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By Idenze Ezeme

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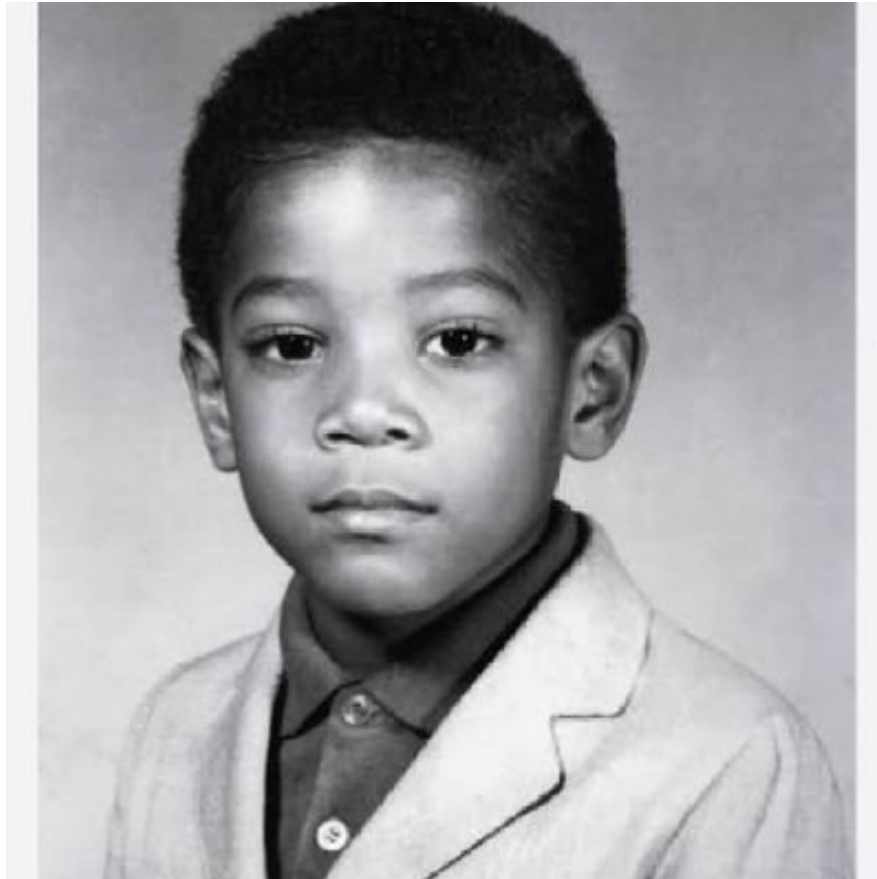
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HOW SUNDAY BECAME KNOWN AS 'ỤKÀ' IN IGBO LANGUAGE

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Christianity was introduced to Igboland in two key stages. The first attempt came in 1841 in Abọ, now in Delta State, when three missionaries met with Obi Ọsaị to share the Christian message and explore the possibility of setting up a mission station. However, this effort did not yield lasting results. The true beginning of Christianity in Igboland occurred in 1857 in Ọnịcha (Onitsha), Anambra State. Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther and Rev. John Christopher Taylor arrived as part of the 1857 Niger Expedition led by Dr. William Balfour Baikie. They successfully established a mission station, marking the foundation for the spread of Christianity in the region.



Rev. John Christopher Taylor was born in the year 1805 in Sierra Leone of parents (an Isuama father and an Arochukwu mother)

Christianity's Early Footprint in Igbo Land

In the 1860s, Crowther and Taylor, in their reports to the CMS headquarters in London, stressed that Ọnịcha was the gateway to Igbo land. This made Ọnịcha the region's first and most crucial Christian mission station. From here, Christianity spread as the CMS station served as a base for other Christian groups that emerged about 28 years later.

Christianity was first called Ụkà in Igbo in Ọnịcha. Today, this word is used for different Christian groups, like Ụkà CMS (Church Missionary Society), Ụkà Katọlik (Catholic Church), and Ụkà Methodist. The word Ụkà comes from the Igbo word for "conversation," "talk," or "discussion" (okwu na ụka). But in Christianity, Ụkà is linked to church events and meetings.

Historical Evolution of the term “Ụkà”

The term “Ụkà” has a rich history and evolved significantly, especially with the arrival of Christianity in Igboland during the mid-19th century. Before the influence of Christianity, “ụka” was a general Igbo word that referred to various forms of communication, such as:

- Conversation or dialogue: As seen in expressions like *ịkparịta ụka* (to converse or discuss).
- Argument or dispute: Used in phrases like *ọkpụkpọ okwu na ụka* (to argue or debate).

When Christian missionaries, such as Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther and Rev. John Taylor, introduced Christianity to Igboland (beginning in Onitcha in 1857), “ụka” shifted to represent aspects of the new faith. Missionaries often emphasized gatherings for teaching and preaching, where people came together to hear about the Christian God. This association led to “ụka” being linked with Christian religious practices.

Over time, “ụka” became the Igbo word for:

- Christianity or the Christian faith.
- Church gatherings.
- Sunday (*Mbọsị Ụka*) is the main day for Christian worship.

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Examples of the Word's Evolution

- *Ụlọ Ụka*: Meaning “church building” (House of Uka (discussion)).
- *Mbọsị Ụka*: Meaning “Sunday,” (the day of uka (discussion))

Ideas about why Sunday is called “Ụkà.”

Many ideas try to explain why Sunday is called Ụkà in Igbo:



- **Talking and Discussion:** Some think the name came from Christians discussing or spreading their faith during worship.
- **New Christians:** Others say it refers to early converts who often spoke up and argued with non-Christians.
- **Church Meetings:** Sunday was the day Christians gathered to worship, which is why it is linked to Ụkà.
- **Imperial Influence:** The missionaries used the term to refer to their faith and activities, which could have influenced its usage in Igbo.

The term Ụkà has a special meaning in the Igbo language and culture. Far from being a product of dialogue or reasoning, the naming of Sunday as Mbọsị Ụkà reflects the integration of a foreign faith into Igbo society. This term shows how Igbo traditions and outside influences came together during an important time in their history.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Idenze Ezeme

Nze is an Igbo history and culture enthusiast with an in-depth passion for exploring the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and historical narratives of the Igbo people. His works is mostly focused on pre-colonial Igbo societies, traditional belief systems, leadership systems, and the impact of European colonialism.



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