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Christian Mission in Dagbon

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Abstract

Christianity is a Missionary Religion, and often interact with the people of Dagbon. In Ghana, there has been a constructive engagement of Missionary activities in this great religion. Christianity, appeared in Dagbon long after Islam had gained roots in area. Christianity, since its inception in Dagbon, has been involved in Missionary works. But the early Missionaries did not make Muslims their target of conversion. The Missionary activities were centered on the traditionalist. As time went on, the Christian Mission was extended to the Muslims in Dagbon. Presently there are Christian symbols in both urban and rural Dagbon. Several denominations are making inroads into the area with the view to evangelize the gospel of Christ especially to the Muslims. This article looks at early missionary groups and its impact on the people of Dagbon. It further highlight the social relationship that has developed among Christians and Dagbamba in the area, the response and reactions of Muslims and Muslim leaders to the spread of Christianity and the impact of the phenomenon on the people of Dagbon. The article therefore makes some recommendations on the Christian Mission in Dagbon to give an overview of the missionary works in the area.

Keywords: Mission, Dagbon, Church, Dagbani, Institutions, Organizations, Dagbamba

Introduction

The main focus of this article is to outline Christian Mission in Dagbon. We shall begin by looking at Christian Mission in general, and what it is about. We shall then briefly discuss the Mission in Ghana; and finally narrow the discussions to the Mission in Dagbon. Activities of some Christian denominations in Dagbon, and their impact on the lives of the people will also be discussed.

Christian Mission, Mission is derived from Missio Dei, taken from the Latin root which means "the sending of God". This is in the sense that "one is being sent", a phrase used in Protestant Missiological discussion especially since the 1950s.¹

Missio Dei was first used in a Missionary sense by the German Missiologist Karl Hartenstein in 1934. The term was motivated by Karl Barth's emphasis on the Actio Dei (the action of God), over against the human centered focus of liberal theology at that time. ² The term "Mission", an English term with no direct Biblical equivalent, has a broad range of acceptable meanings.

Mission in the Christian faith could refer to a group of Church members sent by the Church to another part of the land or to a foreign land to propagate their faith, and to do medical or social work. ³ One Christian writer, A. Clark Scanlon, gives the following definition of Mission: "By Mission, we mean that God, through redeemed people, is seeking to make himself known to men, women and children everywhere, reconciling them to Himself through Jesus Christ."⁴

David Bosch, in an admirable book, *Transforming Mission*, has provided different paradigms of Mission that have emerged in the life of the Church as discipleship, proclamation, liberation and dialogue. To him, Mission refers to Missio Dei (God's Mission). This is God's self-revelation to the world and His involvement in the world. In other words it is the pronouncement of the Good News to the people. Bosch points out that before the 1950s, Mission was referred to as: (a) "the sending of Missionaries to a designated territory; (b) the activities undertaken by such Missionaries; (c) the geographical area where the Missionaries were active and (d) the agency which dispatched the Missionaries....."⁵ In a broad theological presentation of Mission, Bosch presents the following several themes as the meaning of Mission: Propagation of the faith, Expansion of the reign of God, Conversion of the heathen and the founding of new Churches.⁶

It is said in Acts 1:8 also that "But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth".⁷ The disciples, to whom the instruction was given, waited till the Holy Spirit was sent to them, and they followed the Lord's instructions and went to other parts of the world to present the Good News of Christ Jesus. This kind of witnessing, among other things, is considered as Mission.

Furthermore, as found in the text in Matthew 28:18-20, "Jesus drew near and said to them, I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth, Go, then, to all people everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age"⁸ which came to be known as "the Great Commission" undergirded missionary thinking and inspired missionary action. Missionary movements arose, not with the desire to exploit nations, but to take to the nations a divine treasure.

The interpretation process of the context of Mission however became quite complicated. It was said, for example that the, "nations" in the passage, as in Matthew 28, were not the gentiles thousands of miles away, but in reference to the "gentiles down the road" with whom the Jewish Christians refused entirely to associate. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and as was reported also in Acts 1:8, is seen as obligatory for Christians, to carry the gospel to those who have not heard about it. In this way, Mission was taken into a particular direction to justify a particular understanding of the missionary task.

The early eighteenth century missionary interpretation of the biblical text drew a distinction between home and abroad. The home Mission indicates the local fronts of Missionary works, while getting out of the environment into a different land on a Mission work refers to the "abroad". This has the implication of those "out there" are in real need of the mission of the Church. Today, mission is viewed as carrying the message to the world at our door step (the local) as well as the world out there (the global). The Church is the main mouth of God's mission at home as well as for those out there. It was observed by Bosch that the book of Matthew did not intend to show the distinction between home and abroad.⁹ To Kwame Ofori "all nations", not only the gentiles, but those Jews who still had not responded to the gospel are liable to accept and propagate the faith of Christ to all human beings.¹⁰

At another level, the inadequacy and even the danger of using that interpretation of Matthew 28:18-20 for our time is inherent in the word heathen used to translate the Greek word ethnos. Though the term itself has been dropped from modern translations of this text, its influence lingers. The term "heathen" conjures up visions of unenlightened persons.¹¹ This may then be seen as the objects of Christian mission, for heathens need to be saved from darkness, ignorance and sin. The term nation on the other hand is a more positive word, because it denotes people with identifiable religious, social and political cultures whom God has created and loves in their ethnic particularity. However, many mission readings of Matthew 28:18-20 today still carry the influence of the term heathen which clashes with modern understandings of ethnos as nations, and thus distorts the thrust of mission as the proclamation and practice of the good news.

Early Christian Activities in Ghana

Missionary activities began in the West Africa with the Roman Catholic Church when in 1482 one of Prince Henry's captains reached the shores of Senegal in West Africa, from Portugal. The Prince wanted the Roman Catholic Missionaries to establish the message of Christianity along the West African coast. By 1482, the Portuguese sought to build their first tropical possession in the Gold Coast. This became necessary when King John II of Portugal charged Don Diego De Azambuja to build a permanent settlement for the Portuguese at the Atlantic Coast. When Diego asked a local king's permission to build, the king resisted and asked them to go elsewhere. He was later persuaded to be baptized for the salvation of his own soul, and eventually he permitted his spiritual overlords to build. Missions took a new turn when the castle, called Sao Jorge da Mina (Saint George's of the mine), or simply Elmina, was completed in 1482. They were now ready to embark in trade with gold, human bodies and to evangelize the people of West Africa.⁸

In 1642, the Calvinist Dutch proscribed the Catholic Mission. This was done by the capture of all Portuguese possessions throughout the West Coast of the Gold Coast. The impact of this early Missionary activity was therefore insignificant as the arrival of the Dutch prompted the Catholics to go on recess for a long period of time.⁹

Basel Missionaries

The arrival of the Basel Missionaries in 1828 marked in roads of Christian activities in the Gold Coast (now Ghana). At the early stages the Missionaries were serving as Chaplains to the Danish people in the Castles. The arrival of Andreas Riis (Chaplain) to Akwapim areas in 1835 was followed by a dispute between the Missionaries and the traders. Riis initiated and established Missionary stations in Akwapim and Aburi by 1847. Two West Indians, Dan Rochester and Joseph Mohr, gave a helping hand and supported Riis to achieve the target goal. The Basel Mission paid more attention to education by establishing schools because education was regarded as an important element in conversion. Nathan Samwini quotes S.K Odampfen as saying that "Basel mission came to open schools and in general lived in Brotherly love with the Africans".¹⁰

In addition to educational services, the Church provided some services to the people in the area. For example, they

really gave complete evangelism through preaching in the Church and outside the Church. They also promoted peace between the European merchants, the local people and the traditional leaders.¹¹

The Basel Missionaries were deported by the British Government as a result of the agreement the British and the French had to dismantle the Germans during the First World War in 1914. The Scottish missionaries then took over. A Constitution and a Synod committee of the Church were established in 1930. Legal matters were handled by the local graduates. The Church had its self-autonomy in 1950.¹²

Long before the northern part of Ghana became outposts of other Missionaries, the Basel Mission was conscious of their Missionary obligation towards the population in the northern territories of the then Gold Coast. As early as 1905 the Basel Mission seriously discussed and examined two alternative possibilities, one was to expand the work to the Asanteland and the other was to put a pioneer station at Yendi. But the Yendi ambition took time, until in 1909 when the British government invited the Basel Mission to establish a post of the Basel Mission factory at Tamale and normal Missionary activities to be welcome. Somewhere in January 1913 the Basel Missionaries arrived at Yendi to establish a new Mission station. The Basel Mission took over the Crafts training centre at Tamale in 1929 after the World War one.¹³

Wesleyan (Methodist) Missionaries

After the Basel Missionaries came the Wesleyan (Methodist) Missionaries in 1835. They were invited by the Bible Band of Ghana. The leaders of the band included De Graft and George Blankson. The leaders requested for copies of the Bible from the British government. Rev. Joseph B. Dunwell arrived in the Gold Coast in the same year (1835). He died the same year. Other Wesleyan Missionaries included Rev. George Wrigly who translated some parts of the Bible into Fante. Abura Dankwa and Dominasi were among the locals who took over the mission after the death of Wrigly in 1838. Thomas Birch Freeman (Swiss) arrived in the country in 1838 and served for fifty two years. He visited Kumasi in 1839. His visitation to Kumasi made the Asantehene Osei Yaw Akoto (1824-1833) to accept both Islam and Christianity to be practiced in his palace. Riis, a Danish Missionary, visited Kumasi alongside Hayford (a British missionary) who seemed to have a long misunderstanding with the Asantehene Osei Yaw Akoto. The Asante people marvelously welcomed them into the garden city (Kumasi).¹⁴

The main objective of the Methodist Missionaries was to convert the locals to Christianity. Clarke is quoted as saying; "The great object was to implant Christianity and civilization while the approach was to get people to renounce their sins and evil ways and convert to Christianity."¹⁵

The preaching exhibited by the Wesleyan Methodists was against idol worship. They called the people to repent and accept Christ as their personal Saviour. The local people felt attacked by the Missionaries on their socio-religious concerns. Only a few traditional rulers converted to the Christian fold. The Asantehene Nana Kwaku Dua II, for example, stood firmly against the Missionary activities. Locals such as J.A Solomon, Timothy Laing, Frederic France, John Plange and Edward Fynn were trained to serve at the Mission stations within the locals. The Church struggled for self-autonomy in 1961.¹⁶ The evangelization of the Methodist faith in the northern Ghana begun in 1910, after a long period of conflict with the Colonial Government, Missionary work was established in 1955. Paul Adu of Ghana was the first indigenous Missionary to the northern Ghana.¹⁷

Bremen (Evangelical Presbyterian) Missionaries

The people of the Gold Coast (Ghana) witnessed the arrival of the German Bremen (Evangelical Presbyterian) Mission to the country in between 1829 and 1847. They first established themselves at Peki in the Volta Region of Ghana. The team was led by Lorenz Wolf. Wolf left the mission work due to ill-health in 1851 and died in Humburg on his arrival that same year. This and other setbacks made the missionaries to withdraw from the mission work and returned in 1853. Dauble and Plessing (Germans) led another team and settled at the coast of Keta. They thought that Peki was already conquered by the Bremen and so there was no need for them to establish a center there. The Peki mission station opened again in 1877 while new areas such as Waya, Anyako, Amedzofe and Ho had stations established.¹⁸

They (Dauble and Plessing) regarded education as the main tool to evangelization. Based on this, a college was set up to train local and indigenous pastors in Westheim, Germany. Again the New Testament was translated alongside some hymns into Ewe (language of the people of Keta). Dr Zahn was behind the localization of the Missionary works. Again local converts were properly trained to handle leadership positions and the running of the Church. They, to a large extent, accommodated the African culture instead of eradicating and condemning the African customs, traditions and rituals. Peter B. Clarke confirms this when he indicated that "the Bremen Mission adopted a positive approach to African society and culture".¹⁹ According to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church Calendar, it was after the Mission had spread around the Volta Region, that it moved to Yendi in 1952, to Bimbila in 1955, to Saboba in 1961, to Wa in 1968, to Tamale in 1973 and to Bolgatanga in 1976.²⁰

Catholic Missionaries

In 1880, the Catholic Church re-surfaced in Ghana. At this stage it became the last Christian denomination of the 19th Century to be established in Ghana. Rev. Father Auguste Moreau and Father Eugene Murat from France were members of the society of the African mission who were credited for the second establishment of the Catholic Mission in Ghana.

Before anything else, the young missionaries had to learn Fante language. Their Teacher, James Gordon, became the first Fante convert in those times. Elmina became the headquarters of the Gold Coast Catholic mission until 1897 when it was removed to Cape Coast. After Elmina they (the Catholics) extended missionary activities to Kumasi (the capital of the Asante state) in 1882. It took the Catholic Missionaries twenty eight years to found a formal Church in the Asante State.²¹

The Catholic Mission outlined several aims and made some gains within the Gold Coast. Some of these were Evangelization which was to be conducted through the support of education. Based on this, several schools were established and hundreds of pupils were enrolled in the schools. The state supported the Catholic schools on their programmes within the areas.

Again the Catholic Missionaries established several Mission stations in the country, for example, the mission station in Kumasi (1896), Bolgatanga (1924), Wiaga (1927), Jirapa (1929), Kaleo (1932) and Nandom (1933). More people were converted and baptized by 1950.²² The Catholic Church therefore seemed to have made wider in-roads in the northern part of the Gold Coast (Ghana) than the other Churches during these early times of Missionary activities in the country.

In 1906, the White Fathers entered the Northern prefecture of Gold Coast from Ouagadougou (Now Burkina Faso) to start Missionary work in the northern part of the Gold Coast (Now Ghana).

Not long after their arrival, they showed signs of success among the Dagaba of Jirapa, Nandom and other towns in the north.

In 1950 the Roman Catholic Missionaries established the Diocese of Tamale. It became a metropolitan Archdiocese of Tamale in 1977. The seat of the Archbishop was the Cathedral in Tamale. The metropolitan Archbishop of Tamale was Cardinal Proeku Dery (1977 to 1994) and from 1994 Archbishop Gregory Ebolawola Kpiebaya took over up to today.²³

Church of the Twelve Apostles Missionaries

Apart from what came to be known as the "Mainline Churches", some of which we have discussed, we also have "Pentecostal/ Spiritual" Missionary activities in Ghana, one of the earliest of which is the Church of the Twelve Apostles. The Church was referred to by many people in the western region of Ghana as Nackaba (to look after the needs of a flock).²⁸ Baeta observed that the group claims to be the first of the Spiritual Churches in Ghana. The Church sent twelve Apostles to each village to take care of the flocks.²⁴

William Wade Harris (a member of the Grebo ethnic group of Liberia) was the prophet who had been with the Church (Twelve Apostles) in Liberia. He was said to have had contact with the Archangel Gabriel. Harris said that he was called to do God's work. His preaching was referred to as "the harvest of souls". Harris was not a learned prophet. He moved along the coast of the Gold Coast from 1913 to 1915. He used to dress in white garb with a cross and a Bible in his hand.²⁵

Harris did not see the Church as one that should be based on denomination but wanted his members to join any type of Church service, except the Catholic Church. The reason behind his rejection of the Catholic Church was that the Catholic Church does not practice some kinds of spiritual activities which are the core of the Christian life. These include healing the blind and deaf. There was emphasis on Bible studies, Spiritual gifts (Prophecy, Healing, and Praying in Tongues) and Holiness. Members were of the view that any soul outside the realm of Christ is doomed to Hell.²⁶

Pastor Kwame Ofori of the Light House Chapel International, Savelugu, at Tamale, was of the view that the conversion of John Nackaba (former fetish priest) and Grace Tanne (priestess) into Wade's faith brought about denominationalism after the demise of Wade. Based on the theological presentation of Wade, various Christian Churches erupted as a result of the emphasis placed on the teachings of the Holy Bible, the acts of spiritual gifts (prophecy, healing, praying in tongues) and holiness. The above practices were believed to have brought about the development of the Church of Pentecost and the Apostolic Church of Ghana in 1925, but the Church of the Twelve Apostles did not make head way into the northern territories. It is the Churches that were established as a result of the main Church (the Church of the Twelve Apostles) that made in-roads into the northern territories.²⁷

Christian Mission in Dagbon

There have been several Missionary organizations in Ghana who embarked upon Christian Mission to the people of Dagbon. These include the White Fathers Mission (Catholic), the Trans Volta Mission (Bremen) and the Assemblies of God Mission.

The Christian Missionaries were of the view that the peoples of Dagbon territories needed both the Gospel and civilization. The Gospel presented by the Missionaries was based on the conviction that Christianity was the arbiter of salvation and civilization. The various Missionaries in Dagbon are of the view that the indigenous people were illiterates and very poor.

We now discuss in this part of the chapter some Christian Missions in Dagbon which have affected the lives of the people, as we also move into the next chapter to discuss Christian Mission and Muslims in Dagbon. They are: The Basel (Presbyterian) Mission, The Wesleyan (Methodist) Mission, The Assemblies of God Mission and the Roman Catholic Mission. These, among others, have had significant impact on the lives of the Dagbon.

The Basel (Presbyterian) Mission

The Basel (Presbyterian) Mission, as we said earlier, was founded in 1815, based on a Pietistic Swiss background. The Basel Mission which established the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, embarked upon her first Missionary activities to Dagbon in 1897.²⁸ This was in Yendi. According to R. Fisch, few Basel Mission trained craftsmen, government clerks and workers could be found in Tamale who were Christians.³⁵ They constituted a congregation of seventy. On 29th of April 1909 Governor Watherson invited the Basel Mission to establish a factory in Tamale.²⁹ In 1913 Basel Mission presented the mission to the Dagbamba in Yendi.

Objectives

The objective of the Mission was to evangelize the people and to plant and build rural and urban Churches. Through this the people of Dagbon might receive the mission within a specific period. Church leaders and Pastors were to be trained to be in charge of the various Church branches that were to be established.

The Basel Mission focused on ministering to the whole person: to develop spiritual soul and body. They believed it is the will of God for His children to prosper spiritually, physically, intellectually and materially.³⁰

Another objective was to involve in Bible translation and the translation of Biblical stories. The Mission was to investigate the relationship between Dagbani and other local dialects in Dagbon, such as Gonja, Nanumba, Konkomba and the Basari.

The Basel Mission, through the Presbyterian Church, started its activities by learning the Dagbani language. This was to enhance a rapid and effective communication of the Christian message to the people.

Another important objective of the Mission was to set up a dispensary in Yendi to address the health needs of the people there was no access to health facilities in the area.

The establishment of formal education was another important objective of the Church. The establishment of formal education would enhance the achievement of the missionary works, since it would be the main tool to propagate the Christian faith to the people.

Approach/Method

The Basel (Presbyterian) Missionaries employed the services of Dagbani Teachers who were also part of the Church to teach the leading members of the Church the Dagbani language. This was done in a formal way. This could be the only way of presenting the faith to the people in their own language.

The early Basel (Presbyterian) Missionaries also presented themselves to the traditional rulers in the area to enable them acquire land to establish the Churches. The mission of the Church was made clear to the indigenous people of Dagbon.

Alfred Kwansa a member of the Presbyterian Church at Bamvim, is of the view that the early Missionaries put themselves into groups to enable them preach the Gospel to the people. They moved from one place to another in the area to enable the people receive the required information about the gospel. Few converts were made at the early stages of the Basel Mission. These converts were used to present the mission to some of the Dagbamba.³¹

Achievements

The Basel (Presbyterian) Mission had various achievements in presenting the Christian faith to the people of Dagbon. The main achievement of the Basel (Presbyterian) Mission was the establishment of schools and other educational centers to promote literacy among the people. This could also enhance the understanding of the Scripture. Based on these, various schools were established in Dagbon. These included the Presbyterian primary schools in Tamale and its surroundings. The schools had produced many graduates in the country. Even though they were Mission schools, they were not limited only to Christians but opened to other religious faiths as well. These included Muslims.

Another achievement about the Mission is the establishment of Churches in the area. There have been many Presbyterian Churches in Dagbon such as in Tamale, Viting, Bilpella, Bamvim and in the rural settlements.³²

The Mission has made numerous Muslims, Traditionalist and Indigenous converts into the Christian faith. The Mission sought to establish the largest and healthiest Mission on the Dagbon soil which would be the base for strong Missionary outreach to other parts of the area that had no knowledge of the Christian faith.

Weaknesses

The Basel (Presbyterian) Church is regarded as a southern Church. This is because a greater part of the population of the church is made up of people from the Southern Ghana who came to the area to work in government offices and organizations. Based on this, the indigenous people do not attach much seriousness to serving in the Church. Only a few Dagbamba can be counted in the Church.

Another weakness of the Basel (Presbyterian) Mission in Dagbon is the relaxation of using the Dagbamba language in its services. Even though the Church had encouraged the learning of Dagbani, it uses the Akan language during Church activities, in addition to the English language. Because of this the Church is regarded as an Akan Church.

One may therefore conclude that the Presbyterian Church has not had great impact on the indigenous people in Dagbon. The pioneering Basel (Presbyterian) Church has little impact in administering the faith to the people of the area. But today there has been an improved presentation of the faith to the people of the area. There have been converts from Islam and the traditional religion to the Presbyterian Church.

The Wesleyan (Methodist) Mission

Even though the Wesleyan (Methodist) Church arrived in Tamale in 1913, it was in 1955 that it found its feet in the area. In July 1961 the Wesleyan (Methodist) Church in Ghana became autonomous and the name was called the Methodist Church Ghana, based on a deed of foundation, part of the Church's constitution and standing orders.³³ •

Objectives

The Wesleyan Mission, like the Basel, wanted to provide formal education to serve as a tool of evangelism. Various schools were to be established in the Dagbon area. Education was regarded as the main tool of Missionaries. This could be used as a pivot of communication to the people. Some Dagbamba benefited from this missionary education and some of them were sent outside the country for further Pastoral studies. They returned to the area to take control of some of the branches of the Church. Such Pastors include Pastor Paul Dawuni and Pastor Awuni Sibdoo, both natives of Dagbon.

Another objective of the Methodists was to provide certain basic social amenities to the people of Dagbon. These included potable water, Schools, Roads, and Dams. The reason behind these was that, the people need to acquire certain social services while listening to the word of God.

Furthermore, as soon as Missionary work began, knowledge of the local languages was considered essential. The study of the indigenous languages such as Dagbani and Gonja was a pertinent issue to the ministry. In spite of difficulties of analyzing a completely unfamiliar language, the first major attempt was to scientifically analyze the local languages such as Dagbani and Gonja. In no time, phonetic alphabets of Dagbani had been constructed. This was followed by compiling of the translated scriptures into Dagbani.

It is also a historical position of the Methodist Church that any disciplined theological work calls for the careful use of reason. By reason, it is said, one reads and is able to interpret Scripture coherently and consistently. By reason one determines whether one's Christian witness is clear. By reason one asks questions of faith and seeks to understand God's action and will. The Church established various schools in the area to enable people to acquire reasoning in their thought.³⁴

• Approach/Method

Bright youngsters were taken as boy servants by Missionaries to enable them become thoroughly acquainted with European manners. The most talented among them were sent for higher education. This practice laid the foundation for boarding schools in Dagbon.

• Achievements

These efforts became pivot in the spread of the Gospel. The scientific study of the local languages afforded the academic world to examine the religious, social and moral concepts prevailing in this part of Ghana. Furthermore, this linguistic achievement prepared the ground for indigenous scientific disciplines. As a result several Biblical information and stories were written in Dagbani and other local languages in Dagbon.

Another achievement of the Methodists in the Dagbon territory was the establishment of the plantations of black pepper, mango, ginger and cotton. They also encouraged and assisted the natives to possess similar plantation farms in the area.

The Missionaries needed to generate money locally to augment the meager allowances sent to them from abroad. The converts who had left their traditional environments to live in the Christian communities also needed jobs and funds for survival. These necessities fueled trading. The Wesleyan Mission encouraged the production of commodities for export or for sale locally.

● Weaknesses

The Methodist Church, like that of the Basel, has not been able to win the majority of Dagbamba to Christianity. This is because the Dagbamba perceive the Methodist denomination also as an Akan Church. It is regarded as a Southern Ghanaian Church. Only few Dagbamba converts were found in the Church.

Another weakness of the Methodist Church is that, the Church did not embrace the use of Dagbani as a means of translating its Missionary activities. Preaching is mostly done in English and Akan. The translation should have been in Dagbani and not in Akan. So the Dagbamba up till today call the Church as Kambonsi Chuochi, which means the Akan Church.

Again the Methodist Church did not use the Dagbamba as their target group of conversion. Their early mission was not to convert the Dagbamba into the Methodist faith. It is only recently that, few ideas came up to include the indigenous Dagbamba in their Missionary activities. The southern Christians who were in the area to work in the governmental offices were the members of the Church. The Church targeted the Akans in the area.

The Assemblies of God Mission

Another Christian group that entered and, somehow, affected life in Dagbon is that of the Assemblies of God Church. In 1931, the Assemblies of God Church came to Ghana from Burkina Faso. Its pioneer Missionaries were Lloyd and Margaret Shirer (a couple).³⁵

In October 1931, Rev. Lloyd Shirer, Margaret Shirer, Miss Beulah Buch Walter and Rev. Guy Hickcok began work at Yendi. The colonial powers supported the existence of this Christian community and children of native officials of the public works department were asked by the Colonial authorities to be baptized. Miss Buch Walter and Rev. Hickcok died in 1932 and were buried in Yendi. This led to the arrival of H. B. Garlock in 1933 in Tamale. They built a residence, a temple and then began to work as Missionaries.

● Objectives

The main objective of the Assemblies of God coming to Dagbon was to facilitate missionary works among the Dagbamba. Their main target was to convert the Dagombas and other locals in Dagbon into the Assemblies of God faith.

Another objective of the Assemblies of God was to establish various branches of the Church within and outside Dagbon. With these Churches the locals would be trained to occupy positions in which they could minister God's word. The Church also established primary and secondary schools for educational purposes in Tamale. These schools trained most of the Pastors and Church workers to occupy the various branches of the Church in Dagbon.

● **Approach/Method** The Assemblies of God Church in Dagbon had to promote the use of vernacular in its activities. The use of Dagbani in the Church was rampant and the converts felt at home in the Church. That is why the Assemblies of God Church was able to convert Dagbamba into Christianity.

The Church uses also the indigenous people who had earlier been converted into Christianity, to adopt a strategy of converting their fellow Dagbamba. They were able to speak also English and were conversant with the cultural background of Dagbon.

The Church also invited Dagbamba of different religious faiths to their programs. They shared the Missionary works with them, and this yielded good results. Agricultural activities were infused into the programs, as the people were peasant farmers. The Church eventually cultivated farms for them and even helped in harvesting. The people saw the good works of the Missionaries, and this prompted them to convert into Christianity.

● Achievements

The main achievement of the Assemblies of God Church is the presentation of the Gospel to the people in Dagbon. In line with this, some Dagbamba have accepted the Christian faith. The Assemblies of God Church uses the local language (Dagbani) as a main tool of communication to the spread of the Gospel. This made the spread of Christianity to the rural areas very simple.

Another achievement is the provision of basic social amenities to the people. For example provision of portable drinking water (bole holes, dams and so on) and schools. Even though this factor was not the main target of conversion, it served as a necessity to the people. With this kind gesture by the Church, it attracted the people into the fold of Christianity.

The Assemblies of God is one of the main denominations with large branches in Bilpella, Nyohini, Yendi, Savelugu and Karaga. These branches are manned by trained Pastors in the Church. The Assemblies of God still provides adequate branches in the rural settlements. Most of the converts are from the rural areas of the Church. The Assemblies of God Church is regarded as the Church mainly involves in the conversion of indigenous rural people.

● Weaknesses

One of the main weaknesses of the Assemblies of God Church is that, its main focus is on conversion and preaching of the Gospel to the people. There was not much emphasis on educating the local people. Even though most of the sermons are in Dagbani, the Church does not emphasize the establishment of schools and educational centers in Dagbon. Yet, this is essential to the people. • The Roman Catholic Mission • When did it enter in Dagbon?

Even though there were several earlier attempts to propagate and evangelize the people of Northern Ghana by the Basel Mission, it was the Roman Catholics who actually made some headway in the evangelization of the Dagbamba people starting from 1906. The Society of Missionaries of Africa or the white Fathers brought Christianity to the door steps of the people of Northern Ghana in that same year.³⁷

Father Olivier Lecestre presented Catholic faith to the people of Tamale in 1927. He was assisted by a Fanti Missionary called Kwesi Abakah. Kwesi discovered some Catholics in the area. They started meetings on Sundays in 1928. It is stated that, these were Catholics, who civil servants were working in Tamale.⁴⁵

The Tamale Chief, known as Dakpema Busagri, gave a piece of land on the Tamale Hospital road to the Catholic mission to establish the first Chapel building in March 1929. The Chapel was ready in September that same year, and a Priest in Bolgatanga was invited to dedicate it. On the same occasion the first Mass was celebrated.³⁸

Objectives

The Catholic Church believes that its Mission objectives are founded upon Jesus' command to his followers to spread the faith across the world. ".....Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 18:20).³⁹ Pope Benedict XVI summarized this Mission as a threefold responsibility: to proclaim the word of God, celebrate the Sacraments and exercise the Ministry of charity.⁴⁰ The White Fathers saw it a task to propagate and evangelize the Dagbamba into the Catholic faith.

The Roman Catholic Mission was to engage in Christian service by serving human needs, breaking down barriers between people, seeking justice and peace, upholding the integrity of creation and foster renewal in unity, worship, Mission and service. The Roman Catholic Church was the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement, a movement whose goal is Christian and religious unity.

To promote their common witness in work for Mission and evangelism, for the spread of the faith in the peoples own language, they aimed at interpreting the Scripture into the local languages of the people. Some of the Biblical passages were translated into various local languages.

The other objective of the Roman Catholic Mission was to improve the educational standards of the people. The Roman Catholic Church realized that in propagation of the Catholic faith lies the educational level of the people. They therefore found it necessary to present formal education to the people.

● Approach/Method

The Catholic Mission established various schools in Dagbon through the assistance from Rome and the resources accumulated in the Church. These schools served as the main root of educating the Dagbamba in Dagbon.

The Missionary activities of the Catholic Mission were based on visitation of the groups formed in the Church to preach and talk of the Christian faith. The groups moved from one place to another. On these visitations certain social needs were provided to help the people in the area. These include health facilities, education, and portable drinking water.

The Roman Catholic Missionaries (White fathers) worked with the local Missionary team members, especially in the villages, where Christianity was spreading among the people. The local team members helped in interpreting the English language into the Dagbani language.

● Achievements

The Catholic Mission has achieved a lot in the area. In the first place the mission had established various Churches in the area. The Churches of the Roman Catholic mission are mostly found in the rural areas.

Another area of achievement of the Roman Catholic mission was the use of the local language (Dagbani) for evangelization and other ceremonial activities of the Church. The language became dominant in the Church to an extent that, the first service was presented in Dagbani language.

The Church in its early and present stage has made a lot of converts from among the Dagbon traditionalists and the Muslims. In addition, certain social services such as portable drinking water, schools and other activities were established by the Catholic Mission in the area.

● Weaknesses

The White Fathers, during the early stages saw the propagation and evangelizing the people into the Catholic faith a Herculean task. This is because Islam had already spread through the length and breadth of Dagbon. The Church needed special strategies to break through the defensive walls of Muslims in the area.

Again in the early stages of the Roman Catholic Mission in Tamale, some of the Southerners in the Church kept chasing Dagbamba children away who came near to the Cathedral. Based on this, Dagbamba called the Church of the Catholic Mission as "Kambonsi Jingli" meaning the Akan's Mosque.⁴¹

The Impact of Christianity in Dagbon

The number of Christians are increasing steadily and the Church forms the second dominant religion in Dagbon, apart from Islam which started earlier in the area. The Churches in the area have founded theological colleges and seminaries to produce Priests and Ministers of the religion. St. Peter's junior secondary and St. Joseph's seminary at Tamale are Catholic institutions. Some of the Protestant Churches have also established their theological institutions.

Since the inception of Christianity, it has made in-roads into the traditional religious fabric and in the process gained many converts. Now a Christian Church is found in every corner of Dagbon.

One important impact of Christianity on the people of Dagbon is education. The Missionaries have been the pioneers of education in the area. They own primary, junior high, senior high, Commercial, Technical, Teacher Training and Tertiary Institutions. This class of education was basically a western type. The main aim of establishing schools was that, education could be a tool for converting the people to Christianity. Those who were looking for change in life went into education. That is why Lamin Sanneh stated that; "The seeds of nationalist awakenings were sown in the grounds of mission schools".⁴²

These schools were also regarded as the starting point of evangelization to the Churches. Most of the young ones were caught at tender ages in the area. Most of the schools were virtually free, especially the Catholic schools. The earliest mission secondary school was the Saint Charles Secondary at Tamale, built by the Roman Catholic Mission. Most of these schools were opened to all religious denominations. The principal means of communication in these schools was English language. The Western type of life completely dominated the area as pupils spoke English at home instead of the usual Dagbani language. Education was regarded among the people as a privilege in uplifting the status of the people. Most of the Christian schools can be found in the various villages and towns such as Yendi, Savelugu, Bilpella, Bamvim, and Nyohini.

The Christian Missions have also been responsible for putting up many hospitals and orphanages. Health service was another important sector that Christian support missionaries used to the people in Dagbon. Many hospitals and clinics were opened by the Missionaries. These health centers were in conformity with the Government hospitals. Today the S D A has established a well-furnished hospital at Karina Kungbini in Tamale to cater for the people in the area.

Another important aspect that the area benefited from the Christian missionaries is in the field of Agriculture. Most farms were cultivated to help support the deprived and the needy. In some cases, lands were cultivated by mission stations for the people who only used hard labour in farming. One important traditional leader in Dagbon who benefited in this concept is Bilpel Na Paul (a Chief of Bilpela in Tamale). The Chief is testified to have said "who will cultivate my farm for me if I become a Muslim". He said this after the Ahlul Sunnah mallams in Tamale visited him on his conversion to Christianity. Some of his elders also accepted the Christian faith. This indicates that certain social aid used were Christian missionaries to assist the people enhance their conversion.

Recommendations and Suggestions

In the past (and even now) people in Dagbon saw the value of Christianity in the ability of its Missionaries to bring social development to them. The People in Dagbon view Christianity as the religion that helps or assists people with social needs. It is recommended that Christian Missionaries should concentrate more on the teachings of Jesus Christ to the people. It is when the teachings are well presented and accepted by the people that, the support of social needs would be required. Otherwise people may convert not because of belief in God but because of services.

Initially Missionary activities have concentrated on Churches and schools, but they are now concentrating on founding Churches to the neglect of schools. It is recommended that they should put up more schools especially in the rural areas.

It is recommended that emphases should be put on presentation of the gospel to Muslims in the urban areas in Dagbon. This would even make Muslims in the area to know much about the Christian faith and the teachings of the gospel.

The Christian Missionaries who have been involved in Missions to Muslims in Dagbon realize the tremendous challenge of some Muslims because of their beliefs and specific views about Christian doctrines and their rejection of it. Therefore Christian Missionaries, should explain well the doctrines, for example that of The Trinity. This would enhance a better understanding of Christianity.

It is also suggested that Christian leaders should interact more with Muslim leaders. This can take the form of seminars through dialogue and discussions for them to understand each other more. It is also very important that, there should be free involvement of religious activities without passing value judgment. This is especially true of those who belong to different religious faiths and are in the same home. These would enhance cordial relationships among Muslim converts, Christians and Muslims in the area.

Conclusion

The Christian Mission (in the country) started earlier in the southern parts of Ghana before its arrival in the northern parts. The early Christian activity was to propagate the faith of Christ. Education was the top priority of the Missionary groups. They used it as a method of conversion. Therefore schools were established across the country. It was through this method that the faith was well presented to the people. In Dagbon they used local language to present the Christian teachings. The objectives, methodologies, achievements of the Basel, Wesleyan, the Assemblies of God, and the Roman Catholic were virtually the same. This is because of the same manner in propagating the Christian faith-provision of portable drinking water, establishment of schools and health centers. But the Missionary groups had their own challenges in achieving these objectives in the research area. Nevertheless Christians were able to penetrate to the extent of converting not only some of the indigenous Dagbamba, but Muslims as well [1-18].

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