Monsieur Samuel N. Nwabara
The history of the founding of the Christian Church in Iboland must be traced back to the Niger expedition of 1841. It was not only a holy cause which earned the exertions of Queen Victoria and her government, but also “the first step toward a general forward policy in West Africa, reversing the established doctrine of minimum commitment.” When Prince Albert christened the project as chairman of the meeting that set the expedition on foot, he remarked, “I do trust that Providence will prosper our exertions in so holy a cause, and that, under the auspices of our Queen and Government, we [. . .] may be rewarded by the accomplishment of the great and humane object, for the promotion of which we have met today.” In spite of the fact that Providence responded adversely since the project ended in disaster and despite the hardships and frustrations of further expeditions, the year 1841 was remarkable because in that very year the first agreement guaranteeing freedom of worship was signed with an Ibo chief, Obi Ossai, of Aboh on the one hand and H. D. Trotter, William Allen, Bird Allen and W. Cook, commissioners, representing Her Majesty’s Government, on the other. Paragraph 6 of the treaty reads:

“Christians, of whatever nation or country, peaceably conducting themselves in the dominions of the Chief of Aboh, shall be left in the free enjoyment and exercise of the Christian religion, and shall not be hindered or molested in their endeavours to teach the same to all persons whatever willing and desirous to be taught; nor shall any subject of Aboh, who may embrace the Christian faith,
be on that account, or on account of the teaching or exercise thereof, molested or troubled in any manner whatsoever.”

The signing of the treaty was considered a phenomenal achievement and merited a “blessing of Almighty God.” The invocation by the chaplain, Theodore Muller, was regarded by the Obi as a charm by incantation which was countered by his *juju* priest who ran into the cabin of the *Albert* with a protective charm that he placed between the king’s feet.

The point however is that right at the beginning government, commerce and mission had hands in an attempt to evangelise Iboland, but initially commerce and mission dominated the scene and gave the impression of being shareholders in a gigantic corporation. Thus until 1879 both worked hand in hand, intermingling religion with commerce.

Writing on May 12, 1857, to the Rev. H. Venn, Church Missionary Society’s (C.M.S.) secretary, the Rev. Samuel Adjai Crowther said, “I hope to make a judicious beginning in forming missionary stations near each trading settlement. The arrangements with trading settlements on the river will no doubt be very advantageous at the beginning as regards financial affairs.” The joint action was more apparent in Dr. W. B. Baikie’s development plan presented to Venn. “The present plan—he stated—is if the state of the country permits it, to leave Mr. Taylor and Simon Jonas [native agents] in the Ibo country at a place on the left bank named Onitsha, where we wish to found a trading station, intended if possible to be of a permanent nature.”

In an earlier letter to the Rev. Venn of the Mission House in London, the Rev. Crowther had reported the great interest of the Ibo on the Island of Fernando Po in the prospect of beginning a mission in their own country: “Many a heart—read part of the letter—burns to see the day when the Gospel of liberty to the captives of Satan shall be proclaimed to the natives on the banks of the Niger.” This interest reinforced the choice of Onitsha site and the stationing of J. C. Taylor and Simon Jonas there.

In the letter of September 29, 1857, to the Secretary, Baikie reported choosing the Onitsha site with Rev. Crowther because of its strategic location as an entry to the whole of Ibo. Indeed this letter

2. Ibid., p. 261.
3. Crowther to Rev. H. Venn, May 12, 1857 (Documents, etc., cited are mostly in the CMS Archives, London).
4. Dr. W. B. Baikie to Rev. H. Venn, Fernando Po, June 1857.
5. Crowther to Venn, Fernando Po, May 29, 1857.
supported an earlier one written by Crowther to the Secretary in which he stated that a trading factory had been established at Onitsha near the waterside, and a site had been selected for the mission station in the suburb of the town about one and a half miles from the factory.\textsuperscript{1} In another letter of May 20, 1858, Baikie wrote to Macgregor Laird of the flourishing trade activities at Onitsha, as well as of the mission operations: “The Church Agent, Mr. Taylor, was on excellent terms with the people within a fifteen mile radius.”\textsuperscript{2}

Taylor began his work, and by April 23, 1858, reported to Crowther that the first mission house in the Ibo district was completed, but very soon he was involved in the Ibo ‘compound’ squabbles. He had stayed temporarily in the compound of a Mr. Orikabue (an unwise act on his part) thereby earning the envy of the king, who changed his mind about the site he had previously shown for a mission house. Instead he wanted it paid for or rented. Taylor describes the incident dramatically:

“The King had deceived me about the spot which we had selected; he wanted me to purchase the ground at once or to rent it. I found out that it was through jealousy on account of my staying at Orikabue’s village. His son Odisi is very ambitious, it was through him I lose the spot.”\textsuperscript{3}

Assisted by Orikabue, a much better plot (250’ by 280’) was given to the mission by an unnamed poor man. On this plot a house (50’ by 30’) was erected.\textsuperscript{4}

Onitsha, the high way into the Ibo country, had become the headquarters of the C.M.S. in Iboland, and it remains so until today. Taylor’s next activity was to start a school. On April 24, 1858, he wrote to the Rev. H. Venn that in August 1857 he had begun a school with thirty boys who had “done remarkably in so short a time, acquired the elements of alphabet,” and could spell two letters such as “b-a-ba” using Mr. Crowther’s primer. The same mission house served the congregation of eighty to one hundred and fifty for divine service which had previously been conducted in the open.\textsuperscript{5} Taylor’s activities did not go unrewarded, for Rev. Crowther recommended him to the bishop for priesthood so that he might serve the Church more fully.\textsuperscript{6}

By the end of the year, the Onitsha staff had increased and were paid handsomely: \textsuperscript{7}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} S. A. Crowther to Venn, “Dayspring” off Ghebe, August 26, 1857.
\item \textsuperscript{2} Baikie to Laird, Encampment near Kelsea, May 20, 1858.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Taylor to Crowther, Onitsha, April 23, 1858.
\item \textsuperscript{4} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{5} Taylor to Venn, Onitsha Mission House, April 24, 1858.
\item \textsuperscript{6} Crowther to Venn, Onitsha, October 25, 1858.
\item \textsuperscript{7} Ibid., October 30, 1858.
\end{itemize}
Work continued in the boys' school but the boys were far from docile, as they regarded "with an air of disdain letters as pronounced by the school master [.] as if it were a thing only fit for females, too much confining to them as free rovers of the fields." On November 15, 1858, a landmark was created by the opening of what appeared to be a girls' school, since there were fourteen pupils—all girls—in attendance. They were naked and so Crowther clothed them in satin stripe cotton goods which in his view "altered their appearance as marked school children." Unfortunately the staff was depleted in December 1858 by the death of the veteran interpreter Simon Jonas in Fernando Po. His death was a sad loss to the cause of evangelism in Iboland.

Taylor's progress report to H. Venn dated December 17, 1858, stated that there was plenty of good oil, castor oil, a variety of seeds growing luxuriantly, abundant cotton and red pepper. The report emphasised the importance of attracting the Manchester manufacturers to the trade in cotton in the Ibo district, and Taylor went so far as to send a specimen of the Niger cotton to Rev. Venn for testing. He also wrote about Thompson, Laird's agent, whom he described as "a very clever man in his work" and who had exerted himself and had "at this time more oil in his possession than last year, so much so that the 'sunbeam' for want of casks left some behind which would fill up about 12-42 inch puncheons." Whether Crowther was judicious in linking his organisation to a trading concern will be seen in latter developments. But the apparent effect of the link was that the Church was regarded as an arm of commerce and government. Crowther could not discern a danger to the cause of the Church in the joint enterprise for he had jubilantly written to the Secretary on December 2, 1858, that: "Our House and Factory have become neutral grounds on which contending parties meet, and talk together as friends to their own surprise. They themselves have remarked the change and foretold it is we who shall put an end to their old grudge and quarrels inherited from their fathers."
In the joint enterprise each had much to gain from the other but the Church seemed to gain more even though evangelistic results were not startling as the following reports by Crowther and Romaine respectively indicate:

**Niger Mission Statistics (December 3, 1859)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congregations</th>
<th>Scholars</th>
<th>Candidates for baptism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gbebe station (Confluence)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onitsha district (Ibo)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It might be observed that the Church had not achieved startling success in converting the Ibo by December 1859, because only thirteen of the hundred in the congregation were ready for baptism, whereas in Lokoja district (Mohammedan region) sixteen out of forty were candidates:

**School Report to Parent Committee, Onitsha, Ibo (up to March 7, 1859)**

Number of standing scholars—42, divided into 5 classes, viz.:

1. **1st class—6** They can read the primer, and repeat the Ten Commandments by heart but not yet to the perfect knowledge of it.
2. **2nd class—11** Can read the whole, but not as the first class.
3. **3rd class—7** Able to read the large letters well.
4. **4th class—12** These are the 2 and 3 letters class of the first two parts in the primer.
5. **5th class—6** This is the alphabet class.

The number of pupils in his report differs by nineteen from that reported by Rev. Crowther on December 3, 1859, indicating an increase of nineteen since the schoolmaster made his report on March 7, 1859.

To the missionaries development was indeed visible, and Onitsha had become an unparalleled example of the Christian strength. For example, the report of Captain I. B. Walker of the Rainbow, to the Society's secretary, Rev. H. Venn, stated that:

"On Sunday Aug. 11, 1859, [. . .] I arrived at the Mission House in time for service. I was delighted to see so many native boys and girls dressed in the

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2. William G. Romaine to the Parent Committee, Onitsha, Ibo, March 7, 1859.
English style, came forward with much confidence and saluted me with ‘Good
morning Sir’, at the same time making a courtesy as they retired and took their
seats in the Church.”

The mission had seemingly been favourably received. Greater
recognition could not have been accorded Crowther as the spirit behind
the work at Onitsha and Yorubaland, than his elevation to the bishop-
ric of West Equatorial Africa in Canterbury Cathedral on June 29,
1864. Upon return from being consecrated in England, Bishop
Crowther began an extensive tour of the Niger churches. In response
to a request from the Bonny king, William Pepple, he proceeded to
Bonny on the delta where a site was given for a chapel-school. The
foundation was laid in 1866 by the king himself and a Mrs Babington,
the wife of an English trader at Bonny. To strengthen the faith of
the new converts, Crowther ordained his son, D. C. Crowther (1870),
and stationed him at Bonny.

Even though activity was still confined to the banks of the Niger,
formal education appeared to proceed at a more remarkable pace than
evangelism. As a result of the shortage of staff to cope with school
work, the bishop issued “Rules and Regulations Requiring the Atten-
dance of Educated Wives of Mission Agents to School Duties.” The
wives were required at the school for three hours and a half daily—
from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.—to teach reading from 10:30 to 12 (noon),
and sewing from 12 to 2 p.m. The wives were warned that “on their
refusal to take part in the school duties for 3½ hours daily from
Monday to Friday, such allowances as are made to their husbands on
their account are liable to be deducted from their salaries.”

Apparently missionary activity was expanding but the bishop
was yet to learn that for the natives expansion was in terms of merchan-
dise and not evangelism. From Kippo station in the upper Niger,
for example, the agent, Mr. C. Paul, on November 13, 1876, wrote to

1. Macgregor Laird to Venn, 3 Mincing Lane, December 10, 1859.
2. Minute on the constitution of the Anglican native Bishopric on the West
Africa Coast (1864), paragraph 7. Dr. Crowther has been consecrated bishop
of the United Church of England and Ireland, and the Church in Western Africa
over which he presides will be a branch of the United Church of England and
Ireland and will be identical with the Mother Church in doctrine and worship
and assimilated in discipline and government as far as the same may be consis-
tent with the peculiar circumstances of the countries in which the congregations
are formed. In any important questions which may arise, the bishop will have
the privilege of applying for advice to the Archbishop of Canterbury as his
metropolitan, to whom he has taken the Oath of Canonical Obedience (cited
in J. F. ADE AJAYI, Christian Missions in Nigeria: the Making of a New Elite,
4. Crowther, “Rules and Regulations Requiring the Attendance of Educated
5. “Report by Bishop Crowther”, Church Missionary Intelligencer, London,
November 1877, p. 677.
Bishop Crowther ordering merchandise for the year 1877. The order reads: "The cloths for next year should be principally prints, satin stripes, plain grey bafts, fents, ramals and looking glasses. The kind of the last named article you left, sold at 12½ strings and 15 strings cowries." Further, by imitating the traders in showering gifts upon both converts and non-converts, the presence of a Church agent in a village became an occasion for the expectation of gifts. It took some time for the Church to realise that it could not effectively propagate the Gospel with mere gifts and identification with the merchants. The true effect of this policy was pointed out in no uncertain tone by the Rev. William F. John in a letter to the bishop dated March 22, 1879:

"I may here remark that this earnest desire for missionaries which many of the chiefs I visited showed was in a great measure owing to a belief current that missionaries will bring merchants with them, or if they are there already they will not easily remove should missionaries be there also. Onitsha was always brought as an example to prove this."

Even before the warning by Rev. John, events had shown that Christianity had not penetrated deep. At Alenso midway between Onitsha and Osomare, the bishop was unfavourably received by the chiefs, while the overall progress of the work on the Ibo district—Onitsha, Alenso, Osomare and Asaba—after nineteen years of "battle" for the "Ibo abandoned souls," compares less favourably with the rest of the districts on the Niger as the following statistics show (p. 596).

Judging by the "Statistical Returns," one could hardly claim much success for the Ibo district. In 1859 Onitsha district reported one hundred members, but in 1876, after seventeen years of hard labor, it reported

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1. C. Paul to Crowther, Kippo, H.M.S. Station, November 13, 1876.
The Bishop's Statistical Return for 1876

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stations</th>
<th>Native clergy</th>
<th>Lay teachers and others</th>
<th>Baptism</th>
<th>Native seminar and schools</th>
<th>Average congregation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>Native communicants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonny:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Stephen's</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Clement's</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Calabar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brass:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Barnabas'</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akassa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osomare</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onitsha:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ Church</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iyawo (outstation)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asaba</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lokoja:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity Church</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunn Chapel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kippo Hill station</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

three hundred and twenty. Yet the column for native Christians gives a total of ninety-one for the district. If the three hundred and twenty average membership included traders and workers in Onitsha, then the rate of conversion was disappointingly slow. Even if the three hundred and twenty were natives of Onitsha district, the rate was still lower than the first two years of the Church's establishment when one hundred were converted. Likewise school enrolment decreased six from the sixty-one students in 1859. The delta areas were more encouraging. The native clergymen were not natives of Onitsha or Ibo but all foreign, mostly from Sierra Leone.¹

Subsequent events showed that indigenous religion was as resistant as the statistics indicate. There were many signs of the deep roots

¹ Staff and Station List prepared by S. A. Crowther, February 14, 1879: statistics were not obtained for Alenso.
of indigenous religion, which stirred up persecution, before the major encounter at Onitsha in 1879. For example, the killing of iguana—a totem animal—sparked off persecution of the Church in Brass area in 1873, and also in Onitsha district, while at Adoni fines were imposed and at Osomare trade was interrupted and school attendance forbidden. At Alenso, the annual clean-up was forbidden since it contributed to erosion. The people considered this an offence to Ala (earth goddess), and declared that the mission personnel had done something nso (forbidden) and beat them up. There were so many persecutions in the years approaching 1879 that one minister reported that the mission staff was being diminished and the work of the mission crippled.

On August 1, 1879, Dandeson Crowther wrote to his father about a serious incident at Onitsha, involving a mother and her twins. His disgust about Onitsha is reflected in his opening remarks: “Dear Father, Onitsha as usual! Every year there must be something against the Factories, Mission or both together. This day has been a hot day for us in the compound.” The incident centered around a Mr. Daniel of Onitsha, a convert, who repeatedly lost his sons by death at a certain age. Soon after the last son died, his wife gave birth to twin girls, which the neighbors insisted must be killed despite the unwillingness of the parents. This roused the bitterness of the non-Christians of Onitsha who took up arms and threatened the lives of the converts as well as the Revs. Perry and Crowther. “The scene outside—wrote Dandeson—was a regular warfare, armed men with guns, cutlasses, spears and arrows.” The atmosphere around the mission compound was heavily charged, and what saved the situation from eruption was the announcement that the twins had been removed from the compound into one of the factories down the beach. There is pathos in Crowther’s words about the work at Onitsha: “We have since 26 years been preaching to them, ‘Thou shalt not kill’ either in sacrifice or twin-born, and now they have sent us to undo what we preach, No—Never.”

Hostility was not limited to the mission. The trading factories at Onitsha were continually pillaged. In October 1879, Mr. Goldie’s store was so outrageously pillaged that he decided to close it. The attack upon the labourers engaged in removing the trade stock worth £50,000 was stopped by troops from H.M.S. Pioneer that was standing by on the river. A party of Blue Jackets commanded by Knapp-Barrow marched to the town, fired at the people, destroying every-

2. Pastor i/c Bonny to Crowther, January 24, 1879.
thing before them and setting fire to the huts, including the mission property. Onitsha was destroyed with the thoroughness of savagery.\(^1\)

The destruction was blamed upon the Christians—a usual occurrence in Church history—and consequently the mission became an object upon which vengeance was wreaked. Before removing to Asaba across the Niger for safety on October 31, the Rev. Perry found time to report to Bishop Crowther that the Onitsha converts had scattered and a few who were bold enough to remain wanted to accompany him to Asaba, but it was too much responsibility for him to endure.\(^2\)

Firing on Onitsha from the warship continued until November 15, when a Mr. Isaac Mba, lay reader, was approached by four chiefs, Iyasere, Odu, Anya and Orakwe Idsedide, to write to the mission authorities for settlement. Part of the letter which Isaac wrote for the chiefs to Rev. Perry reads:

> “Sir, How is it, Is this matter too high for you to settle: We hope not. Say to the Consul the king, the chiefs, the ladies and the whole people of Onitsha beg saying that he is greater than they, and your Queen by far greater, and that they beg for peace [...]. Say to Bishop Crowther that we say, How is it that after he has taken our children out of heathenism to bring them up in the English manner, will it be right that he throw them into it again?”\(^3\)

The letter seemed to have little effect because the few Christians remaining at Onitsha, who described themselves as “the whole scattered Christians at Onitsha,” suggested in another letter to Perry that they move to an independent town by the Anambara river. This letter, written on November 24, was promptly answered by Mr. Perry on the following day. He encouraged firmness in the face of trials, instead of removal.\(^4\)

On November 26, Mr. Perry addressed a carefully worded letter to the bishop about the Onitsha situation, pointing out that about one hundred persons (men, women and children) from Onitsha were at Asaba, without shelter, and that Christians and non-Christians at Onitsha were appealing for peace. He begged that he might be permitted to return to Onitsha, adding that it was his belief that God had a great purpose to accomplish in Onitsha, but what that purpose was remained with the future to unfold.\(^5\) To strengthen his plea, he enclosed a letter by the few Christians in Onitsha to the bishop—a

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2. Perry to Crowther, Onitsha, October 31, 1879.
3. Isaac Mba to Perry, Onitsha, November 21, 1879.
4. Correspondence between Perry and the “Scattered Christians at Onitsha”, November 24 and 25, 1879.
5. Perry to D. C. Crowther, November 26, 1879.
letter which not only depicted the plight of the Christians, but also their love for their ‘country’ Onitsha and more importantly their steadfastness in the ‘new religion’. It reads in part:

"Onitsha
Nov. 24th 1879.

Rt. Revd & Dear Sir,

We are very sorry that you are not here when this worst thing (which we believe you would have heard) the English war befell us. This cause our scattering abroad the river, part of us into Asaba with our dear Pastor and part into the bush, but having returned from the bush, they are now quite restless at Onitsha owing to the steamers firing at them where ever any one is plying the river: and since then we never had the chance of meeting together.

And as we steadfastly seize this chance of meeting together write this to ask help of you to have this matter or the firing at us ceased. We beg for nothing else but help us to see our country good. Remember our country not as it is now but as it was before for we would not like to leave our country and go elsewhere.

This we beg, wishing you all well.

We are,

Yours humble & Obedient servants,

Daniel Odiegu
Simon Mbanugo
Robert Maduka
Josiah Obuyakuru
Stephen Oberi
Levi Orisadiba
Nathaniel Anyabogu
Moses Okereke
Simeon Nzonu
Theophilus Iwemugha
Isaac Mba
Samuel Okosi

The Christians at Onitsha."1

Perry followed up this letter with a personal visit to the bishop at Lagos—a visit that produced the desired effect. On January 5, 1880, the bishop addressed a communication to a Mr. Hutchinson of the Mission House in London, to reoccupy Onitsha on the following conditions: 1) a grant of money from the Parent Committee to enable reoccupation on more solid footing and with effective force; 2) a guarantee from the native authorities of unequivocal protection of the mission, agents, and converts; 3) that the committee request the authorities at the Foreign Office to instruct the Acting Consul of the Bight of Benin and Biafra on the Niger to prohibit the mercantile agents from firing on the shore and Onitsha market, unless in self-defense from aggression by the natives.2

1. Scattered Christians’ letter to Perry, Onitsha, November 1879.
2. Crowther to Hutchinson, Lagos, January 5, 1880.
In a “Proposed Stipulation with the Authorities of Onitsha,” the bishop elaborated upon conditions No. 2 above:

1) The Native Authorities must give us unequivocal assurance of their united Protection of the Mission, Agents, and converts, and to tolerate to their people, the adoption of the Christian Religion, whosoever feels so disposed may, without hindrance by persecution, or by putting any other impediments on the way of his doing so.

2) Christianity is the Religion of God, established in the world through Jesus Christ, to whom all power is given in heaven and earth; therefore the law of any country can never stand against it, as God is the Owner of heaven and earth and all that are in them.

3) The Nation which God blesses is truly blessed, and the Nation which He forsakes is destroyed. Christianity is a great blessing.

4) God by this religion forbids the destruction of twin born children, as well as human sacrifices, and commands us to preach against these Customs, and to rescue the victims to barbarous superstition. This is what we teach in all countries, as well as at Bonny, Brass, New Calabar, and Onitsha. Other countries being convinced of their barbarous nature, are giving them up, because the practices are contrary to God’s holy will and all wise Providence.

5) Christianity being the Religion of God, it is therefore principally the Religion of the soul, to be conscientiously professed, from the inward persuasion of it, truth, and not by compulsion.

6) As God’s messengers, no hindrance must be put in our way in going to preach God’s word in other towns in the Ibo country, till we meet our fellow labourers from Bonny, Brass and New Calabar in the middle of the Ibo country, as we are doing from Lagos through the Yoruba country to the Banks of the Niger, and to the Benin country.

7) Although Christianity is principally the religion of the soul, yet ‘it is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.’

8) The people of Onitsha must not mix us God’s messengers with the affairs of the Factories, nor make us responsible for the acts of the Agents employed in them.

9) We as God’s messengers do not wish to go away from Onitsha as long as the Authorities are willing to protect us, and the people are willing to listen to our preaching, unless they themselves drive us out of the country.”

So fortified, Perry returned to Asaba and soon moved to Onitsha to resume his work. In January 1881, after a year’s arduous work of rebuilding, he proceeded on leave to Sierra Leone where he died.²

The encounter was by no means over. On October 10, 1881, the bishop with Mr. Fyne (Mr. Perry’s successor), the catechist and an interpreter, visited His Majesty the obi of Onitsha to persuade him to abolish some of the ‘evil’ practices that were rife in his realm. Among the practices was the administration of sasswood poison. Abolition

1. Crowther’s “Proposed Stipulation with the Authorities of Onitsha” dated January 4, 1880, Lagos.
2. Church Missionary Intelligencer, September 1882, pp. 542.
of the practice was repugnant to the king because part of his revenue was derived from the fee paid by anybody wishing to administer the poison to another. The practice was that if a man hated his neighbor, he had only to accuse him of witchcraft, in which case the accused sought to disprove the charge by submitting himself publicly to oath-taking by drinking the poison. There was no known case where the victim survived. The king’s refusal to stop this practice that took a great toll of his subjects, convinced the bishop that native religion still held sway.

What looked like a glimmer of light in thick darkness appeared to the bishop in 1883 when he went to Obosi—a nearby village—to dedicate a new church building started by Rev. Strong in 1881. After the service of dedication, he was invited by the village chief named Atta who had assisted in building the church house. The chief was wishing to ascertain the correct information on Christian burial of chiefs and titled men. Non-Christian practice was to keep the body for many days, during which time the mourners indulged in firing guns, drumming, dancing and finally burying a slave with the dead. It was a rare opportunity which the bishop utilised fully. After describing the indigenous practices as “a great abomination in the sight of God”, he concluded: “If the dead be a Christian, as soon as his soul leaves the body he is carried by the angels into heaven, where he will enjoy everlasting happiness with Christ, who has washed the soul clean with His own precious blood.” A glimmer of light indeed!

Two years later, 1885, another missionary body, represented by the Holy Ghost Fathers, “specially dedicated to the abandoned souls of the black race”, joined issues, hopefully to salvage “Ibo souls from depredation,” but was later to exclaim sorrowfully: “One might have expected Providence to accord immense spiritual gains to an undertaking so marked by the cross at its inception. Nothing of the kind happened, at least for nearly a quarter of a century.”

1. Ibid., pp. 545-546.