

THE IMPACT OF ALEXANDER BANFIELD LITERATURE MINISTRY ON CHURCH GROWTH AMONG THE NUPE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

Alexander William Banfield is rated as the greatest Missionary that had ever lived among the Nupe people of Nigeria because his literature ministry had great impact on the lives of Christians and non-Christians. This study attempt to investigate the impact of Banfield's literature ministry on the growth of the Church and the Nupe kingdom, with the view of establishing the uniqueness of his ministry among the Nupe people. Historical method was used for the study. It was discovered that, Banfield was among the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Missionaries that came to Nigeria in 1901. He sailed in company of Albert Taylor, Charles Robinson and Anthony from Liverpool and established their first station in Pategi. By reason of the needs in the mission field Banfield started learning the Nupe Language from a teacher that knew nothing about English language. In less than 12 months he was able to hold service in Nupe Language. In 18 months Banfield had finished translation work on the Gospel of John. He had also translated six (6) Chapters in Mark's Gospel. By 1910, Banfield had established a printing press called Niger press in Tsonga. By 1912, Banfield had translated the book of Acts into Nupe. Between 1914 to 1916 a Nupe Dictionary in two volumes of over 13,000 words was published. 623 Nupe Proverbs in English was published in 1916. He completed the translation of New Testament in 1914. The study concluded that Banfield literature ministry had great impact not only in the lives of the Christians and non-Christians in Nupe land but in the lives of many Nigerians. Banfield printing press provided jobs for many Nigerians. Publications from the press were used in Government offices, Missions stations, Churches, and schools. By reason of these publications several became educated and many became Christians. Therefore, contemporary Missionaries and Church Leaders are enjoined to emulate Banfield by making the Bible and other learning materials available in the mother tongue of the people to reduce the high level of illiteracy in our nation.

KEYWORDS: Banfield, Nupe, Literature Ministry, Church Growth and Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Prior to the advent of the missionaries, Africa was considered a dark continent. It is believed in some quarters that the missionaries were light bearers. This is because their coming dispel darkness on African continent. The activities of missionaries had great impacts on the lives of the African people. One of these missionaries was Alexander William Banfield that came to Nigeria in 1902. Gleaning from literature on him we discovered that he came to Nigeria with great passion to evangelize the whole of Africa from Nigeria. Banfield worked among the Nupe people of Northern Nigeria for more than three decades. Because of his understanding that the best way to reach the people is to understand their language and culture. He started by learning the Nupe language. Within a short time Banfield was able to translate the Bible into Nupe language. He also wrote dictionary and other worship books in the language. Banfield literature ministry is considered to have greatly impacted the Nupe people and the Church in Nupe land.

This study therefore examined the impact of Banfield's literature ministry on Church growth among the Nupe people of Nigeria.

The Nupe People of Nigeria

The Hausa people called the Nupes 'Abaiwa'. The Gbari of Kuta called them 'Anupeyi'. The Yorubas called them 'Tapa'. The Nupe call themselves 'Nupeci or in plural. 'Nupecizhi'. The Nupe called their land 'kin Nupe'. Today, the Nupe are found in Bida, Patigi, Lafiagi, Agaie, Lapai, Shonga, Tsaragi and Lokoja. The core of the Nupe

kingdom is Bida which play host to the head of the Kingdom called Etsu Nupe (Madugu, 2009: 6). The Nupe people are found in the heart of Nigeria, in the low basin that is formed by the valleys of rivers Niger and Kaduna, between 9° 30' and 8° 30' N.L. The northern boundary of the nupe land is a town called Leaba, on the Niger east ward to Katayeregi while the southern boundary is eastward from Share to Abugi to the Niger south of Baro. The river Niger flowing almost straight north-south between Leaba and Jebba, divided the Nupe land from the Yoruba. The eastern boundary of the Nupe is from the east of Lapai and Gidi, sloping upward towards the hills of Gbari (Nadel, 1951).

The Nupe land is a low-lying softly undulating country, not more than 200 feet above sea level. There are a few low ridges of broken, rocky hills stretch out, rib-like from the river valleys, and symmetrical flat-topped hillocks rise abruptly here and there from the plain with the highest point not more than 800 feet above sea-level (Nadel, 1951). The Nupe people are predominantly farmers. They farm crops like rice, sugar cane, onions, cassava, yam, corn, cotton, groundnuts, and beans. Trees and plants which are important for Nupe production and diet are locust bean, shea-nut, baobab, date-palm, mango, oil palm etc (Madugu, 2009: 4). With Rivers Niger and Kaduna flowing across Nupe land is one of the hottest and at the same time one of the most humid districts of Nigeria. This area has abundance of malaria. The water courses are polluted with bilharzia, and the swamp area have plenty of sand flies which can cause a great discomfort for humans (Goertz, 1983).

In 1865, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) opened a station at Lokoja. The Sudan Interior Missionaries (SIM) missionaries arrived Patigi in 1902. This was during the reign of Etsu Maasun Isa (1900-1923). He was a peaceful king and friendly to the missionaries. He warmly welcomed them and gave them a parcel of land stay. The pioneer SIM missionaries in Patigi were Messrs Walter Gowans, Thomas Kent and Rowland Bingham. They were later joined by Messrs A.F. Taylor, A. W. Banfield, E. Anthony and C. H. Robinson. Mr Banfield was a mechanic and as such, he was practical and handy on the field (Bingham, 1948). These missionaries moved from village to village around Patigi preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Several listened to them but no convert was made. According to Madugu (2009: 36) this made the missionaries to resolve as follows:

- The need to learn and communicate in the language of the people
- Accept and respect the people as being different.
- Learn what is offensive to them and their culture.
- Learn the culture of the people in order to properly relate with them

Who Was Alexander Banfield?

Banfield was among the missionaries that were sent to Nigeria by the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) in 1901. He came in the company of Albert Taylor, Charles Robinson and Mr. Anthony. They sailed from Liverpool to Nigeria and established their first station in Pategi in 1902. Anthony was from Michigan and was superintendent of the Michigan conference of the brethren in Christ Church while Banfield came from Toronto (Fuller, 2001: 20-21). These missionaries were opportune to travel to Nigeria with Lord Lugard who was returning as High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria. Lord Lugard was instrumental in finding a place to establish a missionary base for them. He encouraged and supported their missionary effort saying, "... missions will be of great value in the work of civilization and progress." (Fuller, 2001: 22)

On their way from Liverpool to Nigeria on 30th October, 1901 on the Royal Mail Steamer Bonu. The ship's doctor said: "You see that young man, Banfield; you will bury him out there in six months; he will be the first of your party to die." (Fuller, 2001: 23). This did not discourage Banfield as he was determined to serve the Lord till death. As God will have it, Banfield the youngest in the team for many years was the only survivor. In eighteen (18) months Banfield was made the leader because Anthony the team leader took ill and was compelled to return home with Robinson who also became sick. Albert Taylor died of black water fever shortly after he moved to Bida with some new missionaries who arrived in 1903.

Banfield and his team sailed from the then British Government headquarters, Lokoja in a two days canoe journey up the Niger river to a Nupe town called Pategi. It should be noted that there were three smaller emirates on the south side of the River Niger: Shonga, Lafiagi and Pategi. Shonga and Pategi were separated from Lafiagi by the British head in 1833. Lafiagi emirate was under the central of the sons of a Fulani man called Mallam Dendo Usman. In 1898, the British installed Idirisu Gana as the Etsu or king of Pategi and thus taking it out of Lafiagi's central. Idirisu Gana died in 1900 and his son Muazu Yisa succeeded him (Mason, 1980: 2). It was during the reign of Idirisu's son that Banfield and his team arrived Pategi and requested for a place to stay. Fuller observed that:

Lugard probably considered the Nupe, a tribe controlled by the British and one of the smaller emirates, a safe place for inexperienced missionaries to start. From the Etsu's point of view he could hardly refuse a request from the white men who had brought his family back from exile to kingship (Fuller, 2001: 31).

Pategi town at this time was about 10,000 people. Although slave trade had been abolished, but when slaves ran away they were often pursued. But any slave that reached Pategi would be saved from recapture so many slaves ran to this town and as such there was a rapid growth of the town (Fuller, 2001: 31). When Banfield and his team arrived Pategi the Etsu gave them some land and promise to build some grass huts for them. Banfield was a man of prayer and great faith. On their way to Pategi he prayed for favour and it was granted. They were received warmly by the head and the people of the community (Hallman, 1905).

Banfield and His Literature Ministry

Banfield started a literature ministry by reason of the need in the mission field. He applied himself whole heartedly to mastering Nupe. In less than 12 months, Banfield was able to hold services in Nupe language. According to Banfield as quoted by Fuller:

At once I applied myself diligently and strenuously to Nupe, spoken by a million people in the middle Niger. For the first two years, I never read a book or paper of any kind in English, except for my Bible. I determined to get this language at all costs. I lived in it, I thought in it; I dreamed in it. So great was my passion to learn it that I even put it before my health and life. At no time, during my years of language work, did I ever have as a teacher a Nupe man who knew a word of English. I struggled for and hunted out every word I learned. I never forgot a word (2001: 33).

It is clear from the above statements that Banfield was sold out to Nupe language. He was preparing to give it what it takes in order to succeed in his ministry. Banfield further submitted that while studying with a Nupe teacher he always adds to his vocabulary an average of 15 words each day or 2-3,000 in a year (Banfield, 1908). Banfield's desire was to translate Bible passages into Nupe so that missionaries could read scriptures in Nupe language during their visits to Pategi town, a predominantly Muslim community. In 18 months, Banfield has finished translation work on the Gospel of John. He had also translated six (6) chapters of Mark's Gospel (SIM, 1903).

It should be noted that Banfield's translation was not too exact but it was a good foundation for revision. He employed the phonetic skills he had learned in Toronto. Since he had not studied Greek language he used the English Revised version of 1881 for his translation (Fuller, 2001: 46-47) work. Commenting on Banfield's committed to Nupe language study his contemporary by name R. V. Bingham said:

Mr. Banfield applied himself whole heartedly to mastering this difficult tongue. Into it he began to translate the precious word of God. He compiled his own dictionary and when he returned from his first furlough he had ready the manuscript which the British and foreign Bible Society printed, so that he was able to take back to the field these portions of the New Testament (the four Gospels) to the two or three million people who spoke the Nupe language (1943).

From the above Banfield's commitment to the course of the Nupe was total. He knew that it would be difficult to reach the Nupes without the scripture in their tongue. He was therefore prepared to make it available to them. When Banfield discovered that his language teacher appears to be interested in accepting Christ as his personal Savior and Lord he requested for prayer thus: "until lately he had not had any interest in the message of salvation but only a few weeks ago our teacher said he desires to know God and to believe on Jesus Christ, ... we would like it if this one would be remembered in your prayers." (Fuller, 2001: 35)

Banfield took ill and left Nigeria with six other missionaries reaching Toronto in January 1905. When he recovered from his illness he got married to his fiancée, Althea Priest on 1st March. While in Toronto, the leadership of the church of the Brethren Mission approached him to open up a mission work for the church of the Brethren in Nigeria. Upon his return to Nigeria on 17th August, 1905, Banfield resigned his appointment with SIM to start a new work known as United Missionary Society (UMS) with Tsonga as his base (Fuller, 2001: 36). It should be noted that up to today the relationship between SIM and UMS have been cordial.

An Anglican Bishop by name Herbert Tugwell suggested that the missions interested in Nupe should come together to address the issue of translation. The missions in attendance at the first meeting in 1906 at Pategi were the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), SIM and UMS. Banfield was appointed secretary at this meeting

which resolved that the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's prayer be translated to Nupe language first. The second meeting held in Tsonga in 1907 and later meetings were at Pategi in 1908 and 1909 (Fuller, 2001: 37).

At this juncture, it should be noted that Banfield and his team were not the first to attempt Bible translation into Nupe language. As early as 1877, Samuel Crowther, an Anglican Bishop translated the Gospel of John to Nupe and it was printed in London by the CMS. In 1886 – 87, the BFBS published the four Gospels that was translated to Nupe by Archdeacon Henry Johnson. The literature conference of 1909 encouraged Banfield to continue translating. Banfield reported that for 6 months he had been working on the Book of Acts and stories from the Old Testament, sometimes struggling with one verse for an hour. By 1912, the book of Acts was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS). A Nupe Dictionary in two volumes of over 13,000 words was also published volume 1 in 1914 and volume 2 in 1916. 623 Nupe proverbs in English and Nupe was published in 1916. Banfield's translation efforts became popular by the completion of a draft of the whole New Testament in 1914 (Fuller, 2001: 48). According to Nadel (1951), there exist today five markedly different dialects: a dialect which can be termed Nupe proper, and the dialects of Ebe, Zitako, Bassa and Kupa. God gave Banfield the grace to translate the English Bible into Nupe between 1902 and 1927 (Madugu, 2009: 6).

The Impact of Banfield Literature Ministry Among the Nupes

According to Bingham, the leader of SIM work in Nigeria: "A. W. Banfield set the standard and tone for SIM's translation programme." (George, 1925: 17) In other words, the SIM literature ministry that has affected millions of people in African continent has its foundation laid by A. W. Banfield. It was the translation efforts of Banfield that led to the establishment of Niger press by the Joint Missionary Conference of Missions in Northern Nigeria. The Conference held at the CMS station in Lokoja in July 1910 and resolved that a mission press be opened under the supervision of A. W. Banfield. A sum of £72 was release to him to procure a hand operated press and paper cutter, type, ink, type cases and paper. The machinery arrived Tsonga in December 1910. The printing press was called Niger press (Bingham, 1943).

Orders were sent in from a number of mission stations, government officials and traders. It was soon discovered that the press could not meet up with the orders and as such there was the need for a bigger machine. The first publication by the Niger press was a monthly prayer cycle for the use of all missions at their stations in Northern Nigeria. Several gave their lives to Christ by reason of this prayer magazine while Christians who encountered this piece got their prayer lives revived. Prayer points on happenings in missions' stations were raised in this magazine and as such Christians in Nigeria and overseas were kept abreast on goings on in all the missions' stations (Fuller, 2001: 37).

In 1912 when Banfield went on furlough, he was able to raise enough money for the work of the Niger press. He bought a larger printing press for £400 and brought it to Nigeria in 1913 (Mason, 1980: 25). The printing business went ahead in leaps and bounds and was well patronized. In 1913 the missionary conference resolved among other things that the ownership of Niger press be transferred to Banfield after full payment of the CMS Literature fund released at the beginning of the project (Mason, 1980: 24). This in their own opinion will make Banfield to concentrate on the work to keep up with the orders. Also, he was to ensure that the printing press is sustained by making every customer pay for the job done. By 1914, the press was in full swing. Seven trained Nigerian joined the staff strength. Printing and binding were done in twelve languages: English, Yoruba, Hausa, Nupe, Gbari, Munchi, Yergum, Angas, Sura, Bachama, Jukun and Burum. Scripture portions, dictionaries, prayer books and Bible stories, hymn books, readers, primers, catechisms and reading sheets were produced by Niger press (Mason, 1980: 25).

The impact of Banfield Literature Ministry among the Nupes in Nigeria can be summarized as follows:

2. THE OLOGICAL IMPACT

Theology is the science of God (Dada, 2007: 42). In other words, it is discourse about God. The literature translated to Nupe language by Banfield afforded many Nupe people the opportunity to embrace Christ. The knowledge of the true God increased in the land. During his days some Nupe people that gave their lives to Christ did so because they were able to read the scriptures in their own language. Today there are one million Nupes in Northern Nigeria that are Christians. Many Nupes believe that the literature ministry of Banfield is a great blessing to the church (Harman, 2015). This is because the Nupes were one of the first tribes to have the scripture in their mother tongue in Nigeria. Banfield laboured with other missionaries to build the SIM mission station in Patigi. Some Nupe accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and the Church continued to grow. Today, the several Nupe in Pategi, Bida, Lokoja and their environs have become Christians. The literature of Banfield has contributed

a lot to the growth of Christianity in Nupe land. Bida and its environs are not left out as there are Anglican Dioceses already established in the land.

Also, Banfield was the pioneer missionary of the United Missionary Society (UMS) that started its work among the Nupe People of Nigeria (Harman, 2015). It would be recalled that it was Banfield's labour with other missionaries that produced United Missionary Church of Africa (UMCA) today in Nigeria. This church has well over 5million Christians in Nigeria. Its membership cut across many tribal groups in Nigeria.

Today, the impact of Banfield literature ministry is felt in denominations like the Anglican, Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) and the United Missionary Church of Africa (UMCA). These denominations used his work in their worship services and their training institutions. It should be noted that the first SIM/ECWA Church to be planted in Nigeria is in Pategi. This church has grown and planted sister churches in the environs. In ECWA today, Pategi is a Church District Headquarters. The literature of Banfield has contributed a lot to the growth of Christianity in Nupe land. Bida axis has not less than three Anglican dioceses and institutions of learning. This has positively influenced the growth of Christianity in these areas. The UMCA Church has grown in Nupe land as well. There are not less than six Church Districts of the church among the Nupe people. The membership is also in millions. Some of the past and present National leaders of UMCA are Nupe.

3. EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

One of the unique works produced and published in 1916 was a collection of 623 Nupe proverbs which is a valuable foundation for Nupe studies today (Mason, 1980: 8). These literatures are used in many institutions today. Learning Nupe language has become easy by the reason of the literature ministry of Banfield. Most of the recent works on the Nupe people always make reference to the works of Banfield.

It has been observed that education is the "shaping of behavior or modification of an individual's behavior for adequate adjustment in the society." (Oduolowu, 1999: 3). In other words, the chief purpose of education is character formation and development of intelligence. It is the art of developing a person mentally or morally (Allen, 2001: 444). Correct education is aimed at training or improving a person's faculties, judgment, skills etc (Allen, 2001: 444).

It should be noted that the educational institutions established by Banfield and other missionaries in Nupe land helped in the educational development of the Nupe people. The elementary and high schools sharpen the lives of many of them. Today there are highly education people from this tribe sewing in all walks of life. Examples are: Professor Jerry Gana, Professor Aaron Gana, Late Dr D.K. Madugu, Late Dr Isaac Madugu, Mrs Serah Jubril and Professor Samuel Tswana, to mention a few. These people have made and still making positive impacts in Nupe land and in Nigeria.

4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

As mentioned earlier, one of the goals of education is the formation of character and development of intelligence. Correct education is capable of shaping of modifying people's behavior for adequate adjustment to the society. The beginning of education in Nupe land can be linked to the activities of missionaries especially Banfield. This has helped in the social life of the Nupe people. The printing press established by Banfield was the first in the Northern Region of Nigeria. Some young Nupe men were hired to learn the printing trade. This provided employment opportunity for the people (Mason, 1980:30). Income from the printing work was also used for the propagation of the Gospel of Christ. Today the printing press produce Christian literatures, textbooks, journals, magazines etc which are sources of revenue generation of the church today. The press has empowered many Nigerian Christians economically. Challenge Bookshops of SIM/ECWA was born to spread the gospel through literature. These Bookshops were the major players in distributing Christian literature in Nigeria along with the many CMS bookshops throughout Nigeria. The SIM bookshops were well stocked with Christian books, school books, Children books, a few general books and stationery. Government establishments orders books and stationery for their schools from these bookshops and these provide income for the work of the ministry. Today, these bookshops have become a major source of revenue the Church.

5. ETHICAL IMPACT

Religion and conduct are closely related as such true faith in God must be accompanied by practical commitment that shows itself in right living (Routledge, 2008:239). The scripture condemned the attempt to separate religion from lifestyle (Isa. 1:11-17; Hos. 8:12-13; Amos 5:21-24). The Nupes contact with Christianity and the Bible changed their ethical live. Ethics is defined as "the philosophical examination of such concepts as good and bad, right and wrong, virtue and vice." (Oyedepo, 1984:15). Ethics is what is expected and not expected of humans.

Ethics is a factor governing the social life of communities. Moral and ethical norms arise from the experiences of a community, which are passed from one generation to the next to ensure the survival and well-being of that society. He stresses that ethical conduct in the Old Testament is primarily theological (Eichrodt, 1961: 316-322). According to G. L. Lasebikan (1984:85), the whole structure of Israel was strengthened by the force of faith in Yahweh, when they surrendered to him. The nation of Israel was expected to obey God through the Prophets. Ethics was to alert and awaken the sense of faithfulness and loyalties in Yahweh. Since the converts to Christianity in Nupe land have adopted the Bible as they guide, this changed their attitude to one another and their neighbor's. In other words, the literature ministry of Banfield have sharpen and changed the moral and attitude of the Nupe people of Nigeria.

Besides, the ethical imperative is the revelation of the character and will of God. Right conduct in the society is the evidence of walking with God. Living in covenant relationship with God results in a felt obligation towards his people, and in the practical outworking of that obligation in social duty and responsibility. (Routledge, 2008: 247).

6. CONCLUSION

From our study, it is evident that the impacts of Banfield's literature ministry to the development of the Nupe people cannot be overemphasized. Banfield's life and ministry has positively impacted the religious, educational, socio-economic and ethical lives of the Nupes. To sustain the legacy of Banfield the church in Nupe land must encourage young men and women that have passion for missionary work in the area to do so. Adequate support arrangements must be made for them. Church leaders in Nupe land should encourage young talented persons in the area to engage in writing literature in Nupe language to promote literacy and Church Growth.

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