

NEW TASKS AHEAD



Enugu

Our train pulled into Enugu station. Now I could breathe more easily: the 25-hour journey behind a coal engine with three small but active girls had strained my nerves. But Paul would be here at the station to meet me and I could rest again in his security and protection. He had travelled with Bernhard on the preceding train (one week earlier!) in order to prepare our move at this end. He wanted to get the carpenter to make beds,

to buy provisions, to organize a truck for our baggage which had come down south by freight train, etc., while I had stayed up in Zaria to finish packing up the house.

How glad I was to be able to leave the compartment where the soot had gathered on everything - even our faces. With one girl on one arm, one holding my hand and the third my dress, we stepped down, friendly passengers behind bringing our luggage.

But there was no Paul. I was disappointed and worried. Had something gone wrong? Had he and Bernhard even arrived a week ago? Then a comforting thought came: he couldn't, of course, know the time of my arrival; trains don't run on time in this part of the world. I didn't even know how many hours I was late! So we would just have to sit on our suitcases and wait.

The Senior Station Master came over to chat. "You are waiting for your husband? Oh yes, a white man has been here inquiring about the Zaria train, but of course we couldn't give him the exact time of arrival... Yes, he was with a small, fair-haired boy. In fact, he has been here three times already today...!"

I was reassured now; Paul would certainly come back soon. A porter boy, about 12 years old, joined us now.

"Madam, I know where your husband is. Do you want me to call him?"

"Oh, come on, you don't know where he is! I don't even know myself!"

"Yes, I know him. I have seen him in town. He is with a little boy. They arrived on last week's train. Should I go and call him?"

I didn't believe he could find him, but I didn't want to dampen his zeal.

"O.K., you may go and call him," I told the boy who ran away happily, anticipating a reward.



Ogui Street in Enugu, one of the main tarred roads

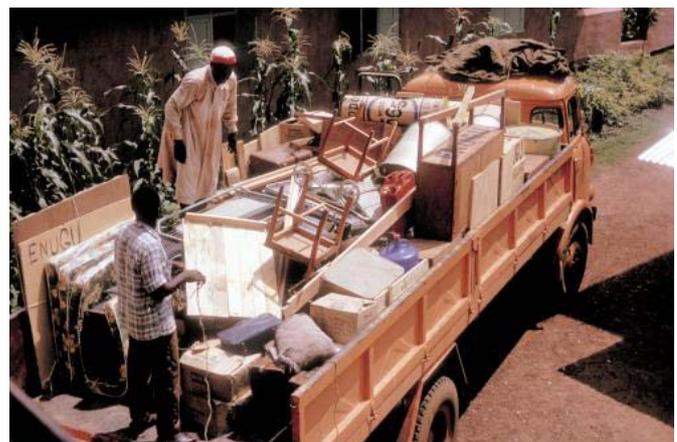
He must have run all the way to the town shopping center, for soon afterwards Paul arrived in a taxi.

"This boy found me and told me you have been waiting an hour already," he exclaimed, happy at our reunion.

We were able to stay at the house of an Ibo pastor, right in the center of the town. At 4 am we were woken up by the piercing noise of a generator which drove the neighbor's

corn mill. Different sounds reached our ears as at 5 am some members of our friend's church met for praise and prayer. The town awoke at daybreak - about 6 o'clock - and the streets resounded with the hubbub of a busy town.

The big truck from the Agricultural Mission in Ikwo came the next day and took us and our baggage on the four-hour ride to their station. 'NORCAP' - a large agricultural project of the Norwegian Church - consisted of many buildings: a medical clinic, agricultural school, mechanical workshop, model gardens and animal stables, residences for staff and students, two chapels, etc... About 4 Norwegian families and some single people were living there, working in connection with the Presbyterian Church of the Ikwo area. They had invited us to stay in their guestrooms for the first two weeks while we prepared our own home in Echara, 15 miles away.



The first morning, we all went over to Echara to see what the Lord had given us there. We were excited. The compound was large, with a number of buildings. We would have the use of two bungalows, one for our own family and one for Samuel

and whoever would join him as our other assistants. A former medical clinic with 5 small rooms would serve as offices and duplicating room. Other people connected with the agricultural project lived on the compound too. A large rice mill served the surrounding population and a deep well provided water for us all!



our house in Echara

Our house needed only a few repairs. So for a week, Paul went over to Echara everyday, helped by a friend from Switzerland who was visiting us just then. One evening Paul reported excitedly:

"You know that I took a painter with me today. While I was working, I suddenly heard this Ikwo man singing one of Samuel's Izi songs. First I didn't trust my ears and

thought I had mistaken it for something else. But it was Samuel's song. So I asked him what he was singing. 'Sir,' he said, 'I am singing one of the new Izi songs. In my brother's compound we had a visitor one night from Izi with a talking box. We liked those songs so much, we learned them all. They are just beautiful. And we can understand the Izi words quite well!'

"Inge, I just think the Lord had a purpose in sending us out of Izi to live among the Ikwo - only I do not yet know what He has in mind!"

We didn't have to wait long. On one of the following evenings, two young men knocked at our NORCAP guesthouse door.

"I am Thomas Uzim and this is Joseph Oko. We are elders in the local Presbyterian Church." Elders? They were still in their early twenties! "We have heard about the work you are doing for the Izi people and would like to know more about it."

We had a long talk with them. They themselves had heard the Izi cassettes and seen their effect on people. They wanted them for their people too. Having heard about the beginning of translation work, they were excited to a healthy jealousy. Why should we be doing this work for the disdained Izi people who didn't care? Why not for them, the progressive Ikwo? Why should we try again to help those who often refused help before, who were not at all responsive to the gospel? Why couldn't we switch over and do this wonderful work for them, for the Ikwo people? They were the progressive ones, they had schools and church groups all over the land. Their Presbyterian church had been established for 30 years already! Now that we were even living in Ikwo, couldn't we do this translation work for Ikwo, too?

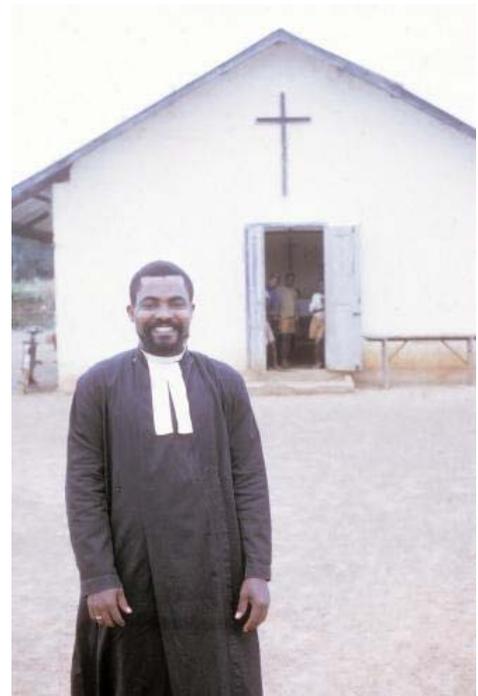
Paul did a lot of explaining, trying to get across to them that we couldn't abandon the Izi translation as the Lord has clearly led us back into it. They, the progressive Ikwo with their dozens of churches, they would have to do it themselves. We would be willing to give them help; they could attend all our Institute's training courses, but they would have to do the work themselves. He suggested they should talk with their pastor and decide as a church if there were any men they could set apart for the task of translation.

"And what about yourselves? As you feel the need so desperately, wouldn't you like to offer yourselves?" asked Paul at the end.

"I certainly would," said Thomas, "but I am still in Secondary School and I have exams coming up in October. I will certainly talk to our pastor. He is an Ibo, but he loves the Ikwo people and wants to help them."

Later, a meeting with the pastor, Rev. Otu, was arranged and we learned more about the Ikwo people and their church situation.

This local Presbyterian Church extended through the whole of the Ikwo area - about 500 square km with roughly 200,000 inhabitants - and also through the equally large neighboring Ezaa area! For this vast task there was only one ordained pastor. About 50 church outposts were served by a number of minimally trained evangelists. The pastor preached in Ibo and was interpreted by Ikwo or Ezaa helpers. He did not speak the Ikwo language and did not even understand it well enough to communicate. This was the cause of a lot of his frustrations. He loved the local people - otherwise he would not have stuck it out through the years of the war and afterwards when no salaries were coming through, when he had to visit his widespread groups on a bicycle instead of on a motorcycle! He was concerned that the membership of his church was composed only of those who had gone through the Presbyterian Primary Schools and so had learned Ibo, and that he had no outreach whatsoever to any of the others.



*Pastor Otu in front of his church
in Ikwo*

Therefore he had welcomed with an open mind the proposals of these elders and was eager for our suggestions. He realized that a New Testament in the language of the people would be an effective tool, both for strengthening and teaching the church members and also to reach out to non-Christians. He was very willing to call a meeting immediately with the Church elders of the whole Session whereby a young man would be selected for training.

The question of financing the training and work of such a translator was a more difficult one. Paul and I had assumed that a church with 3000 members could afford to support a single man. We were told, however, that the weekly offerings did not even cover the pastor's salary.

"Unfortunately the members have never learned to support the church," explained the pastor. "The first missionaries failed to teach us how to give. On the contrary: the first converts were given free gifts! Since then, every member still thinks that the Church is a place where people pay nothing and gain everything free of charge. We have to work to correct this idea. It takes time..."

After that first meeting with Pastor Otu, we did a lot of thinking. A dream, a vision, a conviction, was beginning to come true: Africans translating for Africans! For years Paul had been praying and speaking out for this. Besides his director, John Bendor-Samuel, he had no one among his colleagues who was open to the idea of what Paul called a "satellite translation project". Nobody had done that before. How could it work with us?



the newly chosen Ikwo candidates leaving for the linguistic workshop

The meeting of the Session in Ikwo brought a further surprise. After Paul had presented the need and effectiveness of Bible Translation, Samuel read to them - as a foretaste! - the specially prepared passage of 1 Peter 5:1-11 about 'elders'. The men were touched. They understood the Izi version. A long discussion followed and in the end it was decided that not only an Ikwo man should be

trained, but also one from Ezaa! It was agreed that a special collection should be announced

in all the church outposts. The money would go entirely to the training of the two men. From the Ezaa church, Daniel Eze was chosen (he has just finished Secondary School) and from Ikwo, Christopher Nwankwo (a young teacher). The first steps of their training would be the 10 weeks' linguistics course in Zaria, after which they would work under Paul's supervision and guidance.

* * *

In the meantime, we had settled in our new home. To our vision of 'Africans translating for Africans' was added another: European churches - where Bible translations abound - becoming a partner to a church in Africa so that it will get at least one version of the New Testament ...

Yes, this was the key. "Partners in the Gospel", the Apostle Paul had written. One church in Europe could become the partner of an African Church. The New

Testament shouldn't be the gift of the overseas church; no, we didn't want to repeat the mistake of the early missionaries.

As Paul started to work with Samuel again in his 'new' office, his vision accompanied him. He already saw the remaining rooms occupied - one for the Ikwo translator, one for the Ezaa translator, one for the typist or typists, one for duplicating and publications room... How wonderful that the Lord had led us to this place, a real mini-translation center!

From our own finances, we had guaranteed the expenses of the two men until such a time as the local Church would have collected enough money to pay it back. But by this time, Paul felt sure it would be all right to present this vision of partnership to some of our friends back home.

We selected 20 names from our list of addresses of friends who were either pastors or in some leading position in the Presbyterian Church in Switzerland. Paul presented the need of their sister church, asking if anybody saw in any way a possibility of their church joining in partnership. We made it clear that we did not ask for ourselves, for our Izi translation work, but just for the need in Ikwo and Ezaa. We committed the letters and their outcome to the Lord and sent them off.

It had also become clear to us that our idea of partnership did not include just a relationship between two Presbyterian churches on either side of the ocean. It should also include partnership of the existing local churches. Surely the second Protestant church in the Ikwo area, the Assemblies of God, would also have the right to receive the Word in their language and would cooperate.

Our Ikwo friends, however, had a different opinion.

"Don't you know that the Presbyterians and the Assemblies people don't like each other? Haven't you heard that they burn one another's churches down? That they insult and abuse each other?"

No, we hadn't heard. "You mean Christians do that to other Christians? How come?"

"Well," came the hesitant answer, "they are two different kinds of Christians! The Assemblies people say that the Presbyterians are not real Christians because they allow their members to drink palm wine. The Presbyterians say that the others are too noisy and shout too much in their church."

We were not shocked. Had they ever understood the Gospel of peace in their hearts? Was not the translation of the New Testament into their language the means to bring them together? It is not always a common language what unites people. Only the truth, well understood, would set them free from their divisions. We made it clear to Pastor Otu that there would only be an Ikwo translation if both parties would pledge their support.

One Sunday we heard through the grapevine that the leader of the Assemblies of God Church was visiting a church nearby. We also knew that Rev. Otu was preaching not far from us. Quickly we sent two messengers, inviting them both to our house for lunch. I cooked the usual visitor's meal, rich with meat in a tomato and palm-oil sauce. We waited. We prayed. It was shortly before two o'clock when one and then the other arrived. We sensed the uneasiness of both. But the honest desire to see the Word of God in the Ikwo language was greater than their prejudices, misunderstandings and theological differences. In the middle of our discussion, they both stood up and gave each other the hand of fellowship. Our hearts were filled with joy! It was Paul's suggestion that, as the Presbyterian Church was providing the translator, the Assemblies of God Church should select one of their men as a typist and support him.

Our family had survived the move from Zaria town to Echara quite well. From birth, the children had been used to moving house about once a year and sleeping every so often in a different bed. Bernhard now looked forward so much to going to boarding school in August. At the age of seven, he would go 700 km by plane to a 'new' school in Jos by himself. The sorrow of separation was alleviated by the prospect of being able to talk to him every week on our new two-way radio.



taking Bernhard to Enugu – he would fly by himself to his boarding school in Jos

Although we lived 15 km south of the Izi area, many visitors found their way to us. One Izi teacher from the most Northern part of Izi cycled for 6 hours to Abakaliki. From there a friend brought him to us. He was a member of the Methodist Church in the neighboring Igede area and had tried to hold some church services among the Izi living there. He spoke to them in English or Ibo and complained that he only reached school children! At the end of our chat, Paul suggested that he pray in his Izi language. After praying he could hardly contain himself for joy:

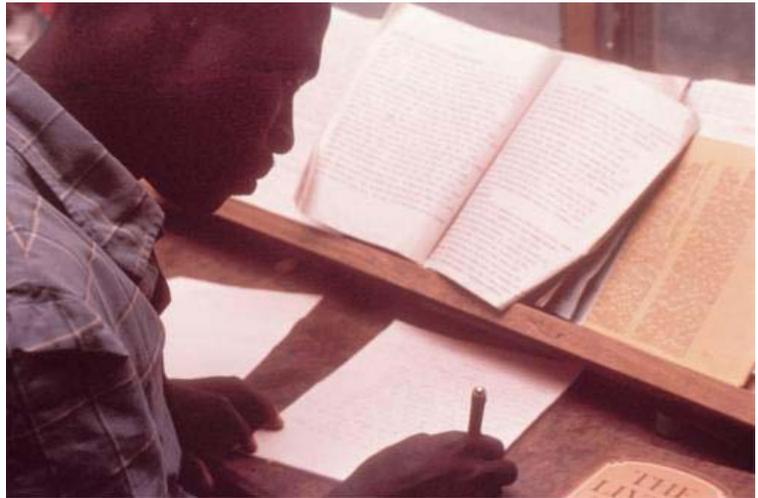
"I have never before prayed in Izi. I would never have dared to do it. I thought it was only possible to pray to God in English or Ibo. I thought God wasn't pleased to hear a language which our heathens use to call on their jujus!"

He stayed with us for two days and listened to all the cassettes we had recorded. With great joy he went back - for we lent him one of our cassette players and a number of Izi cassettes. How we wished we had the finances to buy more players! The seven we had purchased were all given out on loan - and it was nearly

impossible to get them back again unless they were broken! From everywhere came reports of how eagerly the people were listening.

Paul and Samuel were working on the letter of James. How they toiled and discussed, searched for the right expressions, tested out new renderings. Often Paul would search for a suitable word in his dreams - 'conscience', 'to resist', 'pure', 'sound doctrine', were expressions they desperately needed for this letter. The two were not always of the same opinion and often heated arguments ensued. However, the final verdict did not lie with them, but with the monolingual villager way out in the bush! He had to decide whether an expression was meaningful to him, if it hit the nail on the head or not. So when Samuel went home at weekends, he usually had a list of expressions with him to discuss with his Izi friends.

Samuel did not go home to rest. His heart was too full of the wonderful message he had been translating during the week. It was a special joy to him when the letter of James was finished - he carefully tucked a copy in his bag and said good-bye.



Samuel at the translation desk

"I want to go and see John today," he said to me. "I have heard that he is in some kind of trouble."

To visit John meant a cycle ride of about 40 km along mainly bush paths. John was one of the older Christians in Izi. Although he couldn't read or write and had never gone to school, he went regularly to visit his neighbors and into market places to seek people for the Lord.

It was late afternoon when Samuel reached his home. John was overjoyed to see him and started to pour out his heart. There were pressures on him from all sides. His brothers had tried to force him to contribute money and wine to drinking festivals in honor of his father; his wife's relatives had threatened to carry her away by force as he had never performed the pagan initiation rites for her, and refused to placate the spirits with wine.

As Samuel was talking and eating with John's family, others of the group of Christians came in. They had heard that Samuel was there and didn't want to miss such an opportunity for talking about their faith.

"We all face the same kinds of troubles and persecutions from our people," Samuel encouraged them. "But God's Word says that we should not be astonished about

this, we should even rejoice! I will read you the verses which tell us so. They are in the letter of James."

Samuel pulled out his Ibo Bible. He purposely left the new Izi version of James in his bag for later. He wanted to carry out a test first - and then teach them a lesson.

He read some verses in the first chapter and then turned to John.

"John, would you please translate what you have understood," he asked him.

"I haven't understood a word," muttered John. "Ask Peter, he has been to school."

Peter tried his best. He translated the words he knew, and the others which he didn't know - mainly the important ones! - he left untranslated and pronounced them in Ibo. This resulted in a sentence as unintelligible as when the whole was read in Ibo!

How thrilling it was for Samuel then to pull out 'James in Izi' and read the message to these people who now understood it for the first time. How meaningful was the message now and what a comfort for those enduring trials. After reading each verse they talked about it, then prayed. Verse by verse, reading, explaining, praying. No one felt it was time to go home. At about 3 in the morning, they had finished reading and praying through the whole letter. They were encouraged, comforted, ready to face another day and its burdens.

Samuel himself was so seized by the message of James that it inspired him to write two songs. 'Brothers, do not grumble' explained some truths of chapter 1, and the second song dealt with the tongue being an evil part of the body, causing so much strife.

The reports Samuel brought back after every weekend thrilled our hearts. By Saturday afternoon usually every helper had disappeared from our compound - all trying to take the message to people who had never before heard the name of Jesus. Even our grass-cutting boy who had never gone to school 'preached' somewhere with the help of our cassette player and taught the people the songs.

"If the Izi people are so open, why don't you go out yourselves and preach?" some of our supporters and friends at home might have asked. "Why do you let untrained boys do it? They might make mistakes! They might preach heresies and do more harm than good! Would not more people come together if you yourselves were to preach?"

Sure! On the very rare occasions when Paul did preach, there was a large crowd - especially when three little blond-haired girls were trailing behind him! They would listen, yes, but the danger that they would see only the white man and listen to the white man's message was too great. We did not want to perpetuate the impression that the Izi New Testament was the White Man's book, that it was

something imported, foreign. The Word of God must become flesh in Izi through the work of their own people.

It was also true that our helpers did make mistakes. But this was still a lesser evil than if we had preached ourselves. The study of the Word of God would lead them into truth!

Above all, we did not want to take away from them the thrill of being fishers of men among their own people! Our task was to put a tool into their hands, to give them the net to fish! And also to let them feel the responsibility of carrying on what they had started and not to give up once trials came. They would be the ones that would remain even if we had to go. The translation should be their work, not ours.

We had learned that critical voices are never missing. Again and again we were challenged by outsiders who seriously questioned that the Izi people, and now, of course, also the Ikwo and Ezaa people, needed a separate translations from Ibo.

"Izi is a dialect of Ibo and these people understand Ibo well enough!" was a comment we heard hundreds of times, even from church leaders in the surrounding areas.

"When I go and preach to them, they all understand me!" they said.

Certainly, if somebody asks the audience after the preaching: "Have you understood what I said?" they will all shout "Yes!" But if such a person should say: "What have I said? What have you understood?", he would be surprised at the outcome.

It was true that all three languages Izi, Ikwo and Ezaa were related to Ibo and that the majority of the people could trade their goods very well with the Ibos in town, but how could we prove to the outside world that the gospel in Ibo could not penetrate to their hearts? The few months we had lived in the Ikwo area had made us all the more conscious of the gulf between these groups and Ibo society. We were sad to see that the church had become a church only for those who understood Ibo. Others did not come, or if they did come once, they often didn't come again.

In the long run, the weekly bicycle ride to Samuel's home proved too strenuous for him. He asked the Lord to show him a less distant place where he could preach from the newly translated passages. He tried to start with the nearest Izi village area, about 10 miles away.

That first Saturday evening, he rode from compound to compound and played sermons and songs. At the same time, he invited the people to come to the school the following morning where would teach them about God. One man was so eager to hear more from Samuel that he invited him to spend the night in his

hut. As he had been to school, Samuel gave him a duplicated copy of the gospel of Mark to read - and although he had never before seen his own language in writing, he read slowly on and on by candlelight through the night.

There were 20-30 people at that Sunday service, men, women and children. The second Sunday, a week later, the number slightly increased. Two wives of the local chief had been present at both services, and as Samuel went to greet the chief, he told him that one of the wives had begged him every day of that week to be allowed to follow Jesus and give up her jujus...



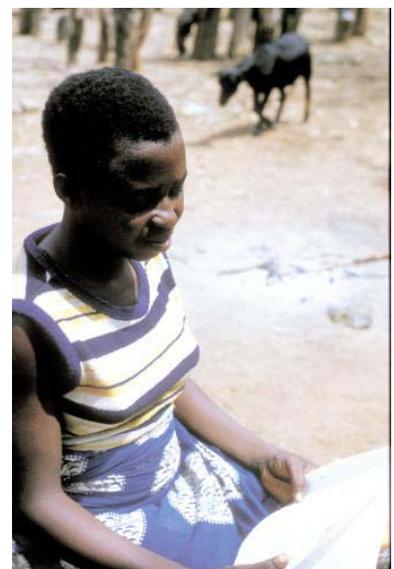
Christiana, a chief's wife, becomes the first Christian through Samuel's preaching

A steady attendance of 45 to 55 people each Sunday kept Samuel busy at weekends. Men and women were born into the family of God and had to be fed, encouraged and taught. The younger of the chief's wives was blossoming in her new-found faith and was a testimony to all. From now on, she wanted to be called by the name 'Christiana' and no longer by her pagan name. One day she visited her mother and sister and during a discussion her sister slapped her across the face.

"I don't mind at all!" Christiana said, to the astonishment of her mother and sister, who knew her to be very easily roused to anger.

"Something has happened to you, my daughter," cried the mother, who was a famous medicine woman, "I promise to sacrifice a rooster or a goat! Just so that nothing

bad will happen to us now!" The young Christian calmed them and then told about what Jesus had done for her. Christiana had gone to school only one year, but she knew the shapes of the letters. Her hunger for spiritual strength was so great that she sat for hours over the little lzi songbook and the gospel of Mark, deciphering each word and memorizing the songs. Often she enlisted the help of her - sometimes unwilling - husband who had to read the stories of Mark's gospel to the whole compound!



The news about the change in Christiana's life spread like wild-fire. Samuel - and we all - were amazed to see how the Spirit of Jesus had been working in this new babe in the faith.

Just one friend from Switzerland had replied to our letter requesting partnership: his church was interested to help another church in this practical way. They asked for fuller information, budgeted costs of the project and its duration. We prepared an extensive answer (budget of \$ of 16,000 needed, for 3 years) and rejoiced. Surely the Lord would use this church to help.

It was exciting to be part of the Lord's plan for a people. But would we be able to shoulder the responsibility? Joyful anticipation mingled with feelings of inadequacy. Would our health last through a heavy programme of supervising three translations? Would we get the necessary finances? Would the people use the primers, the books, the New Testament? Would this triple project ever succeed?

We could give no answers, but this we knew: there was no turning back. We were not only committed to the Ikwo church and the Swiss church, but, above all, to the Lord. And he had already given us the green light by giving us this compound as an ideal work situation. Now it was our turn to conquer the remaining land, to fight with all our might and yet to expect the victory entirely from Him.