are of some years standing at Abeokuta, Ibadan, Otta, the Liturgy of the Church of England is regularly used on the Lord's day. ... This practice must be followed in all settled congregations in the new Diocese. ...

It appears that Venn was holding out until the last, hoping that Townsend would change his mind. When he did not, or when one or two of the Committee had been lobbied, the exclusion clause was added in Article 3, and Article 9 remained unaltered. The main concern of the Minute was to emphasise the need for loyalty to both the Archbishop and the CMS. The buildings, houses, lands given to the Church were made out to the CMS as a central Trust until the Native Church became sufficiently advanced (Article 11).

Venn issued a last personal appeal to Townsend and other European missionaries to accept Crowther's episcopal authority:

I do not hesitate to say that in all my large experience, I never met more missionary wisdom nor - I write advisedly - more of the Spirit of Christ than in him. Here, I felt to him as much drawing and knitting of soul as to my own brother. Be you a brother to Bishop Crowther. You will be abundantly repaid. God destines him for a great work. I should rejoice to be helper, however, to him.

Townsend replied that he did not doubt that the Yoruba Mission needed a bishop, but it must be a white bishop. When Venn replied that the Colonial Office would not hear of it, Townsend replied angrily, virtually threatening secession:

If the British Government won't authorize the consecration of Colonial or missionary bishops, then we must get power to ordain elders in the churches elsewhere. I don't see any necessary connection between the episcopal office in a foreign country and the Crown of England. If the episcopal office be necessary for the good of the Church, then it is a positive duty to provide it by the heads of the Church.

That was part of the questioning of the value of the established Church: to lean on the Crown when necessary, and repudiate the link between the episcopal office and the Crown when it proves inconvenient. In spite of such clearly implacable opposition, Venn still hoped that the anomaly of Crowther's position would soon be regularised and the two Bishops agree on the transfer of Lagos and the Yoruba Mission from the absentee Sierra Leonean bishop to Bishop Crowther who was resident there.

It needs to be repeated that Crowther was not bishop of the Niger Mission, but Bishop of West Africa beyond the Queen's Dominions; and that, for his enormous Diocese, Lagos was the most appropriate headquarters. It was because the anomaly of a Bishop of Sierra Leone presiding over Lagos and the Yoruba Mission was not regularised that Crowther appeared to be an absentee bishop. And we need to remember that because the Bishop of Sierra Leone was not able to visit the Yoruba Mission between 1859 and 1879, Crowther was the Bishop available, though he had to obtain authorisation before he could act. At the least, the work of translating the Bible continued to require his attention and supervision. As late as 1875, he had to preside over a crucial meeting to settle various controversies on orthography so as to get a standardised version acceptable throughout the Yoruba Mission. The translation of the Bible was not completed until 1889, and the Yoruba Bible was not available in one volume until

1900. As of 1864, transportation up the Niger even once a year was not yet guaranteed. That was why he still travelled often by canoe in between the stations. Residence at Lagos remained crucial for negotiating for the annual expeditions to the Niger. It was from Lagos that he communicated with Sierra Leone and the Yoruba Mission from where he recruited his staff. It was also from Lagos that he could most easily communicate with the CMS and the Archbishop. He also took seriously his episcopal duties to the Episcopalian Church in Liberia, which approached him for episcopal oversight. For administering his large diocese, he had to be an absentee bishop at any rate for most of the places at any given time. It was his role as an absentee missionary that presented more problems, and that was part of the anomaly of being a Missionary Bishop. It is easier to understand why Crowther had his seat in Lagos than to understand why the expected transfer of Lagos and the Yoruba Mission from the Diocese of Sierra Leone to Bishop Crowther did not take place. In October 1867, there was an insurrection in Abeokuta in which the Egba vented their pent-up feelings against what they saw as the treachery of the British, friends who knew their secrets and turned against them. Schools, churches, harmoniums, printing press, and other properties of the missionaries were looted and vandalised. The Egba authorities said it was spontaneous. The missionaries said the authorities did little to protect the Mission. The insurrection was partly a feature of the instability of political authority in the town, and partly the result of recaptives taking over control of the power Townsend used to exercise as the adviser to the chiefs in the management of their relations with the Lagos Government. The intention of the authorities remained unclear until a year later, when they issued a formal order expelling all Europeans.

It seemed like a God-sent opportunity to end the anomaly of Crowther's position, but nothing was done. Crowther himself was anxious that nothing be done to give the impression that he condoned the anti-European feelings being stirred up in Abeokuta, much of it directed by the recaptives reacting against Townsend's acts of discrimination and denigration. The Europeans were forced to reside in Lagos. The Ijebu and the Egba frequently blockaded the trade routes, making it hazardous for Europeans to travel without negotiation and due authorisation. In 1871, stranded again at Onitsha, Crowther was able to guide a group of Europeans from Onitsha by canoe to Egga and to Bida where they received lavish hospitality. They obtained horses and travelled overland from Rabba to Ilorin, to Ogbomoso where Crowther visited a small Baptist community surviving in the absence of their European missionaries since the American Civil War. From Ilorin, they went on to visit the CMS community in Ibadan, surviving under Olubi and his two assistants. From Ibadan they went to Abeokuta where both factions in the town welcomed him, but he had to co-operate with the larger faction who asked him to stay in the Methodist compound rather than at the CMS compound. He demonstrated, and documented that he enjoyed widespread respect and much more authority than the Europeans.

The blockade merged into the so-called Sixteen Years War which broke out between Ibadan and the Ekitiparapo alliance in 1877. The Egba, Ijebu, Oyo, even Ilorin joined. It came to cover all Yorubaland and it lasted till 1893. In 1873, the Pastorate controversy in Freetown was assuming the nature of a revolt. The CMS arranged a meeting in London between Townsend, Crowther and James Johnson who was regarded as the leader of the Freetown movement. Johnson was

transferred to Lagos, but no conclusion was reached about the transfer of territory. When the matter was raised again in 1875, Hinderer said there was no reason to delay the transfer. Townsend said that rather than hand over the Yoruba Mission to Crowther, James Johnson should be appointed Bishop of the Yoruba with a seat at Abeokuta. Crowther was all for it. The Bishop of Sierra Leone advocated caution. Johnson was appointed superintendent to oversee the Churches there on a probationary basis before his elevation could be considered. The Bishop of Sierra Leone went to inspect in 1879. He found James Johnson pushing the idea of self-support and greater commitment to discipleship, perhaps too hard. Johnson was concerned about the toleration of slaveholding. The Bishop encouraged him in that, but a combination of those opposed to his high-handed manner led the opposition against him. He was recalled in 1880 because it was judged that he had shown more zeal than judgement and would be unable to ride the storm he had created. The opportunity was allowed to pass. James Johnson was not appointed. The Mission was not transferred to Crowther. Rather, Europeans in Lagos, controlling the Finance Committee of the Yoruba Mission began, as Europeans, to control events also in the Niger Mission.

## **Native Agents in the Niger Mission**

It is of course true that Christianity can adapt itself to every phase and epoch of human culture. But, humanly speaking, it is difficult to see how the Niger Mission could have been established without the trade and the traffic on the Niger that resulted from the trade. There had to be an infrastructure of communication between the missionaries and the people. There was trade on the Niger and exchange between the people. Most of it was overland because long distance trading on the river required political organisation and some measure of control. That is another way of saying that communication across cultural and linguistic frontiers requires the co-operation of Mission and Empire.

What needs to be emphasised here is that, although the all-African staff were called a Native Agency, natives of the Niger areas were scarce in the Mission. Most were Sierra Leoneans or Yoruba who had to preach through interpreters. The Mission started as a string of mission stations along the river, each within different linguistic and cultural zones. At Onitsha and Asaba, the people were Igbo; At Igbebe and Lokoja at the confluence of the Niger and Benue, they were mixed and the adopted Hausa, or Nupe or Yoruba as lingua franca. In the Delta, the people were Ijo, but substantial numbers among the slave labour force were Igbo, and the Igbo language was spreading. The Mission tended to simplify the complex linguistic situation by encouraging the spread of Igbo as a lingua franca. The point was that Sierra Leone remained the most important place for recruiting staff. The enthusiasm of the time of the 1841 expedition, of people being excited and volunteering for service on the Niger, was long past. The reality in the 1860s and 1870s was that it was difficult to find people volunteering. Initially, Crowther thought of recruiting young people from the Grammar School in Freetown and Lagos, giving them a theological and pastoral training either at Fourah Bay, Abeokuta or Lagos. Very few of such people

wanted to volunteer, and a number of those who did proved disastrous. The worst scandal of the Mission - F. W. John who was convicted of the murder of his ransomed slave girl who was trying to escape - was from the Freetown Grammar School. Thereafter, Crowther tried to avoid the younger, better educated but inexperienced volunteers. He preferred the older volunteers, chosen more for their solidity of character than for education. The truth was that the Mission was founded at a time when the income of the CMS was dwindling. Native Agency became more of a mode for stretching dwindling resources than for promoting indigenous participation in the spread of the Gospel. The salaries were barely enough to live on. It was not enough to provide for the education of their children in a way to hold out the hope that the children would be able to improve on their parents' standard of living. The wives, often uneducated, had little role in the Mission, and generally took to trading to make ends meet. The salaries were not paid in cash, but in specie that of necessity involved the staff in bargaining and trading by barter. Shortage of funds and personnel delayed the establishment of boarding schools for raising up young boys locally for Mission work. One or two promising ones took to trade. The buildings of the Training Institution called the Preparandi were not completed until 1887, and the members of the Sudan Party sold it to Goldie, saying it was too grand and an embarrassment to Christian modesty. Goldie used it as military barracks. As a result of this, the most obvious characteristic of the Mission was chronic shortage of staff. This was the reason why a person like F. W. John, caught in adultery which he tried to deny, and who came begging the following morning with his tearful and pregnant wife and daughter, was not immediately dispensed with. He was removed as a catechist in Bonny, and appointed as personal assistance and clerk to the Bishop. He turned up as an interpreter in Onitsha where he committed the brutal torture and murder of the slave girl. Erring staff got away with light punishment because, quite often, the choice was between a defective staff capable of reformation and none at all. Life was lonely on many of the stations. Because of the transport situation, each station had a rough idea when the bishop would come, if he would come at all. Increasing prosperity of trade reduced the loneliness, and made life on the Niger more attractive. But it was far more attractive to traders than to missionaries.

## Trading With Goldie

George Taubman Goldie was a younger son of a minor aristocratic family in the Isle of Man who lived a dissolute life. He had a 2-year training as an engineer in Woolwich. He said he was dead drunk when he took his exams. When he heard that a relation had left him some money, he hurried off to Cairo without turning in his papers. Then he fell in love with an Arab girl, escaped with her to an isolated haven near Suakin, his Garden of Allah, as he called it. He learnt colloquial Arabic and read four volumes of Heinrich Barth's *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*. Then he broke up suddenly and returned to the Isle of Man. He then became infatuated with the family governess and ran off with her to Paris in the summer of 1870. There they were held up by the Franco-German War. By the time they returned in February 1871, they were clearly so compromised that the only thing they could do was to get married quietly in July 1871.

Trade on the Niger was booming on the basis of Native Agency. Increasing prosperity attracted competition, and attitudes began to change. Prosperity and intense competition could be just as hazardous as economic decline because companies unable to stand up to competition could lose out. Take the West African Company. Thomas Clegg had died. J. Edgar, the new Managing Director of the Company wrote from Manchester to Josiah Crowther, the Agent-General on the river in 1875 that he had information that on one of their ships...

there was drunken excess and extravagant waste of stores and strong liquor, hungry missionary rabble devouring everything, lazy loafers, illicit traders, dissolute black women and all implied in so naming them, smuggled on board or brought in imprudently and found squatting or lying above and below among the men and much else besides.

It happened that Crowther himself was on board that day and he resented the characterization of "hungry missionary rabble". The point was that in the competition, Edgar was becoming irritated that he had to allow passage to missionary personnel and luggage in accordance with existing agreements between the Company and the Mission. Crowther took the hint and suggested that the CMS should try to raise some money to buy a ship for the Mission. He went to Britain in 1877. He addressed the Royal Geographical Society and obtained a gold watch for his contributions to geographical exploration on the Niger and Benue. He was able to raise the money for buying the Mission vessel, which was named *Henry Venn*.

One of the smaller companies attracted to the river was Holland, Jacques and Co. and it was going bankrupt because it could not cope with the competition. An uncle of Goldie had majority shares in the Company, and he approached the family for financial support to stave off bankruptcy. The family decided, rather, to buy the Company and challenge Goldie to nurse it back to health without additional investment, since there was no more money to invest in it. Goldie went to visit the Niger in 1877. He investigated, and concluded that competition was the problem and amalgamation the answer. The problem then was how a merger plan was to be framed and implemented by the smallest company, on the

verge of bankruptcy, led by one with no commercial experience. Goldie had the gift of supreme self-confidence, which fooled some people, and charmed others, even those who knew he was a rogue. He was ambitious, committed to his grand visions and utterly ruthless in pursuing them. By 1879 he succeeded in amalgamating the Companies into the United Africa Company. From there, he sought to establish a monopoly of the trade for the UAC, and then a Royal Charter to give him delegated power of the Empire to protect and enforce that monopoly. He renamed the United Africa Company the National Africa Company so it could play a national role in excluding French and German traders from the Niger, and in getting the Berlin Conference to recognise the Niger Territories as a sphere of British influence, by manufacturing evidence of "effective occupation".

It was soon clear to Goldie that the greatest obstacle on his way was the Bishop and the Native Agency in the Mission and in Trade. They alone knew how hollow were his claims of effective occupation. They were close to the people. In the Delta they were allies of the Liverpool Merchants and the Ijo chiefs who opposed his penetration into the interior. On the river, they were allies of the chiefs of Onitsha and Nupe on whom he had to enforce respect for his monopoly. Above all, they were victims of his resolve to hound Sierra Leonean and other small traders also in enforcing his monopoly. When he heard that the Mission had acquired a vessel, he offered to buy it from them saying it would be too expensive to maintain, and it would encourage surreptitious trading by the African staff of the Mission and his own Company. He offered all the transport facilities the CMS could wish for. The CMS saw through that and declined the offer. But they reacted by placing control of the boat, not with the Bishop, but with the Lay Agent managing the boat.

The basic strategy that Goldie adopted was to befriend the CMS headquarters and pretend to be a lover of Mission. He needed the influence of the CMS and its broad constituency in Britain to build up a reputation with the Parliament. A major weapon was to accuse the Liverpool merchants of trading in liquor whereas in the Niger Territories, being Muslim, liquor was abhorred. In reality, Goldie traded in liquor in Onitsha, but banned importation of liquor to everyone else. Then he began to denigrate the African staff of the Mission and tried to put a wedge between them and the CMS headquarters. He found Edward Hutchinson, the Lay Secretary of CMS who asserted his position over the Clerical Secretaries, amenable. In the same way that he asserted his position, he encouraged Ashcroft, the Lay Agent managing the *Henry Venn* to do the same over the Bishop. Together they diverted the *Henry Venn* to trading for potash on the Benue and selling in Lagos for huge profits to run the expense of the vessel. When this came to light in 1881, both were obliged to resign. But before then, Goldie had succeeded in shaking confidence in Crowther and his mission staff and the cry for European missionaries as a cure to the ills of the Niger Mission had begun.

## The Sudan Party

We can afford to be brief on the activities of the Sudan Party in the Niger Mission. These were young, fervent, idealistic graduates of Cambridge University and Ridley Hall, imbued with the spirit of the Keswick Convention. Reform and revival are characteristic features of the Christian life, and to be expected in the life of a Mission. The Sudan Party went out in the Convention spirit, to reform and revitalise. They tried to get the CMS to get Crowther to retire and spare himself the pain of the radical reforms they considered essential. It was not only about European leadership. They wanted to show that if they abandoned the association of Christianity with Commerce and Civilisation, they could imitate Muslim evangelists, live among the people and run the Mission more efficiently and cheaper than Crowther and his staff were doing. When Crowther did not resign, they decided to force his resignation. They came to the conclusion that Crowther was a failure; that he ought not to have been made a bishop at all, and that he was an old man who had lived beyond his time. In short, they tried to show that Crowther's episcopacy had vindicated Townsend's prophecy that 'it will be a let down', rather than Venn's prophesy that 'God destines him for a great work'. I wonder if it is still controversial that their vindication of Townsend rather than Venn was prejudiced and wrongheaded. What we need to explain is why, when they had so much they could have contributed to reform and revitalise the Mission, they became so wrong and so destructive.

The Evangelical revival, as we tried to show, began as a call to radical discipleship and personal holiness as a mark of the regenerated spirit. The Keswick Convention was rekindling these ideals, and combating worldliness among Christians. In place of the pride in the scientific and technological achievements of Victorian England, the Convention spirit emphasised the Ministry of the Holy Spirit, the healing power of the blood of Jesus, and the life of prayer. As we have tried to show, these were thoughts to which the Yoruba and other African people were open in their search for spiritual power. James Johnson was an advocate of the spirit of the Keswick Convention. Rather than recognise this and ally with him, the Sudan Party saw him only as a disciple of the embattled bishop. The Sudan Party were not really after reform. The data they compiled about the moral lapses of the Mission were meant only to embarrass the CMS. It was the bishop himself, and the Archdeacons Henry Johnson and Dandeson Crowther, and Charles Paul that they were after, and could not easily find fault with them. The venom with which Robinson at a personal level pursued Charles Paul of Egga, and close associate of the bishop, for no obvious reason at all, points in this direction.

Some historians, especially Church historians, are reluctant to acknowledge that people so idealistic could be described as racist, but it is difficult to find any other adequate explanation for some of their attitudes and behaviour. They were zealous for God. They held strong convictions. In fighting for these convictions, they would not brook compromises and they did not care what they destroyed on the way. Much as they emphasised separation of Mission from Empire, they were working within the context of Empire in which whites had become rulers and blacks were subjects. Because these categories were relatively new, there was a lot of tension, secessions and averted secessions throughout the Mission of the different denominations. Secession was averted in the Methodist Circuit in

Lagos in 1884, but not in the Presbyterian Church in Calabar. There was secession in the Baptist Church in Lagos in 1888, and in the Anglican Church in 1891 and 1901. Apart from secessions, there was the struggle to get taxpayers' money to support a colonial church for whites only in Lagos after decades of integrated congregations. There was the case of Thomas Birch Freeman, son of an African father and English mother, born in England and had never considered himself as other than English. He founded the Methodist Mission in Cape Coast, Abeokuta and Lagos. In 1884, a young Methodist superintendent sought permission to transfer his name from the list of European missionaries to the list of Native ministers. Permission was refused. But when Freeman died in 1890, the Mission had no doubt that his widow, a Fanti woman after two previous English wives, was to be treated as the widow of a native pastor. The insistence on the need for a European to take over the Niger Mission as a precondition of reform was by itself prejudiced and racist. It was because of it that the merits of a man like James Johnson could not be recognised. It was because of racism that the Sudan Party could not see the impropriety of the Secretary of the Finance Committee, an ordained minister of the Anglican Church, overruling the Anglican bishop who was presiding. The question still remains whether they would have treated a European bishop in that way.

The main reason why the Sudan Party got away with their plan was because the CMS Parent Committee at that particular time was weak. Because of the rapid decline in voluntary subscriptions, they lacked the moral authority to respond to the challenge of the members of the Sudan Party. They met Wilmot Brooke, a freelance missionary, without a university degree or regular training for evangelical work. They liked him. They hoped that the new enthusiasm he would bring would help to improve the position of the voluntary contributions. They took the extraordinary step of asking a freelance missionary to head a group to take away a part of the diocese of the bishop, when they had not been able to persuade the absentee Bishop of Sierra Leone to give up Lagos and the Yoruba Mission to Crowther. That was why the determined young men were able to blackmail the CMS Committee. They compiled a 76-page document, saying that the data was less than 10% of the material they had, and that if they published it, it would damage the CMS and worsen their financial position. The document was not published. Both Hill as bishop-designate, and Tugwell as bishop, criticised the method of compiling the document. It was passed on to the Archbishop with the sole purpose of preventing James Johnson's appointment. Perhaps more than anything else, the Sudan Party got away with it because of the tragic death of the main characters, Wilmot Brooke in July 1891, Robinson in February 1892. They were beyond questioning, beyond challenge. And not given time to reconsider the rashness of their proceeding Eden, the Secretary retired to an English curacy. Dr Harford-Battersby, the doctor member and son of the founder of the Keswick Convention, had quarrelled with Brooke since 1890, and had retired. The only surviving member, Archdeacon H. H. Dobinson, was not speaking for himself alone when he apologised openly in Lagos and Freetown for the harm the whole group caused on the Niger. He wrote to the CMS, confessing that they were 'hurried along in unknown depths of free-flowing river...'. He was more specific in his letter of March 1896:

I do rejoice that Archd. Hy Johnson is again established. I burn with shame and horror now at the awful charges made against him in 1890. ... May God forgive us the bitter slanderous and lying thoughts we had against him and others in those dark days of 1890. ... We have suffered, no one knows how much, by those rash and hasty actions. We condemned others and we ourselves have done less than they did.

I am puzzled why more than a century after the event, and with all the scholarship dedicated to looking at the different dimensions of the Niger Mission dispute, we are still unable to come to terms with the reality of what Dobinson confessed publicly and in writing in 1894, and again in 1896.

## Epilogue

Rather than a Summary or a Conclusion, Let us attempt a brief Epilogue. My PhD thesis submitted to the University of London in 1958 was entitled "Christian Missions and the Making of Nigeria". A colleague of mine submitted a thesis in 1957 entitled "Chartered Company Administration in Nigeria". To catch the mood of 1960, the year of Nigerian Independence, this thesis came out as a book entitled *Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*. Together with another work entitled *Lugard: Maker of Nigeria*, the impression was created that the Empire constructed the Nigerian state with hardly any input from the Mission. My thesis was eventually published in 1965 as *Christian Missions in Nigeria: the Making of a New Elite*. The New Elite was of course Crowther and Henry Venn's Native Agency. What we have tried to show in these lectures is that the Mission and the Native Agency have as much claim as Goldie or Lugard to be regarded as Makers of Nigeria. It is a role they seem to find embarrassing, and would rather not talk about. The new elite preferred to discuss their role in the Origins of Nigerian Nationalism, the heritage of Henry Venn's policy of Development, and the spread of Grammar School Education, those being titles of journal articles I published in the 1960s.

In the colonial period, the Mission formally rejected Venn's formula of euthanasia. Instead, they reversed the roles of missionary and pastor. Native pastors were to be concerned with evangelisation, and the missionaries with administration and control, and they supplied the Church with a bishop. The process began when the CMS abandoned Crowther and the Native Agency in their struggle against Goldie and the Sudan Party on the Niger. The Mission then became the Foreign Mission, more concerned with frustrating the ambitions of the Native Agency in their effort to construct a National Church. The Foreign Mission became an ally of Empire in its struggle against nationalism. Foreign Mission, and the denominationalism of foreign missionaries have so far frustrated the efforts at constructing a National Church.

The secessions of the 1890s and the opening decades of the 20th century produced the African Church and the growth of Independency. Studies of the African Church (Bertin Webster, Sarah Berry) have shown how they tried to

practice Henry Venn's policy of development, using agriculture and the cocoa industry in the Yoruba area to spread Christianity, Commerce and Civilisation. Some studies have shown also how southern traders, railway workers and civil servants in Northern Nigeria have continued the process of evangelisation. Like Muslim evangelists, they relied on self-help, through independent Churches such as Aladura, Church of the Lord, Cherubim and Seraphim, Celestial Church, Deeper Life, Redeemed Christian Church of God, etc. Together with the Sudan Interior Mission, Sudan United Mission and other Churches of the Evangelical Alliance, as distinct from the 'established' Foreign Missions, they have ensured that the Christian presence in Northern Nigeria can no longer be ignored. Indeed, without the validation of reliable census figures, some studies suggest that Nigeria might be one country where the number of Christians have overtaken and surpassed the Muslim population.

What this means is that we have a country that has to consider more seriously the peaceful co-existence of both religious groups. Does the alliance between Crowther and the Etsu Nupe provide a clue? The formula of a secular state as a way of ensuring freedom of worship to both religions is not adequate. In the way that Christianity has grown up in close association with Empire, and the insistence of the Muslims on the shari'a, neither group can be satisfied with freedom of worship alone. Each group has a concept of the state and of politics in which religion has a duty to provide the moral authority. This is a major agenda for the future. We can only note at this point how different the picture is from the vision and plans of those who initiated the Mission agenda in Nigeria. As we said at the beginning, God continues to write the story. The story continues.

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