

**THE INCULTURATION OF THE GOSPEL: IMPLICATIONS  
FOR THE METHODIST CHURCH THE GAMBIA'S QUEST  
FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP**

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## Abstract

The philosophy, traditional and cultural religion of the African laid the foundation for a people that had the structural requirements for assimilating the content of the gospel, not as uneducated natives but as people with a distorted content of the gospel message and distorted application of it within their social and customary realities. Understanding the content of the gospel and its relevance for the African sets the tone for considering the various models of application that have been employed in mission in Africa. A similar quest is seen in Asian Christianity, where Western dualism and enlightenment thought governed the 'heart', while authentic Asian Christianity can only emerge when there is a dual recovery of confidence, in culture and in the gospel, within Asian Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

It is however, vital to note that the limitation of this missional approach is balanced by the availability of the gospel content in the language and within the reach of The Gambian. This should empower the Gambian and encourage attempts of inculturation that would produce a more relevant ministry fulfilling the existential purpose of the gospel. This therefore makes essential an understanding of leadership from the content of Scripture, Church history and Church traditions. For the Gambian Methodist Christian, this is supplemented with the additional consideration of the Methodist heritage that gives a sense of belonging to the tradition and defines its Christian orientation.

The major task of leadership is to explore the inculturational opportunities of the gospel within the African Traditional and Cultural beliefs and practices providing pillars that hold the worldview together for possible leadership application. This will solve the need for an inculturated gospel and ministry for the Methodist Church The Gambia. These pillars are presented as the rites of passage in the African Traditional and Cultural beliefs. Together with the Heritage of Methodism's accommodative quality of a discipleship movement shaped for mission, a family base leadership community structure evolves catering for scriptural, African and Methodism. The researcher thus recommends that the Methodist Church The Gambia should consider inculturating the gospel cognizance of its African traditional and cultural practices with its Methodist heritage for a better expression of Church leadership in The Gambia in the practice of ministry through the rites of passages of its people.

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<sup>1</sup> Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for An Authentic Asian Christian Theology*, (Milton Keynes: Regnum Books International, 1997), pp. 1-8

## **Declaration**

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other college, university or other institute of learning.

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# Acknowledgement

To God be the glory! Great things He hath done!  
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son;  
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,  
And opened the Life gate that all may go in.  
*Refrain: Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*  
*Let the earth hear His voice!*  
*Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*  
*Let the people rejoice!*  
*O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son:*  
*And give Him the glory! Great things He hath done!(MHB 313)*

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I wish, however, to state that any shortcoming of this project work is the sole responsibility of the researcher.

To serve the present age,  
My calling to fulfill:  
O may it all my powers engage  
To do my Master's will! (MHB 578)

# Dedication

Dedicated to the following:

- Almighty God; for calling me into the gospel ministry as a Prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1: 4-19) beginning from and anchored in The Gambia.
- The Methodist Church The Gambia and The Methodist Church Britain; for providing the opportunities for my spiritual growth and for equipping me for the work of the Lord's ministry. A great investment that is dear to my heart and to which I pledge my allegiance in obedience to the calling of God to serve Christ, the Church and the world.

# **General Introduction**

The Gambia, like most African countries, has a very rich cultural heritage. However, it seems that there is a conflict between these cultural heritages and the Church, which has for a very long time been European driven. This may be the reason for the Church's relative weakness in The Gambia. This research seeks to advance the study of inculturation for Gambian Methodism in order to unearth a more contextual approach to Christian leadership within the biblical worldview, Gambian traditional and cultural religious practices and the Methodist heritage.

## **Problem Statement**

The dichotomy between "Christian principles" and cultural realities has always been a challenge for the Methodist Church The Gambia. Though these two have always existed concurrently, that has not been the reality for the Methodist Church in theory. For example, Gambian Methodists observe the tradition of "Charity" (a traditional ceremony to recall the memory of departed loved ones) - a practice that the Church frowns at. This is, I consider, a result of the failure to inculturate the gospel in the practice of ministry. In the light of the fact that The Gambia is now an autonomous Methodist Conference (2009), an analysis of the way this, and other cultural practices, can be accommodated in our quest for greater relevance is of the utmost importance if Methodism is to increase in The Gambia.

## **Motivation**

The Methodist Church The Gambia has had a profound impact upon my whole life continually from Sunday School days till present. A variety of different experiences have compelled me to offer all I am and all I have in the service of this Church. I am thus motivated to try and explore parallels in leadership patterns within Gambian cultural realities, biblical worldview and the Methodist tradition. It is my hope that in the life of the new autonomous Methodist Church The Gambia, a greater inculturation of Church leadership can be realized in order for the practice of ministry to become more relevant.



### **Limitation**

The Methodist Church is blest with not less than ten (10) various cultural and tribal people groups. It will be difficult to do justice to all these people groups and relate the present topic to all of them individually. In this view, I will seek to give a brief overview of each group and hope to establish a common ground through The Gambia's traditional and cultural religious practices; the rites of passage.

### **Methodology**

Various research methodologies will be employed. Principal amongst them will be the following; living human documents, literature review, use of interviews and theological reflections.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is important for the Methodist Church The Gambia, as it will help Methodists understand the Church's responsibility in practicing relevant inculturated ministry. It will also stress the centrality of the gospel and its trans-cultural essence in the practice of ministry for relevant Church leadership. I hope to trigger a consciousness within the Church, which will inspire it to be culturally relevant in its concepts of leadership by exploring how cultural rites of passages can act as an integral part of Christian ministry. I hope that my research will serve as a guide for the Methodist Church The Gambia as it continues to shape its approaches to Church leadership.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

Chapter one establishes the existent and essence of West African traditional and cultural religion. Through this the core of its pillars; rites of passages, are discussed for the better understanding of the West African worldview. It then narrows down to give a brief history of The Gambia and its various ethnic groups. This is followed by a brief history of Islam as a major religion in The Gambia and its accommodative nature, which helps it to be the major religion in The Gambia.

Chapter two seeks to provide a definition of the gospel, and explore the understanding and implications of inculturation as an enhancer of indigenous ministry. Furthermore, it considers the various models of inculturation adopted in

The Gambia over the years, namely; expansion, *diakonia*, presence, dialogue. Against these, it evaluates the option of *kenosis* and proposes the model *skenosis* for greater practices of relevant inculturation that can benefit the Methodist Church The Gambia in Church leadership.

Chapter three focuses on understanding Church leadership, by considering the quality of leadership in biblical characters of the Old and New Testaments, namely; Moses, David and Paul respectively. Furthermore, it explores the meaning of the term ‘Church’ and discusses three main approaches to Church leadership and governance; Episcopal, Presbyterian and Congregational. Finally, it evaluates the conception of leadership within the Methodist Church The Gambia in order to see whether this assists the inculturation of the gospel within the Gambian context.

Chapter four centers on lessons from the Methodist heritage. It considers the society and worldview within which Methodism was born and the Wesleyan character shaped. John and Charles Wesley’s university life and involvement in the Holy Club and further mission work in Georgia is briefly stated. Then Methodism in inculturated mission and ministry is addressed as John demonstrates inculturational leadership as he accommodates strategies of practices of ministry in creating societies, class meetings, bands and a connexion, all forming a discipleship movement for mission.

Chapter five focuses on the inception of Methodism in The Gambia and its initial ministry among the Gambian people. Following this the challenges of Islam and the failure to inculturate in order to meet the needs of Gambian traditional and cultural religious practices expectations are considered. Other areas of the mission work are also looked at; education, medical and health, agricultural and environmental dimensions. Then the focus shifts to the development of indigenous ministry and the journey towards autonomy of the Methodist Church The Gambia and its implications.

Chapter six seeks to offer a new perspective on the inculturation of Gambian Methodism by combining the insights of pervious chapters. It triangulates chapter one (West African Gambian Identity), chapter three (Scripture), and chapter four (Methodist Heritage) and seeks to establish a relevant pattern of the practice of

ministry for the Methodist Church The Gambia to facilitate Church leadership through traditional rites of passage. Examples of inculturation in West African Churches are explored in order to support the relevance and need for this type of inculturation in The Gambia. The chapter then brings together a theological reflection on the possibility of an inculturated ministry with the rites of passage as a practice of ministry, the model of *skenosis* as a leadership strategy supported by a discipleship movement accommodative nature learnt from the Methodist heritage. Chapter seven concludes with a summary of the pervious chapters and the attempts of the Methodist Church The Gambia to inculturate Church leadership. It provides a theological reflection, states the contribution that this research makes to knowledge and recommendations for further study.

# Chapter One

## The African and their Beliefs

### Introduction

The African is notoriously religious and this religiosity is rooted and interwoven in their diverse traditional and cultural belief systems.<sup>2</sup> The African has normally been more of an oral, thinking, acting individual rather than a writing one. In presenting and engaging in ministry to the African, the philosophical, traditional, cultural and religious context are important because it is within which relevance and meaning will be best understood, appreciated and practiced.

### African Traditional and Cultural Religion

Superficially, African traditional and cultural religion (ATCR) has been considered as mainly about superstition, fear and witchcraft. Due to these misconceptions, ATCR was considered diametrically opposed to Christianity by many early missionaries, who felt that it has to be eradicated. This was especially during the time when normality was thought to be Western and considered civilized, logical and healthy while non-Westerners were seen as primitive, pre-logical, sick, evil and savage.

The alleged cultural superiority of Europe led many missionaries to not only bring the Christian faith but also Western culture at the expense of local cultures and religious traditions. ATCR however, cannot be separated from the African worldview. With this in view it remains clear that an inculturation of the Christian faith in this context must give ATCR an important role. Even if, in some African countries, ATCR is not very visible, the thinking of the people, especially in crises, death and other experiences, is still very much linked with traditional culture and religious traditions. Without this knowledge, a non-African missionary is unable to fully understand their thinking. A critical and positive approach to ATCR can serve

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<sup>2</sup> J. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Johannesburg: Heinemann Publishers, 1999), p. 1.

as an indispensable tool for inculturation that strengthens African identity and African Christianity.

The approach of many African Scholars to ATCR has been phenomenological including scholars such as J. S. Mbiti, E. B. Idowu, Harry Sawyer and Kwesi Dickson.<sup>3</sup> This method consciously excludes the kind of eurocentric ideological underpinnings that have generally characterized anthropological discourse on African religion, since phenomenology is not as reductionistic as anthropology.<sup>4</sup> Phenomenology attempts to describe the experience of the divine from the point of view of the worshipper, while anthropology reduces the experience of the worshipper to moral, psychological or social phenomena. Through the approach of phenomenology, a systematic analytic investigation of the presuppositions and assumptions that shape religious traditions is allowed.<sup>5</sup> Religion is a path to salvation for the African. This is the fundamental *raison d'être* of religion in Africa.<sup>6</sup> Without this approach, one cannot understand the African mind-set for this enables understanding of the nature, inner logic, function and goal of religion in the life of the African.

Across Africa, creation is the most widely acknowledged work of God.<sup>7</sup> The African views the world as a sacred cosmos of interplay of material and spiritual forces in a complex interdependent relationship.<sup>8</sup> Religious language, attitudes and practices give clear insight to the concept of reality for the African. For example, in the Akan libation rite the Akan would say the following:

Supreme God, who alone is great, upon whom men lean and do not fall,  
receive this wine and drink. Earth goddess, whose day of worship is  
Thursday, receive this wine and drink. Spirits of our ancestors, receive this  
wine and drink,...<sup>9</sup>

The prelude in this prayer clearly demonstrates the belief in the existence of a supreme being to be followed in descending order by the deities (lesser gods) and

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<sup>3</sup> A. Akrong, 'African Traditional Religion in Western Scholarship' in *An African Philosophy of Religion*, (Unpublished manuscript, 2007), p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Akrong, 'African Traditional Religion,' p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Akrong, 'African Traditional Religion,' p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Akrong, 'African Traditional Religion,' p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Akrong, 'African Traditional Religion,' p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> K. Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought* (Philadelphia, PA.: Temple University Press, 1995), p. 68.

then the ancestors. These are then followed by the human and physical world of natural objects and phenomena.<sup>10</sup> One cannot therefore think about creation independent of a divine dimension because creation is the expression of divine activity and also a window to divinity. This theory of creation sets up the ontological presuppositions that govern the theory of knowledge in much of the African worldview.

African spirituality and worship is based on the assumption that human life is dependent on spiritual power and that humans are capable of relating to, and interacting with, the spiritual world.<sup>11</sup> The African thus maximizes the potentialities of life through ritual processes to continually establish the transforming relationships between humanity and the transcendental dimension. These ritual processes do not lure human beings into what they are not, nor do they cause them to abandon their humanness but rather enhance and increase the potentialities and vitalities of human existence. The ultimate goal is to become an ancestor, the ideal fulfillment of life.<sup>12</sup> However, this is not attained by any form of special superhuman moral or spiritual achievement. This is achieved by the fulfillment of the required demands, duties and obligations of what Akrong calls each station of life in the rites of passage cycle of the life process.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, spiritual growth and moral maturity is based on individuals' fulfillment through the functions and offices that sustain the community at various stations of children, youth, parents and elders. Through this process, the African believes one attains the goal of life's destiny enshrined in our soul by God. The philosophy underlying these rites of passage is the attempt to integrate the natural biological processes of life into the cultural systems at major existential moments. These moments are at birth, puberty, marriage and death. These rites of passages involve all aspects of human will and personality, and growth into maturity involves psycho-social, moral and spiritual through education, training, physical and spiritual processes. The understanding is that,

we are not just born, we are made to conform to roles in our community; we are not just youth, we are made into men and women with specific duties and

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<sup>10</sup> Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, p. 68.

<sup>11</sup> Akrong, *An African Philosophy of Religion*, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> Akrong, *An African Philosophy of Religion*, p. 58.

<sup>13</sup> Akrong, *An African Philosophy of Religion*, p. 58.

obligations; we just do not die, we are transformed to conform to life after death.<sup>14</sup>

Through this the biological life process becomes continuous with the psychosocial and cultural process of transformation. The rituals of rites of passage create the conditions that allow the person to cross from one station in life to another and in the process enabling intergeneration mutation and transformation. There is a tripartite substructure of the rituals of the rites of passage, which Akrong calls the period of separation, transition and incorporation. In Van Carnep's terms these three are called the preliminal, liminal and postliminal stages.<sup>15</sup>

These rites of passage as discussed below are the bedrock of Africa traditional and cultural beliefs. Without understanding their roles one cannot fully appreciate the African traditional and cultural practices associated with God, spirit beings, humanness and the world. Thus, my a focus on these stations of the African's life journey will ground the inculturational approach of Christian leadership within the Gambian context.

## **Birth**

In the African worldview, human life is a process that runs in cycles of generations. The generational cycles of life assume concrete form at birth. This is regarded as a separation from a pre-existent union of the child with its spiritual parents. The moment the child receives its destiny from God it is detached from its spiritual parents and begins its journey by becoming a fetus in the womb. The gestation period is a transformative transition period. During this stage, the child is vulnerable to attack from evil forces that may want to disrupt, disturb or confuse the life and destiny of the child. There is therefore a protective ritual performed during pregnancy for both the child and mother from evil forces. Pregnancy itself is also believed to be a transitional stage in which the mother becomes womb through which transformational life takes place.<sup>16</sup> Gestation marks the end of the unborn child's life with its spiritual parents and at birth its spiritual existence ends.

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<sup>14</sup> Akrong, *An African Philosophy of Religion*, p. 62.

<sup>15</sup> Akrong, *An African Philosophy of Religion*, p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> Akrong, *An African Philosophy of Religion*, p. 63.

The child now enters into the social world of the community. Normally the child is kept indoors for seven days before being officially 'out-doored'. Thus if it lives until the seventh day, it has then come to stay and qualifies for initiation and incorporation into the community. The child is then formally initiated and incorporated into the family, lineage, clan and tribe by being given a name, identity and status as a member of the group. After initiation and incorporation, a childhood status is assumed. At this station, the child is then molded according to the values and ideals of the society. Parents, family and community co-operate to inculcate the moral values of the community into the child, which helps the child to grow into maturity, healthy adolescence and adulthood. The traditional and moral values are passed on to the child through proverbs, stories and riddles. They are also given specific roles in rituals and festivals that they may learn through participation. This participation helps them train their spiritual sensibilities. The civic and public training of children is done by families and communities through participation, observation and instructions. Each family in African society is assigned different public functions such as linguists, drummers, dancers, priests, police, soldiers, rulers etc. Thus, each family teaches the children at an early age their particular civic and public responsibilities.

### **Puberty**

The rites of puberty deal essentially with the separation of the adolescent from the world and status of childhood and the initiation and integration into adulthood. This station has a very strong educational and moral accent including that of sexual morality. This is so because at this level the child has all the biological properties and readiness for procreation but without the necessary moral, social and spiritual preparation required for parenthood. The culture thus controls and contains the natural biological process until they can be exercised within marriage. For example, there is a serious taboo against sexual intercourse before marriage. This is viewed as crossing a boundary that can unleash destructive forces on the community. Virginity is the norm and is celebrated while the opposite attracts public community disgrace. Failing to keep such laws causes one to be severed from their roots, their context of security, their kinships and all those who made them aware of their existence in the



community.<sup>17</sup> The integration and initiation into adult life marks an initiation into a higher social status of duties and responsibilities.

### **Marriage**

Marriage marks the end of preparation for adulthood and the beginning of life as a parent. Here the marriage rite is an extension of the puberty rite to formalize the transition from mere adult life to the vocation and office of parenthood. Marriage is understood as an ordination into the status of parenthood where one is expected to be a biological, moral and spiritual channel through which the cycles of generational life can come to concrete expression in the family lineage, clan and tribe.<sup>18</sup> This vocation and office of parenthood is believed to be held by parents on behalf of the ancestors, the ideal parents, thus a deep level of commitment and seriousness is held with it. For Mbiti, marriage is a religious duty and responsibility of everyone and it forms a focal point where departed, present and coming members meet.<sup>19</sup> Therefore this stage remains a vital stage in African traditional and cultural religion where the norm is for every single individual to be looking forward to be married which carries a high degree of respect in society.

Those who excel over years become elders and represent the visible moral authority of the ancestors. Their status as elders bring them morally and spiritually closer to the ancestors they represent and in many cases they demonstrate a very high level of wisdom that can only be ascribed to the ancestors.

### **Eldership**

Eldership is both a ritual and political office. Eldership in its political dimension is the presupposition of chieftaincy. The chief is an elder 'primus inter paris' who rules at the pleasure of the council of the elders which represent the various clans.<sup>20</sup> The elder demonstrates the duties of the priest, judge, arbiter, leader and as a representative of the ancestors as the custodian of the family. Thus they are people of integrity, generosity, and wisdom, and carry a high sense of respect and influence.

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<sup>17</sup> F. J. Manka, *Janjangbureh: A History of an Island Community 1800 to Present* (Unpublished, 2011), p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Akrong, *An African Philosophy of Religion*, p. 67.

<sup>19</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, p. 144.

<sup>20</sup> Akrong, *An African Philosophy of Religion*, p. 68.

As their area of knowledge and understanding covers both material and spiritual dimensions, it is therefore a privilege and a great honour to be in the presence of an elder within the African worldview. Elders serve as a link between the past and the present while guaranteeing the way of life is extended into the future. This characterizes the responsibility of maintaining the cohesion of the community, maintaining peace, correcting imbalances, revitalizing the community and at the same time building the moral fiber of the community's youth and generation to come.<sup>21</sup>

The ritual of eldership is similar to that of enstooling a chief. The elder is installed to lead, guide and protect the family, exercising a priest-king function of the African chief. At this stage, the transition towards ancestorhood begins in a spiritual and social sense. The life journey of the rites of passage thus ends here with eldership, the transition station to the threshold of ancestorhood.

## **Death**

In the African worldview, life and death are qualities of the human existence. Therefore death is not a privation of life that needs an eternal life to overcome it nor is it the end of life. Rather life is a cycle of generations that comes from God through the ancestry of the individual. Human life is the concrete form of an ever-existing life. Thus death for the African is just another transitional stage from eldership to ancestorhood. Where the transformation element is absent the death ritual is dominated by the idea of separation and transition into the world of the departed. The ritual is to prepare the dead person for life in the land of the departed. The separation ceremony is the central point of the death ritual and must be done properly lest the departed person is left in a dangerous and incomplete transition state where he or she may become a dangerous spirit that may come back and torment or frighten the living.<sup>22</sup> Those who are not buried correctly permanently live in the transition state of disincarnate wandering spirits with no home, name and identity. Being in this state means one is outside the family and also outside the cycles of generational life through which one can come back to life. The transition and incorporation into the land of the departed ensures one being part of the family

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<sup>21</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, pp. 68-69, 184, 201, 206.

<sup>22</sup> Akrong, *An African Philosophy of Religion*, p. 69.

again. The death ritual thus makes it possible for the deceased to be separated from this life and incorporated and initiated into the land of the departed. It also serves as healing for those whose lives have been disrupted by death. Amongst the Akans of Ghana, the Akus, and many other tribes of The Gambia, there is a further death ritual performed forty days after the funeral. This is believed to mark the final point of separation between leaving the relatives and initiation into the land of the 'living-dead'. It is believed that before the fortieth day ritual/charity, the deceased person still lives with his or her relatives in the house or roams.

It is clear that much about African traditional and cultural belief is embedded in its stations and rites of passage. These are the educational opportunities for forming the generations into the belief of the community, thus must likewise be effective as a Christian educational opportunity for inculturational ministry.

The Gambia is an African country with African traditional and cultural beliefs and practices. Its people are a variety of major and minor ethnics groups with various African traditional and cultural religious practices. The rites of passages unite the groups and forms the common denominator through which the inculturation of the gospel and the practice of ministry can be best explored. Since this research is meant for Methodist Church The Gambia and its practices of ministry in The Gambia for the purpose of Church Leadership, the next sections will be a brief look at the history of The Gambia and its ethnic groups.

### **A General History of The Gambia**

The Gambia is situated at 13.47 North→13.04 North, 16.49 West→13.47 West and is the smallest country on the continent of Africa with a total land area of only 11,295km sq. It is almost entirely landlocked by Senegal, except for its Atlantic Ocean coastline.<sup>23</sup> The Gambia has 5 regions namely; Western, North Bank, Lower River, Central River and Upper River. The capital is Banjul, the population is 1.6 million, and its official language is English with two major religions; Islam (90%)

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<sup>23</sup> A. Robinson, *The Gambia Guide Book* (London: Affording Gambia VIP, 2008), p. 33.

and Christianity (9%) and others (1%).<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, many Muslims and Christians still practice African traditional religion.

Written sources of the history of The Gambia before the 15<sup>th</sup> century are limited, apart from accounts of Arab explorers, geographers and Islamic scholars who travelled in the Western Sudan from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards. One non-Arabic written source, which mentions the river Gambia dates around 500 BC, is a report of a Carthaginian soldier commissioned to explore the West Coast of Africa. There is, however, no indication Hanno went ashore in The Gambia.<sup>25</sup> Oral history does show the settled presence of various migrated ethnic groups to The Gambia, well before the arrival of the 15<sup>th</sup> century European explorers.

The first Europeans settlers in the Gambia were the Portuguese, led by Alviso Cadamosto in 1455. They brought new crops such as cotton and groundnuts that still play a major part in the agricultural system today.<sup>26</sup> They met the Wolof Empire firmly established in the north at a time when Islam had already begun spreading among the Wolof.<sup>27</sup> The mission of the Portuguese was to combat the threat Islam posed to Europe, to spread Christianity and trade. Diomo Gomes was initially sent to seek Prester John; the Christian King who could serve as an ally against the Muslim forces of North Africa. He did not find Prester John but had a successful visit to the Muslim chief of Niumi. During the visit, religion surfaced in their discussion and Gomes answered all the Chief's questions about Christianity satisfactorily, leaving a challenge to the Chief and his Muslim advisers. Consequently, the chief expelled all his Muslim counselors from his court and requested baptism.<sup>28</sup> This was a clear opportunity for the evangelization of many. However, while there was successful monopolizing of trade in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there was little to show for the evangelical efforts.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.accessgambia.com/information/country-facts.html> accessed on 9 July 2012.

<sup>25</sup> A. Hughes and H. A. Gailey, *Historical Dictionary of The Gambia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1999), p. 89.

<sup>26</sup> Robinson, *The Gambia*, p. 87.

<sup>27</sup> F. Mahoney, *Stories of the Senegambia* (Kanifing: BPMRU, 1995), p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> M. Frederiks, *We have Toiled all Night, Christianity in The Gambia 1456- 2000* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2003), p. 1.

The first British traders in The Gambia came in 1587, eventually controlling St. Andrew's Island in 1661. It was renamed James Island after the Duke of York, later King James II, a name it has retained to this day. Trading companies were set up such as the Companies of Merchant Trading in West Africa, The Royal Adventurers and the Royal African Company and controlled the area. By the mid-seventeenth century, the slave trade had over-shadowed all other trade.

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century through to the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Senegambia region was one of the four main slave trade centers in West Africa. There were at least 3000 people taken annually from The Gambia region into slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> When the British parliament abolished slavery in 1807,<sup>30</sup> this meant that slavery was to stop in all British territories of West Africa. This however, was not the case. In 1816, a treaty was signed by Captain Alexander Grant, which authorized the Royal African Corps to station a garrison on the island of St. Mary's.<sup>31</sup> This, with another garrison in Bathurst, was to intercept slavery and its influence in The Gambia.

The road to independence was gradual and non-violent. A political awakening after World War II promoted increasing participation of Gambians in national politics. Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra-Leone took the lead to independence from Britain. In 18<sup>th</sup> February 1965, The Gambia became an independent state. After a second referendum 5 years later, on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1970, Sir Dawda K. Jawara became the first executive President of The Gambia as a Republic.<sup>32</sup> After 30 years of independence, a group of junior army officers seized power in a brief and bloodless coup led by Lt. Yahya A. J. J. Yammeh on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1994.<sup>33</sup> In September 1996 there was democratic elections for parliamentary and presidential elections in January 1997. The second Republic was inaugurated and Jammeh was announced as the head of a new party called APRC (Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction). The APRC received more than 70% of the votes and Jammeh was thus elected

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<sup>29</sup> A. Meagher, *Historic Sites of The Gambia: An Official Guide to the Monuments and Sites of The Gambia* (Banjul: NCAC, 1998), p. 47.

<sup>30</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 91.

<sup>31</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 92.

<sup>32</sup> A. Hughes and H.A. Gailey, *Historical Dictionary of The Gambia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1999), p 16-17.

<sup>33</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 109.

president.<sup>34</sup> Since then, the government has experience many changes with increasing greater number of women in different leadership positions including Mrs. Isatou Njie-Saidy who is currently the Vice-President and Yahya Jammeh the President.

### **A Brief Overview of the Ethnic Groups in The Gambia and their religions**

The word 'ethnic' has often been used in the past to refer to a certain group of common descent, based on blood relationship, common past, language and traditional cultural values.<sup>35</sup> Wijsen however states that ethnicity can also be an identification process without necessarily the sharing of a common ancestor.<sup>36</sup> This is true for the *Krio* which is discussed below and also among the Mulatto who are of mixed African and European descent. The main ethnic groups in The Gambia will be considered to give us a general idea of the major cultural representations in The Gambia among whom the Methodist Church lives and is called to witness. These ethnic groups include: the Wolof, Fula, Jola, Serer, Mandinka, Serahuli and Krio.

#### **Wolof**

This group of people was traditionally found in Saloum, north of Niani and in Upper Niumi, Baddibu and Jokadu.<sup>37</sup> More recently however, the Wolof are found all over the Gambia especially in Banjul. This has contributed to their language being the *lingua franca* of The Gambia. It is further argued that it was because it was the language of commerce and communication in the trading centers. Their ancestors are believed to have migrated from the Sahara desert area in search of better habitation and agriculture.<sup>38</sup> Gailey offers a different opinion that the ancestors of the Wolof were of Libyan or Yemeni descent and they gradually conquered the Niger valley in the seventh century and later moved westwards towards the Senegambia where they

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<sup>34</sup> A. Hughes and H.A. Gailey, *Historical Dictionary of The Gambia*, p. 22.

<sup>35</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> F. Wijsen, *I Am Just A Sukuma: Globalization and Identity Construction in Northwest Tanzania* (Amersterdam: Rodopi, 2002), p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> P. Sonko-Godwin, *Ethnic Groups of The Senegambia Region A brief History* (Banjul: Sunrise Publishers Ltd., 2003), p. 19.

<sup>38</sup> Sonko-Godwin, *Ethnic Groups of The Senegambia Region*, p. 19.

settled.<sup>39</sup> In their settlements, they lived independently of each other but governed by a chief with the title Laman.<sup>40</sup>

With traditions that traced their ancestry to the Almoravids, Islam was at the very cradle of the Wolof Empire, however, Frederiks argues that the Islamization of the Wolof was a gradual process, which was completed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>41</sup> Diop submits that the first encounter with Islam by the Wolof was in the 11<sup>th</sup> century when the inhabitants of the neighboring states of Tekrur became Muslims and propagated Islam to their neighbors.<sup>42</sup> It is however stated that even though the Wolof became Muslims they continued to practice their traditional religion until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Muslim Brotherhood through their jihads made a change.<sup>43</sup> Ma Ba Diakhou, a Tijani jihadist, is known to have established an Islamic state in Baddibu in The Gambia from 1861-1867, a decisive move to the islamization of Wolof. He reigned for a short period yet was very influential and resisted colonial powers.<sup>44</sup> There were some Christian Wolof in The Gambia through contact with the Portuguese.<sup>45</sup> Some of these Christian Wolof slaves were emancipated by the Methodist Church and employed as church workers. Among them were John Cupidon, Pierre Sallah, William Jouv and Amadi Gum. The Methodists therefore had significant work with the Wolof, which included preparations of teaching materials and translation of religious texts by Hannah Kilham in the 1820s and the compilation of a Wolof dictionary of about 2000 words in 1829, by Rev'd Richard Marshall. Services in the Methodist Church during the 19<sup>th</sup> century were conducted in both English and Wolof with specialized translators like James Fieldhouse (1876-1879) and Robert Dixon (1880-1882 and 1903-1909). Fieldhouse translated parts of the Book of Common Prayer into Wolof and composed a Wolof Liturgy while Dixon translated the gospels of Matthew and John, the Wesleyan Catechism, compiled a Wolof primer for primary schools and Wolof hymnbook.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately today, none of these works of earlier missionaries still exist. In spite of these innovations,

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<sup>39</sup> H. A. Gailey, *A History of The Gambia* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> D. P. Gamble, *The Wolof of The Senegambia* (London: International African Institute, 1957), p. 16.

<sup>41</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 43.

<sup>42</sup> A. Diop, *La Societe Wolof: Tradition Et Changement: Les Systems D' Inegalite Et De Dominion* (Paris: Karthala, 1981), p. 213.

<sup>43</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 44.

<sup>44</sup> Diop, *La Societe Wolof*, pp. 233-234.

<sup>45</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 46.

<sup>46</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 47.

the Wolof language remained a second language in the Methodist Church while the Krio community dominated. In this light, when the Holy Ghost Fathers of the Roman Catholic Church arrived in Banjul, they attracted many Wolof Methodists over to the Roman Catholic Church with the move of making the Wolof language the Roman Catholic liturgical *lingua franca*,<sup>47</sup> a practice that still continues.

It is vital to note that Islam succeeded because of its accommodative nature to exist alongside African traditional religious practices of the Wolof and also with the advantage that came along with an established state by jihadists. Christianity must find a more accommodative approach to existing with African traditional religious leadership and practice, which would create the atmosphere for inculcation.

### **Fula**

The Fula are widely dispersed in West Africa.<sup>48</sup> Their light skin, non-negroid features and their straight hair and noses raises speculation regarding their origin.<sup>49</sup> In Sonko-Godwin, there is the reference to Semitic descent,<sup>50</sup> others a relationship to the Berbers or Tuarey,<sup>51</sup> yet others say they were from the Hyksos, Romans or Indians.<sup>52</sup> The Semitic origin remained the most popular and it is likely that the ancestors of the Fula migrated from outside the African continent, as their own oral history suggests they were of white descent.<sup>53</sup>

The Fula are a nomadic people. They continually migrated, spreading and establishing states at different places as they moved with their cattle in search of better pastures. As they migrated they would settle in the land of the Mandinka and Wolof with the agreement to pay certain taxes to the rulers, which included looking after their cattle. They never built mud huts like the Mandinka or Wolof but instead built circular cane huts with the use of grass, corn or coos sticks.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> W. Cleary, *Reaping A Rich Harvest: A History of The Catholic Church in The Gambia* (Kanifing: New Type Press, 1990), p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> Sonko-Godwin, *Ethnic Groups in The Senegambia*, p. 42.

<sup>49</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 36.

<sup>50</sup> Sonko-Godwin, *Ethnic Groups in The Senegambia*, p. 42.

<sup>51</sup> Gailey, *A History of The Gambia*, p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> S. U. Balagun, 'The Fulani in Arabic sources', *Research Bulletin*, Centre of Arabic Documentation, Institute of Ibadan, Vol. 14-17 (1983-87), p. 88.

<sup>53</sup> Sonko-Godwin, *Ethnic Groups in The Senegambia*, p. 42.

<sup>54</sup> Sonko-Godwin, *Ethnic Groups in The Senegambia*, p. 43.



The Fula people are believed to be among the earliest to convert to Islam from sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>55</sup> Between 1000-1600 AD the majority of the Fula became Muslims<sup>56</sup> and a major force that enhanced the course of Islam in West Africa as they continually migrated carrying their religion everywhere they went. In the midst of these were those who also continued practicing traditional religion.

For a nomadic people, migrating Islamic scholars and marabouts were the best attempts of keeping their commitment to Islam and spreading it along the way. The Methodist Church The Gambia has a very important example here bringing into consideration the use of 'traveling nomadic evangelists' for such a people group.

### **Jola**

The oldest settlers in The Gambia are the Jolas although very little is known about them. It is considered that they did not have *griots*<sup>57</sup> in their traditions handing down the history of their ancestors from one generation to the next. Nevertheless, they did have musicians and entertainers who delved into their past however the stories of such occasions proved to be fragmentary.<sup>58</sup> They originated from the South East of Africa possibly Zimbabwe. About the second millennium, they moved via Tanzania to Egypt, then across the Sahara and the Niger to settle ultimately in the Senegambia, first at the coast, then later forced more inland by the Mandinka.<sup>59</sup> This same source associate the Jola with the famous stone circles in the Central River Region of The Gambia and parts of Senegal presuming that with traditions familiar to the megalithic traditions of Old Zimbabwe and Egypt, they had the techniques and were responsible for erecting the stones circles.<sup>60</sup> Another tradition claims the Jola originated from Guinea-Bissau, which confirms the linguistic similarities between the Jola language and that of the coastal people of Guinea-Bissau and both excel in traditional wet rice culture. It is believed that they migrated in search for more rice fields northwards crossing the San Domingo River and settled close by the River

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<sup>55</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 38

<sup>56</sup> P. B. Clarke, *West Africa and Islam: A Study of Religious Development from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), p. 35.

<sup>57</sup> These are praise-singers (Mandinka), the *finjo* griot were Islamic praise-singers, while the Jola griots were general praise-singers.

<sup>58</sup> Sonko-Godwin, *Ethnic Group of the Senegambia*, p. 68.

<sup>59</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 28.

<sup>60</sup> Meagher, *Historic Sites of The Gambia*, p. 18.

Gambia and intermingling with the original residence of Bagnum and Conjagi, thus, forming the Jola ethnic group. The Jola however engaged in different kinds of occupations including fishing, tapping palm wine, processing palm oil, harvesting oysters, cockles and clams. They had a reputation to be ferocious and unfriendly to strangers.<sup>61</sup>

Jola are known to adhere to their traditional religion in spite of contacts with outsiders. Those who converted to either Christianity or Islam retained the distinct elements of their Jola traditional religion and continued to perform rites at the shrines. The traditional religion of the Jola is called Awasane literally meaning ‘one who performs rituals’. Awasane deals with the worship of the high God Emit or Emitai who created the Jola people.<sup>62</sup> The Kumpo and the Kankoran Masquerades are also part of the Jola tradition. These serve to maintain the social order and to combat witchcraft. They are on duties during initiations or quarrels and will be covered from head to feet with grass or bark masks and mete out discipline in the villages where required. The Jola’s encounter with Christianity goes back to the Portuguese period, when Cacheu became the seat of the archdeaconry of the diocese of Santiago, Cape Verde. Baum suggests that the crucifixes and saint’s medals – like the ‘greegrees’ (amulets) made by marabouts, were soon also adopted by the Jola community to complement their own amulets.<sup>63</sup> There was outreach at Marrakissa among the Jola clan of the Karoninka by the Methodist Church in the 1960s. There they met the Manjago and Karoninka and a number of them were converted to Christianity.

Considering the deep involvement of the Jola people in African traditional practices, one would suggest that the significance of inculturation is important for the Methodist Church The Gambia in its attempt to make the gospel and the practice of ministry relevant.

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<sup>61</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>62</sup> R. M. Baum, ‘The Emergence of the Diola Christianity’, in *Africa* 60/3 (1990), p. 370 and 395.

<sup>63</sup> R. M. Baum, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Pre-Colonial Senegambia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 153.

## **Serer**

The Serer are believed to be closely related to the Wolof. They reside mainly in Niumi. While some consider they hail from Kaabu and eventually settled in Sine-Saloum, others understand they were originally from Futa Toro area but were driven south, first by the Tokolar, and then later by the Wolof until they settled in the Sine-Saloum around the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>64</sup> They were initially part of the Wolof Empire until they became independent, and maintained this until the French colonization of the area in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>65</sup> Their society is highly hierarchical and organized according to caste while age-groups function as sub-divisions within the castes. They have a mixed tradition of cattle holding, and agriculture, growing millet and groundnuts and fishing.<sup>66</sup>

The Serer had very strong resistance to Islam and foreign influence, holding on to traditional religion. It is said that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century jihads the Serer would rather be martyred or commit suicide rather than convert to Islam.<sup>67</sup> However, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Serer gradually began to convert to Islam and by the end of the colonial era about 50% had become Muslims.<sup>68</sup> The Serer worship spirits who are said to live in small houses built at the bottom of the cotton trees and regular sacrifices of milk and millet are made to them. In addition to this is the veneration of their ancestors who were called upon at certain rain ceremonies. They had quite powerful practices, which were feared by many. The Methodist Church had a parish in the Serer area of Niumi from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards but the congregation was mainly liberated Africans and soldiers of the West Indian regiment. Attempts were made to evangelize the Serer were largely unsuccessful.

## **Mandinka**

The Mandinka (also known as Mandingo/Malinke) of The Gambia are believed to be from Kangaba, a state of the ancient Empire of Mali. By the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century most of the Kingdoms along the river Gambia with the exception of the Foni, were under the Mandinka control. The Mandinka form about 40% of the Gambian

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<sup>64</sup> D. Faal, *A History of The Gambia AD 1000-1965* (Latrikunda: Print Promotions Ltd, 1997), p.14.

<sup>65</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 50.

<sup>66</sup> D. P. Gamble, 'A Note on the Serer' in *The Wolof of Senegambia* (London: International African Institute, 1957), p. 101.

<sup>67</sup> Gamble, 'A Note on the Serer,' p. 102.

<sup>68</sup> Clarke, *West Africa and Islam*, p. 202.

population.<sup>69</sup> The Mandinka society is organized in caste structure also. Foday Manka submits that the Mandinka is famously associated with the Kankurang masquerade tradition as far back as in ancient Mali Empire. The word Kankurang is a combination of the Mandinka words 'Kango' and 'Kurango' which mean 'voice' and 'enforce' respectively. Kankurang masquerade was the empower voice that strictly enforced rules and decisions made by senior members of the Mandinka traditional society. In the Mandinka's worldview, the Kankurang is both judicial and spiritual in function. The Mandinka tradition is also linked to the initiation of young people and teaching them the rules of the community, medicinal plants, hunting techniques, songs and proverbs. This is largely done within the aspect of a ritual retreat in the forest called the Bush school where the Kankurang plays a significant role as a protective spirit which disciplines and protects young initiates from the spell of witch-craft and evil spirits.<sup>70</sup>

The distinction between the traditional religion and the Islamic religious practices among the Mandinka has been a difficult one to make. The adherents to traditional religion were called the 'Soninke' and the Muslims were called 'Marabouts'.<sup>71</sup> It is however observed that the Mandinka keep both the Islamic religion and their traditional religion side by side with increasing influences from the Islamic aspects. Muslim clerics gradually replaced the smiths in the circumcision ceremonies.<sup>72</sup> The *fino griots* who sing religious hymns and recite lists of people in the Qur'an also gradually, both in number and respect, surpassed the *joka* who were the more general praise-singers.<sup>73</sup> The traditional religion of the Mandinka involved the worshipping of objects called the 'jalang' which varies from stones, to trees, man-made instruments like spears, shaped rocks, animals like the crocodile etc. These for the Mandinka were life-giving forces, which could be encapsulated at certain places and be influenced by those who had 'captured' it. Most of the sites, which the Mandinka used, are still very much active today.<sup>74</sup> The Jalang worship was both individualistic

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<sup>69</sup> Cited in Frederiks, *We have toiled*, p. 54, URL <http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/countries/Gamb.html>. Date: 9 Aug 2001.

<sup>70</sup> Manka, *Janjanbureh: A History of An Island Community 1800- to present*, p. 8.

<sup>71</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 55.

<sup>72</sup> Cited in Frederiks, 'We have Toiled', p. 55, F. Renner, *Intergroup Relations and British Imperialism in Combo: 1850-1902*, PhD Thesis at the University of Ibadan, (1982), p. 31.

<sup>73</sup> M. Schaffer, C. Cooper, *Mandinko: The Ethnography of A West African Holy Land* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1980), pp. 66-67.

<sup>74</sup> Meagher, *Historic Sites of The Gambia*, p. 29.

(individual's welfare) and communal (general community welfare) in nature. The Jalong also serves as oracle in the Mandinka practices of divination. Mandinka traditional religion (Soninkeya) also had the practice of passing on moral values, usually through the elders and the 'jeliba' through tales, stories and proverbs. This is done informally during the evening 'burn fires' / around the fireside, while the more formal instructions were reserved for the bush school. Oral tradition mentions the names of the Janneh, Darbo and Turay families as Muslims when they arrived in the Senegambia. Initially, the Mandinka Muslims were looked at with suspicion and lived in separate villages like the Fodekundas or Morikundas and they were governed by the Islamic calendar. The Islamic way of life was evident in the abstinence from eating pork and from drinking alcohol. Gradually their influence spread and many converted to Islam especially after the Muslims won the war against the Soninke rulers.<sup>75</sup> It is recorded that the Methodist missionaries never had any hopes in converting the Mandinka as they were seen as '...completely wrapped up in the absurdities of the Mahomedanism.'<sup>76</sup> There are very few Mandinka Christians in The Gambia; one exception though is the widely known Lamin Sanneh of Yale University.<sup>77</sup>

The close and inseparable link between traditional religion and Islamic religious practices remained a purpose for keeping the Mandinka as an Islamic group. This therefore reinforces the fact that for a better appreciated ministry among such people, the Methodist Church The Gambia has to consciously attempt the inculturation of the gospel and ministry with the traditional religion which remains the common denominator.

### **Serahuli**

There are uncertainties with regards to the origin of the Serahuli/ Soninke. There are traces that link them back to the Ghana Empire as the descendants of the founders of that great Empire. They traditionally are long-distance traders and the founders of the major trading towns of Walata and Jenneh, which played an important role

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<sup>75</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 57.

<sup>76</sup> Cited in Frederiks, 'We have Toiled', p. 57, Journal of William Fox, entry February 23 1936, Box 293 H2709 MF. 839.

<sup>77</sup> The story of Sanneh's conversion is related in L. Sanneh, 'Muhammed, Prophet of God, and Jesus Christ, Image of God: a personal testimony', in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 8/4 (1984), pp.169-174. Also see website: <http://divinity.yale.edu/sanneh>.

during the trans-Sahara trade. They also intermarried with the Mandinka, forming a network of traders and Muslim clerics in West Africa among whom the Jakhanke are recognized.

Most Serahuli are Muslim and they act as propagators of the Islamic faith spreading the religion as they trade in West Africa. In The Gambia the Serahuli have a reputation of being staunch Muslims and form a closed community. Not much missionary effort among them is recorded. Many Serahuli are poor farmers<sup>78</sup> but some are comparatively rich due to diamond trading in places like Sierra Leone before settling in The Gambia. Today they are one of the larger minority groups in The Gambia. They are of a patriarchal nature with each man having up to four wives. They have a caste system, are indifferent to Christianity, and celebrate Islamic festivals with a heavy animistic tone with the use of amulets, charms and spells.

### **Krio**

The Krios are not an ethnic group in the strict sense, but shared a common past, language, and today in The Gambia, they are a distinct group of people with a common history related to the slave trade. They have been affiliated to the Christian Religion with most being Anglicans or Methodists.<sup>79</sup> There is however a small number of krios called 'Aku Marabouts' in The Gambia who formed a distinct group with the liberated Africans. These were of Yoruba descent who became Muslims during the Fulani jihad in 1804.<sup>80</sup>

By 1807 when Britain officially abolished the slave trade and started hunting slave ships on the coast of West Africa, the slaves on any captured ships were put ashore and declared free in Freetown. With the help of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), there was a so-called 'Parish scheme'. In accordance with this plan Liberated Africans were settled in villages around Freetown and were supervised educationally, spiritually and administratively by the CMS missionaries. Through this exposure to western culture and education, many converted to Christianity. Most of the Settlers however were already Christians (many of them Baptists) on arrival in

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<sup>78</sup> Gailey, *A History of The Gambia*, p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 62.

<sup>80</sup> A.J.G. Wyse, *The Krio of Sierra Leone: An Interpretative History*, International Library of Sierra Leone Studies II, W. D. (Freetown: Okrafo-Smart & Company, 1987), p. 9.

Freetown and had brought their pastors along.<sup>81</sup> The intermarrying and intermingling between the Settlers and the liberated Africans yielded descendants with a new identity, which had come to stay and be known as the Krio. As their numbers increased in Sierra Leone there was the difficulty of provision thus there was the need for redirection and relocation. Thus some were sent to Fernando Po, Bathurst and Georgetown. By 1821, liberated Africans or Krios were in Bathurst, when the Methodist missionaries Rev'd John Morgan and Rev'd John Baker arrived. There was another major influx of liberated Africans between 1831 and 1838 in The Gambia, at a request of Governor G. Rendall.<sup>82</sup>

There are other minor groups such as the Manjago, Bambara, the Mankaing, the Basari, the Balanta, the Mansuanka (Kunante) and the Conjagis. Most of these originated from Guinea-Bissau and settled in The Gambia in the 1960s during a bloody guerrilla war against the Portuguese colonialist.<sup>83</sup> There are other minor groups like the Lebanese, the Mauritians and the some Europeans who have made The Gambia their home.

In the light of all the above mention ethnic groups, it is vital to note the essential position and role that African traditional and cultural religion holds in the livelihood of such people and how due to both the dominant and accommodative nature of Islam the majority accepted Islam rather than Christianity. The rites of passages form the common denominator across all the ethnic groups in The Gambia, thus, remains the core unifying practice that brings the worldview together and with which inculturation of the gospel and practical ministry can be best attempted. Inculturation of the gospel and practice of ministry with the rites of passages as a practice of ministry will form a grounds for seeking the appropriate approaches to nurturing leadership for the Methodist Church The Gambia.

### **A Brief History of Islam in The Gambia**

The Gambia is largely a Muslim dominated country even though it is constitutionally a secular state. This however has not meant that the relationship between the

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<sup>81</sup> L. Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 1983) p. 58.

<sup>82</sup> J. M. Gray, *A History of The Gambia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 363-364.

<sup>83</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 70.

Christian minority and Muslim majority are strained. Both religions behaved accordingly as guests in their initial arrival and slowly adapted to living as cohabitants with African Traditional Religion. Both have through the years tried to contextualize and accommodate the African Traditional Religion even though arguably the Islamic religion is a better reflection of contextualization. This is simply put, 'In Africa, Islam had no more color than water; and it is exactly that which explains its success; it adapts to the shades of the territory and the stones.'<sup>84</sup>

The brand of Islam that arrived in The Gambia is largely a receptive type. According to Sanneh, 'the Senegambia Islam was of a predominantly peaceful and accommodative strand, which adapted to its environment by specializing in divination and the production of amulets.'<sup>85</sup> In addition to this was Islam's adaptation to matrilineal cultures, which showed their flexibility and their contextualization of West African Islam.<sup>86</sup> The traditional believers turned to the clerics for amulets, education and their literacy skills while the clerics had a form of income to guarantee their livelihood and at the same time gain access in the community creating the opportunity for teaching Islam.<sup>87</sup> This benefit was vital as the traditional worldview of the indigenes began to see their safety in the arms of these Islamic brothers through their provision of amulets, to name but one. Islam became attractive to the people of Senegal and The Gambia with War-Dyabe of Takrur<sup>88</sup> as among the first rulers in West Africa to convert to Islam. With this success came a reorganizing of Takrur according to Islamic principles who soon began to send Islamic missionaries to other ethnic groups.

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<sup>84</sup> H.J. Fisher, 'Conversion Reconsidered: Aspects of Religious Conversion in Black Africa', Africa, 43 (1973), p. 30.

<sup>85</sup> L. Sanneh, *The Jahanke Muslims Cleric: A Religious and Historical Study of Islam in Senegambia* (New York/London: Lanham, 1989), pp. 22-24.

<sup>86</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 157.

<sup>87</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 114.

<sup>88</sup> By the 11<sup>th</sup> century. <http://archaeology.about.com/od/tterms/g/takrur.htm> The Takrur Empire was an early Iron Age kingdom of West Africa, including much of Ghana and Senegal and the Western Sahara desert. Described by the historian al-Bakri, the trade ports of Takrur were located on the Senegal River in the 10th through 13th centuries AD. They were extremely important to the trade of goods in and out of Africa, including salt and gold. Archaeologists Susan Keech McIntosh and Roderick McIntosh have conducted excavations at the Takrur Empire sites of Cubalel and Sincu Baru.



The Dyula<sup>89</sup> were a group of traders who after contact with the Berbers, became Muslims and also contributed largely to spreading Islam in Senegambia. Not all the Dyula were missionaries but were accompanied by a Muslim religious guide or cleric everywhere they went with their trade. Fula Jihadists of the Torodbe militant clerical tradition were responsible for establishing Muslim villages in Senegambia.<sup>90</sup> Other such Fula Jihadists<sup>91</sup> had attached themselves to the pastoral Fula people accompanying their nomadic wanderings as they gradually expanded Islam throughout not only Senegal and The Gambia but also the most of West Africa.<sup>92</sup>

While this was active, there were also the Jakhanke<sup>93</sup> who had a more peaceful approach of propagating Islam by adapting to their environments, contextualizing with the provision of Divination, amulets and powerful potions. Another reason for the success of Islam was the early establishment of Islamic centers for learning on the North Bank of The Gambia River.

The Marabouts<sup>94</sup> as called by the Portuguese explorers were deeply involved in the community. Their involvement brought Islamic influence, providing the assurance of safety and protection even for the animals purchase by the kings or very important people in the community. We see that;

Muslims were extremely tolerant of the African way of life, and were not regarded as aliens. Their forbearance was in distinct contrast to the attitude of some Catholic Priests, who went about breaking ancestral lares, and demanding the limitation of the number of wives of the polygamous people they were trying to convert. On a fundamental issue such as initiation and circumcision, a marabout could become the individual in charge of the ceremony. This involvement was possible because African Muslims still shared most of the basic conceptions of their society, especially with regards to metaphysical force.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Muslim traders who spread Islam through West Africa.

<sup>90</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 123.

<sup>91</sup> Someone pursuing a Jihad (holy war) in Islam.

<sup>92</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 123.

<sup>93</sup> These were traders as well as clerics and owned large numbers of slaves to provide them with a basic income through agriculture and weaving.

<sup>94</sup> Al-Murabitun: those who live in castles; a combination of a traditional healer and a Muslim cleric.

<sup>95</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 127.

The Soninke-Marabout wars had also profound impact on The Gambia. The pressure of their upheaval and wars enhanced colonial imperialism and led to the creation of The Gambia Protectorate in 1902. By the end of the wars almost all the Soninkes converted to Islam as a result of the jihads. This spread continued in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the conversion of the Serer and Jola ethnic groups to Islam from 1920s to 1950s which were attributed to the Tijani and Murids brotherhoods and the Qur'anic schools of the Jakhanke.<sup>96</sup>

In the words of Martha Frederiks;

...while there are tendencies towards a more fundamentalist type of Islam, the accommodative type of West African Islam continues as well. Though both in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries there have been attempts to purify Islam of its accommodative aspects, the traditional 'Islam noir' with the marabout rather than the Imam as crucial figure, persists. ...this accommodative type of Islam, among others, with its openness towards Christianity and the traditional religions, which has guaranteed the centuries of peaceful coexistence of Christians, Muslims and traditional believers in the Senegambia valley.<sup>97</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most Gambians were either Muslims or Christians with close interrelations, thus promoting peaceful co-existence. Nevertheless, there is always the tendency for this harmony to be endangered. On the Christian side exclusivist Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches tend to have an aggressive attitude towards Muslims. Many Islamic scholars who have studied in North Africa and the Middle East return to The Gambia with an exclusivist view and the dream of an Islamic state in The Gambia.

The above chapter has reflected on understanding African traditional and cultural religion, the various Gambian ethnic groups and Islam in The Gambia. The next chapter will reflect on the gospel and inculturation. It will also look at the various attempted inculturational models in The Gambia, and offer a proposed model.

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<sup>96</sup> P. B. Clarke, *West Africa and Islam*, p. 202.

<sup>97</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 158.

## Chapter Two

# The Gospel and Inculturation as an enhancer of Indigenous Ministry

### Towards A Definition of The Gospel

Gospel is central to this research. In Greek, gospel refers to a public announcement of glad tidings, such as the news of a birth in a royal family, a victory in war, or a treaty of peace.<sup>98</sup> Gospel was also used to represent the early English ‘God-spel’, a story about God.<sup>99</sup> This is now not generally used as such but as ‘good-spel’, which means good tidings. It is also used to translate the Greek word *evangelion*, which originally meant the reward for bringing good news, and later the good news itself. Jesus spoke about himself as a carrier of this good tidings (Luke 4:18-21).

Mark 1:14-15 states ‘After John was put in prison; Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” This was directly relational, relevant and the ultimate answer to the apocalyptic hopes of the people. This was the gospel of the Kingdom of God by Jesus. The mystery surrounding this was that the gospel and the bearer of the gospel are one, embodied, enshrined and incarnated in Jesus; Jesus himself as Immanuel (God with us) and all its implications for the individual and the community at large. Loosley puts the reaction of primary hearers as thus,

Have you heard the good news announced by the new prophet? He claims that by His coming God Himself has broken through into human history: that God came at last, and we shall surely see wonderful things happening.<sup>100</sup>

It was no longer a dream to be fulfilled in the future. It was a present reality, a realized eschatology.

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<sup>98</sup> H. W. Stone & J. O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 2006), p. 72.

<sup>99</sup> E. G. Loosley, *The Gospel, the Gospels and the Evangelists* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1962), p. 11.

<sup>100</sup> Loosley, *The Gospel.*, p. 13.

The meaning of the gospel is derived from its relationship to the notion of the law and rightly interpreted by Jesus. This is seen in Matthew while Paul conveys a view that the gospel fulfills the law and at the same time is the end of the law. The inseparable link between the gospel and the law remains the basis of the Christian identity in relation to its Jewish heritage. Furthermore, the reformation era providing a period of evaluating the content and meaning of the gospel. Luther argued that the Christian message of God is of both the law and the gospel on either sides of the same message. Thus, the gospel is meaningless without the law while the law is incomplete without the gospel. For the law sets forth what God commands humans to be and do; gospel sets forth what God promises to be and do for those who, having failed to observe the commands perfectly, stand condemned by the law.<sup>101</sup>

Moreover, Daniel Montgomery and Mike Cosper suggest a definition called the whole gospel. They speak of the gospel in three aspects: kingdom, cross and grace:

The gospel of the kingdom is the good news that life with God under the rule of God is available to all who would turn from their rebellion and trust in King Jesus. The gospel of the cross is the good news that through faith in Jesus' perfect life, death for our sins and victorious resurrection from the dead, we are justified and reconciled to God. The gospel of grace is the good news of God's wonderful acceptance of us not because we have earned it or deserve it but because he gives it to us freely at Christ's expense.<sup>102</sup>

They then encourage the embracing and proclaiming of the 'whole' gospel saying:

The great temptation is to allow one aspect to overshadow or compete with the others... The case we're making is that the gospel is not simply a kingdom message or a cross message or a grace message – it's all three. Our tendency, for a variety of reasons, is to splinter the message, to exalt one aspect over the others, and to diminish the scope and impact of the others. By doing this, it is we who suffer, missing out on the totality of the message of the gospel.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Stone & Duke, *How to Think*, p. 74.

<sup>102</sup> D. Montgomery and M. Cosper, *Faithmapping: A Gospel Atlas for Your Spiritual Journey* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2013), pp. 43, 90.

<sup>103</sup> Montgomery and Cosper, *Faithmapping*, p. 90.

Newbigin emphasized the definition of the gospel not as a religious experience but a factual statement. Consequently;

at a certain point in history, the history of this world, God who is the author, the sustainer, the goal of all that exists, of all being and all meaning and all truth, has become present in our human history as the man Jesus, whom we can know and whom we can love and serve; and that by His incarnation, His ministry, His death and resurrection, He has finally broken the powers that oppress us and has created a space and a time in which we who are unholy can nevertheless live in fellowship with God who is holy.<sup>104</sup>

The gospel as the proclamation of Jesus is in two senses, however. It is the proclamation announced by Jesus – the arrival of God’s realm of possibility his kingdom in the midst of human structures of possibility. But it is also the proclamation about Jesus – the good news that in dying and rising, Jesus has made the kingdom he proclaimed available to us.<sup>105</sup>

Considering the above, it is clear that the gospel remains two fold, within the context of the imminence of the end and rightly interpreted by Jesus, united in the one person Jesus, who is both the Christ, the fulfillment of the hopes and promises of the Old Covenant; and the Savior and Lord, the one in whom forgiveness of sins and new life under the New Covenant is offered. This gospel therefore is to be preached to all peoples and must be understood as the fulfillment of all people’s expectation of God’s divine intervention as the answer to the needs of humanity and nature across the universe in every time and space.

### **Towards A Definition of Inculturation**

A definition of the theological content of inculturation can be considered from a variety of angles. Indigenization and contextualization, among others, have been used to define it respectively and collective. However, while indigenization and contextualization addressed methodological aspects of adapting Christian faith to a new culture, inculturation furthermore is the activity of the on-going interaction or

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<sup>104</sup> L. Newbigin, *Signs Amid the Rubble: The Purposes of God in Human History* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 113.

<sup>105</sup> A. Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), p. 146.

synthesis between faith and culture. Inculturation therefore suggests a creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures. Arbuckle is among those who argue for the ongoing critical interaction and assimilation between the gospel and culture.<sup>106</sup>

Just as the *logos* ‘took flesh’ and entered into the culture of first century Palestine, so must the Christian faith take on the culture of each group that receives the gospel and at the same time be influenced by the culture defining a culturally relevant gospel. This makes the process of inculturation two-fold; the gospel affecting culture and culture affecting the gospel within its contexts.

Mullins gives a similar approach by noting that, in the social sciences, indigenization is understood broadly as the process of transformation that occurs to foreign-born religions as they come into contact with native religion and culture which includes cultural adaptations in social organization, liturgy, leadership and theology.<sup>107</sup> Here, the native religion and culture determines, influences and promotes the cultural adaptation. An opposite approach in the mission of indigenization is that of contextualization which is focused on transmitting and or translating the gospel through the local idioms and languages of a culture. This is more of a ‘top bottom’ approach while indigenization is a ‘bottom top’ approach to mission.

Thus, indigenization and contextualization are the two-fold opposition functions of inculturation, as the gospel infuses into the local culture of a people and at the same time takes on unique characteristics and concerns of the culture. Therefore, Shorter argues that in inculturation the gospel transforms a culture and is transformed by the culture, not in a way that falsifies the content, but in the way whereby it is formulated and interpreted anew.<sup>108</sup> It is through this process that a foreign-born religion is incarnated into a native religion and culture, just as God incarnated as

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<sup>106</sup> G. Arbuckle, ‘Inculturation and Evangelization: Realism or Romanticism,’ in *Missionaries, Anthropologists, and Cultural Change* (Williamsburg, VA: College of William and Mary, 1984), pp. 171-214.

<sup>107</sup> M. R. Mullins, ‘Christianity Transplanted: Toward a Sociology of Success and Failure,’ in *Perspectives on Christianity in Korea and Japan: The Gospel and Culture in East Asia*, (Lewiston, NY:

The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), p. 65.

<sup>108</sup> A. Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999), p. 14.

Christ engaging a culture and revealing the gospel.<sup>109</sup> For Schineller inculturation is the combination of the theological significance of incarnation with the anthropological concepts of enculturation and acculturation to create something new.<sup>110</sup>

According to Walligo, inculturation means the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his gospel of salvation understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time. It is the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought patterns of each people. It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity 'truly feel at home' in the cultures of each people.<sup>111</sup>

Arrupe presents inculturation as the incarnation of Christian life and message in particular cultural contexts, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the cultures, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation.<sup>112</sup> Crollius adds a new dimension to this concept of inculturation when he defined it as,

The integration of the Christian experience of a local church into the culture of its people in such a way that the experience not only express itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion not only within the culture in question, but also as an enrichment of the church universal.<sup>113</sup>

Inculturation therefore in this study, is the continuous processes and events of making relevant the Christian gospel in the African culture through critical

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<sup>109</sup> See D. Stinton, 'Africa: East and West,' in *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, John Parratt, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 105-136, esp. p. 115.

<sup>110</sup> P. Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, (New York: Paulist, 1990), p. 21.

<sup>111</sup> J. Walligo, *Making a Church that is Truly African*. In *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency* (Nairobi: Pauline, 1986), p. 11.

<sup>112</sup> K. I. Anthony, 'Inculturation and the Christian Faith in Africa', in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 2, No. 17; September 2012.  
[http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol\\_2\\_No\\_17\\_September\\_2012/25.pdf](http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_2_No_17_September_2012/25.pdf) accessed on the 5 Dec 2012.

<sup>113</sup> R. Crollius, *Inculturation: Newness and Ongoing Progress*, (Nairobi: Pauline, 1986), p. 43.

reciprocal interaction and assimilation, with the gospel's establishment as the ultimate destiny for the fulfillment of African traditional and cultural religion.

In a sense this is known as the tabernacling of the gospel in culture. Thus God would encounter Africans as an African and that the missionary had to come as African in order to communicate effectively with Africans, so as to win them over to and for Christ. This conviction of Paul and his approach in Corinth (1 Corinthians 9:19-23) has come to be known under different terms such as indigenization, inculturation, Africanization, contextualization, Ethiopianism, localization, accommodation, adaptation and tabernacling as African theologians seek to engage the scripture above. It is such that necessitated comments such as;

As one watches the daily lives and activities of the people and takes account of the rites connected with marriage, birth, death, widowhood, harvest and installation to traditional offices, one learns that a great deal of the normal communal activities of the converts lie outside their Christian activities, and that for all their influence, the Christian churches are still alien institutions, intruding upon, but not integrated with social institutions.<sup>114</sup>

This is the one reason for focusing on the rites of passages as they are both individual and communal. They are the core of African Gambian society such that when the Church is seen at the center engaging with such, then can the Church begin to practice the responsibility of inculturating the gospel. It is within these stations of education that the Church and the gospel can be better appreciated and relevant for the Gambian. Eventually leadership which is seen as the purpose of these stations in shaping the destinies of individual and community in the African society becomes a process in which the Church is fully involved and likewise shape its approaches for better inculturation and Church leadership. If this is not encouraged for the Church, there will be the risk that 'the faith of the church in Africa is in danger of death because the church tends to forget that its cultural dimension are marked by its Graeco-Latin heritage. If the faith of Africans is not to die, it must become a vision

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<sup>114</sup> K. A. Busia, Report of a *Social Survey of Sekondi-Takoradi* (London: Crown Agents of the Colonies, 1950); cf. R. Desai, ed., *Christianity in Africa as Seen by the Africans* (Denver: A Swallow, 1962); S. G. Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith* (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1965), p. 175.



of the world that they can feel as theirs....'<sup>115</sup> As far as Ela is concerned, unless the African is educated in European scholarly content, the unschooled African remains an illiterate in his or her Christian belief and practices. Repeating phrases such as 'of one substance with the Father', and hymns that include 'consubstantial', 'co-eternal', 'while unending ages run', remain only in the abstract with no relevance and thus shallow and not strong, rooted and grounded in the Christian faith. Pobee argues language is not to be identified as that which defines Christian faith; there is the responsibility, which the gospel and culture debate has to do with distinguishing between the non-negotiable 'essence' of the faith and its negotiable 'accidents'.<sup>116</sup>

Frederiks presents four models of inculturation that have been explored in The Gambia for many years. She uses the term 'model' to describe how the Christian community throughout its history had related with Muslims. Thus, the attitudes are abstracted into models of interacting with Muslims. These models are expansion, diakoia, presence and dialogue. She then proposed the model of kenosis as the relevant and most effective model for the Gambian situation.

### **The Model of Expansion**

This is a model that seeks to spread Christianity through its geographical area and or numerical strength. The main focus is the idea of converting individuals and incorporating them into the church. This tradition has long since been articulated from the early beginning of the Acts of the Apostles and the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome.<sup>117</sup> This was a model throughout the 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries as Protestants and Roman missionary activities spread the Christian faith as the main missionary task.<sup>118</sup> However, this model has been tainted by its association to power throughout most of Christian history, which carried the connotation of territorial expansion. Sanneh makes the connection between power and the spread of Christianity at the time of maritime expansion of Europe and the beginning of the colonization and exploitation of the non-western world from the 15<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>115</sup> J. Ela, *My Faith as An African* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), p. 44.

<sup>116</sup> J. Pobee, *West Africa Christ Would Be An African Too*, Gospel and Culture Pamphlet 9 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>117</sup> T. Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 7.

<sup>118</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 6.

onwards.<sup>119</sup> This idea characterized the missionary activities in The Gambia as well as most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. The model has always seen the ‘hearer’ as one who is to be conquered and converted and it had a serious competitive nature especially in relation to the spread of Islam.<sup>120</sup>

This has been the predominant model of relating to non-Christians throughout the history of The Gambia with the convictions of missionaries that they were called to ‘go and make disciples of all nations’.<sup>121</sup> The understanding was that they were to convert people and plant churches. This was also influenced by the spread of Islam as evangelization was in the context of a perceived competition with Islam. This was not free from political influence, which twined the approach of missionaries as they provided education and medical services next to their preaching while the Islamic militant responded with jihad to expand and other trends of accommodative approach to traditional and cultural religion.

Considering the efforts of expansion in The Gambia, Frederiks submits that given Christianity being less than 10% of the population after 550 years of missionary toil, the model has not been very successful. It is also devoid of a genuine encounter with the other person since it only perceived the other as one to be evangelized. The story of Peter and Cornelius however denotes the continuity, rather than a fresh start, of a person who already has a religion and a grasp of God.<sup>122</sup>

### **The Model of *Diakonia***

This model is rooted in and influenced by the scripture of reconciliation as, ‘All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...’ (2 Corinthians 5:18). The church thus identifies with God’s ministry of reconciliation of the world and serves the other person whether Christian or non-Christian as a fellow human being. This concept stems from both the Old Testament and the New Testament with its ultimate manifestation in the life and

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<sup>119</sup> L. Sanneh, ‘Should Christianity Be Missionary? An Appraisal and An Agenda’, in *Dialogue: a journal of theology*, 40/2 (summer 2001), pp.89, 90. See also D. J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 228.

<sup>120</sup> L. Rasmussen, *Christian – Muslim Relations in Africa: The Case of Northern Nigeria and Tanzania compared* (London: British Academic Press, 1993), p. 38.

<sup>121</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 396.

<sup>122</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 397.

ministry of Jesus Christ as the great ‘diakonos’. *Diakonia* has played a significant role in mission history and often taken the form of ‘missionary service’; education, medical, welfare and relief work and development projects.<sup>123</sup> This understanding gradually evolved and came to mean not only the idea of service to individuals but led to the Church’s participation in the ministries of reconciliation, liberation and social change including questioning power structures. In West Africa including The Gambia, missionary schools were built as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century characterized a great number of schools and developmental projects. After the independence of many African countries most of those schools and hospitals were nationalized and there had been the influx of many aid and relief non-governmental organizations.<sup>124</sup> This posed the important question of what distinguished Christian *diakonia* against secular aid organizations.

In The Gambia the model of *diakonia* had characterized the missionary efforts with hospitals and school as instruments for spreading Christianity. This gradually lost its evangelical motive to one of service to society as a sign of the Kingdom. The mainline Churches including the Methodist Church therefore focused not in evangelizing Muslims but at spreading the Christian influence in society and creating goodwill for the Christian community.<sup>125</sup>

### **The Model of Presence**

The model of presence comes with the understanding of witnessing among people through the silent testimony of living and working with the people. It has a conscious respectful approach to the faith, beliefs, traditions and cultures of the ‘other’ with the attempt to witness in a non-confrontational way by sharing life.<sup>126</sup> The old tradition of presence is traced back to the monastic tradition of exemplifying actions like that of Francis of Assisi stressing the idea of the value of presence in a Muslim society.<sup>127</sup> Missionaries were therefore instructed to go and live among Muslims, adopting their culture, their dress, their food and their language in order to gain their confidence, creating the atmosphere for future witnessing. Max Warren speaks of

<sup>123</sup> J. A. B. Jongeneel, *Philosophy, Science and Theology of Mission in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries*, II, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997), pp. 307, 313-336.

<sup>124</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 10.

<sup>125</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 399.

<sup>126</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 11.

<sup>127</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 11.

presence as taking the form of friendship, as he summaries Charles Foucauld's position as 'being present among people with a presence willed and intended as a witness of the love of Christ's'.<sup>128</sup> Foucauld lived among the Tuareg in the Sahara with the approach of silent presence drawing convictions from the hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth during the first thirty years of his life.<sup>129</sup> The model was taken to sub-Saharan African by the White Fathers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and their examples followed by many missionaries practicing the approach in predominantly Muslim population.

Fredriks considers that being present is not 'just willed and intended as a sign of the love of Christ', but must be recognizable and understood as such. This last aspect has largely been absent in the lived-out models of presence in The Gambia and has not always shown the openness to accept the other as a fellow pilgrim in life who also has gained some profound insight about God.<sup>130</sup>

### **The Model of Dialogue**

This model encourages an open attitude and respect to people of non-Christian faith with the willingness to be challenged and changed through the encounter within an organized or religiously pluralistic setting. There is the common understanding of the non-Christian and the Christian alike as fellow pilgrims in the journey of life and faith in God.<sup>131</sup> From the 1960s dialogue has gained prominence in missiology with the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC in Mexico 1963, considering;

True dialogue with a man of another faith requires a concern both for the gospel and for the other man. Without the first, dialogue becomes a pleasant conversation. Without the second, it becomes irrelevant, unconvincing or arrogant.<sup>132</sup>

From Vatican II the Roman Catholic Church developed its understanding of peoples of other faiths and *Nostra Aetate* re-evaluated relations with Muslims, amongst

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<sup>128</sup> M. Warren, *A Theology of Attention* (Madras: Diocesan Press, 1971), p. 68.

<sup>129</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 11.

<sup>130</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 402.

<sup>131</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 13.

<sup>132</sup> Cited in Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 165-166.

others, and urged Christians to strive sincerely for understanding with others.<sup>133</sup> Dialogue in the African setting comes with the priority of ‘dialogue of life’; the reality of living in a religious pluralistic society. In 1959, European Protestant mission organizations in co-operation with African churches started the Islam in project advocating a respectful dialogical attitude towards Muslims.<sup>134</sup> Such attempts have played their part in The Gambian experience and contribute to the religious tolerance The Gambia is known for.

The Christian attitude in The Gambia changed from confrontation to openness and respect even though there is a measure of mutual suspicion.<sup>135</sup> At national events the government involves religious leaders of the Islamic and the Christian faiths to participate in prayers. This, alongside sensitization programmes has also contributed to promoting the peaceful coexistence, not forgetting the role of the extended family system consisting of both Christians and Muslims.

After considering these, Frederiks suggests the model of *Kenosis* for mission and ministry as a model that combines all the positives aspects of *diakonia*, presence and dialogue and at the same puts in a new all compassing framework seen in the emptying of the self in Jesus’ incarnation.<sup>136</sup>

### **The Model of *Kenosis***

In Philippians 2:5-11, Jesus’ self-emptying act in the incarnation is the model of *kenosis*.<sup>137</sup> Jesus emptied himself by sharing our humanity and by living among us in order to show the love of God for humankind. Thereby, the underlining principle of a shared humanity as modeled by Christ becomes the ‘blue print’ for Christian witness. The idea of identification also plays a role as the individual identifies with the other in all aspects of life<sup>138</sup> especially to those on the periphery<sup>139</sup> imitating

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<sup>133</sup> K. Steenbrink, ‘The Mission of Dialogue after 11 September 2001’, in *Exchange* 31/2 (2002), p. 123.

<sup>134</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 15.

<sup>135</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 402.

<sup>136</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 403.

<sup>137</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 403.

<sup>138</sup> M. Warren, ‘The Meaning of Identification’ in G.H. Anderson, *The Theology of Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1961), pp. 231, 234.

<sup>139</sup> D. J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 513.

Jesus' example of laying aside power and status. This self-emptying act entails a radical contextualization for identity, which encompasses culture (inculturation), religion (interreligious dialogue) and the social political setting (liberation). It is highly relational and interactive in nature within the context of the community and thus carries an attitude of flexibility and adjustment centered on people rather than the rigid and uncompromising maintenance of structures, institutions, policies and theologies.<sup>140</sup> The ultimate aim of *kenosis* is to glorify God in the understanding of Christ's reconciliation of the world. In this willingness to seek, the other, to respect the other in his or her culture and religion while sharing our deepest convictions about God, models a paradigm for a joint human pilgrimage towards God.

In The Gambian experience, there is the reality of a shared humanity between Christians, Muslims and African Traditional and Cultural believers. It is the basic common participation of the same daily activities like going to school together, naming ceremonies, marriages, funerals, and working together that relationships, friendships and faith is built and shared. In this shared human experience *kenosis* becomes a radical self-emptying as a necessity to establishing meaningful relationships with people of other faiths and cultures. It is through this approach that the village catechist lives out daily: s/he works on the land, teaches in the school, eats the same food and visits the neighbors in the evenings. His or her presence in the village and participation in the village life is in itself a sign of the love of God.

Inculturation and interreligious dialogue therefore are not just optional for the interested few, but according to the model of *kenosis*, they belong to the core of the Christian calling to imitate Christ in his self-emptying love for people which brings a deep appreciation of the culture, religion and socio-political framework of the other. This process leaves the Christian community, in this case the Methodists, with the freedom to review the structures, institutions and theology they have inherited from the missionary age to fit the present age because the other person rather than the structures is central.

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<sup>140</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 406.

In as much as Frederiks addresses the need for *kenosis* as the answer for the Christian witness in The Gambia, I wish to go further with specific focus on the traditional and cultural religion taken into consideration all the effects of *kenosis* but with the approach of *skenosis* (tabernacle).

### **The Model of *Skenosis***

The word *skenosis* is used by John Pobee as referred in John 1:14, the ‘tabernacling’ of the one and eternal word of God which must be active in each particular culture with no one culture deemed normative for either mission or the gospel. This is presented with a fourfold image;<sup>141</sup>

- First it holds us to a non-negotiable word of God, which transcends time and place but must nevertheless be translated to become comprehensible in new times and contexts.
- Second, whatever validity a construct coming out of this struggle has is essentially and necessarily temporary; like a tent dwelling, it cannot be for all time.
- Third, it cannot therefore live in isolation, but must be attentive to the living stream of tradition of the living communities of faith.
- Fourth, because the word of God is the key, it will make a critique of the culture of the particular community. Like all true prophecy the word of God contains, words of hope as well as of condemnation.

Considering Pobee’s argument of *skenosis*, I argue that one can conclude that the context of the scripture is merely presenting the entrance of God in human form in the person of Jesus into the world, thus Pobee is doing *esigesis*. All the four points he brings out are implied rather than categorically stated in the scripture.

Nevertheless, for the context of inculturation in an African setting, I argue that the implicational meaning of the very word *skenosis* ‘tabernacling,’ cannot be left out of the process of engaging with the Gambian due to its worldview of African traditional and cultural religion.

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<sup>141</sup> Pobee, *West Africa Christ Would Be An African Too*, p. 3.

As seen in chapter one, the existence of God is taken for granted in Africa. So is the word of God within African traditional and cultural religion. It is assumed that it transcends time and space and contextually brings meaning. The characteristics of the temporal nature of a tent as in ‘tabernacling’ also agrees with the specific nature of God’s Word within the African traditional religion contextually as it is always open to new meanings in different times and places. The implication of ‘tabernacling’ means temporally living within an area. For the African, one is considered living in an area when one has fully engaged with all living and non-living factors within that area. Thus the gospel in *skenosis*, I argue, is not only about its entrance into the world, as some may limitedly understand, but an entrance and full existence temporally within an area at every given time and space. Again, at the apex of the Gambian worldview is the divine who is involved in all things, directs, critiques and guides, and is in whom all things are fulfilled. Thus the gospel that ‘tabernacles’ must give guidance, critique and show its potency to be the fulfillment of all that African traditional and cultural religious could ever be.

With all these aspects at work *skenosis* can be fully interpreted in this context with the reciprocal engagement of the Gambian and the gospel. The contextual indigenized interpretation and understanding of *skenosis*, I argue, is already inculturation at work. The emphasis of the above implication of *skenosis* brings a standard with which the communal life is to be seen in the light of the gospel thus the gospel remains a non-negotiable truth that brings opens the true meaning and ultimate desired end of the traditional and cultural realities of any community. Then the flexibility and relevance of the gospel cuts across time and place as it is essentially and necessarily temporary like a tent-dwelling, thus applies differently for various times and age. This leads to its *kenosis* functions of *diakonia*, presence and dialogue within the setting of God’s mission of reconciliation effected through a shared humanity. However, it further culminates again to the standard of the word of the gospel as the key that makes critique and puts into proper perspective the traditional and cultural religious beliefs for their ultimate destiny. It is through this process of *skenosis* that the ultimate result of the witness of The Methodist Church The Gambia in leadership needs to evolve.



## Chapter Three

### Understanding Church Leadership

Church leadership has been in constant evolution as part of the various experiential journeys and understanding of the Christian faith at various times and ages. The journeys are characterized with various encounters with the traditional cultural religious realities of a people in the light of the revelation of the gospel. Further understanding brings about change, which helps redefines leadership. As a result leadership can be traced back to the beginning of the history of God's encounters with humanity. The initial interaction of God with humanity leaves a reflection of the image and likeness of God in the creation of Adam (Genesis 1:27). Leadership thus remains centered in humanness recovering, maintaining and fulfilling the expected standards of the image and likeness of God. For the purpose of inculturation, church leadership has this responsibility to be connected with the current move of God at each particular age and to recognize the need for relevance in ministry cognizance of the worldview within which they exist and serve.

Leadership according to Grundy comes from an old English word *lead*, which originates in the idea of travelling together and making pathways through to a new place. It comes with the idea of people using their resources, joint efforts and collective wisdom to develop their lives.<sup>142</sup> This, I consider, inevitably marks inculturation as a process of leadership in which two agree and walk together (Amos 3:3), with an end result of growth and change that affects both involved through the onward critical reciprocal interaction and assimilation, which for others like Maxwell, is described as influence.<sup>143</sup> For McRae-McMahon, leadership is about moments rather than lifestyles or dramatic personal gifts. Leadership can arise from the 'center', from where the power is perceived to be a nation, an organization, an institution, or a group or even from what we often perceive to be the margins of those same communities of people. She goes on to argue leadership is about choice making and it is responsible for the changes in both individuals and communities

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<sup>142</sup> M. Grundy, *What's New In Church Leadership? Creating Responses to the Changing Pattern of Church Life* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2007), pp. 19-20.

<sup>143</sup> J. C. Maxwell, *The Twenty-One Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 17.

from generations to generations. These choices are catalysts of our evolution with 'value-added' when we co-operate with the love and good that lies at the heart of all reality. Therefore, good leadership is defined in accordance to the degree to which it enhances or inhibits the creative evolution of life for us all. Leaders are those who understand the depths of human existence and who see the profound possibilities of recreating our collective life by gathering up the past, present and future.<sup>144</sup> This approach to leadership is valid in the sense that the future we create in any place including the church is dependent on the momentary choices we make. This is however in connection with the center, which I consider, is God the ultimate leader. Nevertheless, leadership goes beyond momentary choices one makes for it becomes a lifestyle as God does not stop and start in leadership. He is the 'I AM', (Exodus 3:13-15) in leadership continually.

Clinton presents leadership as an initiative of God, defining a Christian leader as one with God-given capacity and God-given responsibility to influence a specific group of God's people towards God's purpose for the group.<sup>145</sup> This is endorsed by the fact of biblical history recording the call of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, David, Isaiah, the Twelve and the apostle Paul as well as the leadership roles played by Miriam, Deborah, Dorcas and Priscilla, not forgetting the evangelist Philip's four daughters among others.<sup>146</sup> The unavoidable character of leadership in influence shows again in the role of these individuals called to influence rather than dominate the groups each were given responsibilities towards. Therefore, for Gibbs, all it requires to constitute an individual as a leader, which applies to every level of the Church's structure, is for one person to be following.<sup>147</sup> This reiterates Drucker's submission of leadership in the light of the availability of followers to a leader.<sup>148</sup> However, this is subject to the nature of the task at hand and the availability of such person with appropriate gifts. Thus, for Banks and Ledbetter, leadership involves a person, group, or organisation who or which shows the way in an area of life, either

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<sup>144</sup> D. McRae-McMahon, *Daring Leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2001), pp. 3-10.

<sup>145</sup> Cited in E. Gibbs, *Leadership Next, Changing Leaders in A Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Press, 2005), p.20, J. R. Clinton, *Leadership Emergence Theory* (Pasadena, CA.: Barnabas, 1989).

<sup>146</sup> Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>147</sup> Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, p. 21.

<sup>148</sup> P. Drucker, 'Forward: Not Enough Generals Were Killed,' in Frances Hesselbein, M. Goldsmith & R. Beckhard (eds.), *The Leader of the Future* (San Francisco, CA.: Jossey-Bass, 1996), xii.

in the short or long term or both, and in doing so both influences and empowers enough people to bring about change in that area.<sup>149</sup>

Recognizing the subject of Church leadership as an institution and a body of people, Wright's distinctive definition of leadership is paramount. He argues that leadership depends on the context. Where it is seen as a position of authority held, then not all Christians can be leaders but in the context of relational influence of one person on another, which ultimately affects behaviour, values and attitude, then all Christian should exercise leadership.<sup>150</sup> Church leadership is anchored in both positional and relational leadership as the Church remains as much an institution as it is a body of believers.

### **Leadership in the Old Testament**

Leadership in the Old Testament was generally characterized around the figures of a king or a prophet walking with a vision, maintaining character and having responsibility over the people of God towards an expected end. Every leadership story in scripture, I argue, has been an inculturational experiential process.

### **Prophet Moses**

Moses grew up in the context of a need for a liberator of God's people (Israel) who were in bondage in Egypt. Moses' life, closely intertwined with double identity of Hebrew and Egyptian, brings Moses to a privilege position of choice. He chose to be a Hebrew. This former prince, now refugee, had become the very instrument of God's choosing to respond to the cry of his people (Hebrews 11:24-29). Moses operated in a prophetic leadership role. He was a prophet for Yahweh, an extension of Yahweh's rule in the life of Israel, the means of their provision and the agent of their deliverance.<sup>151</sup>

The implications for leadership create the allowance for human limitations and responses in line with the consciousness of human frailty. Moses was a provider and

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<sup>149</sup> R. Banks and B. M. Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker, 2004), pp. 16-17.

<sup>150</sup> W. Wright, *Relational Leadership* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>151</sup> T. S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart, Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Press, 2006), p. 87.

a deliverer but with human limitations that are not far from the Methodist Church Gambia. Likewise, the Methodist Church Gambia is God's agent for the inculturation of the gospel to help reconcile Christian beliefs with traditional cultural practices of the Gambian Methodist Christians. There are human limitations and other limitations for the Church; yet, God's grace is sufficient to enable adequately the inculturational ministry of the Church in each age.

Moses is an example of one raised as an Egyptian Prince who had to learn to be contextually relevant to the life of the Hebrew people. The transition from Egyptian to Hebrew in Moses' life is an aspect that I consider a *skenosis* leadership model, which proved more effective in the context of the need, which Moses identified with.

### **King David**

David is recognized as one of the great leaders of the Old Testament serving as King of Israel for 40 years. The role of king was a leadership development for the people of Israel, recognizing their need for a figurehead similar to other nations, and so a contextual response to their need.<sup>152</sup> David faced the challenge of remaining faithful as king while surrounded by the trappings of power. In his adultery with Bathsheba he showed his failure, yet his serving of his brothers and sparing of Saul's life demonstrated his strength.

Being a culturally relevant king was his challenge. It is clear that the context of kingship negatively impacted aspects of David's life. David acted as a king might be expected to, in the context of his adultery with Bathsheba. Nevertheless, he repented, as is expected from a follower of God, after prophet Nathan confronted him with this sin. David, like Moses, is described as 'God's servant' and despite whatever other titles he has that reflect his contextual role as king, he is still primarily a follower of God.<sup>153</sup> Through this there is the recognition that inculturation needs to discern what is both contextually appropriate plus in line with the gospel. The inculturational attempt must not evolve outside the scope of scripture as *skenosis* would ensure that scripture directs and its application remains in harmony.

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<sup>152</sup> R. Routledge *Old Testament Theology: A thematic approach* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), pp. 230-31.

<sup>153</sup> S. Dempster, 'The Servant of the Lord' in S Hafeman and P House (eds) *Central Themes in Biblical Theology* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), p. 133.

## Leadership in the New Testament

Leadership in the New Testament is commonly referred to with the term ‘elders’. For example, in Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church. This seems to be a standard practice as the old Jewish presbyteral system was largely adopted.<sup>154</sup> The word ‘elder’ or ‘presbyter’ and ‘bishop’ or ‘overseer’, namely *presbuteros* and *episcopos*, are synonyms in the New Testament, and both are used to describe the same office. Elders are usually mentioned in the plural with the exceptions of a few scriptures namely 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:7, however, for Harper, he suggests it is a generalizing singular.<sup>155</sup> There is nevertheless, a singular use in 2 John 1 and 3 John 1.

Elders were appointed in the church for varying reasons. These included to exercise authority or to rule (1 Timothy 5:17), care for God’s Church (1 Timothy 3:5), preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17), among others. In Acts 20:28, Paul tells the elders at Ephesus that the Holy Spirit has made them ‘overseer’ or ‘bishops’ (*episcopous*). Leadership in the Church from the earliest times until the Reformation has been dominated by Episcopacy and many of the Reformers also accepted Episcopacy.<sup>156</sup> This makes it a central theme in leadership one cannot avoid when looking at Church Leadership. However, Harper argues that when we turn to the New Testament, leaders understood as Bishop cannot be found even though the word *episcopos* is used, as this is synonym for the much more frequently used word *presbuteros*. The office of the bishop as understood from the second century onward to the Reformation, he argues, was unknown to the early Church but the office of the Apostle was rather more clearly designated. However, by the second century, Apostles had ceased and the Church had switched from an Apostolic to Episcopal government.<sup>157</sup> Apostles were described in the light of those who are sent on mission by someone else; conforming to the popular use in contemporary Judaism, but it was primarily used to describe the twelve Disciples of Christ (less Judas Iscariot, plus Matthias), Paul, Barnabas and James, the brother of Jesus. When the Church had lost its Apostolic leaders, Episcopacy played a major role in combating schism and

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<sup>154</sup> M. Harper, *Let My People Grow – Ministry and Leadership in the Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), p. 174.

<sup>155</sup> Harper, *Let My People Grow.*, p. 174.

<sup>156</sup> Harper, *Let My People Grow.*, pp. 184-185.

<sup>157</sup> Harper, *Let My People Grow.*, p. 185.

safeguarding against Gnostic heresy at a time when Christian unity and doctrinal purity were threatened.<sup>158</sup> The Apostle's role was to travel and to found new Churches, over which they exercised strong pastoral oversight whereas, the Bishop also traveled, but over smaller areas, not primarily concerned with starting new Churches but with exercising pastoral care over existing ones and uniting them together. The authority of the Bishops extended from and beyond the congregation, where there were elders, to a number of Churches.

Leadership structure in the New Testament Church is necessarily emphasized as directly under the leadership of Christ Himself and continues to be so, for he is High Priest (Hebrews 2:17), Apostle (Hebrews 3:1), Shepherd (John 10:11), and even Bishop (1 Peter 2:25). Jesus did not categorically set up any kind of formal organization for the Church apart from calling disciples to be with him, follow him and be sent out by Him. He commissioned 70 (Luke 10:1, 17), which he sent out among others. He also appointed 12 disciples (Mark 3:16-19), yet among them he further had an 'inner circle', or 'band' in Wesleyan terms, Peter, James and John (Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:33). He had a special disciple among the three; John son of Zebedee called the beloved disciple (John 20:2). He did give authority (Matthew 16:19) and assigned responsibility (John 20:15-17), but he did not set up a formal constitutional Church. Jesus is seen in the Gospels as the model leader as he gathers, teaches, encourages, corrects and commissions agents to participate in His mission.

Peter led the Church in Jerusalem. He is seen in supervising the election of Matthias into the place of Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:15-26), leading the preaching on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-42), defending the Church before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:5-22; 5:27-42) and many other leadership actions. The apostles thus continued to play a leading role in the Church. Their role was however foundational and unique and was not replaced when they experienced martyrdom and others deaths, for in their context, the Apostolic calling was limited to those who had been with Christ from the time of his baptism to the time of his ascension and had witnessed the resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). Consequently, the Church did not have anyone qualified in that respect to operate in the traditional office of the apostles.

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<sup>158</sup> Harper, *Let My People Grow.*, p. 193.

Paul and Barnabas were also apostles (Acts 14:4,14) who founded churches during their missionary journey to Cyprus and southern Galatia (Acts 13 and 14). Their apostleship does not completely fit the total requirement of the original twelve yet Paul had a significant encounter with the risen Christ and they were also commissioned by the Church of Antioch (2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25).

Elders are mentioned in connection with the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30), the churches founded by Paul and Barnabas in southern Galatia (Acts 14:23) and in the Church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17). Their roles were not specific but it seems more of a general responsibility or charge of their congregations in the absence of an apostle. These same elders were also called *episcopoi* (overseers or bishops), which supports the plural application of the same term, and also may show that there may not have been any distinction between elders and bishops.

In Acts there was also an order of deacons as part of the leadership, who were elected to help in the distribution of food (Acts 6). However, nothing is said in establishing this order permanently. It seemed like a spontaneous *skenotic* or accommodative arrangement to meet a need.

The rest of the New Testament likewise strengthens the argument that there was no rigid structure of leadership in the Church, as there is no evidence of such structure. There was rather flexibility and fluidity in the organizational life of the Church in the New Testament. This offers a model of flexibility to the Methodist Church The Gambia.

### **Apostle Paul**

Paul, born in Tarsus, was raised according to the Jewish customs (Philippians 3:5) and was proud of his Jewish heritage (Romans 9:3, 11:1). He claims to have lived as a Pharisee in faultless obedience to the law (Philippians 3:6, 2 Corinthians 11: 22), and to have surpassed many of his contemporaries in zeal for the oral traditions of

the Pharisaic code (Galatians 1:14).<sup>159</sup> It is likely that he had the opportunity to study Greek as Tarsus was a leading center of learning with a school committed to philosophy and rhetoric about the time Paul was born (Acts 21: 39).

Coming to Jerusalem as a young man, he had the privilege to study under Gamaliel and he was exposed to Greek culture, as well as rabbinic learning.<sup>160</sup> His knowledge of Greek literature and culture is reflected in his letters. To Paul, Hellenism was an advantage. He was not parochial rather appreciated what he regarded as positive dimensions of non-Jewish religions.

His encounter with Christ shaped his life after which we see three distinctive facets about his apostolic mission. He proclaimed the Christ whom he had previously persecuted; he was convinced that it was his distinctive mission to take the gospel to the Gentiles, and he preached justification by faith entirely apart from and in contrast to the works of the Law.<sup>161</sup>

With such background of three worlds, Jewish, Hellenistic and Christian, Paul gained insight to appreciate better the value of the gospel. Paul's vision and mission is captured in his prayers (Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Phi 1:3-4; Colossians 1:3; I Thessalonians 1:2). This is paramount for inculturation as maintaining the harmony between humanity and the transcendent being is essential and West African traditional and cultural religion seeks to guard its sustenance continually.

Paul was able to integrate his Greek, Jewish and Christian experience to help contextualized the gospel.<sup>162</sup> When speaking to Jews he used Jewish idioms. When in Athens his preaching ignored the Old Testament and instead he used Greek imagery. Consequently Paul provides a flexible model of contextualization, therefore *skenos*, for the Methodist Church The Gambia.

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<sup>159</sup> G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), p. 398.

<sup>160</sup> S. Mpereh, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Ligon: Unpublished Manuscript, 2006), p. 30.

<sup>161</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 404.

<sup>162</sup> D. Sills, 'Paul and Contextualisation' in R. L. Plummer and J. M. Terry, *Paul's Missionary Methods* (Nottingham: IVP, 2012), pp. 196-215.



## **African Traditional Leadership Structure**

Traditional leadership structures in Africa are as diverse as the continent itself. This makes it difficult to describe an 'African' style of traditional leadership structure. Even within West Africa there is a variety of leadership structures, although it is possible to make some general comments. Tangwa gave a philosophical analysis of the political structure and stability of pre-colonial Africa Kingdoms, looking at both large ones like Ghana and Songhai among others, and other relatively small ones like Nso' and Bafut. There was revealed a combination of leadership strategies including the important role of democratic processes in traditional governance. He argues that traditional African leadership and authority systems can be understood paradoxically as a harmonious marriage between autocratic dictatorship and popular democracy. Although these vary from culture to culture, specific formal practices included in citizenry is to authorize, critique and sanction the ascension of their rulers, his or her continued reign and the selection and ascension of his or her successor.<sup>163</sup> Aletum likewise describes these as the exercise of democracy in traditional institutions through means including, checks and balances imposed by citizenry participation in transition and maintenance of leadership.<sup>164</sup> A scenario that exemplifies this ideology is seen in the Bafut Kingdom of Bamenda, Cameroon, where when a new ruler is been installed, he or she is presented to the Bafut population for 'stoning'.<sup>165</sup> This ceremonial stoning may consist of tiny, harmless pebbles in the case of an approved and respected new leader, or of large, injurious rocks hurled to maim, chase off or kill the undesired incumbent. It in each case reminded the leader what could happen if his or her rule became illegitimate. Robert and Pat Ritzenthaler interprets the stoning in the light of the people's last opportunity to treat their leaders as mortal, for after this, the leaders become king or queen and god.<sup>166</sup>

In the choices of leaders and resolutions of conflicts of contestations, ritual checks and balances are employed especially when related to succession issues. There are offices that require categorical gender and ages, which narrow the competitions in the lights of the responsibility, and may fall on the eldest male or the youngest

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<sup>163</sup> G. Tangwa, 'Democracy and Development in Africa: Putting the Horse Before the Cart' in *Road Companion to Democracy and Meritocracy* (Bellingham, WA.: Kola Tress Press, 1998), p. 2.

<sup>164</sup> T. M. Aletum, *Political Sociology* (Yaounde, Cameroon: Patoh Publishers, 2001), p. 209.

<sup>165</sup> Aletum, *Political Sociology*, p. 209.

<sup>166</sup> R. Ritzenthaler and P. Ritzenthaler, *Cameroon's Village: An ethnography of the Bafut* (Milwaukee, WI.: North American Press, 1964), p. 73.

female or even among many of the same age. The patterns of inheritance also vary from class of statues to different types of families. A particular strategy would require a committee of a distinct gender and class representatives.<sup>167</sup>

There are also checks and balances for traditional administrators. Some offices are for a lifetime appointment and others are graded with possibilities of promotion and demotion based on time and good assessment. Chieftaincies could be graded to status and population sizes as first, second and third class. Politically the grades serves as indications of their ranks and popularity, which necessarily meant the level of influences each would have on the community life and resources.

Noble status depended on birth and some form of community approval. Both are necessary and neither is sufficient in isolation. Ceremonial objects in the form of stools, cups, caps, staffs, etc, are also part of the noble status with established protocol for usage. These objects are invested with ancestral power for inhibiting their abuse. In the event of an abuse, perpetrators risk serious mishaps such as sterility, madness or even death. This is also true when a chief goes against the decision taken by the people while at the same time drinking from the ancestral cup to which he or she has swore allegiance to the people.<sup>168</sup> In as much as it is a fact, the King or Queen or Chief or Alkalo is powerful, and their words could condemn anyone even unto death, nevertheless, they are subject to strict control, not only by means of taboos, but also of institutions, personalities of high moral authority and integrity whose main preoccupation is protecting and safeguarding the Kingdom.<sup>169</sup> To date, presently, many African communities including in The Gambia continued to be governed by a council of elders, with the chief among them, which is responsible for mediating conflict and making all-important decisions within the community. They are expected to maintain order and are partners of government.

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<sup>167</sup> Tangwa, 'Democracy and Development in Africa', p. 6. The King (Fon) of Nso', who by original consensus, was always selected by a committee headed by the leader of one of the strands comprising the Kingdom from among the male offspring of a female of another distinct strand (the *mmntar* or free commoner

class) and a male of yet another strand (the acknowledged royal *wonto*' or princes class), had very extensive powers which were, however, considered as held in trust and subject to several putative controls.

<sup>168</sup> Aletum, *Political Sociology*, p. 206.

<sup>169</sup> Tangwa, 'Democracy and Development in Africa,' p. 2.

All the above biblical evidences of leadership and West African traditional leadership structure provide guidance and are important for the Church today. The story of the Church is grounded in its mission from the biblical story within which is revealed the purpose of the biblical prophecy and its ultimate fulfillment. Therefore, the nature of the Church and its administrative options it has adopted at various times is also essential in understanding the journey of Church leadership thus far.

### **What is the Church?**

Conner argues that the Church is to be defined in terms of the Sovereign will of God, the Eternal Purpose of God, the Mystery and The New Ethics.<sup>170</sup> Stott argues that some churches have lost their identity and their vocation and thus live in a ‘mentally unhealthy’ state for they do not have an accurate self-image. Stott mentions two false images of the church as (i) religious club (or introverted Christianity) and (ii) secular mission (or religionless Christianity).<sup>171</sup> Conner further advocates a re-definition of Church in our modern society to escape the recent understanding of ‘Church’ to refer to a material building, a denomination, organization or sect.<sup>172</sup> Asante agrees with Conner, saying that the Church transcends denominational boundaries and organizational structures. It consists of those who have obeyed the call of God through Christ and have gathered around Christ as believers, regardless of race, nationality or culture.<sup>173</sup>

The word Church is *ekklesia* in Greek which comes from the verb *kaleo* meaning ‘to call’, thus the word *ekkaleo* means to call out or summon. The Church is therefore a community, which has been called out of a bigger community. This *ekklesia* is referred to believers in a particular city (Romans 16:1; 2 Corin. 1:1), a house Church (I Corin. 16:19; Philemon 2), in plural as in Churches of Judea (Gal. 1:22), as Churches of Christ (Romans 16:16), in a restricted sense to a local Christian community (I Corin. 11:18), and also refers to the invisible body of Christ (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22) and the total body of Christ including the living and the departed believers (I Corin. 15:9; Gal. 1:13, Heb. 12:23 and Rev. 19:6-9). This is rooted in scriptures as the Church is the people who have been called out and translated from

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<sup>170</sup> K. J. Conner, *The Church in the New Testament* (Victoria: K.J.C. Publications, 1982), pp. 12-25.

<sup>171</sup> J. Stott, *The Living Church Convictions of A Lifelong Pastor* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007), p. 53.

<sup>172</sup> Conner, *The Church in the New Testament*, p. 9.

<sup>173</sup> E. Asante, *Gems from the Preacher's Pedestal, A Collection of Sermons and Talks* (Accra: SonLife Printing Press and Service, 2006), p. 95.

the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:9-11). The Church is therefore beyond institution, denomination, race and sect. It is the body of Christ (Romans 7:4; 1 Corinthians 12:27).<sup>174</sup> Brunner adds that the church is not in the first instance an institution or a visibly organized society but a fellowship and a pure communion of people.<sup>175</sup>

Stott writes that in addition to the Church having been called out of the world to worship God, it is also sent back into the world to witness and serve, thus giving the Church a double identity or incarnational Christianity.<sup>176</sup> Conner therefore argues that the Church though a supernatural entity which is in the process of growth towards the world to come, yet it is also an existential entity thus carrying a dual nature.<sup>177</sup> Yalley presents the Church as an organism with each member performing its function (1 Corinthians. 12:12-27), as branches that bear fruits of the true vine Jesus (John 15:6). In addition, as an organization, it is seen as the household of God (Ephesians 2:19) with hierarchical structures, placing Jesus as foundation, chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20) and head of the Church (Colossians 1:18).<sup>178</sup>

Asante adds that the church in its existential reality is encountered in terms of denominational, national and institutional particularities.<sup>179</sup> It is thus paramount that to ignore the existential 'reality' of the Church is to not fully appreciate the totality of its identity, operations and leadership governance,<sup>180</sup> as sent back into the world to witness and to serve.<sup>181</sup> It is also in this light that Dulles defines Church primarily in terms of its visible structures, especially the rights and powers of its officers.<sup>182</sup> He makes it clear that the aim and consequences of the church as an institution is to be visible as any other society, a standard feature of Roman Catholic ecclesiology from about 1550-1950.<sup>183</sup> It is in this aspect of the Church's existential nature that we encounter the likes of the Methodist Church, the Anglican Church, The Roman

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<sup>174</sup> Conner, *The Church in the New Testament*, p. 25.

<sup>175</sup> E. Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (London: Lutterworth, 1952), p. 17.

<sup>176</sup> Stott, *The Living Church*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>177</sup> Conner, *The Church in the New Testament*, p. 95.

<sup>178</sup> E. A. Yalley, *The Episcopacy in the Ministry of The Church* (Tema: Hacquason Press Ltd, Unknown), p. 20.

<sup>179</sup> Asante, *Gems from the Preacher's Pedestal*, p. 96.

<sup>180</sup> Asante, *Gems from the Preacher's Pedestal*, p. 96.

<sup>181</sup> Stott, *The Living Church*, p. 55.

<sup>182</sup> A. Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), pp. 15-33.

<sup>183</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, p. 42.

Catholic Church, The Lutheran Church, The Church of Pentecost, The Assemblies of God and many others.

According to Conner, denominations are the evidence of our carnality and division.<sup>184</sup> To this Asante responds that so far as this holds true, they are also evidences of our freedom, distinctiveness, diversity and different appreciation of the one reality, the Church. Denominations and institutional structures define and inform the existential nature of the Church as they are ecclesiastical realities.<sup>185</sup>

The double nature of the Church demands it to be 'holy' unto God (distinct from the world) and 'worldly' (not in the sense of assimilating the world's values and standards, but in the sense of renouncing other-worldliness and becoming instead immersed in the life of the world). Alec Vidler admirably captured this double identity of referring to the Church as 'holy worldliness'.<sup>186</sup> The Church must therefore not overlook its place in the human family sharing the same concerns as the rest of humanity.<sup>187</sup> The perfect exhibition of such identity of 'holy worldliness' is seen in the incarnational life and ministry of Jesus, the ultimate leader.

It is in this identity that the Church is called unto holiness, to witness and serve existentially through character and responsibility. The Church has therefore since its inception continued to do so in various governance leadership styles. The government of the Church, according to Asante, calls for the organization of the Church as an institution consisting of people who identify and interact with one another in a structured way, based on shared beliefs, values and goals.<sup>188</sup>

The following below are forms of leadership governance the Church has employed at various places and times: Episcopal Leadership Governance, Presbyterian Leadership Governance and Congregational Leadership Governance.

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<sup>184</sup> Conner, *The Church of the New Testament*, p. 9.

<sup>185</sup> Asante, *Gems from the Preacher's Pedestal*, p. 96.

<sup>186</sup> Stott, *The Living Church*, p. 55.

<sup>187</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, p. 91.

<sup>188</sup> Asante, *Gems from the Preacher's Pedestal*, p. 98.

## Episcopal Leadership Governance

The term Episcopal is derived from the Greek word *episcopos*, which is translated, ‘overseer’ or ‘bishop’.<sup>189</sup> The Episcopal form of leadership governance refers to a system of Church government in which the principal officer is the bishop. It is hierarchical in nature with the chief authority being the bishop over a diocese or over a local Church. The structure is found most often in the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and the Orthodox Churches and they view the bishop as a superintendent with authority to ordain presbyters and deacons.<sup>190</sup> According to O’Donovan, ordinary Church members do not have administrative authority, although they may exercise their spiritual gifts in various ways.<sup>191</sup> It is claimed that Episcopal Church polity has been practiced since the days of Ignatius of Antioch.<sup>192</sup> Asheim and Gold write that historic Episcopacy was developed in the Roman Empire and was influenced by secular Roman government.<sup>193</sup> Thus Murray argues that the Church, in modeling Roman systems, perverted the understanding of leadership in a process of operating through territorial and hierarchical systems that fitted the Empire’s structures and value-system, with its titles, power and privileges and thus settled as an institution dependent on a top-down authority.<sup>194</sup> This however holds true against the abuse of such structure rather than the existence of the biblical basis of episcopacy as seen in 1 Timothy 3:1-13.

Episcopacy is seen by Asante as divided into two distinct but interrelated applications: These are ‘historic episcopacy’ and ‘monarchic episcopacy’ which may be understood as traditional episcopacy practiced in the Roman Catholic Churches and the new forms of episcopacy which are practiced in some Methodist and other denominations.<sup>195</sup> Both ‘historic’ and ‘monarchic’ episcopacy claims connection with historic ministry in that there is a direct line of ordination from bishop to

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<sup>189</sup> S. Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions: Ordination and Leadership in the Local Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000), p. 142.

<sup>190</sup> C. O. Brand & R. S. Norman (eds.), *Perspectives on Church Government: 5 Views* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2005), p. 228.

<sup>191</sup> W. O’ Donovan Jnr., *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective* (Ilorin: Nigerian Evangelical Fellowship, 1992), p. 170.

<sup>192</sup> J. N. Darby, *Episcopacy: What Ground is there in the Scripture or History for Accounting An Institution of God* (Unknown: Stem, 2002), p. 314.

<sup>193</sup> I. Asheim & V. R. Gold (eds.), *Episcopacy in the Lutheran Church?* (Philadelphia, PA: Mahlenberg, 1956), p. 55.

<sup>194</sup> S. Murray, *Post Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004), p. 125.

<sup>195</sup> Asante, *Gems from the Preacher’s Pedestal*, pp. 99-100.

bishop, the new forms however do not claim any of such connection.<sup>196</sup> The Methodist Church in Ghana and The Gambia, though having bishops as the chief officers, practice the presbyterial form of governance. Thus, though the supreme officers of the Church are ‘bishops’, they are expected not to govern without taking note of the special functions of the other offices and committees.

### **Presbyterial Leadership Governance**

The term ‘presbyterial’ is derived from the Greek word, *presbuteros*, meaning ‘elder’. The presbyterial system of leadership emphasizes a presbyterial polity on the basis of the parity of ministers, deacons, congregational lay-leaders, and a representative synodical and conference government.<sup>197</sup> It is argued that elders were vital in Israel’s leadership as they assisted Moses, the Kings, the Judges, the priest, and the Levites.<sup>198</sup> According to Myers, elders (older people) in the early Church who had demonstrated wisdom (1 Timothy 5:1; Hebrews 11:2) were granted such authority and (Acts 15:6, 22) beyond (Acts 16:4) records the influence of elders on the Apostolic Council at Jerusalem.<sup>199</sup> In this model, the principles of democracy are applied deriving from the belief that Christ is the sole head of the Church. The members are God’s priests, and they are considered each as an outcrop and envoy of the ecclesia.<sup>200</sup> Though similar with the congregational it is different, for while congregational systems vest all authority, legislative and administrative in the local church, unlike the presbyterial, which is vest in the synod or the conference.

The Presbyterial system contrasts sharply with the ‘historic’ Episcopal polity where there is a lower grade of self-governing capacity in the laity and a concentration of power in the bishops.<sup>201</sup> However, in the presbyterial system there is no distinction between the Moderator or Presiding Bishop and the other ministers. Nevertheless, the Moderators of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana or the Synod of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana are the first among equal

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<sup>196</sup> Asante, *Gems from the Preacher’s Pedestal*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>197</sup> Asante, *Gems from the Preacher’s Pedestal*, p. 101.

<sup>198</sup> Brand & Norman, *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views*, p. 93.

<sup>199</sup> A. C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 319.

<sup>200</sup> P. E. Engle & S. B. Cowan (eds.), *Who Runs the Church: 4 Views on Church Government?* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2004), p. 135.

<sup>201</sup> E. Asante, *The Call to Serve, A Theological Reflection on Ministry* (Accra: Methodist Book Depot, 2002), p. 123.

ministers. The same applies to the chairperson of various presbyteries, the Presiding Bishop and Bishops of The Methodist Church Ghana and the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of The Gambia. The chief officiating ministers in the commissioning and ordination of ministers are the Moderator and the Presiding Bishop. The highest court of appeal is the General Assembly or the Conference, which also oversees the whole Church (that is the denomination). In the Presbyterian system every ordained minister can baptize and confirm.<sup>202</sup> The Presbyterian Church polity operates on tenure of leadership. Therefore, one is elected into office mainly by the synod or conference and in other times by the local church, for a specified period after which the tenure comes to an end. For Asante, the merit of this position is that from the account of the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, the elders or presbyters occupied an important place at the highest levels of the Church.<sup>203</sup>

### **Congregational Leadership Governance**

Thiessen asserts that ‘the congregational type of church government vests all legislative authority in the local Church. District and general organizations are merely advisory in power and instituted simply for the purpose of cooperating in missionary work, education work, and so on...’<sup>204</sup> Akin, Garrett and White write that:

It is that form of Church government in which final human authority rest with the local or a particular congregation when it gathers for decision-making. ...decision about membership, leadership, doctrine, worship, conduct, missions, finances, property, relationships... are to be made by the gathered congregation except when such decision have been delegated by the congregation to individual members or group of members.<sup>205</sup>

This system emphasizes the place of the local congregation in the Church leadership governance. It is rooted in two scriptures namely; Colossians 1:18; that Christ is the head of His Church and 1 Peter 2:9; the priesthood of all believers. This is further supported by the fact that Christ has not left His Church and wherever two or three are gathered in His name He is there in their midst as their head (Matthew 18:20).

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<sup>202</sup> Asante, *Gems from the Preacher's Pedestal*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>203</sup> Asante, *Gems from the Preacher's Pedestal*, p. 102.

<sup>204</sup> H. C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* Revised Edition (Grand Rapid, MI.: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 317-318.

<sup>205</sup> D. Akin, J. L. Garret & J. R. White, *Perspective on Church Government* (Nashville, TN.: Broadman & Holman, 2004), p. 157. Also see, D. Akin, ‘Perspective on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity,’ in *Journal of Religious Leadership*, Vol. 5, Nos. 1 & 2, (2006), pp. 45-50.



Kung further says the accent in Ephesians and Colossians is on the headship of Christ and on the subordination of the total Church to Christ.<sup>206</sup>

Christ is the great High Priest, in whom believers have access to the presence of God without the need of any human priestly intermediary. The local congregation is thus self-governing and not subjected to Episcopal or Presbyterian control.

Congregational polity however does promote the popular election of Church Boards though ordination is not necessary for leadership; a form of recognition is given to individuals who are appointed by popular acclamation to lead the congregation.<sup>207</sup>

This system has two main streams namely: ‘connective congregationalism’ – when the local Churches come together in agreement to spread the gospel and for the sustenance of catholicity. The second is ‘associational congregationalism’ – which gives local Churches the freedom to shape their practices according to their own judgment about the gospel’s requirements. Freedom is given greater emphasis than control.<sup>208</sup> In the congregational system therefore each congregation sets its own doctrine, practices and standards. Congregational leadership governance clearly shows the flexibility of operations and the all-inclusive nature of participation in decision-making yet it seemingly undercuts or downplays the roles of the ministry gifts of the minister, pastor, elder, and others as encouraged by the scriptures (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Ephesians 4:11-12; Titus 1:5-9).

No leadership system can claim to be fully biblical. All have elements that can be buttressed by the New Testament and still others which cannot be substantiated by New Testament evidence.<sup>209</sup> Morris argues:

It is better to recognize that, in the New Testament Church, there were elements that were capable of being developed into the Episcopal, Presbyterian, and congregational systems, and which, in point of fact, have so developed. But, while there is no reason why any modern Christian should not hold fast to his or her particular Church polity and rejoice in the values it

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<sup>206</sup> H. Kung, *The Church* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968), p. 225.

<sup>207</sup> Asante, *Gems from the Preacher’s Pedestal*, p. 103.

<sup>208</sup> E. L. Long, Jr., *Patterns of Polity Varieties of Church Governance* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), pp. 103-136..

<sup>209</sup> Asante, *Gems from the Preacher’s Pedestal*, p. 103.

secures to him or her, that does not give him or her the license to unchurch others whose readings of the evidence is different.<sup>210</sup>

For Conner, all three Church leadership types of governance have been in operation with the evidence of the Spirit of Christ at work.<sup>211</sup> Nevertheless, Asante rightly emphasizes that Church governments are hardly ends in themselves but means to an end. The end is the glory of God. Therefore, the differing Church governments should facilitate the glory of God in the world through the workings of the Church, concretized as structured denominations.<sup>212</sup> This I urge is the only way the manifestation of unity in diversity, and diversity in unity of the Spirit, can be revealed and demonstrated as understood from scripture.

The Church today is challenged to be an active, relevant, audible voice with a vision, shown in character and in its ministry. At the forefront are the clergy with a ‘facilitating ministry’ that works in cooperation with other ministries in the Church.<sup>213</sup> There is therefore the need for responsible management; however, not that management becomes an end in itself, but a means that calls believers to discipline, and commitment. The contemporary situation needs a collaborative Church where the clergy are people of vision who are able to help the Christian community to work out its policies and vocation. The Church should be facilitated by a leadership governance that makes obvious the Church’s call to being and doing in its ‘holy worldliness,’ expressing its vision, living its character and doing its responsibilities.

The Gambia Church, conscious of its context within a West African religious worldview and the need for a relevant inculturated gospel needs to strategize its leadership accordingly. This influence is vital for ministry for, without it, the effects of leadership will be null and void leaving a theology without the power of the practicality of the gospel in the daily physical and spiritual needs of the West African Gambian Christian. It is therefore important that these leadership skills are married

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<sup>210</sup> L. Morris, ‘Church Government’ in Everett F. Harrison (Ed.) *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1960), p. 27.

<sup>211</sup> Conner, *The Church in the New Testament*, p. 104.

<sup>212</sup> Asante, *Gems from the Preacher’s Pedestal*, p. 104.

<sup>213</sup> Asante, *The Call to Serve*, p. 124.

with the knowledge of the need of the gospel that relevantly speaks to the Gambian people. This is the purpose for understanding the Gambian worldview and inculturational need in the preceding chapters.

With the above said, biblical, church, and African Gambian leadership together can be more effective when it considers the rites of passages as a means by which the Methodist Church The Gambia inculturates the gospel. The rites of passages thus become major points of contact and engagements between Church leadership and the community. That is one place where the theologizing and inculturations activity can shaped and form the people's total identity. There the Church can practice grass-root ministry, a demonstration of leadership that engages the culture and total livelihood of the people's customs and traditional practices. This leadership is encouraged, as suggested in the previous chapter, to be of the *skenosis* model, which is flexible, accommodative, adaptive and temporal in addition to its *kenosis* qualities. Therefore the quest for the inculturation of the gospel with its implications for Church leadership could provide this practice of ministry that brings together the rites of passages of Gambians and the *skenosis* leadership model under which the Methodist Church The Gambia can chose to operate. The next chapter helps the Gambian Methodist Christians identify with their Christian heritage of Methodism.

## Chapter Four

### Lessons from the Methodist Heritage

The heritage called Methodist came from a context surrounding the lives of John and Charles Wesley. It is however wrong in Davies' view to think of Methodism as coming into existence in the time of the Wesleys. It is rather a recurrent form of Christianity, which is sometimes contained within the frontiers of the Church at large, or drives itself over those frontiers to find a territory of its own. The recurrent characteristics of such a movement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century begun by the Wesleys with great expansion and permanence gave them the right to be called Methodism par excellence.<sup>214</sup>

#### Society and Worldview

The world of John and Charles Wesley was characterized with contrasts and extremes. Significant turning points in English and European history had just been passed about the time John Wesley was born<sup>215</sup> on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1703, in Epworth, Lincolnshire. This was the period known as the 'Age of Reason' where ideas included; the origin of knowledge being from our sense experience (Empiricism), existence of rational theology (Deism) and a display of Scepticism when reason judges revelation. Everything was to be reduced to nature (Materialism), nothing was to be known outside nature (Naturalism), and the accepted process of knowing was through reason (Rationalism). The publication of Isaac Newton's *Principia* in 1687 ushered in what is understood to be modern scientific method.<sup>216</sup> British society in 1700 had a very wide gulf between the lifestyles of the aristocracy at the top and the common people at the bottom of the social pyramid.<sup>217</sup> The economic changes which brought prosperity to the country as a whole remain only an illusion for the vast majority of the population who lived in a world of disease, high infant mortality,

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<sup>214</sup> R. E. Davies, *Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1985), p. 11.

<sup>215</sup> H. Butterfield, 'England in the Eighteenth Century' in Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp (eds), *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. I, (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1965), p. 3.

<sup>216</sup> B. Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2000), p. 1.

<sup>217</sup> Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, p. 3.

lack of education, drunkenness, promiscuity and all manner of appalling conditions.<sup>218</sup>

There were many nominal Christians during the eighteenth century who rarely attended Church services. The Church of England enjoyed national status as the only body accepted in the English constitution. The Church was diverse in character and examples of excess wealth, corruption, ignorance or neglect among others were set alongside, with its many opposite impressions, the daily experiences of the Church. Many of the clergy went about their duties with little enthusiasm or conviction. There was moral and spiritual laxity as many clergy were ‘absent’, employing curates, often overworked but underpaid, who carried the majority of the work. The clergy were often occupied in hunting, shooting, fishing, and drinking with the local gentry.<sup>219</sup>

### **The Holy Tradition**

In 1727, after his initial experience at Oxford, Wesley was called home to assist his father as curate at Wroot.<sup>220</sup> He returned to Oxford in September 1729 and joined the ‘Holy Club’.<sup>221</sup> The ‘Holy Club’ was already in existence but John became its natural leader taking over from Charles. They engaged in private devotion, prayer, studying and discussing the Bible and other books of sacred learning, communion prison visits.<sup>222</sup> They were eventually nicknamed – ‘Bible Moths’, ‘Enthusiasts’, ‘Methodists’, etc. Among them, ‘Methodist’ proved longest lasting.<sup>223</sup> Davies describes them as a company of rather priggish young men who were horrified by the things they saw around them and were determined to save their souls in the only way they knew they could.<sup>224</sup>

After a largely unsuccessful time in Georgia, John Wesley returned to England and in February 1738, he and Charles met a Moravian called Peter Bohler.<sup>225</sup> Bohler

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<sup>218</sup> Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, p. 3.

<sup>219</sup> Davies, *Methodism*, p. 28.

<sup>220</sup> Collins, *John Wesley A Theological Journey*, p. 43.

<sup>221</sup> Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, p. 12.

<sup>222</sup> J. Wesley, *Journal*, November 1729.

<sup>223</sup> Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, p. 13.

<sup>224</sup> Davies, *Methodism*, p. 45.

<sup>225</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, Tuesday 7 February 1738.

showed them a different quality of living that was possible for those who were at peace with God.

This struggle accompanied him till 24<sup>th</sup> May 1738:

In the evening, I went very unwilling to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change, which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.<sup>226</sup>

Aldersgate marked an important theological and psychological turning point for Wesley. Having the best of both worlds he combined the notion of personal holiness and personal faith, harmonizing grace and holiness. Hong views Wesley as experiencing the gospel personally. His theology was transferred from his head to his heart, from a theoretical notion to a personal assent as a result of his 'heart-warming' experience.<sup>227</sup>

### **Methodism in inculturational mission and ministry**

The Wesley brothers became the center of what became known as 'the Methodist Revival', even though according to Davies, the originator of the revival was George Whitefield.<sup>228</sup> Whitefield was the most striking orator of the revival, but his long-term impact was less than that of the Wesleys. John had better powers of organization and administration.

Whitefield invited John to Bristol in 1739 to join in his open-air preaching. John went reluctantly due to his concerns of anything done contrary to the established nature of the Church of England at the time tended to be classified as 'dissent'. It was not that open-air preaching was entirely new but that in Wesley's case, this was without invitation or permission from other Anglican clergy.<sup>229</sup> It was however, an inculturational attempt to meet the needs of the people, at the place where they were.

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<sup>226</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, Wednesday 24 May 1738.

<sup>227</sup> Hong, *John Wesley The Evangelist*, p. 31.

<sup>228</sup> Davies, *Methodism*, p. 56.

<sup>229</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, Saturday 31 March 1739.

Wesley preached to people who needed to hear the gospel, within the conditions of the daily existence in the street, outside the established church. John Wesley's sermons stressed personal acceptance of God's forgiveness and love. He preached 'experiential religion'.<sup>230</sup> Wesley's congregations were often hearing for the first time a gospel, which was for them personally.<sup>231</sup> Wesley demonstrated inculturational leadership as he took on the assistance of 'helpers' who were both ordinary men and also Anglican priests. Some gradually became known as local preachers working within the locality they lived while others travelled the country preaching and became identical with full-time ministers. There were also many women helpers in Wesley's ministry, including women from his own family. Wesley relied on Scripture, tradition, reason and experience as the main source for understanding what a Christian and the Christian community should be and do. These four are called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, although it was not unique to Wesley and demonstrates his ability to learn from others and use their insight.

### **Societies, Classes Meetings, Bands and Connexion**

Gradually, the need to provide structure to sustain Methodism's preaching ministry became essential. Inculturational leadership became paramount considering the needs of this growing discipleship movement. Therefore, Wesley applied an inculturational strategy of organizing the movement into societies, class meetings, bands and connexion.

Wesley's purpose for Methodism was to reform the nation, particularly the church and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.<sup>232</sup> He organized United Societies with sole enrollment requirement of the desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from one's sins. They had Bible study, prayer, religious conversations and dynamic fellowships in the class meetings as they bore one another's burdens, cared for each other and spent more time together.<sup>233</sup> Wesley's evangelistic strategy was simple and fruitful. He did not wait for people to come to him; he went with the gospel to where the people were. He then immediately brought them to the class meetings, worked and prayed with them until they have had the inner assurance of salvation. Wesley

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<sup>230</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, Sunday 8 April 1739.

<sup>231</sup> Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, p. 43.

<sup>232</sup> Hong, *John Wesley The Evangelist*, p. 113.

<sup>233</sup> Hong, *John Wesley The Evangelist*, pp. 140-141.

continued with them and eventually many turned out to become lay leaders. The class meeting was thus Wesley's best organization for effective evangelism.

As the connexion spread across the country, Wesley saw the need to organize Methodists on a national as well as a local level. In 1744, he began the practice of calling together his clerical supporters and his preachers to a conference.<sup>234</sup> This gathering became annual, and settled the main affairs of the 'Connexion', as it came to be known, for the ensuing year.<sup>235</sup> The first Quarterly Meeting, which resembled the Conference at the circuit level, was held in October 1748 at Todmorden Edge.<sup>236</sup> By the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century thus, much of the structures that gave birth to the Methodist Church were already in place, however, Wesley continued to advocate his loyalty to the Church of England.

Again the inculturational leadership strategy that Wesley continually employed gave rise to issues, which gradually made the 'separation' evident from before his death. Such was the Deed of Declaration, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1784, which gave Methodism an independent legal status. Wesley signed for the constitution of a 'Legal Hundred', which served as Conference, when his desired wish to hand over leadership to Fletcher of Madeley was impossible because of Fletcher's death. Secondly, when the need for more ministers to be sent to America came, and the Bishop of London turned down the appeal from Wesley to ordain some, he ordained ministers for the American Church. This is however, a sensitive move by Wesley, I argue, for he could have waited for the possibility of another Bishop in the established Church to do the ordination, but went ahead and did it. This is contrary to his supposedly strong Anglican identity and respect for Church order. In spite of this action taken by John, I argue that the context demanded a missional priority, an act of inculturational leadership. Thus, though Wesley can be considered ecclesiastically wrong, considering its missional purpose, it is an action that teaches the priority of mission over ecclesiastical order in Wesley's understanding which definitely influences leadership. Charles Wesley's often-quoted declaration that 'ordination is

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<sup>234</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, Monday 25 August 1744.

<sup>235</sup> Davies, *Methodism*, p. 77.

<sup>236</sup> Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, pp. 45-47.



separation'<sup>237</sup> set the situation in its proper perspective. John Wesley, nevertheless, ordained deacons, elders and to the office of the episcopacy, only indicated a clear and unmistakable break with the Anglican concept of episcopacy, even though he had initially asserted that only a Bishop could ordain to holy orders. This I consider a radical move cognizance of the inculturational needs of setting a new creation for a new nation; America. The American Church was new and separate, in a land that the Anglican Church was effectively non-existent, and had needs of the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion; thus needed a new and independent leadership authorized to perform sacramental ministry. It therefore needed nothing less than an Episcopal leadership, which the Methodist movement in England did not need since they were still considered as part of the Anglican Church. I argue for the ordination as act of inculturation as it is seen as a result of pragmatic realization of the situation in the new world; America. The need for new leadership was apparent and urgent, as well as the need to provide and support this leadership by Wesley who saw the opportunity for the expansion of his missional discipleship movement. The ordination of an episcopal leadership thus was the manifestation of Wesley's inculturational leadership attempt of meeting the needs of the American society.

The third was the revision of the 'Book of Common Prayer' for the North American Church.<sup>238</sup> With all of these, it was just a matter of time after Wesley's death as an Anglican Priest that the Methodist Church rose as an independent body.

Methodism continued to grow after the death of John Wesley yet with many leadership problems and splits. There was the issue of preachers and the laity with regard to the leadership of the Church. However, the tradition Wesley left with the Deed of Declaration kept the governance of the Connexion at the hands of the preachers. The relationship between Methodists and Anglicans became another issue in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a number of Methodist splits occurred.

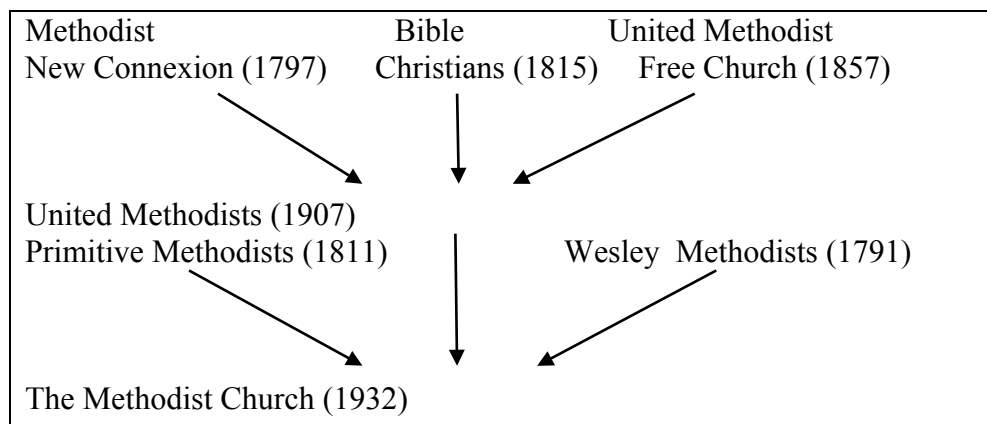
Methodist union in 1932 was one response to the challenges. There was however a prefaced earlier union in 1907 of the Methodist New Connexion, the Bible Christians and the United Methodist Free Church. This union current had begun even earlier

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<sup>237</sup> D. M. Campbell, *The Yoke of Obedience* (Nashville, TN.: Abingdon Press, 1988), p.66.

<sup>238</sup> Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, pp. 48-51.

with the crucial 1878 Wesleyan Conference adaptation of lay representatives, thereby removing a main course of disagreement with its fellow Methodists.<sup>239</sup>



The union itself was a scene of celebrations. The publication of the Methodist Hymn Book in 1933 contained a balance selection of hymns from all three traditions (Wesleyan, Primitives and United Methodists). Furthermore, each had to compromise with the Wesleyan practice of always having a ministerial President was retained, but out of deference to the Primitives whose Presidents had sometimes been a layman, a new (lay) office of Vice-President was created. The most important tenets of all three bodies were preserved, but open-ended, to allow a certain degree of flexibility of interpretation.

The most obvious challenge remaining for the Methodist Church was the ongoing decline in a more secular, post Christendom Britain. Its theology, worship, ministry, mission and service had to be renewed. In recent years, there has been more focus on developing the theology of ministry for both the ordained and lay ministries. Both roles are continually explored for a better wholeness in ministry. Consequently; the ‘sector ministry’ – those whose main ministry is outside the church but are ordained, and the ordination of women – which was also a major step in 1974 though had been considered since 1939. The role of women continued to be explored to the extent of women being ‘Chair’ of Districts, with the first female President of Conference, Rev’d Kathleen Richardson in 1992. There had also been a major step in recognizing two orders of ordained ministry in the Conference of 1993 in Derby, namely, the diaconal and the presbytery.<sup>240</sup>

<sup>239</sup> Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>240</sup> Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, pp. 90-91.

Cognizance of Methodism's accommodative nature, structural changes to adapt to the missionary needs of the ministry continued to be inevitable. This is a trait that John Wesley was known for - his gift for improvisation and his willingness to embrace change provided such a notable precedent. In the words of Tabraham, 'Methodism has never had an immutable system of theology, churchmanship or government,' this has been its essential strength.<sup>241</sup> Wesley's approach of creating an inculturational form of leadership in the Methodist movement equipped the Church with the ability to adapt and accommodate the needs of the individual, nurture believers and ensure growth. This is seen in his creation of the class, band and select systems. The underlining leadership strategy is discussed in chapter six and seven, as they are genetics of John Wesley's leadership. Within the context of 18<sup>th</sup> century England, Wesley creates an inculturational system that accommodates relational and accountability leadership, in all levels with the aim of seeking God, using disciplines, engaging mission and sharing fellowship. This created the atmosphere within which those who wanted to escape the wrath to come, could be gathered and nurtured and through them nurture others. Thus, within an African Gambian worldview, Methodism must do no less.

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<sup>241</sup> Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, p. 92.

## Chapter Five

### An Overview of the Methodist Church The Gambia

#### The Methodist Story (1821 to 2009 Autonomy)

The beginning of the Methodist story came with the landing of the Rev'd John Morgan on Gambian soil on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 1821, who was shortly joined by the Rev'd John Baker from Sierra Leone. Morgan came at the request of Sir Charles MacCarthy, the then Governor of both Sierra Leone and the newly founded colony of Bathurst, who, when on furlough to England asked the Wesleyan Missionary Society, amongst others, to send personnel to The Gambia.<sup>242</sup> This was for the opportune purpose of mission work at Tendaba; a trading town where the security of the missionary could be ensured by merchants but more so that a rural mission station with an initial established congregation could be explored.<sup>243</sup>

From the initial encounter with the Gambian people Morgan faced expectations to make amulets and interpret dreams of those who listened to his sermons and call to repentance. Little did he realize that these expectations were as a result of the metaphysical concept of the Gambian worldview who saw him as another “marabout” who had come to work for them.<sup>244</sup> The understanding and application of this metaphysical concept remained a major distinction of relevance between the Methodist Missionary and the Islamic Missionaries that worked in The Gambia.

Shortly Morgan and Baker left for Tendaba. There, the Chief could not assure their security, they were to settlement near by the river for possible and immediate escape sensing danger. This pushed them to explore other options. One was readily available with the help of the Combo King. Mandanaree, located on the south bank of the river about six miles from St. Mary's was their second choice. It was a settlement of staunch Muslims who were very hostile to the missionaries as individuals and to their mission. In the face of such opposition they were able to erect a chapel for the small Christian community called Bethesda in August 1821.

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<sup>242</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 194.

<sup>243</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 194.

<sup>244</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 195.

This effort was short lived and after a few months of facing ill health, bad water, consistent robberies, and continuous opposition, they returned to Bathurst.<sup>245</sup>

In 1824 John Morgan had the assistance of Rev'd Robert Hawkins and his wife. Morgan made certain vital decisions that set the framework of the future of the Methodist Church The Gambia. His work was twofold; to have the mission center in St. Mary's Island and an up-river station - McCarthy Island - which could serve as a center for evangelization of the countryside. Through the efforts of Morgan, a school was started in St. Mary's. This was not very successful initially as Morgan's approach showed again his limited knowledge in the metaphysical forces of the African Gambian worldview. Morgan burnt the amulets of the children, which provoked the anger of parents and thus resulted in the withdrawal of many of the children from the school.<sup>246</sup> Morgan continued to face challenges with respect to the Gambian customs and traditions at the dawn of his work, such as his inability to tolerate the membership of individuals who were living in polygamy and cohabitation, and superstitions. This was a disciplined approach to Christian doctrine from a European perspective and yet an insensitive application to his environmental/ cultural needs which resulted in only a few members, about 20 to 30, since the majority of the liberated African Gambians, Wolof artisans, merchant and Wolof Slaves were practicing African traditional cultured people.<sup>247</sup> This demonstrates inculturation as necessary bearing in mind their metaphysical concepts, customs and traditional practices.

The missionary work against slavery and other oppression was very important. Missionaries like Richard Marshall, William Moister, Thomas Dove, William Swallow, Henry Wilkinson, Robert MacBrair and especially William Fox were actively engaged in the struggle against the slave trade and domestic slavery. Sanneh notes that the church 'joined the struggle against slavery, social repression and discrimination against women with all their hearts and minds, however meagre the means, however uncertain the future and however hazardous the path'.<sup>248</sup> Their commitment was absolute that when force and published treatises and articles

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<sup>245</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 196.

<sup>246</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 200.

<sup>247</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 197.

<sup>248</sup> *Foundation Conference Brochure* (Banjul: The Methodist Printers, 2009) p. 8.

written against slavery in all its form were not enough, the missionaries raised the funds and bought the freedom of their members.<sup>249</sup> These turned out positively for the Methodist Missionaries as more freed slaves joined the church with the Wolof in majority. To assist this Wolof work was the compilation of a 2000 Wolof dictionary and translation of religious materials like the conference catechism and parts of John's Gospel by Marchell and translation of liturgy, hymns and Gospels by John Fieldhouse (1876-1879) and Robert Dixon (1880-1882 and 1903-1909), respectively.<sup>250</sup>

Methodism in The Gambia associated strongly with the African liberated slaves, known as the Krios, and the core pillars of Methodism in The Gambia to date. Both the Methodist Church and Church of England felt responsible for the fate of the many liberated Africans who were transported to The Gambia.<sup>251</sup> Many of the Anglicans among them came from Sierra Leone, as the Church Missionary Society was active among the liberated Africans. In 1832, there was a station in Maccarthy with a resident assistant Methodist Minister. The initial aim was to convert the Fulas but it failed. In that light they shifted their full attention to the liberated Africans. Their children were invited to the Methodist day Schools and special Sunday school classes for adults and children.<sup>252</sup> Liberated Africans were also employed to build the mission premises and to clear the 600 acres the Mission had purchased for a model-farm, thus giving them income and instructions from an agriculturist.<sup>253</sup> By providing education, fellowship and income, the foundation was laid for the intimate ties that exist between the Krio community and the Methodist Church up to this present day.

The Krio identified themselves with a Western life-style, with the Victorian values of thrift, industry, self-reliance and piety and by accepting Christianity as part of the life; they built for themselves a new future and a new identity.<sup>254</sup> They adopted European habits, which included; clothing, names, house decorations and style of

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<sup>249</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 199.

<sup>250</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 200.

<sup>251</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 65.

<sup>252</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 66.

<sup>253</sup> W. Fox, *A Brief History of the Wesleyan Mission on the Western Coast of Africa* (London: Aylott and Jones, 1851), p. 444.

<sup>254</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 67.

worship. In addition, they also attended the Masonic Lodge and joined clubs, playing cricket, golf or tennis. Nevertheless, not all things in the Krio Culture are European. They had reverence for their ancestors and participated in secret societies and Husting Societies such as the *Egugu*, like many other African Gambians. Among these they practice the rites of passages of birth, marriage and death during which they do the 'pull na do or komojadu' surrounding the birth, 'pul na stop' or 'put stop' surrounding the engagement and marriage, and the 'wake-keeping and charity' surrounding the death.<sup>255</sup>

The Methodists' attitude towards Islam varied according to personal experiences rather than theological standpoint. Islam formed the major obstacle to the growth of Christianity as it labelled Jesus Christ as the white person's God and Mohamet, the black person's God from the onset. This coupled with the accommodative approach of the Islam that arrived in West Africa, enable it to '...adapt so well to the shades of the territory and the stone'.<sup>256</sup> This Islam did with particular focus on divination and the production of amulets, which the British Methodist Missionaries neither attempted to understand nor provided a relevant alternative from the Christians Scriptures. The total acceptance of polygamy was another area in which Islam had a greater advantage over Christianity as it proved an obstacle for practicing Gambians to convert to Christianity. Two things, which became clear, were the fact that missionaries needed a different approach to evangelizing Muslims compared to African Gambian Traditionalists. Secondly, they needed to contextualize their habits and services like the Muslim Quranic Teachers, rather than remain strangers among a people they were witnessing to.<sup>257</sup>

Morgan's decision to set MacCarthy Island as another mission base up country was vital. This strategic move was in addition to countryside evangelism and to ensure the feeding of people during the hungry season since MacCarthy was a suitable and fertile spot for agriculture. The mission presence there would also provide education and other services for the liberated Africans whom the Governor intended to settle there from Sierre Leone. Furthermore, he wanted to separate the Fulas from their

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<sup>255</sup> C. M. Fyle and I. Heroe, 'Krio Traditional Beliefs', in *Africana Research Bulletin*, VII/3 (1997), pp. 3-26.

<sup>256</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 114.

<sup>257</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, pp. 252-253.

oppressive counterparts; the Mandinkas. They got the funds and purchased the plot of land, yet the Fulas did not resettle. Morgan realized that the Fulas were a nomadic people with what he believed to be a Semitic descent and thought they would be interested in Christianity.<sup>258</sup> However, what is problematic is the fact of Morgan's knowledge of the Fulas being a nomadic people yet choose to settle them down, when one of many options would have been to attach a travelling evangelist to the group. This strategy of attaching a Muslim Cleric was what the Islamic Fula Jihadits used to their advantage and succeeded in spreading Islam in The Gambia.

The attitude of the British missionaries towards the African Gambians gradually began to change after William Fox and William Swallow left in 1843. Many letters of complaint were written to the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) about the conduct of Benjamin Chapman and Matthew Godman who championed the course of racism. The letters requested replacements but WMMS supported their British personnel over the Gambian agents. The Gambians had a long struggle under this problematic leadership conduct. Many members were expelled and most of the indigenous workers (assistant missionaries, teachers and ministers) were suspended or retired. The partnership and friendship between Europeans and Gambians that existed in the first two decades had gone and racism and European superiority had come.<sup>259</sup> Failures to inculturate leadership were apparent.

An example was that of John Samuel Joiner, a local Gambian Minister. In 1889, Joiner was accused of embezzlement of funds. This period belonged to the heyday of colonialism and racism.<sup>260</sup> The Chairman W. R. Cockill realizing how obvious the extent of racism had been among the British missionaries sought a team of Sierra-Leonean missionaries to help him consider the case of Joiner. This seemed wise, yet the relationship between the Sierra-Leonean and the Gambian Krio were no better.<sup>261</sup> The team declared Joiner guilty. Members of the congregation and a British missionary Robert Dixon (1880-1882) protested. Dixon had been instrumental in Joiner's candidature and argued that Joiner did not have a fair hearing, and was given too many responsibilities without proper instructions on how to also keep

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<sup>258</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 201.

<sup>259</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 205.

<sup>260</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 266.

<sup>261</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 260.



accounts.<sup>262</sup> The Bathurst Leaders' Meeting argument was that Joiner's case was that of neglect and ignorance rather than embezzlement. Unfortunately, the team also did not hear them. In the process, the British Chairman Cockill was accused of racism, and treating others with contempt.<sup>263</sup>

This was a very serious leadership issue that, in my view, affected Church leadership with a huge gap between British missionaries and second generational Christians for in 1849, none of the first generation of Gambian assistant missionaries, who had served the church for many years, were available. All had been removed. This did not help the cultural differences and differences in priorities between the British missionaries and the indigenous personnel. More so the limited training of the indigenous ministry, lack of supervision, encouragement and limited communication between missionaries and indigenous personnel contributed to the hurdles the early mission faced in raising a better leadership, even though they tried.<sup>264</sup> Ongoing British control and the failure to fully contextualize leadership negatively impeded the work of Methodism in The Gambia.

### **The Education Mission (1821-2009)**

Schools were set up from the very beginning as part of the mission strategies of the early Methodists. According to Sanneh, 'If through the hymns of Charles and John Wesley it can be said that Methodism was born in song, in The Gambia and elsewhere it can be said with equal justification that Methodism was bred in Education, with School Teachers Methodism's foremost evangelist's and foot-soldiers.'<sup>265</sup> A missionary in The Gambia, Rev'd Benjamin Tregaskis (1865-75), argued '...you may sooner think of closing your chapels than of extending religion without education.'<sup>266</sup> In 1821 John Morgan and John Baker set up a school in their house. Mrs Hawkins and Mrs Moister, wives of missionaries, helped teach girls to sew. In addition to this, Frederiks noted the early consistent involvement and participations of the Gambian teachers as they were employed as staff in the schools.

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<sup>262</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 260.

<sup>263</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 260.

<sup>264</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 269.

<sup>265</sup> L. Sanneh, 'Charting a Course in the Era of Autonomy: Prospectus of Methodism in The Gambia April 2009', in *The Methodist Story* (Banjul Methodist Printers, 2009), p. 13.

<sup>266</sup> G. L. Allen, 'A Count Down to Autonomous Foundation Conference' in *The Methodist Story*, (Banjul: The Methodist Printers, 2009), p. 6.

Among them were Robert McDonough who was employed as schoolmaster in 1828, and later John and Mary Cupidon, Pierre and Mary Sallah, Abraham Goddard and Amadi Gum.<sup>267</sup>

By 1840, in St. Mary's Island, a co-educational institution was opened and named the Wesley Day School. Again in 1843, the Southampton Committee in England helped sponsored another Georgetown project for yet another special school initiated specifically for royalty - the sons of chiefs. This was an attempt to evangelize through the palaces. However, this attempt failed. The project was then taken over and named Armitage High School after Governor Armitage of Georgetown. By this time the Georgetown Wesley Methodist School was a decade old and very active.

By September 1875, the Methodist Boys High School was founded in Bathurst. This school grew in membership and teaching quality under the mantle of Rev'd C. L. Leopold (1908-20) a Sierra Leonean missionary.<sup>268</sup> Even though education was focused on with less emphasis on evangelism, the two main schools of Georgetown Wesley Methodist School and the Methodist Boys High School left deep convictions and appreciation in the lives of individuals who later attained important government positions and other significant roles in society. With the government becoming partners in the education enterprise in 1882, school graduates were needed to staff offices of the state. The pressure was then on the schools to produce quality individuals, which the Church measured up to. About a hundred years later, the school became the foundation for the government's decision to establish primary education.<sup>269</sup>

In 1894, the Methodist Mission took a very helpful approach to maximize the limited space available for both evangelistic and educational purposes at the Stanley Street grounds. The Result was the Bethel Methodist Chapel on a first floor and the Bethel Day School on the ground floor. The church continued to strive with education as a major tool for evangelism. A girls' school was also initiated by 1915, called the

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<sup>267</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 201.

<sup>268</sup> Sanneh, 'Charting a Course in the Era of Autonomy: Prospectus of Methodism in The Gambia April 2009', p. 15.

<sup>269</sup> Sanneh, 'Charting a Course in the Era of Autonomy: Prospectus of Methodism in The Gambia April 2009', p. 14.

Methodist Girls High School at the ground floor of the Dobson Street Manse, presently the Methodist Connexional Office.

From 1950 onwards came a massive strain on the provision of adequate resources for quality teaching and facilities at both the Methodist Boys High School and the Methodist Girls High School. Thus the Government came in with the proposal of an amalgamated school with the provision of land, an attractive standard infrastructural package. This was however not going to be directly under the Synod of the Methodist Church but under a committee of management. The outcome is the establishment in 1959 of Gambia High School, a leading school in the country.<sup>270</sup>

Methodist education was ecumenical and interfaith. Anglican and Muslim children were all enrolled in Methodist schools from the beginning. There was no confessional requirement, but was open to all. In 1955 when the Methodist Boys High School had 140 students; 87 were Muslims, 24 Anglicans and 29 Methodists. A Muslim boy won the Scripture Prize of 1956.<sup>271</sup> The work of Methodists therefore towards interfaith understanding and collaboration cannot be underrated, for in the absence of a strong active evangelization effort among Muslims; they devoted themselves to educating Muslim children and affording them equal opportunities for leading productive lives in the society. Thus, Methodist witness expressed the example of inter-religious harmony and inter-personal solidarity, which is true to present day.

Today, this Methodist attitude has not changed. It continues to cater for all children in The Gambia, irrespective of their creed and ethnicity. Education and a place in Methodist Schools are available for all especially for hardworking students who perform well in School. However, this stress on education has not produced significant growth in Church membership.

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<sup>270</sup> Sanneh, 'Charting a Course in the Era of Autonomy: Prospectus of Methodism in The Gambia April 2009', p. 14.

<sup>271</sup> Sanneh, 'Charting a Course in the Era of Autonomy: Prospectus of Methodism in The Gambia April 2009', p. 16.

### **The Medical and Health Mission (1966-2009)**

The Church also considered health work with respect to its evangelical mission. The first medical missionary from the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society was Edna Green.<sup>272</sup> She came to The Gambia in 1926, started a mother child clinic in Bathurst, medical work in the 1930s in Sukuta and a small clinic at Cape point which lasted until 1940.<sup>273</sup>

Medical work was again encouraged in the 1960s by the Chairman Rev'd John Stanley Naylor (1959-1966) who initiated a health program to accompany evangelical work at Marakissa. The World Council of Churches (WCC) supported this initiative financially. Right from the start Gambian lay workers were involved and participated fully. People like C. M. J. Edwards, Charles F. Mendi (now the Reverend) and W. Bankole Coker (now the Reverend), were practically implementing such activities alongside their evangelical responsibilities. The WCC finance enabled the construction of the Marakissa Clinic, a Church and School. Sifoe and Jiboro outstation clinics were built along other vital services, equipments and transportation services procured. The Rev'd Eric St. Claire Clarke from Barbados, served as Chairman and General Superintendent (1966-1971) consolidating the program.<sup>274</sup>

In addition to the Medical and Health services offered by the Mission, the Church opened a Dental Clinic in 2006 at Brikama within the property of the Methodist Mission Agricultural Program (MMAP). This was affordable and accessible to many in a location where there was no such facility instituted by the Government. The Church therefore took the initiative where a medical service was needed but not available.

### **The Agricultural and Environmental Mission (1970-2009)**

By the 1970s, a great deal of concentration was given to an agricultural approach to mission. The MMAP was launched in Brikama to tackle the dual problem of arresting the prevailing severe environmental degradation and to assist in raising

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<sup>272</sup> It is not clear whether she was a medical Doctor, as she was only mentioned as a medical missionary.

<sup>273</sup> Federiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 301.

<sup>274</sup> Allen, 'A Count Down to Autonomous Foundation Conference,' p. 8.

agricultural productivity in the Sahel, as this was a vital concern for The Gambia in general. The Mission operated in a wider base than any previous projects. They created community wood lots and market gardens in the Western Region, North Bank Region and Janjangbureh. Countrywide there was also a well-digging component. According to Allen, the foresight to plan and initiate the program must be credited to the leadership of the Rev'd C. F. Alleyne (1971-74) of Guyana and the Rev'd Charles Awotwi-Pratt (1974-77) of Ghana respectively not forgetting the supportive impetus for an era of exhilarated growth given by the interim Chairman Rev'd Joseph Yedu Bannerman (1977-78) of Ghana and the Rev'd Ian Cuthbert Roach (1979-84) respectively.<sup>275</sup> A further development of this project gave rise to the two commercial wings of MMAP namely the Methodist Mission Agricultural Farms with production sites at Brikama and Makumbaya and the Methodist Preserves, which processes fruits and vegetables, all to generate income for the Church.<sup>276</sup>

### **Church Life**

As far as inculturation was concern, the Methodist Church The Gambia remained a British oversee district in its theology and praxis much longer than the rest of West African Methodism.<sup>277</sup> Being a local district of the British Methodist Church in praxis limited their appreciation of African traditional and cultural beliefs. Focus was therefore on expressing their way of life and understanding of ministry and the gospel as 'the way' rather than seeking to understand and inculturate the gospel with the culture of the people. Thus, Gambians only remained followers who only had to learn from missionaries, and follow orders and instructions. Therefore within a Gambian society, church, meetings, order of worship and celebration is all British. This indeed did not help especially when the missionaries remained comfortable to only minister among the African liberated slave due to failures with other ethnic groups, as African liberated slaves were easily ministered to due to their European experience. Thus the Church remained within its comfort zones replicating British structures in Gambian soil. Over 188 years The Gambia Methodist Church remained an English cultured and worship structured driven Church. This is so rooted in

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<sup>275</sup> Allen, 'A Count Down to Autonomous Foundation Conference,' p. 9.

<sup>276</sup> Allen, 'A Count Down to Autonomous Foundation Conference,' p. 9.

<sup>277</sup> The dates of autonomy for the Methodist Churches; Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone are 1961, 1962 and 1967 respectively.

worship to the extent that you have a whole year of services in the traditional British dressing and worship style while one Sunday is set apart to celebrate an 'African Sunday'. For a Gambia Methodist Church, this should be in the reverse, I argue.

For ordained ministry qualifications were consistent with the expectations of British academic standards. For this reason, many potential candidates who would have been in the ordained ministry today could not even offer themselves due to their inability to comprehend and properly converse in English nor seen as theologically sound in British standards. Therefore, the only main growth experienced in the Methodist Church The Gambia has been biological growth within the Churches populated by the descendants of African liberated slaves. For the ministry and ministers produced were mainly geared towards ministering to such peoples with the help of interpreters when ministering to other ethnics groups. The Methodist Church Gambia has over the years had many good interpreters who could have qualified within a Gambian setting to become ordained ministers but as far as the academic standards of a British local district in The Gambia is concerned; they were only qualified to be local evangelists and interpreters. The other indigenous ministers were mostly trained with the British academic standards qualification to make them fit for leadership. Without these qualifications, none of the Gambians ministers were fit for leadership roles. I therefore argue, this has to change for an inculturational ministry that appreciates the needs of the local uneducated non-English speaking Gambians to the office of an ordained minister to fully meet the needs of Gambian people in language and culture. With this in place, local indigenous ministry and leadership can better be explored and sustained.

The British oriented church did well in areas such as education, medical and agriculture, which yielded some benefits, but people needed such services temporarily and then returned to their African traditional and cultural beliefs. The few who were converted to Christianity often lived a dichotomized life while others reverted to Islam or African traditional and cultural religion after benefiting from the missionary resources. The social work was important but it did not help to grow the strength of the Church spiritually and numerically.

The position of the Methodist Church to promote a pure and witnessing community was nonetheless envied by many who coveted membership and its privileges. This

witnessing community was to promote Christian family life and Christian ethics and protect it from un-Christian influences that surrounded them. At the same time it was to serve as testimony to the Christian faith in such a way as to attract others to the faith.<sup>278</sup> This, though it served to preserve the pureness of the faith, had in a way limited the influence on 'outsiders'. It remained a struggle as this kind of Christianity exhibited to awaken desire in the African Gambian Traditionalists and Muslims proved to be non-effective, although there was difference intersperse of high and low membership strength due to some revivals at different times.<sup>279</sup>

### **Developing an Indigenous Ministry**

The Methodist Church The Gambia has been privileged in having mission partners from other West African countries. This has included both circuit ministers and district chairmen. Ghanaian and Sierra Leonean ministers served the district for a major part of its history. Presently, there are a few Sierra Leonean ministers still serving the Methodist Church The Gambia. They have all contributed to awakening and strengthening the quest for an inculturational ministry as they came with their individual ministry experiences and ideas and share them whenever the need arises. They encouraged Gambians to consider leadership.<sup>280</sup>

The Methodist Church The Gambia, as early as the 1950s, was already thinking about the future of the Church. This period had registered a number of other African Methodist Church gaining autonomy.

Ernest Stafford and Ian Roach were the first young Gambians ordained in the quest for the new Gambian leadership. Sadly this dream was short lived. After some years of service in The Gambia, both Ernest Stafford and Ian Roach went on the exchange program to Ghana and West Indies respectively. They were called later to the Chairmanship of The Gambia Church when the need arose. They faithfully came and served; Ian Roach from 1979-1984 and Ernest Stafford from 1984-1989. The Gambia then became handicapped again with no Gambian leader qualified to head

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<sup>278</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 244.

<sup>279</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 244.

<sup>280</sup> Conversation in June 2009 with Rt. Rev'd Jedu Bannerman of Methodist Church Ghana. He was once a Chairman of Gambian District. Also with Rt. Rev'd Titus Pratt from Methodist Church Ghana, who was also once the Chairman of the Gambia Methodist District.

the Church. There were three other ordained ministers; The Rev'd Richard Wilson who left for the USA, the Rev'd Francis Forbes who was nearing retirement age and the Rev'd Joseph Gomez who was not qualified in terms of years<sup>281</sup> in ministry to head the Church at the time. In 1989, one more candidate, Bankole Coker was accepted for the ministry. The Gambia then had her first Gambian female (Olufemi Cole-Njie) accepted candidate for the non-stipendiary ministry in 1992. Charles King became a candidate in 1994 and was sent to Ghana for ministerial formation while in 1995 Francois Mendy was proposed as a Ministerial candidate. In 1997, the Willie Carr was also accepted for the non-stipendiary ministry and Michael Jabang as a ministerial candidate. An additional two others offered for the ministry that year; Hannah Caroline Faal-Heim (the current first Gambian female Presiding Bishop) who was residing in England though a member of The Gambia Methodist District and Theophilus Mahoney who had just finished school. Later in 1999, Shaka Ashcroft and Bannie Manga were sent for training in ministerial formation to England. In the course of 1999, there were again two more female candidates, Matilda Mendy and Lucy Sarfo.<sup>282</sup> In 2005, three candidates were accepted for the Ministry; the Malanding Mendy, Gabriel Leonard Allen and Rodney Louis Prom. This growing trend of ministerial staff was an encouragement in the pursuit for autonomy.

In addition to the ministerial strength, were lay people who had been put into committees to work towards a Church Constitution and also study possibilities of improving the financial sustainability of the Church.

### **Road to Autonomy**

In 2000, the 160<sup>th</sup> Gambian District Synod in Bakau from 31<sup>st</sup> January to 3<sup>rd</sup> February, discussed a special Autonomy Agenda item presented by the Autonomy Steering Committee 1999 (ASCOM'99). In the words of Allen, 'the presentations made were professional, the questions posed were penetrating and the debate was exhilarating.'<sup>283</sup> This document was unanimously adopted and in 2003 the 163<sup>rd</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> One should have travelled at least 10 years in ministry to be qualified for the General Superintendent.

<sup>282</sup> Frederiks, *We have Toiled*, p. 351.

<sup>283</sup> Allen, 'A Count Down to Autonomous Foundation Conference' *The Methodist Story*, p. 10.



Gambia District Synod, ratified the first draft of Constitution and Standing Orders of The Gambia Methodist Church Conference.

From 2000 when the document was first adopted to 2009 when The Methodist Church The Gambia became autonomous, there were three distinct but inter-related leadership insights that steered the mission of the Church. These three were best described, in my view, in line with Allen, by a mission partner's wife-; Gera Fieren of Reverend Cornelius Fieren - from the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (2000-2006). She had worked with all three, and remarked;

The Rev'd Titus Pratt, Prof. Stephens and the Rev'd Norman Grigg, three totally different workers in God's vineyard. After Titus Pratt, the exotic and charismatic Ghanaian, Peter Stephens, the high-church scholar and ascetic, now Grigg, a relaxed and amicable pastor. What they have in common is that they are all three devout Methodists.<sup>284</sup>

After 188 years of eventful missionary service, the last of the three - the Rev'd Norman Grigg - became the first President of the Foundation Conference of the Methodist Church The Gambia on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 2009, that historic 271<sup>st</sup> Birthday of Methodism.<sup>285</sup> At Autonomy, there were 19 Methodist Ministers, 6 Circuits and 21 Churches and about 3,000 members.

### **Implications of Autonomy**

At autonomy, the Methodist Church in The Gambia became a "Partner Church" joining about sixty-eight other Methodist Churches throughout the globe. The Church therefore from this stage sought to take on the responsibility of leadership, mission and renewal, standing amongst other world church bodies bringing its uniqueness that is known from its Gambian heritage. The Church was already a member of the All African Conference of Churches (AACC) and the World Methodist Council (WMC). In 2011, from the 6<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> of December, the church received three representatives led by Bishop Ivan Abrahams of South Africa, to consider the Church's application to be a member church of the World Council of Churches.

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<sup>284</sup> Allen, 'A Count Down to Autonomous Foundation Conference' *The Methodist Story*, p. 10.

<sup>285</sup> Allen, 'A Count Down to Autonomous Foundation Conference' *The Methodist Story*, p. 11.

At Autonomy three main areas of concern were generally recognized. These were the areas of ministry, leadership and finance.

The entry of a number of Gambians into the ordained ministry was a positive step for leadership. The long awareness of the issue had promoted a lot more participation of both lay and clergy in the committees, and the like, for the realization of the Foundation Conference.

Finance is another challenge for the Church at autonomy as it till then relied heavily on the financial support of the British Church and donors from the U.K. and had the question of financial sustainability yet unanswered.

The Church's societal position is positive as there is good relationships with other ecumenical partners, and friendship with Muslim sisters and brothers, encouraged by the national leadership and the government. The Church has lively centers of worship both in urban and rural areas. An extension of the church's work has reached the Cassamance region of Senegal. In the absence of a guarantee of sustainability the Methodist Church The Gambia has a firm foundation on which to build with the responsibility to enhance the strengths and to diminish the weaknesses.

Considering infrastructural benefits of the missionary work leaves the Methodist Church The Gambia with the capacity, the strategic positioning for ministry and tools together with the gospel to go further. It is established that the Methodist story in The Gambia was successful in terms of education, medical and agriculture. This is as far as it went, nevertheless, an effort worth noting. Even though, it had been such a long way and time before reaching the status of an autonomous Church, it has not involved much in inculturational ministry expect for the few local translational attempts of liturgy and scriptures, which have all been lost along the years and today are no more. The dichotomy of the spiritual and social remains the position, in practice, of the average Methodist, which has inhibited potential individuals from leading or being able to lead the Church into better inculturational ministry. Therefore, paramount now more than ever, is that the Church leadership more consciously in practice, takes active and relevant steps to bridging the gap between

the socio-cultural and traditional realities of her people with the gospel through inculturational attempts. The preceding chapters of these work sets the tone for such a work and thus enable us to see this needs while looking at this chapter. In chapter six, therefore, attempts of possible inculturational opportunities shall be explored with further consideration of other similar inculturational approaches in West African Methodism.

## Chapter Six

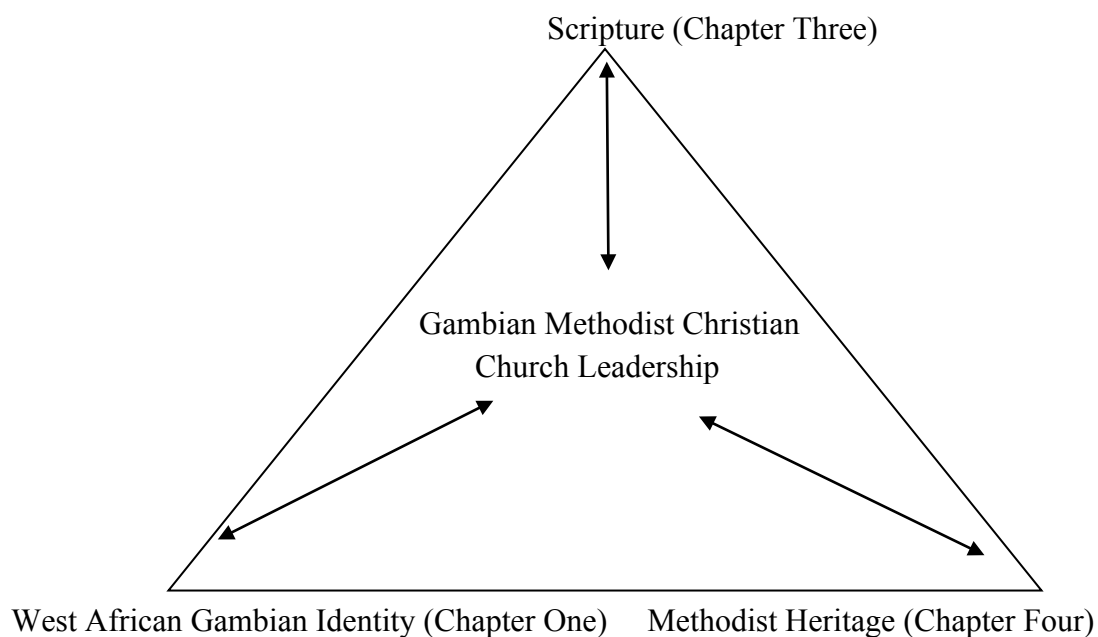
### The New Phase of The Methodist Church The Gambia (I), Reflection on Inculturational Opportunities for Church Leadership

The Methodist Church The Gambia faced a critical challenge at autonomy to be relevant to its people. Its quest for relevant Church leadership is challenged by its ability to be self-propagating (inculturational mission, not just transmission), self-governing (leadership) and self-financing (sustenance and renewal). The Methodist Church lives within a context of majority Islam and an overall underlying traditional and cultural religious beliefs cutting across both Islam and Christianity. The Gambia is constitutionally and practically a secular state with the freedom of varying religious practices that are not threats to the national peaceful harmony. It is therefore within this context that the Methodist Church of The Gambia is called as an autonomous indigenous agent of God who is our kinsman redeemer (Exodus 20:2), and has made us ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) in bringing the gospel and in responding to the needs of its people. The visionary mandate is given in scriptures, and nurtured through the heritage of the Methodist revival movement and engages with, the African identity generally, the Gambian particularly, for ultimate transformation producing a genuine reflection of the Gambian Methodist Christian. In this light therefore, the focus of this chapter will be to triangulate the three worlds of influence that catalyst and usher the Gambia Methodist Church Leadership strategies for the future. They are as follows: Scripture, African Gambian identity and Methodist Heritage.

Considering the context of ministry for the Methodist Church The Gambia, in line with Methodist understanding scripture takes the lead in guiding the responsibility of the Church to its society. As the Methodist Church seeks more relevant leadership among its people, understanding and sufficiently appropriating the needs of the traditional and cultural requirements cannot be overemphasized. The Methodist Church The Gambia is also guided by its rich heritage of Methodism, which has equally lived in an era that needed the Methodist movement to be culturally relevant

and has accommodated these needs accordingly. All this can be expressed in the model of *skenosis* and its implication for leadership. Thus the Methodist Church The Gambia could consider bringing the gospel to its people with a ‘tarbanacling’ approach, which takes cognizance of its contextualizing and indigenizing needs. When these are met, I argue that the Methodist Church The Gambia will be in a better position to self-propagate and self-govern with the full participation of its people, preventing the dichotomy of the sacred and socio-cultural traditional religion, and eventually provide sustenance and renewal with its accommodative nature.

I will now discuss the triangulated approach and considered the model of *skenosis* and its implication for the leadership of the Methodist Church The Gambia cognizance of the African traditional and cultural leadership requirements and its West African Methodist Church practice context.



### Leadership Reflection

The Scriptures serves as the source for the gospel message. The unpacking of the gospel reveals the ultimate possibility of a transformed life with the true perspective of divine reality. This encounter between the scriptures and the individual brings a transformation in the person and eventually the whole Church. Transformation brings about influence, which further nurtures leadership. Leadership discipline

begins in a person's life thus becomes the foundation for leadership in the Church. Then Church Leadership becomes a collective effort in steering the transformational journey, influencing the character and objectives of members, individually and collectively towards the aim of reproducing such transformed life in the greater church and un-churched members and unbelievers.

In chapter three, leadership is said to be tripartite in nature. It is birthed with a vision, nurtured and built with and within a character and then administered as a missional responsibility. Scripture demonstrates this from individual leaders God called and used in the person of Moses and David, Jesus and Paul. The birth of the Church in the New Testament is the calling of a collective people with a vision, given a character identity (royal priesthoods) and a missional responsibility (1 Peter 2:9-12). The Methodist Church The Gambia is therefore called out with a vision of the gospel and a character to be holy as God is, yet, sent back into The Gambia with the responsibility to be a not only a mission flavoured church but a missional shaped Church.

In 2009, the Methodist Church in The Gambia became independent with its first 'President of Conference' the Rev'd Norman Grigg. The Term 'President of Conference' was then changed to 'Bishop' of the Methodist Church of The Gambia a year later and then finally, 'Presiding Bishop' of the Conference of the Methodist Church of The Gambia. In February 2011, the Gambia Methodist Church Conference elected its first Gambian and female Presiding Bishop Hannah Caroline Faal-Heim to succeed Presiding Bishop Peter Stephens in February 2012.

Throughout these first three years, one generally observes, from the above changes, that the major issues for the Methodist Church of The Gambia included that of identity and leadership definition in its context. The final adoption of the term 'Presiding Bishop' not only resonates with its surrounding sub-regional Methodist identity (as part of the reason for the proposal), but also shows its quest towards a more biblical or scriptural terminology that makes the Church distinctive within a secular setting. Furthermore, the Church bravely elected a female as its Presiding Bishop, thereby setting the place of women leadership in Church in the West African sub-region. As a witness to these events, I argue that there had not been many 'theologically and ecclesiastically knowledgeable' individuals in these respects, save

Ministers and a few lay members, during the advocate of such change. Nevertheless, the Methodist family strived together towards being ideologically relevant and were not afraid, to take the lead of electing a woman Presiding Bishop. As long as she was Gambian, available and has the gifts and graces of a spiritual leadership, and the experience qualification to lead the Methodist Church in The Gambia for Gambians, were the most important reasons for the decision. The role of women across the domains of public and private has similarly grown, reflective of a world undergoing rapid social change. The economic basis of traditional role exclusion between men and women has been eroded. Furthermore, the increased consumer options of a global economy have fed appetites and raised expectations that go beyond what domestic capacity can satisfy or tribal sanctions constrain. The mass-market brand of evangelical and Pentecostal mobilization, for example, fits into this youth culture of buoyant expectations and an awakened appetite for personal possibility.<sup>286</sup>

Looking back at the Methodist Heritage with the experience of John Wesley and woman leaders, I argue that the Methodist Church of The Gambia is right within its heritage characteristics to be in exploration and accommodative with that which fits its context. Thus, it is the step in the right direction for missional relevance.

One could argue then, in keeping with the British Wesleyan heritage, for the use of the term ‘Chairman’ or ‘Chair’ instead of ‘Bishop’. However, I argue that in the light of Wesley’s context as seen in chapter four, he considered himself and the Methodist movement as part of the Church of England, not separated and never intended to be. If the Methodist Church remained a movement then the obvious head would be content to be a Chairman, since the Bishopric terminology was reserved for the head of the Church institution. Today, the Methodist Church is established as an independent ecclesiastical institution. It is therefore within its biblical responsibility to be of relevance to its context and as close to its biblical roots as possible.

The issue of Church Leadership Governance as explored in chapter three therefore for the Methodist Church in The Gambia remains an Episcopal Leadership in the

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<sup>286</sup> L. Sanneh, ‘The Current Transformation of Christianity’, in *The Changing Face of Christianity Africa, the West, and the World*, eds., Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 219.

light of its Presbyterian government. This caters for the combined work of the lay and clergy within a system of organized committees with an overall ministerial leadership.

This same system is found in the Methodist Churches in Nigeria and Ghana where the lay participate with the ordained in ministry, with overall leadership led by an Episcopal order. While there are female ministers up to superintendents there is yet to be a female Presiding Bishop in Ghana or a female bishop or Prelate in Nigeria.

The prelate, who presides over the conference, the overall governing body of the church, heads the Methodist Church Nigeria. This conference meets every two years to deliberate and take decisions on all issues affecting the life of the church. The conference area is divided into eight archdioceses. Each archdiocese is composed of not less than four dioceses over which an archbishop presides at the archdiocesan council meetings. There are 44 dioceses, each made up of a number of circuits and headed by a bishop who presides over the annual synod. The constitution of the church provides for lay participation in the leadership of the church from the local church through to conference level.<sup>287</sup>

In 1999, the Methodist Church Ghana adopted a non-Monarchical Episcopacy headed by a Presiding Bishop, Lay President, and Bishops at the various levels of the Church's administration and governed by the Conference. By 2005 the Church had 15 Dioceses presided over by Bishops. Dioceses are made up of Circuits and a Circuit has two or more Societies. Societies are the direct local contact points for Church members and the community. There are three top-level decision-making bodies comprising the Conference, General Purpose Council and Synods. The Church also has a Board of Trustees and a Lay Movement. There are five Boards at head office and 15 Dioceses overseeing the administrative operations of the Church. The Boards are: (a) Board of Education and Youth, (b) Board of Administration, (c) Board of Finance and Budget, (d) Board of Ministries, and (e) Board of Social Responsibility and Rural Development.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/regions/africa/nigeria/methodist-church-nigeria.html> accessed on the 4 March 2013.

<sup>288</sup> See Appendix I for further details.



The structures of the Methodist Church Nigeria and the Methodist Ghana remains more complex compared to that of The Gambia, which is significantly smaller in most aspects. However, the underling 2-fold ordained and lay ministry characterizes the three Churches and appears across all levels of the leadership structure within an overall Episcopal pastoral leadership. The sense of a ministry of having Episcopacy and Pastors with ministry is the structure with which the Methodist Church The Gambia will continue to follow in the coming years. The Methodist Church The Gambia remains governed simply by a Presiding Bishop, with Superintendent Ministers, Circuit Ministers and Society Ministers within a Conference of 6 circuits, whereas in Ghana there were about 12 dioceses with Bishops and a Presiding Bishop overseeing the whole connexion. Furthermore in Nigeria, there are Bishop or dioceses, Arch-Bishop over Arch-dioceses and then the Prelate over the connexion. The Methodist Church Nigerian is more of a high Episcopal nature than the Ghana Methodist Church, while The Gambia Methodist Church's Episcopal nature at its inception was only a change of title of the former President of Conference to Bishop, then Presiding Bishop. The term and nature of episcopacy has not yet be established and explored for the use of the Episcopal name and vestments.

I consider the change relevant for The Gambia as the term Bishop within the sub-region carries a deeper sense of ecclesiastical authority and leadership responsibility. This is sensed in the way the West African Gambian sees an elder in the community. Unlike the British sense of a chairperson who assumed more of a guiding democratic role rather than an authoritative responsibility to lead the way, the West African Gambian community vests authority in its elders which seems to easily ground the term Bishop with, since the context of its ecclesiological role, and thus named accordingly, is important for the Gambian. This makes inculturation a lot easier as the Bishop is seen within context and identifies as an elder in the Church community.

Furthermore, the Methodist Church The Gambia from Autonomy, is no longer a British District but an independent Partner Church who must seek its own relevant identity in the context of its, culture, nation and sub-region. The rejection of a British

model of leadership that is not contextually relevant to The Gambia is part of this. The office of Bishop is a step towards inculturation, but more is needed.

## **Inculturation in West Africa**

### **West African Churches**

In the Nigerian, Ghanaian, Sierra Leonean and Gambian context, Christianity remained initially as a foreign religion as it was equated to western education and civilization, which could be embraced intellectually with little or no existential involvement. Therefore, the God of Christianity was viewed as a 'stranger-God' who is unfamiliar with the local spiritual problems. Thus, Christianity was of no practical use in terms of existential crisis.<sup>289</sup> The foreign concept and language of latin (in the case of the Roman Catholic Church) made it continue to look foreign in the eyes of the indigenous people and thus did not take deep roots but remained a stranger religion.<sup>290</sup> The traditional mainline Churches became competitive for converts with the unavoidable danger of conflicting theological worldviews presented to members while they also concentrated on providing of school for education and hospitals for medical care.<sup>291</sup> Education and medical services were extended to many but the mainline Churches had relatively few converts to Christianity due to the fact that it was 'foreign'.<sup>292</sup>

Many of those who became Christians were shallow in belief and never deeply rooted in the Christian faith. It is thus affirming the fact that the gospel message was inevitably brought with European concepts and thought patterns. Many reverted to West African Traditional beliefs or held both to meet their needs. Archbishop Peter Kwasi Sarpong comments;

The Church does not appear to be speaking to the ordinary West African Gambian. She has not got the same grip on the Gambian that the traditional religion had. She appears to have become a status symbol. In time of crisis

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<sup>289</sup> I. Osaldolor, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa* (Achimota: African Christian Press, 1993), p. 63.

<sup>290</sup> M. E. Apochi, *Hints for the Implementation for the Ecclesia in Africa* (Otukpo: Catholic Star Guide Apostolate, 1997), p. 18.

<sup>291</sup> D. Nwachukwu and P. Nlemadim. *Authentic African Christianity: An Inculturation Model for the Igbo in African University Studies*, Series VII, Vol. 210, (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2000), p. 63.

<sup>292</sup> D. Nwachukwu and P. Nlemadim. *Authentic African Christianity*., p. 5.

many Christians do not hesitate to fall back on their traditional magicoritualistic device for assistance. The worst...tribalism manifests itself with alarming frequency. A witchcraft mentality persists and many outmoded customs still prevail.<sup>293</sup>

Adom-Oware further argues that the Christian mission for Ghanaians was simply about a set of rules to be obeyed, promises to be fulfilled in the next world, rhythmless hymns to be sung and rituals to be followed. This was all reserved for only two hours on Sundays while the remaining days of the week were empty.<sup>294</sup> Thus it lacked the potency to become the people's new way of life since it was a once a week or twice a week church related program within the Church building. The West African Gambian context is one that expresses religion to be a whole life and daily living experience. Gaps that qualify 'holidays from church' do not encourage the deep appreciation for a traditional people whose whole life is celebrated on a daily basis intertwined in their daily activities. Forms and rhythms of worship in mission churches also contributed to a cool irrelevant presentation of the gospel for a people whose life and practices involved religious celebrations with clapping of hands, dancing, twisting the loins etc all as expression of worship. Contemporary Pentecostal denominations have proved more ardent at meeting this need.

The dichotomy of faith and practice, religion and morality, individual faith and the faith of the community; the church, were all challenges of the people. Many West African Christians thus found themselves living in between two worlds; the world of Christian beliefs and values and the world of West African traditions where they live and express their inner life more deeply. Christians thus lapsed into polygamy and their daily traditional practices, despite outward allegiance to Christianity.<sup>295</sup> It was inevitable that when faced with death, famine, infertility, and deeper life issues, people resorted to West African traditional religion for the Christian religion received was not spiritually potent enough to address these needs. The Christian religion was thus compartmentalized with prayers, doctrine and worship for Sunday

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<sup>293</sup> P. K. Sarpong, 'A View of Africa: The Content and its Church' in *The Catholic Witness*, Vol. IV, no. 9, 1983, pp. 1-10.

<sup>294</sup> S. Adom-Oware, 'Who Do You Say I Am? (Matt 16:15): A Contemporary African Response' in *West African Journal of Ecclesial Studies*, No. 3, December 1991, p. 15. See also J. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), p. 305.

<sup>295</sup> Adom-Oware, 'Who Do You Say I Am? (Matt 16:15)', p. 15.

and the rest of the week for the individual to display a life that is no way influenced by their Christian belief a result of the weakness and formality of our evangelization,<sup>296</sup> Dickson argues;

...many West African Christians hold on to traditional religio-cultural ideas and practice while calling on the name of Christ. Several writers, mostly West Africans, have called for the working out of a Christian theology that suits the West African situation, a theology which would give recognition to the centrality of Christ and at the same time express West African appreciation of the Christian faith.<sup>297</sup>

The above reaffirms the general Gambian struggle with a 'foreign religion' that does not address its needs in 'the breaking points of life', and thus usually resort to traditional religion, prayer houses, healing homes, prophets, witchcraft or fortune-tellers and yet some to African Independent Churches where elements of the culture are more respected and practiced.

A proliferation of Sects and New Religious Movements in Africa generally and in Nigeria, Ghana and The Gambia particularly, has been one of such responses to the quest for addressing the gap Christianity as brought by the missionaries, had. It is almost impossible to chart growth of new churches in Nigeria, Ghana and The Gambia in recent years. This has startled both governments and traditional Christian Churches and some governments have adopted a form of registration or restriction in an attempt to contain the proliferation. Members of the traditional Christian churches are joining these newly African initiated or Pentecostal/ Charismatic Churches. Although the proliferation of New Religious Movements is evident all over the world, it is however more complicated in Africa as there were already about 10,000 independent Churches. The movements are mainly in different categories that include; those founded by older groups such as Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses, and the Mormons; Eastern imports like Baha'i, Eckankar; and of great significance the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches of American origins like the Assemblies of God, and of African origin such as the Redeemed Christian Church of

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<sup>296</sup> C. McGarry, 'A Community of Disciples to Witness to the Kingdom' in *Inculturating the Church in Africa Theological and Practical Perspectives* (Limuru: Kolbe Press, 2001), pp. 197-198.

<sup>297</sup> K. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (London: Longmann & Todd, 1984), p. 36.

God-Nigeria. Yet there are still others with clearly West African cultural characteristics with obvious traits of West African traditional and cultural religion and charismatic prophetic-typed leadership, like the Aladura (prayer people) church movement and the Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim. Moreover, others are non-Christian or even anti-Christian movements. Among all of the New Religious Movements, the Pentecostal and Charismatic are outstanding in the spread over West Africa as they come in crusades, revivals, charismatic worship, radio, television, Christian literatures, new ministries and Bible colleges.<sup>298</sup>

Indigenous movements attracted greater numbers than both Roman Catholic and Protestant in West Africa, as they emphasize and practice the power of prayer, healing the sick and prophetic utterance. These churches gradually earned the name 'spiritual churches'.<sup>299</sup> While these new churches were actively attempting various methods of inculturation, the mainline Church were typically criticizing them as syncretistic and cultists. However, more independent/indigenous groups who were once labeled as such '... are at last being recognized as what they had claimed to be all along, namely genuinely Christian bodies concerned ... with indigenizing the apostolic faith in terms intelligible to African societies.'<sup>300</sup>

The emergence of these prophetic and unorthodox churches was a reaction to the problems created with the interaction of Christian ethics and traditional morality.<sup>301</sup> Adeboye likens the independent Pentecostal movement in Nigeria to a 'cultural movement' in that it seems 'highly responsive to the contexts in which it finds itself'

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<sup>298</sup> E. R. Mawusi, *Inculturation: Rooting the Gospel in the Ghanaian Culture. A Necessary Requirement for Effective Evangelization for the Catholic Church in Ghana*, Doctor of Theology Thesis, University of Vienna, May, 2009, pp. 19-20.

<sup>299</sup> B. C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), p. 171. "These small sects began to emerge in the 1920s and 1930s [throughout Nigeria and West Africa] and were called 'spiritual' or 'prophet' churches because of their emphasis on prayer, healing, revelation, and biblical literalism." See also K. Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Ltd., 1995), p. 65; C. G. Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of Some 'Spiritual' Churches* (London: SCM Press, 1962), pp. 136-141.

<sup>300</sup> D. B. Barrett, 'The African Independent Churches: Developments 1968-1970,' in *Afer*, 12:2, April 1970, pp. 123-124. See also, D. B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 269-70. For discussions on how the AICs are impacting contemporary theological discussions see Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, pp. 252-65; Stinton, 'Africa, East and West,' in *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, pp. 119-20.

<sup>301</sup> E. Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, (New York: Nok Publishers Ltd., 1974), p. 10.

and one that has ‘lent itself to easy domestication in the cultures in which it has been embraced.’<sup>302</sup> Ray further strengthens this argument by saying,

As in the New Testament, indigenous West African Christianity believes in an intentional world of invisible spiritual agents and in the power of prayer and ritual symbols to cope with life’s problems. These are the principles that unite the indigenous churches and that make indigenous Christianity a West African religion. In their own way, the West African-founded churches have successfully taken on what Archbishop Tutu recognizes to be one of the major challenges facing Christianity in Africa: the effort to ‘root the gospel in Africa, contextualizing and indigenizing it’ and making it ‘authentically African.’<sup>303</sup>

### **Attempts of inculturation in West Africa**

The family is the basic unit of society. In it, one finds acceptance, recognition and a sense of belonging. One enjoys respect and understanding, gives and receives service without counting the cost and takes pride in keeping the name of the family in high esteem. This family system is not peculiar to West Africa since it is found globally, and particularly in many African countries where the traditional and cultural religion is an integral part of the definition of their family. In many non-African communities, the family is made up of the husband, wife and children. However, in the West African designation of family, particularly, Nigerian, Ghanaian, Sierra Leonean and Gambian, family includes the husband, wife, children and all other living members of this group connected spiritually by the ancestors. Others are connected socially through bonds maternally, paternally, friendships, tribes, clans, affinity, and many other forms of an extended nature. The family remains the source of strength and comfort for every individual, as they share together the cost of relief and celebration in every event for every individual.

Attempts in evangelizing the West Africa has brought about concepts of viewing the Church as the family of God for relevance within the West African soil. This approach brings home the sense of an inculturated leadership that is of communal

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<sup>302</sup> O. Adeboye, ‘Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa,’ in *The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria,*” in *Entreprises Religieuses Transnationales En Afrique De L’Ouest*, Paris: Karthala, 2005, p. 439.

<sup>303</sup> Ray, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual and Community*, p. 195.

belonging and interdependency within the West African society. Seeking to build an ecclesiology of the Church in Africa Pope John Paul intimated that it was earnestly hoped that this theology of the African Church would be developed with all the riches of its concept and showing it is complementarily of other images of the Church.<sup>304</sup> In the Church as the family of God, leadership is demonstrated therefore in the light of Jesus as the eldest brother who is in charge under the authority of the Father, and is loving and caring. Inculturational leadership brings on the ancestors as the saints and cloud of witnesses that Hebrews 12:1-2, talks about, as part of leadership nurturing examples to follow. In this family can be found all peoples, all races and all ethnic groups, past, present and future generations. The Christian Church will therefore become a view of a large extended family homestead with different houses within the same compound and other similar homestead in the same neighborhood.<sup>305</sup> Jesus as the first born among many (Romans 8:29) becomes the head of humanity in which our sense of brotherhood and sisterhood is established and promoted to envision the Church as the family of God. All are adopted children in this family. The Nigerian, Ghanaian, Sierra Leonean, and Gambian are all a part of the one compound which is found in the homestead of West Africa and which is in turn found in the neighbourhood of Africa, which in turn finds itself as part of the bigger community of the extended family of God.

Life and respect for the elders is generally considered sacred in Africa, West Africa in particular. Life is valued not on what one has or has achieved but on one's elderly status within a community. West Africans generally have deep and ingrained respect for old age, and even when you find nothing to admire in an old man or woman, one will not easily forget that his or her grey hair earns them the right of courtesy and politeness.<sup>306</sup> Elders are the custodians of wisdom, truth and teachers in the West African community. Elders automatically form part of leadership in every given West African society. Thus eldership remains an obvious sign of the provision of leadership in the society. Moreover, the Church's needs of embracing and integrating the place and role of elders in its ministry cannot be overemphasized, which thereby creates an inculturated leadership. This will further ground Church leadership in its

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<sup>304</sup> Pope J. Paul, 'Ecclesia in Africa', cited in Mawusi, *Inculturation: Rooting the Gospel in the Ghanaian Culture*, p. 92.

<sup>305</sup> Mawusi, *Inculturation: Rooting the Gospel in the Ghanaian Culture*, p. 96.

<sup>306</sup> A. Onwubiko, *African Thought, Religion and Culture*, (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd., 1991), p. 28.

practice of ministry as elders are seen, and work as custodians of Church traditions and authority in guidance and leadership. Therefore this makes elders in the Church's practice of ministry, essential inculturational tools for relevant Church leadership within West African society.

Libation pouring is a major activity that is practice in many celebrative and sorrowful events generally in Africa and particularly including West Africans nations of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and The Gambia. This is a traditional rite that is attached to all the rites of passages and all other private, family and communal occasions. It is poured daily or weekly at the break of dawn to usher in the blessings of God Almighty for the day with the support and guidance of the ancestors. It is also poured when members of the family are about to embark on certain ventures, trade, business, or travel on a journey. This is done in the form of pouring out liquid, (palm wine, schnapps, whisky, gin, water or 'cana') on the ground while reciting certain prayers and petitions in line with the occasion. The prayers and petition that accompany the libation pouring may be impoverished or in stereotyped formulae and many times less defined pattern, beginning with invoking the blessings of God Almighty and continuing with the person or ancestor to whom the petition is made. In The Gambia, libation is poured on traditional occasions and some national festivals and events with Muslim and Christian prayers, while as in Ghana libation is poured on all national events and festivals accompany by Muslim and Christian prayers.

Christian reactions to this traditional cultural activity of libation pouring have varied. For some it should be forbidden as it is considered unchristian and yet for others, demonic. However, many others have held on to it as an integral part of their identity as West African Christians while some among them have in addition, kept the practice with reforms in the prayer content and direction. Still others see it as purely a civil and semi-religious act that has lost its strong religious undertone.<sup>307</sup> This engagement of libation for the Christian with Almighty God as the Supreme Being and Christ as ancestor and mediator is an inculturational activity that helps to maintain the West African identity of the Christian. This inculturational activity

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<sup>307</sup> Mawusi, *Inculturation: Rooting the Gospel in the Ghanaian Culture*, pp. 102-103.



provides guide for an inculturated leadership as Christ assumed what Bujo calls the 'Proto-Ancestor', 'Ancestor Par Excellence' in whom the totality of African Christianity is rooted and elevated,<sup>308</sup> as he is the source of life and the highest model of ancestorship.<sup>309</sup> Thus, an inculturated leadership will provide the pouring of libation to Jesus Christ who is the most worthy of Ancestor to receive such veneration and who is able to listen, provide, direct and guide, from whom inculturated leadership is emerge and is fulfilled.

With this inculturational activity of Jesus the ancestor per excellence, the continuous veneration of other lineage blood related ancestors cannot be set aside. They are deeply honored and seen as guide to the unique traits they exhibited which still runs in each particular family. They thus serve as yardsticks for behaviors and judgments and their works that leave after them are called to witness or bring judgment upon a situation. In Mbiti's words,

Respect given them is that of comrade and elder kinsmen who have as much interest in the welfare of the family as their living kinsmen. The form of the prayer is direct; requests are straightforward as to say it is also to their interest to grant them. The tune of submission and pleading supplication, which appear in prayers to God and the deities, is significantly absent. They may be rebuked, insulted or even threatened.<sup>310</sup>

Ancestor veneration has received special attention in the writing of many African theologians with attempts on the possibility of using the ancestor model for an African reading of the mystery of Christ, the Church, Christian morality, Spirituality and liturgy.<sup>311</sup> It is however important to note that looking at Jesus as ancestor pre-eminence, for he is not just like any other ancestor. The limitations of the ancestor definition and roles can only be applied to Christ metaphorically not literally for some scholars.<sup>312</sup> For, according to Shorter, the strongest critic of Christ as Ancestor Christology, whereas the Ancestor concept does not illuminate and develop our

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<sup>308</sup> B. Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1986), p. 74.

<sup>309</sup> B. Bujo, 'A Christocentric Ethics for Black Africa,' pp. 143-144.

<sup>310</sup> J. S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (Sandton: Heinemann Publishers Ltd., 1991), pp.68-69.

<sup>311</sup> F. A. Oborji, *Trends in African Theology since Vatican II- A Missional Orientation*, (Rome: Liberit Press, 1985), p. 99.

<sup>312</sup> Mawusi, *Inculturation: Rooting the Gospel in the Ghanaian Culture*, p. 111.

understanding of the person and role of Christ, the person and role of Christ can however illuminate and redeem the African understanding of Ancestor.<sup>313</sup>

Witchcraft and evil manipulative activity in West Africa is the most powerful undeniable reality to which the inculturation of Jesus as a ‘non-witch’, ‘anti-witch’, ‘witch healer or doctor’, the greatest physician who has power over witchcraft and evil, is relevant. A case study on witchcraft belief of the people of Longuda in Nigeria enlightens. The stance of the Danish branch of the Sudan United Mission, who worked among them, was that they denied the existence of witches. They hoped then, together with the Lutheran Church of Christ Nigerian, that beliefs in witchcraft were holdovers from traditional beliefs that would eventually fade out once Christianity became more incorporated into the West African belief system. Unfortunately, for them it became apparent after a number of years that such beliefs were not fading, thus the Church hierarchy’s perspective changed.<sup>314</sup> Vital for appreciating the inculturational leadership needs in West Africa including Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and The Gambia, is in leading from the understanding of Jesus as deliverer and healer. The daily reality of the spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, economic, political, social, tribal and national wounds can only crave for the need of a Jesus who has power over witchcraft and evil to redeem, heal and restore wholeness to the West African. Mawusi further argues that the nation of Africa needs the healing Jesus now more than ever, for the experience of slavery, colonialism, post-colonialism formation of the nation states, neo-colonialism’s economic dependency, intertribal violence and war, and the corruption of many post-independence national leaders.<sup>315</sup> The inculturational need of Jesus the healer cannot be overemphasized. This stresses the importance for ministers to be trained to meet the local needs of their people’s cultural, social and spiritual realities and not only in the British way of academia and logic.

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<sup>313</sup> A. Shorter, ‘Ancestor Veneration Revisited’, in *AFER*, 25, no. 4, 1983, p. 202.

<sup>314</sup> T. M. Vanden Berg, ‘Culture, Christianity, and Witchcraft in a West African Context’, in *The Changing Face of Christianity Africa, the West, and the World*, eds. L. Sanneh and J. A. Carpenter, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 51.

<sup>315</sup> Mawusi, *Inculturation: Rooting the Gospel in the Ghanaian Culture*, p. 112.

## **Inculturation for The Methodist Church The Gambia**

The need for the inculturation of the gospel with the administration of the rites of passages to promote relevant indigenous ministry cannot be overemphasized.

Chapter two highlights the importance of understanding the content of the gospel.

This it therefore presented as the message of God's involvement in humanity through Jesus Christ fulfilling the requirements of the Law, on behalf of humanity, in his death and freely offering eternal life to all who believe in the messenger and executer of the message; Jesus Christ. The implication of this message produces transformational life, which influences positive change and brings about leadership discipline in an individual. There is therefore the need to engage the culture of the people to which it goes.

Inculturation carries the connotation of continuous processes to make relevant the Christian gospel in the West African Gambian culture and establishing it as the ultimate destiny for the fulfilment of the Gambian traditional and cultural religion. The ideology used here is *skenosis*, 'tabernacle'. As referred to by Pobee in John 1:14, the 'tabernacling' of the one and eternal word of God, which must be active in each particular culture with no one culture deemed normative for either mission or the gospel.<sup>316</sup> The gospel therefore in this context is not content with only *kenosis* incarnation and the emptying of oneself into the life and experience of the people but the temporal contextual fully living, 'tabernacling', and its actively engaging with the culture, which unavoidably engages with the rites of passages, with a substance of giving meaning and direction to the expected 'end' of the Gambian traditional and cultural religion. This is established in chapter two.

In chapter one, African Philosophy is established with its strengths anchoring on its ancient speculative, constructive and normative philosophy. The philosophy is seen and lived in the life and experiences of the people whose traditional and cultural practices are directly influenced by it. Therefore, the rites of passages and festival celebrations as mentioned in chapter one result from the philosophy of the African. That explains why the rites of passages and festival celebrations are central in many West African traditional and cultural religions including The Gambia. They serve as

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<sup>316</sup> J. Pobee, *West Africa Christ Would Be an African Too*, p. 3.

a common ground that unites the diverse varieties of the African Traditional and Cultural Religion across many African countries.

The people among whom the Methodist Church The Gambia lives and administers its leadership responsibility share the same common grounds in their various ethnic groups of the Krio, Wolof, Fula, Jola, Serer, Mandinka, Serahuli, Mangago and others. Therefore, it is paramount that to inculturate the gospel, relevant indigenous ministry among a people with West African Gambian traditional and cultural beliefs is needed. This can be approached from many angles however, I argue from what I consider as the core of the West African Traditional and Cultural religious beliefs; the rites of passage. This is what holds the worldview and belief system together and it is the formation vehicle with which it is passed on from generation to generation. It also sets the structure through which the elder in the community, which is highly aspired by many, is worked towards. This essential station in Gambian worldview can help the inculturation of the gospel to fully appreciate Church leadership, as the Bishop looks more likely as a West African elder rather than just a chairperson whose terminology denotes more of a guide to a group or activity. Moreover, he or she is a Pastoral authoritative leader, which encompasses a guide, a leader, an example to, and a shepherd of believers.

Emerging from West African spirituality is the belief of the pre-existence of life in the reality of the supernatural and transcendental dimension. This belief agrees with the theology of John 1: 1,14; 'In the beginning of was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...and the word became flesh and dwelt among us.' The gospel therefore engages a culture whose people already have the foundational basis of the source of this gospel. There is also the ultimate end of West African Gambian traditional and cultural religion pointing to life as ancestor in the supernatural transcendental dimension of the spiritual world eternally existing, again, interlocking with the gospel's message of eternal life beyond human existence. The 'source' and 'end' of both the gospel and West African Gambian traditional and cultural religion is therefore a common ground, which necessitates the inculturation for the 'in-between' where the rites of passages exist. Thus I stress the need for this inculturated leadership that explores and ministers through the rites of passages. In this light, leadership would be causing the formation of new generations of believers

who are total West African and Gambian Christians, which will eventually integrate and influence the future leadership patterns of the Methodist Church The Gambia. This attempt will prove valuable lessons for the possibility of nurturing Gambian Christians in the quest for Church leadership, and indigenous ministry. It is therefore expedient to explore the different rites of passages as discussed in chapter one; Birth, Puberty, Marriage, Eldership and Death. These will serve as focal points of inculturational ministry of the gospel, which will bring together both Church and Gambian traditional and cultural religious beliefs and practices.

The ordained minister or bishop thus serves in a related way to the local priest in the inculturational ministry of the Church leadership within the Gambian society. He or she becomes the local priest in ‘function’ as they take central roles in the process of inculturating the gospel through the practice of ministry during the rites of passages. At this stage, as an elder with authority, the ordained minister or bishop theologizes, as the culture and gospel interacts in his or her leadership duties during such events. He or she thus consciously leads the Church in an intentional involvement in all the rites of passages of its people, integrating, contextualizing and indigenizing all at ones, as part of the practice of ministry and responsibility of the Church. This should be done in all the rites of passages as discussed below: Birth, Puberty, Marriage, Eldership and Death.

### **Birth**

An attempt for inculturation begins with a common ground of understanding the concept of birth in the West African Gambian worldview. Birth is seen as a separation from a pre-existence form of unity with parents, to a single concrete human life form of a baby. The child comes into this world as a result of an assignment given it by God. The gospel therefore engages with this concept with the authoritative position of the pre-existence of God before human life and the pre-existence of all who believe in Christ, been chosen in Him to be the righteousness of God through the death of Christ, ‘the slaying of the lamb’ before the foundations of the world (1 Peter 1:20; Ephesians 1:4). Secondly, children are a heritage from God, not by accident but by divine providence. These engagements provide a role for the Church to play within its traditional and cultural practices surrounding the birth of a child.

This common acceptance of the reality that surrounds the child calls for a necessity of inculturation where the traditional and cultural celebration of the child's rite of passage can be one in which the gospel plays a central role. Some efforts in this direction have been in incorporating some statements and phrases, of the prayer rites said over the child, into the worship liturgy book of the Methodist Church in Ghana.<sup>317</sup> It is normally done either in the Church during baptism or at the home while naming the child, which is done by the Minister. It however remains only a matter of the Church, in the person of the Minister, been called to say prayers and leave. Should there be a much deeper involvement that could bring an integrated overlapping experience of the gospel as in the presence and role of the church and the traditional and cultural aspect? As the liturgy guides the occasion the following is observed;

The head of the family or his representative gives the purpose for the gathering, and among other things says; *as our custom demands, such member should be given a name to establish his/her identity in the family. I therefore humbly wish to invite the Minister to perform the ceremony on behalf of the families.*

The minister only names the child after the head of family has explained the reason for giving the child that particular name. Like the traditional set up, the minister calls the name of the child three times, each time dipping his/her finger into a bowl of liquid, or using a spoon to drop on the child's tongue, alternatively water and soft drink and corn wine, or water and roasted corn flour soaked in water and salt, or water and honey, as the custom of the area may dictate. The minister says the following words to accompany the dropping of water or soft drink (as the case may be) on the child's tongue.

(Name of child), *you have been brought by God into this world as a moral being with the responsibility to distinguish between truth and falsehood, right and wrong. This is water, therefore if you say water, it must be water; and*

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<sup>317</sup> Methodist Church Ghana, Liturgical Worship Book.

*this is soft drink/corn wine/honey, therefore if you say soft drink/corn wine/honey, it must be so.*

The symbolism here is society's expectation of the child to be truthful, just as is done in traditional society. The church thus intends to inculcate into the child, certain accepted traditional and societal values and morals. The minister then exhorts the baby, the parents and the gathering. Presentations may then be made to the child, fellowship drink (where each person present sips the soft drink used in naming the child, after mentioning its name). The function is ended with prayers and the benediction.

This liturgical content and guidance was intended towards relating Christianity to the life of the ordinary person in Ghana. This is indeed a noble attempt to give the Church the character of an institution, which belongs in the Gambian soil, instead of it being linked in the mind of the West African with a Western mode of life and thought. When done in church, the role of the traditional elder may not be taken over by the minister.<sup>318</sup>

The above activity is an inculturational attempt on the part of the Methodist Church Ghana in their liturgy to aid better and relevant ministry during such occasions. I thus argue that the Methodist Church The Gambia do likewise in its context, a development that the British dominated church was unable to do. An inculturated Gambian Methodist Church liturgy with the rites of passages as an integral part of worship would be a step in the right direction to the inculturation of the gospel and the quest for relevant Church leadership.

## **Puberty**

This rite of passage brings about a separation of adolescents from children. The individual is considered matured to be ready to grasp the duties and responsibilities of his given task within the society. This rite of passage, I opine, is not too different from the tradition of the Jewish culture of a twelve-year-old male. He is considered

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<sup>318</sup> J. M. Y. Edusa-Eyison, 'The History of the Methodist Church Ghana', in <http://archives.gcah.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10516/1318/History-of-the-Methodist-Church-Ghana.pdf?sequence=1> accessed on the 4 March 2013.

ready to be integrated as a man in the society. It is thus the reason why Jesus would be taken into the temple at that particular age of acceptance. How does the Methodist Church therefore engage with this reality of the Gambian tradition and culture? I suggest in the light of the Methodist Church practice of 'confirmation' as a rite of passage into full membership into the Church, to be a starting point of common objective. The gospel thus engages with a child ready to move from the status of childhood to adulthood with the gospel requirement of personal confession, which comes with its commitment to Christian principles and responsibilities. These Christian principles and responsibilities are to inform the societal training and responsibilities of adolescents, which ultimately complement and further strengthen the convictions of living out their faith in the community within their communal duties and responsibilities. At this stage, the importance of keeping the community free from destructive spiritual forces, which are released by the breaking of certain taboos like pre-marital sex, adultery and in not performing the rite of passage, are emphasized. Thus, the vital core need of the Gambian to keep the community spiritually free from evil spirits that cause destruction on individual's lives and spoils their chances of making ancestor-ship, is taught early. Again, we see the need for a potent gospel that addresses the spiritual need of a community at the very early stage in the rites of passage of adolescents in safeguarding its future leaders and ancestors. I therefore argue for the Methodist Church The Gambia to engage with young people at this stage officially in the dynamics of spiritual walk, the believer's authority, the essence of divine obedience and spiritual warfare practicum incorporated into a syllabus that is consciously exercised by the Church from that level of maturity to all other levels within the Church structure. Here the West African Gambian Christian education becomes the leadership formation tool that equips the individual in his or her transition into fully membership within the Church community and into Church leadership.

### **Marriage**

At the marriage rite of passage the adolescents moves into an office of parenthood. Here it is a strong belief and practice that the marriage must exhibit its biological, moral and spiritual roles, otherwise, it would need some form of spiritual liberation to do so in the case of failure in any of the roles. For marriage in the West African Gambia society is a religious duty and responsibility of everyone and it forms a focal



point where departed, present and coming members meet.<sup>319</sup> The scripture that says to train up the child in the way he should go... (Proverbs 22:6) is appreciated by the Gambian traditional and cultural religion as its emphasis is that it already knows where the child is to go and therefore prepares and trains it in that direction to ancestorhood. As representatives of the ancestors in the office of parenthood, their spiritual 'standings' and spiritual responsibilities cannot be overemphasized. The need to guard and guide their children spiritually is much more important generally than what education, medical and agricultural assistance can give them. Even though these are important, they are secondary to the spiritual needs of the child, which makes a potent gospel that addresses the spiritual, with the bonus of the mental, health and nutrition, a better approach. The spiritual informs the physical. The gospel's potency to preserve, sustain and guard this rite of passage for the safe passage into eldership is essential. The Methodist Church The Gambia will in this regard be involved officially in the traditional and cultural rites of marriage, develop a similar liturgy of the rites of passage of the child after birth at the naming ceremony, for the customary marriage. Most often this rite of passage has been left mainly in the hands of the family and relatives while the Church waits to receive such couples as engaged and then are married in Church, save, the presence of an invited Minister to the traditional customary ceremony. Moreover, I argue for the Church to develop an official liturgy cognizance of the customary requirements of the marriage rite of passage in which the Methodist Church, rather than just as an invited guest, be an integral part of the ceremony. Relevant Church leadership will thus provide closer and consistent guide that encourages dutiful exemplary leadership from parents and marriages while at the same time be involved in the journeys with couples and families through these marriage rites as the Church leadership responsibility.

### **Eldership**

This stage requires both ritualistic and political responsibilities. These are guarded with the spiritual experiences, which have contributed to harnessing the quality of the elder's leadership role display in all manners of religious, social and political situations. Its duty as priest, judge, arbiter, leader, role model, and custodians of the

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<sup>319</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, p 144.

family on behalf of the ancestors leaves this position a very spiritual one, which is essentially the way the connection and consultations with the ancestors is maintained. The elder's role in both material and spiritual dimension reflects the same requirement the gospel calls for in elders among the community of believers (1 Timothy 3:1). They not only serve as examples but more to be the link between the past and present and guaranteeing the extension of the way of life into the future. A sense of apostolicity guarding this noble stage which can be ascribed to, as the apostolic influence of the gospel for Christian. Traditional elders are a lot more revered than Church elders. With the seriousness that is attached to traditional elders in the West Africa society, the Methodist Church The Gambia could emulate the guidance of scripture with regards to eldership at all levels of responsibility. This will not only meet the requirements of the gospel with regards to Church elders but could also help the Gambian see the value and relevance of Church elders in their individual lives, as shepherds like the traditional elders, guiding and shaping the generation present and the ones to come. The Methodist Church The Gambia could therefore identify, cooperate and collaborate with traditional elders not only at surface levels of being present at official programs but in local, practical deep issues and day-to-day activities within the community, which will imprint in society the leadership role of The Methodist Church and its elders.

The elder in the Gambian sense is not just about a leadership role but a person's description. It is not limited to what the person does but goes beyond to what a person is, as an elder in the community. Therefore to better appreciate a leader in the Gambian church, one is seen as a leader not only with regards to his or her office but rather a description of who the whole person is. This description is better found within the context; thus within the ecclesiastical context, the bishop who is a guide, Pastoral leader and shepherd will fit well beyond the limited requirement of a chairperson who presides over groups, and activities. Being a Bishop is a description of the person more than the role. A similar argument could be made for an ordained minister.

Furthermore, the elder never ceases to be an elder until he or she dies. Unlike the chairperson whose term in office determines his duration and function, the bishop however, continues to guide, pastorally care for and shepherd the believers, even

after his or her term of office and will be seen as such. Therefore there is an inseparable link between the traditional elder and the ordained minister, be it a presbyter or a bishop. This link is concreted in the description of their total persona, which goes beyond their institutional obligations, to their entire human duty and responsibility. The rite of passage of eldership thus remains a vital link of inculturating the gospel by the Methodist Church The Gambia for relevant Church leadership.

## **Death**

At this stage of the rite of passage, death plays a very important role as a doorway that leads to the abode of the ancestors. Therefore, it is not negative for the Gambian who is privileged after eldership to be honored into the abode of the ancestors thereby becoming an ancestor too. I argue that the gospel's message of eternal life does not begin after death but rather the very day one receives Jesus, one receives the fullness of life now (John 6:47; 10:10;) then through death is ushered into a fuller life with the greatest ancestor; Jesus Christ. The rite of passage of death attracts one common traditional practice in The Gambia called the fortieth-day 'charity'. This period is believed to be the final time of separation of the spirit of a deceased elder from the family and concrete life to the abode of the ancestor where he or she lives continuously in the cycle of life, except God intimated otherwise. Therefore, before the 'charity' the spirit hovers around the family compounds and beyond. Thus the ritual of providing food and drinks (in most cases, the favorite of the deceased) on the table in the house every day and at the gate of the compound on the fortieth-day 'charity' remains a family identifying ritual celebrating a memorial of the individual. For some this is a way of identifying with Jesus' presence on earth until the fortieth day after the resurrection before he departed finally to heaven.

The Church over the years has in practice, frowned on this particular custom and often it has been considered pagan, demonic, or simply unnecessary by individual clergy or church members while some others embrace it. This I opine is largely due to varying conflicting British institutional practices within and against West African Gambian contextual realities, failing to understand the Gambian traditional and philosophical worldview. Thus British institutional Church practices remain unable to comprehend or satisfy the contextual needs of a Gambian society with regards to its engagement in the matters of death and life after death in West African

philosophy, thereby, resulting in the separation of Church and society. Furthermore, this gradually yielded a people whose lives have been dichotomized into church and culture, sacred and secular or tradition. Nevertheless, the Methodist Church The Gambia in its quest for relevance in the life of its believers should consider its official role in the celebration of such ceremonies that are part of marking the farewell of deceased members in the community, beyond the normal funeral service and thanksgiving which takes place in the church. The Church being present at the home or neighbourhood of such individuals and participating in the ceremony with a developed liturgy would be an effective inculturated ministry and demonstration of Church leadership. Though critical and sensitive, it could have a far reaching effect on its people's understanding and appreciation of being accepted in totality (both sacred and traditional) and seek to guide rather than ignoring such an integral part of the Gambian society, of where there are spiritual implications if not guided. This further strengthens the practice of night vigils in the homes of deceased members in the community bringing the presence and work of Church leadership to the people rather than keeping such ministry within the church buildings causing limitations to the extent of the practice of ministry.

### **Further Reflection**

All of the above rites of passages point to the essential need of spiritual guidance, spiritual protection and spiritual nurturing for the Gambian. The Methodist missionaries were unable to meet this need as seen in chapter five, yet it was met by the Islamic clerics who showed relevance and yielded far more positive response for the Gambians in that time. The potency of the gospel to produce spiritual guidance, spiritual protection and spiritual nurturing is brought into question by the West African and the Gambian which leaves many Gambian Methodist Christians give 'unto Cesar what belongs to Cesar and unto God what belongs to God' in their attempt to be faithful to both Church and Gambian traditional and cultural religion. These rites of passage point to the centrality of the functions of worship in prayer sacrifices and festivals. Worship is vital for West Africans and Gambians alike as it keeps the harmony of the relationship between human beings and the transcendent realm and humans and their culture in reference to the transcendent. This is so because human lives are not only shaped by the ideas in our minds but more so by

the actions we perform with our bodies.<sup>320</sup> Rituals therefore become the basic social act, as it establishes, guards, and bridges between public systems and private processes. Rappaport therefore warns that the fundamental nature of rituals is logically necessary and therefore vital for a community. In enunciating, accepting and making conventions moral, ritual contains within itself not simply a symbolic representation of social contract, but tacit social contract itself.<sup>321</sup> Therefore these rites of passage are social contracts that shape The Gambian community. Bell, moreover, indicates that though rites may loosely linked to biological changes like parturition and puberty, they frequently depict a sociocultural order that overlays that natural biological order without being identical to it. The birth of a person is one thing while being properly identified and accepted as a member of the community is another, likewise, the appearance of facial hairs or menses does not make one an adult, only the community confers that recognition, which is done in its own time. The tension between the natural and cultural that is sometimes recognized and sometimes disguised in life-cycle rituals appears to be integral to the values and ideas that shape person identity, social organization, and cultural tradition.<sup>322</sup> To this I will add, theological identity.

Individually worship brings the balance of harmony in the life of a person who has been troubled and in some case unable to fulfill the proper requirements of the rites of passages. Before, during and after each rite of passage, are individual and communal forms of worship that seek to keep the balance of harmony of the human spirit with the transcendent realm which manifest in protection from evil spirits and empowerment to lead a successful life. In cases of possession by evil spirits, worship in the form of different sacrifices is offered for the deliverance of such persons and in cases of communal disaster, for the whole community.

The above reflections on rites of passage with the central focus of inculturation for indigenous ministry puts the Methodist Church The Gambia in a better position to address the core pillars of Gambian traditional and Cultural Religions which hold the

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<sup>320</sup> T. F. Driver, *Liberating Rites Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1998), p. 79.

<sup>321</sup> R. A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion In The Making Of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 138.

<sup>322</sup> C. Bell, *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 94.

spiritual realities and needs of the people. This, rather than just the supply of human physical needs of education, medical and agriculture, would make ministry relevant and leadership better appreciated and followed. As much as they had excellent social support for development, they were secondary to the Gambian traditional and cultural religion for which the spiritual precedes and gives birth to the physical in all dimensions and sphere of life. Therefore the obvious thing to do was to hold on to Christianity with one hand for the social salvation it provided while holding on to Gambian traditional and Cultural Religion for its spiritual and ‘superior provision’ on the other hand, exposing the need for inculturation.

The gospel came to the Gambia with missionaries who had relatively little knowledge about the Gambian traditional and cultural worldview. This explains the absence of the missionary efforts in areas of spiritual nature and refuses to participate in various rites of passages, which would have been assumed unnecessary. I presume if care was taken to study not only language but also rites of passages and festivals that surrounds them, there would have been a more effective indigenous ministry which is relevant for the Gambian and out of which leadership would have had more impact on society since Church and society would be seen together participating in the formation of the Gambian’s life. The providing of secular education, social medical work, agriculture and the freedom of slaves, in itself, is not enough for a relevant inculturated gospel which transforms and shapes individual and community life.

This calls for a relationship between *skenosis* and the rites of passages for inculturations to be better appreciated. Each of the rites of passages is a concrete part of the West African and Gambian identity. Therefore, the *skenosis* model of leadership is linked with each stage of the rites of passages providing an opportunity for inculturation with the flexibility, accommodative, adaptive and temporal nature that brings meaning contextually, which *skenosis* provides for each place and time. Birth, Puberty, Marriage, Eldership and Death, are all celebrated with the same purpose but not necessarily with the same rituals practices depending on location in West Africa generally and even in The Gambia, location essentially makes the difference. The necessity of *skenosis* provides the flexibility of inculturation based

on context, time, meaning, place and people, for this is what the rites of passages needs in their practices at various place in The Gambia and in West Africa. Moreover, globalization is undeniably unavoidable. Imported cultures are growing everywhere including The Gambia. Inculturation therefore considers this fact for a contextual ministry if relevance is to be achieved. This will thus suggest that inculturation is necessarily partial and transient, hence, the use of *skenosis*. *Skenosis* suggests a leadership strategy that is temporal fully living and accommodative within a community or an area, at different times and places. This means leadership for the Methodist Church The Gambia, in the light of *skenosis* has to not only inculturate but has to be flexible and fluid, contextualizing and indigenizing together at every level of ministry among the vary ethnic groups and geographical cultural requirements of The Gambia. This means for me, the Methodist Church The Gambia has to be fully involved at leadership level in the rites of passage and intentionally seek to participate and during such inculturates the gospel. This thus informs the leadership styles based on the current needs and the place which the leadership is to be exercised at the given time cognizance of the worldview within that area.

I hereby argue, that *skenotic* leadership in a way has already been at work in the Methodist Church The Gambia from the time of Autonomy in 2009 to presently in 2013. Leadership has evolved from Chairman to President of Conference, to Presiding Bishop and at the most current, a female Presiding Bishop, which has been a *skenotic* leadership, based on the needs and availability of leadership and resources rather than on a universal accepted theological position and qualifications.

A *skenosis* leadership in principle can also been seen in the Methodist Heritage that guides us with certain standards to help maintain identity as Methodists and a discipleship movement. Methodism was raised to spread scriptural holiness across the land through the influence of small groups of people with the passion for making disciples. The cry from the heritage of Methodism for the Church today includes developing leadership for a discipleship movement shaped for mission. As the Methodist Church of The Gambia seeks to inculturate and be relevance, the vital lifeline of its vision should be, I suggest, remaining a vibrant discipleship movement shaped for mission, amidst all of its other structural and ecclesiastical theology.

Meadows argues how developing leadership for a discipleship movement shaped for mission is possible. First, analyzing the condition of the Methodist Church a few truths remain obvious that are relevant for the Methodist Church The Gambia. The Church has been a maintaining church rather than making disciples. On the one hand the need to preserve our denomination structures has made managerial competence an indispensable quality. On the other hand the desire to preserve our flagging membership has often turned pastoral ministry into a mixture of personal therapy and palliative care. The danger of the former, Meadows says, is the exhaustive nature of simply fulfilling all the institutional demands of bureaucracy at both local and connexional level. While the latter, the tempting tendency is of settling for cheap grace, concealing the radical demands of the gospel on daily life and being content with spiritually impoverished lives with an anemic sense of God's presence with little expectations of his providence.<sup>323</sup>

The attempts made for a leadership that is a discipleship movement shaped for mission has largely been managing outreach projects, relevant worship and fresh expressions without addressing the underlying nominalism and practical atheism that plagues the ordinary Christian life. There have also been the attempts to run membership courses and discipleship programmes as quick fixes for renewing the church and increasing confidence in the gospel. Unfortunately, it has been unproductive, as the spirit of a movement cannot be produced by denominational slogans or institutional strategies. It comes only as a gift of the Spirit to those who seek God's grace in the midst of their daily lives and knowing that they can only be disciples when in deep spiritual friendship. Meadows argues that this way of life is more caught than taught.<sup>324</sup>

It begins with ordinary people who are desperate for God and will do all it takes to be Jesus-shaped and Spirit-filled Christians. This passion is nurtured within the environment of small groups of like-minded individuals provoking one another to Christian perfection. Meadows then advocates for a cultural shift in how we see life

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<sup>323</sup> P. Meadows, 'Shifting Leadership for A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission' in *Metconnexion*, Autumn 2012, p. 8.

<sup>324</sup> Meadows, 'Shifting Leadership for A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission,' p. 8.



together as the Church and Church leadership. He therefore poses questions for relevant church in the community.

First, reimagining as a community of disciples the church would have to ask, how do they become fully devoted to Jesus, here and now? And how do they invite others around them to share in the journey and find Jesus for themselves? Second, with leaders who have a greater desire for making disciples than managing programmes and offering therapy, how much do the leaders long for God and share it? How deeply do they seek growth in the means of grace and equip others for the journey? Do they have companies of spiritual friends and invest in a few more? Do they surrender to God's leading daily and help others live more faithfully?<sup>325</sup>

The above challenge for Church and leadership are to provoke an intentional attitude to pursuing the Christian calling and enabling others to do the same. Meadows therefore gives a leadership shifting strategy as suggestion for a discipleship movement shaped for mission;

1. Do not just feed the flock, make them hungry!
2. Do not just do ministry, equip the people for life!
3. Do not just attract crowds, invest in a few!
4. Do not just develop strategies, open people's eyes!<sup>326</sup>

With the above suggestions, Meadows is promoting a church leadership that stems from the individual's passion in pursuing the vision of being Christ-like, demonstrating the full character of Christian discipleship shown in works of creating appetite for God in others. Furthermore is the essential demonstration in equipping others, spending time and resources investing in them and opening their eyes to the providence of God at work in their lives among the people they daily encounter. Overall, a combination of 'both' in each suggestion is advocated to realize a discipleship movement shaped for mission which will be seen in local churches becoming communities of mission-shaped disciples.<sup>327</sup> This system accommodates relationship, relational and accountability leadership, through its practical application

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<sup>325</sup> Meadows, 'Shifting Leadership for A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission,' pp. 8-9.

<sup>326</sup> Meadows, 'Shifting Leadership for A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission,' pp. 8-10.

<sup>327</sup> Meadows, 'Shifting Leadership for A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission', pp. 9-10.

of individual and communal seeking God (intimacy with God, filled with the Spirit), using disciplines (prayer, scriptures, fasting, communion), engaging mission (speaking about God, serving body and soul) and sharing fellowship (small groups of twelve, inner circles of three).

This Wesleyan leadership strategy in my view is *skenotic* in that it may be applied differently, though in principle the same, in different places and purposes of such discipleship groups across The Gambia for the Methodist Church contextually based on needs.

In my view, the West African traditional leadership structure, as outlined in chapter three cannot be far from what the current form of leadership is in The Methodist Church The Gambia with an Episcopal leadership and a presbyterial government. It is therefore in this stage, needed to consider how leadership with the idea of *skenosis* fits into its relationship with communities and people. For a community church or a Church that transform community, leadership must be seen and sustained in the light of the good of the majority and at the same time the few, not forgetting the central role the gospel plays in this ministry. Leadership therefore for the Methodist Church The Gambia will need to be as spontaneous as necessary and ‘temporal’ as possible and contextually relevant in each circuit of the Methodist Church The Gambia to do ministry and at each place be fully involved in the rites of passages of its people. For the rites of passage are the stations of leadership within the Gambian traditional and cultural religion. In the core of this is its focus to build a leadership that is brought forth out of a discipleship movement for mission. The governing principle of the discipleship leadership principle is the idea of a community of individuals that express a kind of family sustained by common needs. This however is applied like the ‘temporal’ nature of *skenosis*, which will vary from place to place within the present circuits and in new ones to be created.

The fact of the limitations of the missionary work is important; nevertheless, I side with Sanneh in saying that, grammar and dictionaries exist for the great majority of the languages of the world, due to the virtues of the missionary movement. The effect of those linguistic resources on internal developments and options in the

affected cultures was significant.<sup>328</sup> West Africa was empowered with the arrival of the missionary's bible and translated in West African languages. At this point, the Gambian is called to the responsibility of re-wrapping the gospel content in its context for the total and maximum experience of the potency of the gospel. Similar attempts are seen in the missionary work on Hawaii, where Hiram Bingham opposed the teaching of English to the young people for the fear of the incurable ignorance and degradation on the adults and aged population, and explored Hawaiian features for the presenting of the gospel, sounding the note of Hawaiian cultural authenticity.<sup>329</sup> In 40 years, the people of Hawaii were taught 'to read and write, to cipher and to sew. They were given the alphabet, grammar, and dictionary which preserved the language from extinction; given it a literature, and translated into it the Bible and works of devotion, science and entertainment'.<sup>330</sup> This kind of work was also found in the Gambia with the translation in Wolof parts of the Bible and other devotions as cited in chapter five. It is therefore true to say that in the midst of the evidence brought forth of the limitations of the missionary work in West Africa and The Gambia, there is still recognition that they provided the needed tools for which The Gambia is to continually make the gospel relevant and effectively experience all the dimension of its potency.

The accommodative nature of the Gambian family model of leadership fits well with the flexibility of early Methodism and the inculturational gospel. This approach of seeing the Church beyond its offices, board, committees and the like, to a family-like system was also proposed when studying the theological, spiritual and psychological aspects of a congregation by Charles Cosgrove and Dennis Hatfield.<sup>331</sup> Their position sought to determine the way the Church members relate to one another, do

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<sup>328</sup> Sanneh, 'The Current Transformation of Christianity,' p. 214. See also L. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: Missionary Impact on Culture*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989.

<sup>329</sup> G. S. Parsonson, 'The Literate Revolution in Polynesia,' in *Journal of Pacific History*, (1976), pp. 39-57, 52.

<sup>330</sup> Sanneh, 'The Current Transformation of Christianity,' p. 215. See also The New York Tribune, 5 June 1860, cited in *Missionary Album: Portraits and Biographical Sketches of the American Protestant Missionaries to the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Mission Children's Society, Sesquicentennial Edition, 1969), p. 17. Such language work has been essential to the development of the science of anthropology, as anthropologist Godfrey Lienhardt testifies in his book *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961). He writes: 'Without Fr. Nebel's work on Dinka language and thought, my own would have been made immensely difficult', p. Vii.

<sup>331</sup> C. H. Cosgrove and Dennis D. Hatfield, *Church Conflict*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), p. 5.

business together, care for one another, and argue with one another; seeking to lay strategies of curing internal conflicts and producing eventually nurturing systems for all its members. The application of the family-like system to the congregation is not new in scholarship as many have used it before including Edwin Friedman who considered the way in which the family system of the Minister interacts with the family system of the congregation,<sup>332</sup> and Kenneth Mitchell who applied family systems theory to Church staff relationships.<sup>333</sup> Cosgrove and Hatfield's approach seeks to supplement these and introduce a concept of family structure adapted from the family system models of Salvador Minuchin.<sup>334</sup> It is understood that the family is the basic source of social behavior, which, after established, is replicated in the larger world including the world of the congregation. The models of organization that had largely influenced the early Church in local Pauline groups were based on the household context.<sup>335</sup> This meant that before there was any established understanding of theological concepts of the Church as God's family, the first believers were already meeting in households organizing themselves in family settings and along family-like lines. Gradually, the meeting in homes began to derive the name of a church as indicated in the New Testament.<sup>336</sup> The local Church is therefore a family-like system made up of many smaller family-like subsystems.

Minuchin gives four axioms that provide the basis for a family approach to restructuring a conflicted congregational family. These include; first the congregational system is interconnected, second, the congregation system is both dynamic and stable, third, it is already organized to care for its own members and fourth, the psychic life of the individual is not only private (internal) but also social.<sup>337</sup> These provide the possibility of approaching the individual through the system, at the same time also affecting the system through the individual. Cosgrave

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<sup>332</sup> See E. H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, (New York and London: Guilford, 1985).

<sup>333</sup> See K. R. Mitchell, *Multiple Staff Ministries*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1988). Although Mitchell focuses on staff relations, he also gives some attention to ways in which family systems theory illuminates the larger systemic dynamics of the congregation as a whole.

<sup>334</sup> See S. Minuchin, *Families and Family Therapy*, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1974), and *Family Therapy Techniques*, with C. H. Fishman, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>335</sup> W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 84.

<sup>336</sup> 1Cor. 4:15, 1 Thess. 2:11, Philemon 10, Gal. 4:19, Gal. 6:10, 1 Tim.3:5).

<sup>337</sup> Minuchin, *Families and Family Therapy*, p. 9.

and Hatfield therefore suggest that for restructuring there must be strategic participation essentially describing the ministerial role in the congregational family system as an insider intervention therapist. As the family system is always going through self-adjustments, every strategic step needs new possibilities arising with the need to focusing on the essentials, keeping the boundaries open, to nurturing and maintaining a healthy and balanced kind of affiliation relationship. Then, marking the boundaries to ensure a pastoral strategy for sustaining restructuring, ultimately in the Church family.<sup>338</sup>

This is not far from the accommodative nature of the family structure that Gavin and Anne Calver promote. In the nuclear family, the arrival of children brings evolution in the family structure for both the parents and grandparents. Both parents and grandparents naturally adapt, celebrate and enjoy being a part of the arrival of these new members of the family. They do not find it impossible adjusting to the new structures that must accommodate the new arrival. This is different in the Church for the adults and the youths or new members.<sup>339</sup>

When it comes to family life the number one priority is for everyone to be involved in inclusive times, and so the choice of what to do or watch will often reflect the needs of the least mature. This applies to all groups that might feel left out in the Church including the youths. The vital question is why then do all the rules change when it comes to today's Church life? How then can young people and all other related left-out groups of people be fully integrated without a leadership structure that seeks to be more adaptable? In this light, the suggestion of a Church structure that is experiential, participatory, image-driven and connected is to be explored.<sup>340</sup>

The need is for an inculturational gospel that is relevant with the dynamic accommodative qualities needed for every particular society, in this case the Gambian Christian society (Church), which defines the Gambian Methodist Christian. The theological ideal of the universal gospel remains a driving authoritative influence and guideline for a missional mandate specific for a particular

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<sup>338</sup> Cosgrove and Hatfield, *Church Conflict*, pp. 125-139.

<sup>339</sup> G. Calver and A. Calver, *Stumbling Blocks Conquering the Stuff that Holds You Back*, (Oxford, MI.: Monarch Books, 2012), p. 72

<sup>340</sup> G. Calver and A. Calver, *Stumbling Blocks*, pp. 72-77.

relevance. This need underlines the argument for *skenosis* understanding of the gospel in chapter two, to influence the leadership approach as it engages with the rites of passages and other traditional practices of Gambians.

*Skenosis* brings a standard with which the communal life is to be seen in the light of the gospel thus the gospel remains a non-negotiable truth that opens the true meaning and ultimate desired end of the traditional and cultural realities of any community. Then the flexibility and relevance of the gospel cuts across time and place as it is essentially and necessarily temporary, thus applies differently for various times and age. This leads to its *kenosis* functions of *diakonia*, presence and dialogue within the setting of God's mission of reconciliation effected through a shared humanity. However, it further culminates again to the standard of the word of the gospel as the key that makes critique and puts into proper perspective the traditional and cultural religious beliefs for their ultimate destiny. The rites of passages as examined in chapter six are a point of reference for building the needed approaches to transformational leadership.

Therefore, Church leadership relevant for the West African and the Gambian can best be explored within the context of a Christian community. The heritage of the gospel itself advocates this. Newbigin argued as significant that the Lord left behind Him not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community.<sup>341</sup> Moreover, it is through this community of believers (the Church), that the manifold wisdom of God is to be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realm, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3:10-11).

In Woodward's thought, each neighbourhood Church is called to be a sign, foretaste and instrument of God's kingdom; she is to do this in the light of *who* she is and *where* she is ministering. In this vein, she is able to create a missional cultural web within which the leadership approach is influence by the (i) Narrative – what is God's calling for our Church?, (ii) Rituals – What are our core practices?, (iii)

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<sup>341</sup> L. Newbigin, *The Household of God*, (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), p. 20.

Institution – How will we fulfil our calling? And (iv) Ethics – What does it mean for us to be faithful and fruitful?<sup>342</sup>

These above questions can act as guidelines for the inculturation of the gospel and for deriving a leadership strategy for the Gambian Methodist Church to remain faithfully African, West African, Gambian and Christian. This would eventually produce a dynamic transformational leadership. According to Woodward, we all long for transformation, we just hate change.<sup>343</sup> In order for transformation there must be a conscious decision to enter into an ongoing engaging relationship with the gospel contextually (2 Corinthians 3:18).

When The Gambia Methodist Church attempts to take the gospel into its traditional and cultural realities, it will gather the potential of becoming a transformed relevant Church that will create a potent leadership for the Church at present and in the future. As it employs the combination of the Episcopal- presbyterial leadership government as discussed in chapter three, with the hierarchical and flat leadership influence within the needs of its context it will actually exhibit the possibility of a new breed of a visible community of un-dichotomized Gambian Methodist Christians.

Therefore, a new Church society with stations of the rites of passage as part of its levels of commitment to the Church life and Church responsibility to individual life all for the ultimate breeding of a commitment to community/ communal life is the proposal for Church Leadership for the Methodist Church The Gambia, with its implications. With the Ministers and members working as a family, the individualistic pursuance of sanctification is nurtured while strengthening our collective pursuance of sanctification with the reality of addressing both spiritual and social in the ubuntu philosophy of I am because we are and since we are therefore I am.<sup>344</sup> This underlining philosophy is that which governs the communal nature of the West African Society. This further endorses the family approach understanding of the

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<sup>342</sup> JR Woodward, *Creating A Missional Culture*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2012), pp. 171-179.

<sup>343</sup> Woodward, *Creating A Missional Culture*, p. 210.

<sup>344</sup> <http://www.buzzle.com/editorials/7-22-2006-103206.asp> accessed on the 26 April 2013. Also see K. Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, (Philadelphia, PA.: Temple University Press, 1995), J. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Johannesburg: Heinemann Publishers, 1999).

West African Society and The Gambian likewise. Thus, the rites of passages vital for the family unit and the community as well, which oversees the actualization of the stations and events of life collectively. Together, we bring our resources to celebrate and to mourn, to promote or to bring down, to bless and to curse, to fight and to support. Moreover, as Gambians who are Methodist Christians, we do not forget the identity, accommodative family genetics of Jesus' leadership and John Wesley's leadership; a discipleship movement shaped for mission, as discussed in chapter six. The very core and pillar for building practical leadership in establishing a visible Church family community rests in this identity and vision. It encompasses the divine mandate of the Church to make disciples and provides the system that accommodates relationship/ relational/ accountability leadership (influence), through its seeking God (intimacy with God, filled with the Spirit), using disciplines (prayer, scriptures, fasting, communion), engaging mission (speaking about God, serving body and soul) and sharing fellowship (small groups of twelve, inner circles of three). This very nature of Wesleyan leadership comfortably provides at each station of the rites of passages, that which becomes collective events of seeking God, using disciplines, engaging mission and sharing fellowship, which complements the ongoing work of sanctification.

With the above said, I would therefore argue that the existing constitutional structures of the Methodist Church The Gambia, be at each level as a constitutional requirement that each committee across the board be and function as a discipleship 'fellowship' within which the possibility of multiple 'bands' relevantly created to meet the needs of the people. The training of ministers needs to reflect this West African Gambian orientation.

### **Rethinking the Pastoral Task of the Church**

The presbyterial aspect of the Methodist Church The Gambia's leadership keeps faithfully the priesthood of all believers and encourages inclusive participation of all within the Church. While the Episcopal aspects crowns it with the pastoral importance of all believers to be cared for and pastorally guided by a conscious effort of the Church acknowledging the few set aside by the Holy Spirit and given as gifts to the Church to nurture and care for the believers. Paul valedictory address at Miletus to the elders of the Ephesians' Church (Acts 20:17-38) carried a reflection of



his labor among them with two characteristic of the oversight he assumes. The first, Christian oversight is *pastoral* oversight with the Greek verb of *poimaino* meaning to do the work of a shepherd or to tend a flock especially by feeding it.<sup>345</sup> This is the first responsibility given to Peter after the resurrection (John 21:15-17). Even in the era of the priesthood of all believers, there is still the need to *Pastor the Pastors*, thus it is essential for the Church to consciously exercise this pastoral ministry as vital task within the scope of its responsibilities. The second, Christian oversight is *plural* oversight. In Miletus, the apostle sent for the *elders* (plural) of the Ephesian Church.<sup>346</sup> This is constantly seen from the first missionary journey onward as Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for each Church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). With the following scriptural examples therefore, the need for the Pastoral team is paramount.

This chapter has been a theological reflection on what it means to consider the inculturation of the gospel and its implication for Church leadership of the Methodist Church The Gambia. It has also sought to enrich the attempt with knowledge of other inculturational attempts in especially West Africa. With the above insight to understanding the task at hand, a conscious effort to carry the responsibility of being culturally relevant as a Church in the attempt to inculturate the gospel focusing on the rites of passage for effective leadership in Church and society in The Gambia is essential. Therefore, the need to uphold the idea of *skenosis* cannot be overemphasized as we seek to contextually meet the needs of The Gambia as a Methodist Church with a leadership designed to be a discipleship movement for mission in each level. Without these rites of passage we would not be Gambian; without the discipleship movement for mission praxis, we would not be Methodists and at the heart of all we do with our leadership, without the gospel influence and implications we would not be Christians. Moreover, is the family model of leadership, which seems to provide a better leadership approach to the *Skenotic* leadership needed for The Methodist Church The Gambia, as it brings ministry to its people.

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<sup>345</sup> J. Stott, *The Living Church*, p. 80.

<sup>346</sup> Stott, *The Living Church*, pp. 80-81.

## Chapter Seven

### The New Phase of the Methodist Church The Gambia (II), Towards a Church Leadership Theology for the Methodist Church The Gambia.

The buildup of this research has sought to consider the relevance of the Gambian Methodist Church Leadership within the context of the traditional and cultural realities of its people. This attempt seeks to further strengthen the position of an inculturated gospel that neutralizes the dichotomy of Christianity and traditional cultural religion for the Gambian Methodist Christian. Ultimately, this hopes to propose a leadership strategy and direction for the Methodist Church The Gambia.

The philosophy, traditional and cultural religion of the Gambian laid the foundation for a people that had the structural requirements for assimilating the content of the gospel, not as uneducated natives but as people with a distorted content of the gospel message and distorted application of it within their social and customary realities. Understanding the content of the gospel and its relevance for the Gambian sets the tone for considering the various models of application that have been employed in mission in West Africa. A similar quest is seen in Asian Christianity, where Western dualism and enlightenment thought governed the ‘heart’, while authentic Asian Christianity can only emerge when there is a dual recovery of confidence, in culture and in the gospel, within Asian Christianity.<sup>347</sup>

It is, however, vital to note that the limitation of this missional approach is balanced by the availability of the gospel content in the language and within the reach of the Gambian. This should empower the Gambian and encourage attempts of inculturation that would produce a more relevant ministry fulfilling the existential purpose of the gospel. This therefore makes essential an understanding of leadership from the content of Scripture, Church history and Church traditions. For the Gambian Methodist Christian, this is supplemented with the additional consideration

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<sup>347</sup> H. Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for An Authentic Asian Christian Theology*, (Milton Keynes: Regnum Books International, 1997), pp. 1-8

of the Methodist heritage that gives a sense of belonging to the tradition and defines its Christian orientation.

The major task of leadership is to assess that which precipitates the dichotomy of Church and society and seek for a more relevant and spiritually dynamic gospel, for in its absence, the traditional and cultural religion offers security. The underlining system of belonging to this traditional and cultural reality is known through the rites of passage that define the West African/ The Gambian's stations of identity and functions within their community. The records of the Methodist Church at autonomy seem to be favorable in the areas of its mission in Education, Medical and Agriculture in comparison to its work in inculturational ministry, which could eventually result in growth of spiritual maturity and leadership in the lives of members. At this stage, the early efforts in translation of liturgies and parts of the scriptures and hymns into the local languages were not available, thus the church remained for a major part of its life as an extension of British Methodism, with British liturgy and English language domination of worship services. From autonomy, the desire to self-propagate, self-govern and self-finance, points to the inculturational needs of the ministry, which could help re-define Church leadership and strategy for the Methodist Church The Gambia.

Amidst the various inculturational attempts across West Africa as discussed previously, the rites of passage seem to hold together all other needs of inculturation for individual and the community. It is therefore these rites of passage that define the identity and empowers the individual to fully express their existential potential. They are therefore assured of security from the risks of unaccomplished tasks at the various stations of their existence caused by evil spiritual interferences. Moreover, engaging with the gospel produces the reality of being equipped with the confidence to carry out both individual and communal responsibilities without fear but with power, love and sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).

This means for the Church a redefinition or reinforcing of the meaning of Church as a family within The Gambia setting. With this ideology, the Gambian family system can serve as a leadership building oriented system that strengthens the task of the Church in its quest for Church leadership as it inculturates the gospel with the rites of passage as major entry points.

Inculturated liturgies like that of the naming ceremony discussed previously are concrete examples of Church leadership in *skenotic* leadership. Similar liturgies suggested earlier to be worked on included puberty, marriage, eldership and death. The Methodist Church The Gambia is however limited with the availabilities of such liturgies which could be considered for encouraging the processes of inculturation. Confirmation can be practiced as a rite of passage that unites the cultural traditional requirements of members and Church, which links, directly to the stage of adolescent transition to maturity and responsibility in both Church and society. The Marriage rites of passages, which seem to be more cultural and traditional during engagements and more Christian during weddings in Church, can be provided a more blended event at both stages that makes the Church an integral and concrete part of it all. The eldership rites of passage needs to help the Church better defines the roles of elders in their total being and not only in their office duration and responsibilities. The Death rite of passage remains a vital stage where cultural and traditional practices and beliefs with Church doctrine of the departure of souls into eternity is linked. Therefore, inculturation cognizance of *skenos* can be practice for relevant Church leadership. Furthermore, Gambian Methodist Ministers are to be taught on how to address the issues on the ground through participation and practice in bringing ministry within culture and traditional practices and not be limited to only British ministerial intellectual education.

### **Contribution to knowledge**

The inculturational duty of the Methodist Church The Gambia is now shown to be vital for relevant indigenous ministry for an autonomous Gambian Christian Church. The inculturation of the gospel is not new in West African Christianity but it is yet to take the central stage of Gambia Methodism. Thus in the era of other various attempts of inculturations across West Africa as discussed in chapter six, it is a new and major step for the Methodist Church The Gambia to consider inculturational attempts on the foundational pillars of traditional and cultural religion in the rites of passages. The rites of passage can now take their place as an integral part of the life of the Church. It both informs and sharpens the ministry of the Church within the community of Gambian Christian believers. In addition, our Methodist heritage

provides the vehicles of being discipleship movement church shaped for mission through the lessons of the genetics of Jesus' leadership and John Wesley's.

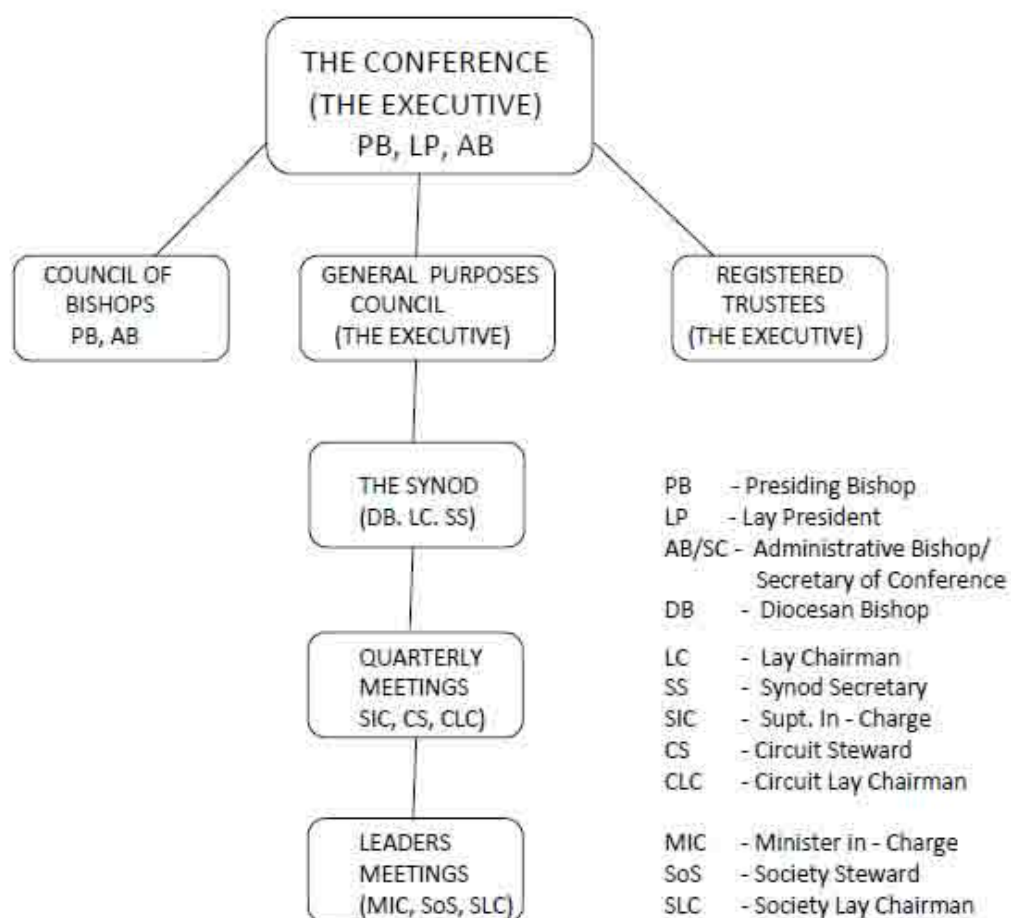
The triangular approach for relevant ministry becomes a fresh expression of the Methodist Church The Gambia's requirement for leadership nurturing in biblical Scripture, West African Gambian Traditional Culture and Methodism Heritage. The emergence of an accommodative family-like leadership structure ensues with sustaining the newly adopted Episcopal-Presbyterial leadership approach after autonomy. Episcopal-Presbyterial leadership governance with a missional mandate of inculturating the gospel gives the possibilities of creating a missional culture for the Methodist Church The Gambia.

### **Recommendations for further study**

The fruitfulness of the inculturation of the gospel in the Methodist Church The Gambia brings to the study of models of inculturation and leadership approaches, only worked with the rites of passages of the foundations of the Gambian traditional and cultural religion that deeply defines the worldview of The Gambian. However, beyond these rites of passages, there is the scope to explore the customary rituals, festivals and ceremonies to examine how the inculturation of the gospel would yield fruits for further leadership values and strategy discoveries. Such exploration vehicles by our Wesleyan leadership heritage could lead to the challenge of the concept of being a community center Church, which might bring the Church relevantly closer to the community and even exist as one.

## APPENDIX I

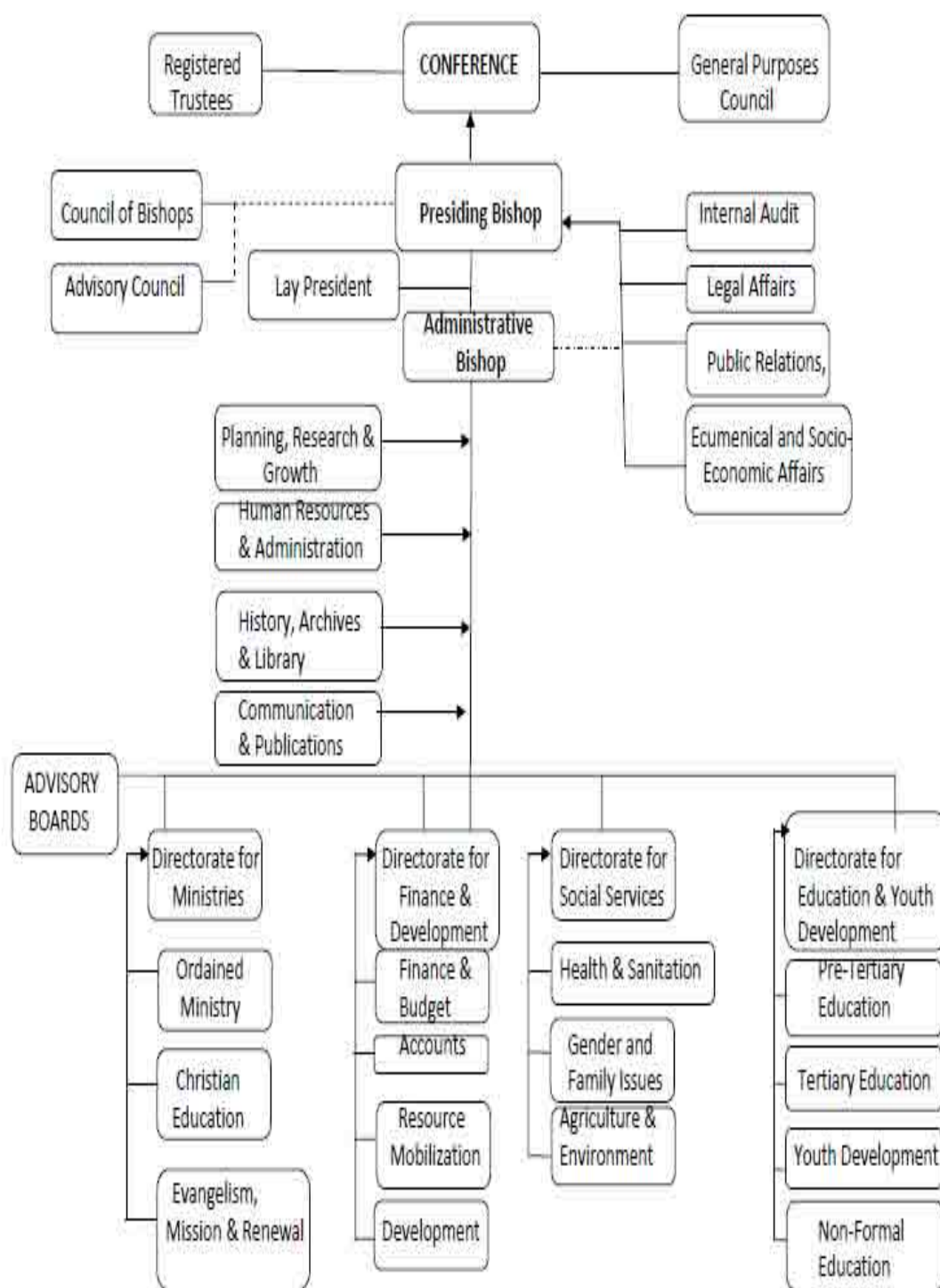
### GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



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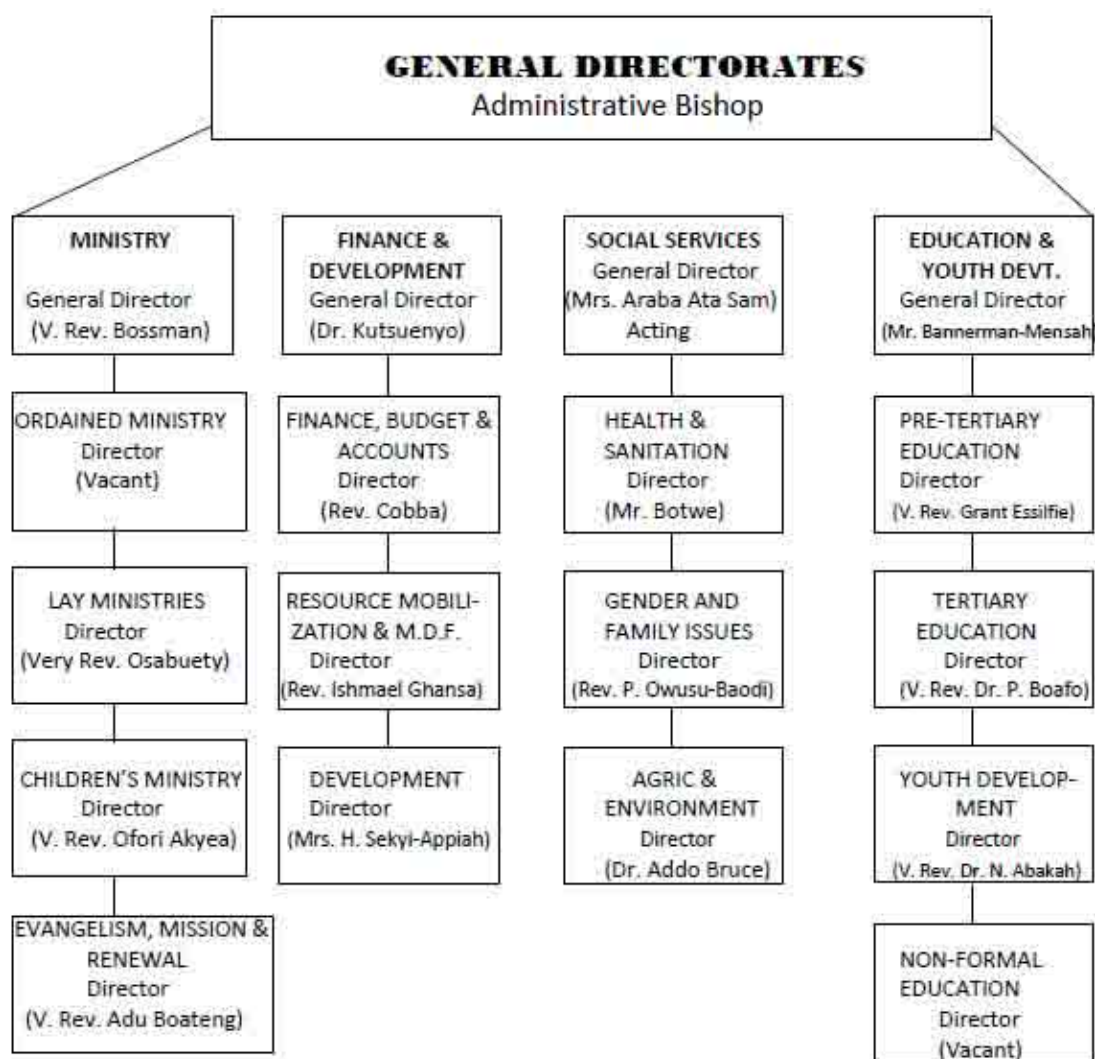
<sup>348</sup> <http://www.methodistchurch-gh.org/churchadmin.html> accessed on the 4th of March 2013.

## THE METHODIST CHURCH GHANA • REVISED PROPOSED CONNEXIONAL STRUCTURE



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<sup>349</sup> <http://www.methodistchurch-gh.org/churchadmin.html> accessed on the 4th of March 2013.



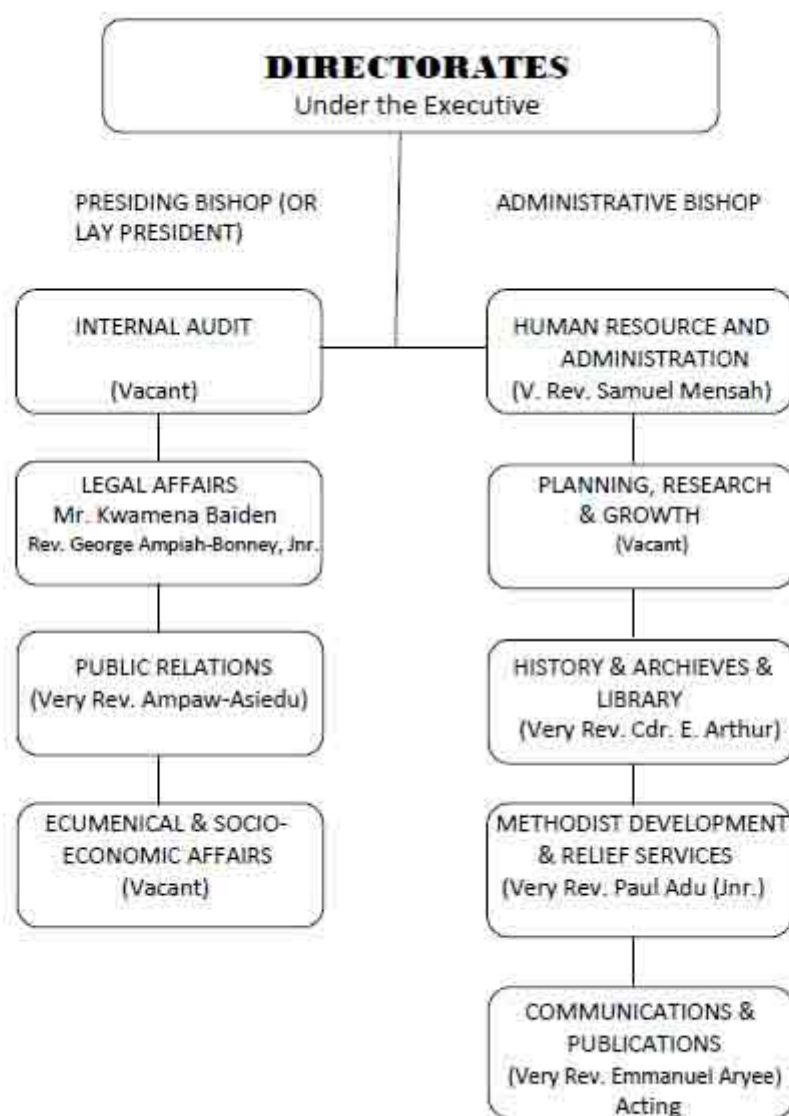
**NOTE:**

General Directors report to the Administrative Bishop and Directors report to their General Director with the exception of those Directors who report directly to either the Presiding Bishop or the Administrative Bishop.

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<sup>350</sup> <http://www.methodistchurch-gh.org/churchadmin.html> accessed on the 4th of March 2013.





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<sup>351</sup> <http://www.methodistchurch-gh.org/churchadmin.html> accessed on the 4th of March 2013.

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