

# **Evangelism and Mission: Their Impact on United Methodism in Liberia**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This presentation on the *Impact of Evangelism and Mission on United Methodism in Liberia* seeks to provide comprehensive highlights of the ministries and mission of the United Methodist Church since its birth on the soil of sub-Saharan Africa's first independent nation almost two centuries ago, and its resultant effect on church growth in Liberia. The writer establishes that amidst the fact that the continent of Africa and, hence, Liberia has over the decades been ravished by poverty, disease, wars and political instability resulting to massive refugees crisis and degeneration of the socio-economic life of its people, the Church of Jesus Christ continues to experience abundant numerical growth. And the United Methodist Church has been in the vanguard as one of the pacesetters to church growth in Liberia.

This presentation further elucidates the fact that Methodism, as John Wesley and other founding fathers and mothers envisioned, can thrive globally and not only in the global south as the case is today. But, the secret to the continued growth of Methodism worldwide is to be found in its quality of leadership and its uncompromised commitment to doctrinal purity, the practice of Christian discipleship and discipline, and total yielding to the control and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

## INTRODUCTION

It is with great excitement and delight that I stand before you at this Twelfth Oxford Institute to address the *Impact of Methodism on Evangelism and Mission in Liberia*. I am highly honored and gratified to address this assembly on this soil, on which the vision of global Methodism as a missionary movement was created by our founding fathers, John and Charles Wesley and others.

Any attempt to speak on the subject of evangelism and mission in the context of Methodism is to speak to the heart and soul of our denomination. This assertion is based on the historical reality articulated by Methodist Church historian, Wade Crawford Barclay who states that, “The Methodist Movement as a whole was missionary in conception, in motivation and in method.”<sup>1</sup>

The missionary focus of the Methodist Church, from its onset, was clearly established by John Wesley himself, as recorded in the *1745 Annual Conference Rules for Helpers*. He states, “You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore, spend and be spent in this work. It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they can not see the Lord.”<sup>2</sup> This common vision of John Wesley and our founding fathers and mothers suggests that the growth and development of Methodism in any part of the globe over the centuries has had to prioritize evangelism and mission holistically.

This presentation on the *Impact of Methodism on Evangelism and Mission in Liberia* therefore seeks to provide comprehensive highlights of the ministries and mission of the United Methodist Church since its birth on the soil of sub-Saharan Africa’s first independent nation almost two centuries ago and its resultant effect on church growth in Liberia. It is no secret to the rest of the world that in recent decades the continent of Africa, including Liberia, has been ravished by poverty, disease (the HIV/AIDS pandemic in particular), wars and political instability creating tens of thousands of refugees and causing the degeneration of the socio-economic life of its people. These crises have undoubtedly impeded the ministries of the Church, destroyed lives and property, and brought untold suffering upon our people. But, we shall endeavor to testify to the glory of God that, in spite of devastating circumstances, the Church of Jesus Christ has never

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<sup>1</sup> Wade Crawford Barclay. *History of Methodist Missions: Early American Methodism, 1769-1844, Volume 1: Missionary Motivation and Expansion*. (New York, Board of Missions and Church Expansion of the Methodist Church, 1949), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Rule number 11 of the Rules for Helpers, 1745 Annual Conference.

ceased to grow both numerically and spiritually. In addition, the United Methodist Church has been in the vanguard as one of the pacesetters for church growth in Liberia. The fact is, throughout history, persecution or hardship has never succeeded in destroying the Church; it has only made it stronger. Indeed, the reverse is often the case; when the Church or some of its constituents begins to enjoy the bounty of God's blessings, it plunges into complacency, slothfulness, and disobedience.

Hence, this presentation seeks to elucidate the fact that Methodism, as its founders envisioned, can thrive globally, and not only in the global south as the case is today.<sup>3</sup> But, the secret to the continued growth of Methodism worldwide is to be found in its quality of leadership and its uncompromised commitment to doctrinal purity, the practice of Christian discipleship and discipline, and total yielding to the control and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

In addition, this presentation seeks to provide for a realistic self-evaluation of the United Methodist Church in post-conflict Liberia. While we attempt to share our seeming successes in the ministries of evangelism and mission, we want to unfold our challenges as well for the prayerful support of our partners everywhere. Therefore, in the words of Nigeria's pioneer missionary, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, this presentation should enable the Liberia Area of the United Methodist Church "to know what has been done, in what way it has been done, to detect our errors and correct them, so as to be able to start with fresh vigor and earnestness in the strength of the Lord in this good work."<sup>4</sup> Inevitably, the story of the impact of evangelism and mission on United Methodism in Liberia can not be successfully told without a brief look into the historical overview of the nation and its people.

## **REFLECTION ON EVANGELISM AND MISSION IN AFRICA**

Since the birth of Christianity on the Africa continent, evangelism has been and continues to be at the heart of its ministry. The zealous proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with emphasis on personal conversion and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior remains the single most important task of the church.

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<sup>3</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming Global Christianity*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Kwesi A. Dickson & Paul Ellugworth, ed., *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, New York: Orbis Book, 1969, pp.11-12.

The fruit of the zeal and enthusiasm for evangelism that has been expressed by African Christians has been a great outpouring and anointing of the Holy Spirit which has resulted in significant numeric and spiritual growth.

Since 1910, a significant shift has been occurring in the growth of Christianity in Africa. Gratitude must be expressed to the Christian Church of America and Europe who in the early nineteenth century saw Africa as a non-Christian continent in need of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Their early missionary enterprises helped to blaze the trail for evangelism in Africa, and the people of Africa caught the vision. The result is the amazing growth of the Church in Africa today.

In the 1900's Africa's entire population was approximately 108 million people, and of that population only 10 million or 9.8% could be identified as Christians. Today, there are approximately 800 million people in Africa, and of that total number the Church of Africa can boast of more than 350 million Christians.<sup>5</sup> That is nearly 45% of the entire population of the African continent.

All this has happened within one century. Forecasters of church growth are now predicting that the growth of Christianity in Africa might exceed all other continents by 2025.<sup>6</sup> This is a testimony to the vigorous evangelism and mission spirit with which the Church of Africa has taken the mandate of Jesus to *“Go ye therefore into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”*

Africa and its contribution to the growth of the Christian faith, especially through the work of the United Methodist Church, is a direct result of the evangelical spirit and humility with which the good news of Christ has been proclaimed. The United Methodist Church in Africa in general and Liberia in particular, has been significantly impacted by this evangelism and mission trend. For instance, in 1980 there were only two central conferences and ten annual conferences in Africa. Today, the church has three central conferences, twenty-one annual conferences, and four provisional conferences; more are being initiated every year. Methodism in Liberia is the oldest Conference on the Continent. *To God be the glory.*

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<sup>5</sup> Philip Jenkins, p.4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

## THE FOUNDING OF LIBERIA: A UNIQUE BEGINNING

The Republic of Liberia, black Africa's oldest independent nation, became independent on July 25, 1847, and unlike the rest of Africa, was never colonized. The country is located south of the Sahara on the West Coast of Africa between latitude 4° 20' N and 8° 30' N and is bordered on the northwest by Sierra Leone, the north by Guinea, the east by Côte d'Ivoire, and the south and southwest by the Atlantic Ocean.

Liberia is a small country with an estimated population of 3.5 million. Ninety-five percent are natives; 2.3% are Liberians of American descent; while the remaining 2.7% are Lebanese, Indians or other nationals residing and working in Liberia. Liberia has sixteen major ethnic groups divided into three language families: the Mande making up 47.2% of the population; the Kru, 41.3% and the West Atlantic, 7.9%.<sup>7</sup>

Liberia's current religious statistics can only be estimated. More than two decades of political unrest and civil war have impeded the Church's effort to develop realistic religious statistics of the spiritual state of the nation.<sup>8</sup> But the available information shows that 48.4% of the population is traditionalists; 38.3% are Christians; 13.0% are Muslims and the Baha'i make up 0.3%.<sup>9</sup>

Since its existence, Liberia, then called the Grain Coast, has been a land of rich cultures and traditions.<sup>10</sup> Each culture has had an appreciable knowledge of a Supreme Being and an explicit form of worship of that Supreme God; yet before the advent of Christianity in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Liberia was also a land of "strongly entrenched and institutionalized secret societies"<sup>11</sup> involving almost every group. Their culture and tradition have always been the integrating force or connecting link enabling each group to maintain their common identity and life. The culture and tradition remain a major inroad to an effective understanding of the indigenous people and of communicating gospel to them.

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<sup>7</sup> Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandrigk, *Operation World, 21st Century Edition* (UK: Paternoster, 2001), p. 405.

<sup>8</sup> Political unrest in Liberia began in 1980 with the overthrow of the government of William Tolbert by a military junta led by Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe. In 1989, a rebel invasion led by Charles Taylor overthrew the Doe government and led to internationally supervised elections in 1997. However, due to abuses by the Taylor government, civil war again erupted in 1999 and only ended August 2003. In 2005, stability was restored with the election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Liberia and Africa's first female President.

<sup>9</sup> Johnstone and Mandrigk.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Robert Hall Glover, *The Progress of World-Wide Missions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 265.

## THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY TO LIBERIA

The advent of Christianity to Liberia is inseparable from the arrival of the free men and women of color from the United States into Liberia. The American Colonization Society (ACS), founded in Washington, DC in 1816, assisted in the voluntary relocation of these freedmen and women to Africa. Many Methodist Annual Conferences endorsed the efforts of the ACS in its beginnings and solicited financial support for its operation. For example, at the Houston Conference 1832 session, a decision was made ordering “every presiding elder and preacher in charge to take up a collection on or near America’s Independence Day in 1823 for the ACS.”<sup>12</sup>

Some of the emancipated slaves were churchmen who looked forward to making their newfound home a Christian community. As Joseph C. Wold records, “In 1820 the Baptist Church, Methodist and Protestant Missionary society were organized on board the Ship Elizabeth”<sup>13</sup> which brought the first settlers to Liberia.

### *Relationship between Settlers and Natives: A Difficult Beginning for the Gospel*

With regards to evangelization, the Gospel had a very difficult beginning among the natives. The initial Christians who brought the Gospel to Liberia soon became pre-occupied with themselves, and a “settler mentality” soon took hold. As a result, they did everything but proclaim Christ to the natives. For a very long time the pioneer missionaries restricted themselves to the coast and remained socially, politically, religiously and culturally isolated from the natives. They referred to themselves as Americo-Liberians, meaning Africans with the prejudices and predilections—the biases and aspirations of white men—and would have nothing to do with the natives.<sup>14</sup>

According to Wold, being a Christian “became one of the marks of being an Americo-Liberian which distinguished them from the tribal people. To them it was incredible that an uncivilized tribesman, who could not even speak English, might be a Christian.”<sup>15</sup>

The settlers’, including the Christians’, only attempt to relate to the natives was not to proclaim the Gospel but, to exercise political control over them. That attempt often resulted in warfare. A patriotic Liberian, E. Wilmot Blyden, lamenting the socio-economic, political and religious disparity between the settlers and natives, pointed out,

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<sup>12</sup> Barclay, p. 327

<sup>13</sup> Joseph C. Wold, *God’s Impatience in Liberia* (California: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 53.

<sup>14</sup> Hallis R. Lynch, ed., *Black Spokesman* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1971), p. 85.

<sup>15</sup> Wold, p. 53.

A group of returned exile-refugees from the house of bondage (USA) settled along a few hundred miles off the Coast of their father land, attempting to rule millions of people, their own kith and kin, on a foreign system in which they themselves have been imperfectly trained while knowing very little of the facts for the history (and culture) of the people they assume to rule ... and taking for granted that the religious and social theories they have brought from across the sea must be adapted to all the needs to their inexpatriated brethren.<sup>16</sup>

Peter Falk also observed that the separation of the settlers from the indigenous population “caused a political and social difficulty and even ... obstructed the evangelization of the indigenous population.”<sup>17</sup>

Wold provides a summary reason why the Gospel initially failed to make any positive impact on the indigenous people, thereby laying a foundation of superficial Christianity in Liberia for many decades.

First the wars between the pagan tribes and settlers kept the former geographical isolated from the Christians. Second, the tribesmen never consider Christianity a real possibility for themselves because it was identified with a foreign culture. Third, unfortunately, the moral laxness and social injustice of the settlers in their relation with the tribes did not commend Christianity as a way of life.<sup>18</sup>

With such a very poor beginning, the indigenous people perceived a negative impression of the Gospel, not as a message of liberation, but one that enslaves. Hence, superficial Christianity became a way of life of the people for many decades until missionaries began to make inroads among the indigenous people. Even today, there still are elements of Christianity in some regions of Liberia that still practice a Christianity that has “a form of godliness but denying the power thereof.” (II Tim. 3:5)

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<sup>16</sup> Lynch, p. 119.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Falk, *The Growth of The Church In Africa* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1979), p. 115

<sup>18</sup> Wold, p. 59.

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF LIBERIA: OUR CHALLENGES**

Socio-economically, Liberia has not yet developed significantly since her independence in 1847. Apart from influential roles Liberia has played in world affairs, for example, as the only African member of the League of Nations and a founding member of the United Nations, OAU (now African Union), and ECOWAS, the country remains burdened with many problems common to the poorest nations of Africa and the world. An example of Liberia's socio-economic burden is its "high illiteracy rate, high infant mortality rate, low per capita income and low production."<sup>19</sup>

This sad reality has been worsened in recent years by a series of bloody civil wars fought in Liberia from December 1989 to August 2003. As a consequence, many of Liberia's citizens are still refugees in neighboring countries; over one hundred thousand soldiers, many of them children, were demobilized and now must be educated and reintegrated into communities; and the war produced a large number of orphans, many of whom have outgrown elementary school age. Hence, Liberia faces the additional challenge of teaching them technical skills for self sustenance.

As a result of the war, approximately eighty percent of Liberians are unemployed; only ten percent of its 3.5 million citizens have access to primary health care; and only twenty-five percent have access to safe drinking water. Coupled with these crippling needs is the fact that many of Liberia's best educated and best trained citizens are outside Liberia. In addition, the nation's education system was severely damaged and is now operating at only a fraction of its pre-war level. These conditions present enormous challenges both to the nation and the Church.

In spite of these challenges, however, it is very important to let you know that the Church of Jesus Christ has been alive and vibrant in this dark, gloomy and seemingly hopeless situation bringing hope and healing to the Liberian people. From the Church's perspective, the challenge of Liberia's recent past has not been one of defeat, but victory; not one of destruction, but one of appropriating God's abundant blessings in a deeper, more intimate way. As the Scripture says , *"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed"* (II Corinthians 4: 8-9).

These crises have compelled the United Methodist Church and the Christian community in Liberia to call the nation to God for a second chance to heal and restore our land. The Lord

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<sup>19</sup> Falk, p. 113.

promises that, *“If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land.”* (II Chronicles 7:14). Out of these crises, the United Methodist Church has also been learning from its past, attempting to understand the present and anticipating a future under the leadership and guidance of the Holy Spirit. We have therefore prioritized the ministry of evangelism and disciple making for the transformation of post-conflict Liberia.

## **WHAT IS EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP?**

The word “evangelism” comes from a Greek word called *euangelion*, meaning “good message” or “good story.” The verb form of *euangelion* is *euangelizeomai*, meaning “bringing, spreading or announcing the Good News,” which generally translates as the “Gospel”. Therefore, the words evangelize, evangelism or evangelization describe the spreading of the good news of the gospel among those who have not yet heard the word or do not have a personal commitment to Christ as their Lord and Savior. And this is what Methodism has been about since its establishment.

When these words were used when the New Testament was written, they meant, “to bring good news about a great event such as the announcement of a new age to come.”<sup>20</sup> This was exactly the meaning the disciples of Jesus gave to the word evangelism to describe the great event when, *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us”* (John 1: 14). Based upon this understanding, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many definitions of evangelism have been developed, each describing or emphasizing an aspect of the proclamation of this Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century British preacher and evangelist, Charles H. Spurgeon, evangelism is **“one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread”**. Based on the story of the Arameans’ invasion of Israel recorded in II Kings, Chapter 7, Spurgeon records the significant role played by the four lepers in getting food into the besieged city of Samaria. The four lepers having entered into the enemies’ camp and found more than enough to eat said to themselves *“we’re not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until day light, punishment will overtake us. Let’s go at once and report this to the royal Palace”* (II Kings 7:9). With the sharing of that good news, Israel, which had resorted to cannibalism (II Kings 6:24-30), was saved from the severe hunger.

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<sup>20</sup> Prakash Yesudian. *Practical Evangelism: Tools for Communicating the Good News Effectively in a Changing World*. (Singapore: Haggai Institute, 2001).

Archbishop William Temple gives an interesting definition as well. To him evangelism is “to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men (and women) shall come to put their trust in God through him, to accept him as their saviour, and serve him as their King in the fellowship of the Church”. This definition of Archbishop Temple points out several facts:

- (a) The effectiveness of evangelism depends entirely upon the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of both the sharer of the Good News and its hearers.
- (b) Evangelism challenges decision. It has a definite goal—the conversion of souls—and therefore seeks for a response from its hearers. The hearers have to decide whether to believe in Jesus as the only Savior for their salvation or to reject his claim.
- (c) True evangelism leads to discipleship. It is not simply a matter of sharing the good news, or persuading people to repent of their sins and turn to faith in Christ. Evangelism leads to a life that is totally transformed, growing, and fruitful and in continuous fellowship with Christ and the body of Christ (the Church).

Evangelism involves witnessing to what God has done, is doing and will do. Evangelism is spreading the gospel of the Kingdom of God by word, deed and sign, then waiting in respectful humility and working with expectant hope. The point here is that effective proclamation of the Gospel is holistic; it has both visible and verbal dimensions. John Stott warns that “to try to do one without the other is like a bird attempting to fly with one wing.”<sup>21</sup> For just as God spoke and creation appeared and Jesus preached, fed the hungry, healed the sick and performed various miraculous signs, so must word, deed and sign be held together if any genuine evangelization effort is to yield the desired impact upon our hearers. It is against this background that Dr. George Hoffman, founder of Tear Fund once lamented the sad situation that, “some try to feed a soulless stomach, and others try to save a stomachless soul. But we must do both.”<sup>22</sup>

Dr. Bill Bright’s definition of evangelism is also worth noting. According to him, evangelism is “communicating the good news in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the result with God.”<sup>23</sup> The point of this definition is that, first, total reliance upon the Holy Spirit is indispensable. Second, evangelism should not be defined in terms of the number of converts that

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<sup>21</sup> John R. W. Stott. *The Contemporary Christianity*. (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> George Hoffman in Yesudian.

<sup>23</sup> Bill Bright. “Personal Evangelism: Conquering the Fear of Failure” in *Evangelism in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. By Thom S. Rainer (Wheaton: Howard Shaw Publisher, 1989), p. 125.

might result from a proclamation. Instead, of primary concern should be the faithfulness of the evangelist. For the act of faithfully proclaiming the gospel is, in itself, success.

For example, in Muslim dominated countries such as Pakistan, Jordan, or Saudi Arabia where national laws prohibit total freedom to Christians who desire to share their faith, one might faithfully share the Gospel for many years without physical results of converts. That is why J. I. Parker insists, “The way to tell whether in fact you are evangelizing is not to ask whether conversions are known to have resulted from the witness. It is to ask whether you are faithfully making known the Gospel message.”<sup>24</sup>

### **WHAT EVANGELISM IS NOT**

The definitions of evangelism stated above are not exhaustive; each of them emphasizes an aspect of the proclamation of the Gospel. Many more descriptive definitions could be given. Yet there are many practices both in parts of Africa and elsewhere that are inconsistent with Scripture. These practices often confuse the minds of the honest inquirer or hinder some from coming to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The following are worth mentioning.

Evangelism is not sheep stealing from other existing Churches.<sup>25</sup> This is how some congregations attempt to grow, especially in poverty-stricken nations. During the civil war in Liberia, many churches were started by distributing relief and by making ‘giant’ promises to hungry, naked and destitute people, some of them active members of already existing Churches.

For the hungry, evangelism meant food; for the sick it meant healing; and for the naked and destitute it meant shelter and clothing. The argument by those practicing sheep-stealing often is that “every sheep belongs to God, no one owns a sheep.”

While this argument might have some elements of truth, it is very important how God’s flocks are acquired. Relief and other social services offered to destitute people without any preconditions bear stronger Christian witness than one done to begin a new congregation or having people transfer from one Church to another. This is exploitation! And such “plastic bag” Christians don’t remain when the relief runs out or the giant promises fail.

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<sup>24</sup> J. I. Parker, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. (Illinois: IntVarsity Press, 1989), p. 41.)

<sup>25</sup> David J. Bosh. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shift in Theology of Mission*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 2.

At the same time we are not encouraging slothfulness and complacency on the part of pastors and Church leaders who are insensitive to effective holistic evangelism. Hence, Churches which are suffering spiritual malnutrition and stand the risk of being closed should take full responsibility for the decline in membership. The reality might be that they are not “feeding the new Christians with the truth; protecting them against error and false teaching; caring for the needy and distressed; encouraging those who had become half-hearted in the faith; keeping order and discipline; giving guidance and spiritual direction.”<sup>26</sup>

Evangelism is not an “optional extra” or “do-it-if-you-like-it kind of a thing.” It is a major part of the obedience of the whole church to the command of Christ to “*Go therefore into all the world and make disciples of all nations*” (Matthew 28:19). To fail to share your faith is to disobey the highest calling of God upon your life.

### **THE CONCEPT OF “MISSION” AND “MISSIONS” IN EVANGELISM**

Evangelization takes into accounts many aspects of a nation’s and its people’s lives (religious, political, social, educational, spiritual, family, motivational, behavioral, economic, environmental, racial, etc.), which are beyond the coverage of this paper. But it is from this multi-dimensional concept of evangelism that we have the fulfillment of the Church’s mission.

Mission is derived from the Latin word *mitto*, meaning “I send”. Its Greek equivalent is *apostello*, meaning, “to send forth with a commission”. Mission has to do with a total Biblical assignment of the Church to the world. This includes worship, fellowship, edification of members, prayer, evangelism, apologetics, its socio-economic and community development services (hospitals, agriculture, business, education, etc.).

Missions, on the other hand, is a specialized area of evangelism carried out in sub-cultural and cross-cultural settings by people called and trained for the task. Unlike local evangelism, this type has to do with the sending forth authorized persons (Acts 13:2; Jonah 1:1-2; Jeremiah 1:4-10) beyond the community of the local church, to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:3-5), in Gospel-destitute areas (Rom. 15:20-24), to win converts from other faiths and non-faith to Christ and to establish functioning, multiplying congregations who will bear the fruit of Christianity in that community (I Thes. 1:1-8).<sup>27</sup> A Gospel destitute area is not limited to high

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<sup>26</sup> Howard Taylor. *Tend My Sheep*. (London: SPCK, 1983), p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> George W. Peters, *A Bible Theological of Mission*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 11.

rate of illiteracy, poverty or disease. Intellectually sophisticated nations that have abandoned the faith are miserably Gospel destitute.

## **METHODISM IN LIBERIA**

The United Methodist Church in Liberia was formally established in 1833 by the late Reverend Melville B. Cox, the first Methodist missionary outside of America and became the first Methodist Episcopal Church mission in Africa and the first Christian denominations in Liberia. Methodists actually arrived in Liberia in 1822 since many of the original group of settlers were Methodists.

Membership of the Liberia Annual Conference/United Methodist Church (LAC/UMC) is strategically organized into district organizations and fellowships to facilitate the active participation of every person, irrespective of age, tribe, social or economic status. These include:

- Twenty districts of the Conference
- The Conference United Methodist Women Organization (CUMWO)
- The Conference United Methodist Men Organization (CUMMO)
- The Conference United Methodist Young Adult Fellowship (CUMYAF)
- The Conference United Methodist Youth Fellowship (CUMYF)
- The Conference United Methodist Children's Ministry

Apart from these organizations and fellowship groups, there are about fifteen departments and program agencies all working together for the evangelism of Liberia.

## **THE PHYSICAL MISSION IMPERATIVES OF LIBERIA'S UNITED METHODISTS**

The proclamation of the Gospel, yea the good news of Christ has not simply been about personal conversion and teachings about the life to come. Evangelism and mission in Africa have taken on many dimensions, and the United Methodist Church in Liberia is a witness to the power of the Gospel to transform lives.

Evangelism and mission in the United Methodist Church in Liberia has always focused four primary areas: health, education, agriculture and spiritual formation/worship. Through these vehicles, the United Methodist Church in Liberia has been able to reach out and meet the people

at the point of their real needs. Several mission stations have been established throughout the country for the purpose of evangelizing the communities in which they are planted.

The United Methodist Church continues to lead the mission and evangelism efforts in Liberia in the area of health care delivery especially through the Ganta United Methodist Hospital. During the 173<sup>rd</sup> session of the Liberia Annual Conference, we were blessed to have dedicated a modern eye clinic equipped with state of the art facilities for the treatment of various eye conditions.

Ganta Hospital is located in the northern part of Liberia near the border with Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. For many years, it has exemplified the way a Methodist mission hospital can serve both the health requirements and the spiritual needs of a community.

The Hospital was established in Liberia in 1926 by Dr. George Way Harley, a medical missionary from the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. It began as a one-room clinic in a mud hut. By the 1980s, the hospital and the 750-acre Ganta United Methodist Mission Compound had become a self-sustaining community, providing quality health services to a surrounding area of some 400,000 people. It also served as the main referral source for another 50,000 people from neighboring Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. The health facilities include a 65-bed hospital, a large outpatient service, a leprosy and tuberculosis treatment center, a dental clinic, an eye clinic, and a school of nursing.

In the area of education, the United Methodist church has a large number of schools and has produced and influenced some of Africa's greatest leaders including Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Bishop Abel Muzorewa of Zimbabwe, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Vice President Joseph Boakai of Liberia—all products of Africa's obedience to, and fulfillment of the great commission.

The LAC/UMC operates academic institutions at all levels—primary, secondary and tertiary. There are over 133 United Methodist elementary, junior and senior high schools operating across Liberia. The LAC/UMC also operates a tertiary institution, the United Methodist University, which currently has five colleges. There are four mission stations run by the LAC/UMC: the Ganta United Methodist Mission established in 1926, the Gbarnga United Methodist Mission established in 1947, the Camphor United Methodist Mission established in 1947 and the Gbason Town Mission station established in the early 1970s.

## THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

The Liberia Area of the United Methodist Church is a part of the holy Catholic (universal) Church. Those who choose to be a part confess and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They attend worship services, participate, and contribute to all of its programs; receive the sacraments of baptism and the Holy Communion.<sup>28</sup>

When one confesses and receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he or she is united to a local church. At this point, the person makes known his/her desire to live well in Jesus Christ. The person professes faith in God as creator, sustainer, provider and protector. In other words, he/she enters into an agreement with God and with the local Church to keep the vows during confirmation and reception into the Church.

There are seven vows, which every convert into the United Methodist Church is called to abide by:

1. To renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of the world and have a repentant heart;
2. To accept the freedom and power that God gives each of us to resist evil, injustice and oppression;
3. To confess Jesus Christ as Savior, put our whole trust in His grace and promise to serve Him as our Lord;
4. To remain faithful members of Christ's Holy Church and serve as Christ's representatives in the world;
5. To be loyal to the United Methodist Church and do all in their power to strengthen its ministries;
6. To faithfully participate in its ministries by our prayers, presence, gifts and service;
7. To receive and practice the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Book of Discipline, paragraph 216, pp. 130 and 131).<sup>29</sup>

These vows mandate us to demonstrate faithfulness as members of the household of faith. Members must involve themselves in Christian actions, must be disciplined, must cheerfully

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<sup>28</sup> *Book of Discipline*, Paragraph 214, p. 130.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Paragraph 216, pp. 130 and 131.

gives, must appreciate working for Jesus Christ and must understand that they have been chosen by God as accountable, Christ-centered, spirit-filled and morally-upright disciples.

Membership in the Church also obligates us to shoulder the burdens, share the risks and celebrate the joys of fellow members. As Christians, God in Jesus Christ calls us to love each other and be ready to confront conflict in the spirit of love, care, forgiveness and reconciliation. By doing these things, God looks upon us with his rich blessings and enables us to build a healthy and vibrant community of believers.

## **CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO THE HOLISTIC GROWTH OF METHODISM IN LIBERIA**

### *Our Belief in the Inerrant Word of God*

Much of the adventure of the Christian life comes from discovering through the Bible more of what God is like and what His plans are for humanity. The Bible is sixty-six books collected into one volume, written over a period of more than 1,600 years, by more than forty human authors who came from a wide variety of backgrounds. Yet the Bible is a single unit, bound together by the theme of God and His relationship to humankind. Each book, section, paragraph, verse, sentence, and clause works together with the others to reveal God's truth.

The Bible is the inspired (God-breathed) word of God. That is, God breathed out the Scripture and supernaturally guided its human authors to pen the words, without compromising the perfection, integrity or purity of the finished product. As Charles Ryrie puts it, "God superintended the human authors so that, using their own individual personality, they composed and recorded, without error, His revelation to man in the words of the original manuscripts."

Another truth about the Bible that the Church in Africa ascribes to is that it is inerrant; that is it contains no errors or mistakes in the original writings. We however accept that there have been errors in transmission of the Bible from copy to copy over the years. But such errors are quite insignificant in altering any truth of Scripture. Inerrancy, therefore, means that we have a Bible that is completely trustworthy, reliable and without error in its original form. We can therefore study it, live it and teach it.

It is this belief of the Church in the canonical word that welds our lives to its teachings, thus, resulting in numerical and spiritual growth. Unfortunately, the Church in many Western nations

has rejected the Bible as the word of God and as final authority for faith and practice, often resulting in the rapid and massive decline in membership. Science and technology have now become, for some, the source of salvation.

In their opposition to God's word, Charles Colson quotes Daniel Quinn as describing the acceptable ideology of the West thus, "we humans are the apex of evolution, with the intelligence to control nature and bend it to serve our purpose. The solution to or social problems therefore lies into our own hands, through the exertion of human intelligence and ingenuity. Through our ever advancing science and technology, we will save ourselves."<sup>30</sup>

I am of the strongest opinion that it is this disbelief of the Church of the West in the inerrant word of God and, hence, disloyalty to its teachings that has turned the Church into a battlefield of arguments, debates over numerous social, ethical issues that hold the propensity of fragmenting God's Church and exposing it to continued public ridicule and decline. If we must correct our errors and save the Church from further decline, let us return to the Scripture.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BIBLE TO BELIEVERS**

The Bible has life changing power to convert unbelievers (I Peter 1:22-25; Rom.: 16); it is the believer's food for spiritual growth (I Peter 2:2; John 6:63); it has power to combat sin (Ps. 119:9-11); and it constitutes a guide for living (Ps. 19:7-11). More than anything else, the Scripture deepens one's spiritual growth, maturity and effectiveness (Heb. 4:12; Ps. 1:1-3; James 1:22-25).

### **Our Responsibility to the Bible**

One major factor that was responsible for the outbreak of revival during the post-exilic era of the Israelites was that both political and religious leaders held unswervingly to the word of God. In Ezra it is stated, "*For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.*" (Ezra 7:10).

In addition, our forefathers depended upon the Holy Spirit to teach and guide them in life and ministry (John 14:25; 16:13), to enable them discern errors (1 John 2:20), and to illuminate their minds with insights to understand and accept truth. If the contemporary Church is to continually

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<sup>30</sup> Charles Colson, *How then Shall We Live?* (Wheaton: Tyndale Publishing House, 1999), p. 246.

experience growth and vitality, our commitment to Scriptures and dependence upon the Holy Spirit is indispensable.

## **THE POWER OF PRAYER**

Prayer was a priority for the Lord Jesus Christ. In spite of the demands of ministry, He always prayed (Mark 1:35-39). Prayer preceded His major decisions: choice of vocation (Luke 3:21); selection of the apostles (Luke 6:12-13); strength for mighty work (Mark 9:29); power over temptation (Luke 22:44); and facing of death (Luke 23:46). Hence, the strength of the contemporary Church depends upon the power of prayer.

## **INGREDIENTS FOR THE GROWTH OF METHODISM IN LIBERIA**

### *John Wesley's Class System*

Methodism's founding father, John Wesley, was highly strategic. He was deeply concerned about the continued holistic growth of the Church, and therefore introduced what was commonly called the Class System. John Wesley introduced the class system as the thrust for holistic small group discipleship and as an excellent means of meeting the real needs of members of every congregation in every local church. Many who have committed themselves to the practice of the Class System—Methodist and non Methodists—have testified that this is the greatest gift of John Wesley to the world for the training of new converts.

Utilizing this concept of the Class System, we have structured the membership of the Liberia Annual Conference. As a result, the realization of our vision for the making of disciples for the transformation of the world is regularly taking place at every structural level of the Church.

What is very unique about this influential instructional unit of Methodism is that John Wesley used it as a vital part of creating interlocking groups within every local church within the community. These interlocking groups consisted of:

1. *The Society Meeting*: the cognitive mode of ministry. This meeting seeks to provide teaching and preaching to change the thinking and understanding of people within the community.
2. *The Class Meeting*: the behavioral mode of Ministry. Converts won from worship services and public meetings were brought into the class meeting for fellowship and training which sought to transform their behavior.

3. *The Band Meeting*: the affective mode of ministry. This class of select persons was more of an accountability group which builds character, integrity and accountability with one another. Contemporary Methodism may have lost this precious ingredient for disciple-making.
4. *The Select Society*: the training mode of ministry. This was a specially selected group developed to be leaders of leaders. Out of this group John Wesley identified and selected persons called of God to full time ministry.
5. *The Penitent Band*: the rehabilitative mode of ministry. This fifth group targeted persons with special addiction problems. John Wesley sought them out and helped many of them overcome their addictions.

Utilizing these Church growth principles and practices of John Wesley, we continue to experience both numerical and spiritual growth—yet, not without challenges which will be elaborated upon later.

### **Our Identity**

As mentioned above, the United Methodist Church in Liberia (known then as The Methodist Episcopal Church, South) was organized in 1833 by the late Reverend Melville B. Cox and was officially established in 1834. It is best known for its holistic approach to ministry, which is geared towards evangelization, discipleship and transformation of the nation and its people through the implementation of various forms of ministries: evangelism, human resource development, education, church growth and development, health care delivery and agriculture, among others.

It is amazing that throughout the more than fourteen years of Liberia's civil crisis, the LAC/UMC remains committed to the peace process and the welfare of the Liberian people. It continues to undertake appropriate programs of relief, reconciliation, rehabilitation, psycho-social counseling and peace building programs in response to arising emergencies and devastations. This effort is undertaken despite the fact that the LAC/UMC itself was adversely affected in many ways as a result of the crisis. For instance, hundreds of United Methodists were displaced or killed; valuable properties and institutions of the Church including mission stations, Ganta Hospital, clinics, schools, church edifices, parsonages, offices and homes of individual United Methodists were looted or destroyed.

The LAC/UMC in its 174-year history has been self-governing, self-propagating, self-theologizing and creatively tackling the challenges of self-sustainability. In spite of being overwhelmed by diverse needs and challenges of resource constraints, the LAC/UMC is committed to its mission of making disciples regardless of race, creed, gender, tribe and status.

## **Our Core Values**

Values are defined as the beliefs that one holds in high esteem, worthy principles that serve as the basis for one's existence, the driving force for operations and the criteria for strategies and actions. These values are a part of the statement of faith on which a church or denomination is founded. LAC/UMC upholds the following values:

1. **Sound theological and doctrinal heritage**—We value our sound theological and doctrinal heritage that marks LAC/UMC as a unique Church. We consciously work towards reflecting this sound theological and doctrinal heritage in our worship and also ensuring that this provides a basis for our service to both the Church and the world and our common life as lay people and clergy.
2. **Connectional system**—According to paragraph 130 of *The United Methodist Book of Discipline*, the United Methodist Church is described as “The Journey of a Connectional People”. Connectionalism in the United Methodist tradition is multi-leveled, global in scope, and local in thrust. Our connectionalism is not merely a linking of one charge conference to another; it is rather a vital web of interactive relationships. We are connected by sharing a common tradition of faith, including our doctrinal standards and general rules (Para. 130), by sharing a common mission, which we seek to carry out by working together in and through conferences that reflect the inclusive and missioner character of our fellowship; by sharing a common ethos that characterizes our way of doing things.
3. **Organizational structure**—We value our Organizational structure, the clear reporting lines and relationships and the reflection of this in bringing about order in our engagements within and outside the LAC/UMC.
4. **Education and training**—We are a learning organization and have chosen to put learning at the core of our Church. We value education and training as a means of learning to meet the complexities and ever changing nature of society. We recognize

that there can never be an end to knowledge and skills required in becoming an effective and efficient Church.

5. **Service**—We value service to God and humanity. Our service is grounded in scriptural injunctions motivated by values of compassion, justice and love as exemplified by our Lord Jesus Christ.
6. **Preaching**—We are committed to the Great Commission and the primary mission of the Church which is to make disciples of all nations ( Mathew 28:19-20). We are committed to fulfilling this mandate by proclaiming the gospel through preaching, seeking, welcoming and gathering persons into the body of Christ.
7. **Teaching**—We believe that one major way to keep the Church alive and growing, not merely having a form of godliness, is through learning and teaching (Ezra 7:10; II Tim 2:15; 3:16-17). We believe that it is when the Church ceases to study, obey and teach the Scripture that it loses its focus and eventually becomes spiritually dead.
8. **Evangelism**—We value evangelism as a means of proclaiming the gospel to all nations bringing hope and healing to a dying world.
9. **Missions**—We are committed to missions as a Biblical mandate. This commitment is evidenced by the Church’s various mission stations and the commitment to open new areas and mission stations with a view to reaching all nations with the gospel.
10. **Commitment**—We value commitment to our ministries and work as a Church. Our commitment is borne out of desire to promote excellence as a Church.
11. **Perseverance**—We value perseverance in our work for the Church borne out of our love for God and Humankind. As we persevere, we recognize that God is able to make all grace abound to us so that in all things at all times, having all that we need, we shall abound in every good work (II Cor. 9:8).
12. **Love, Unity, Care and Concern for One Another**—We value love, unity, care and concern for one another. We seek to reveal the word of God to all, irrespective of age, status, ethnicity, race, culture, nationality and physical condition.

13. **Advocacy (Peace & Justice)**—We believe that based on the Biblical mandate for advocacy (Deut 10:18, Isaiah 58:6-7, Lev 25, Amos 5:11-15, Micah 6:8, Luke 10:25-37, Luke 11:42, James 2:1-26), we are called to do the following:
- Play the prophetic role in speaking against injustice.
  - Bring peace and reconciliation between human beings and God and between human beings and other human beings.
  - Seek social justice through influencing those in power.
  - Undertake social action.
  - Model an alternative society/community.
14. **Holism/Holistic Ministries**—Our understanding and practice of our mission is holistic, which means that in our proclamation of the Gospel, we endeavor to meet both the physical and spiritual needs of all people irrespective of their socio-economic status, gender, age, physical, mental, sex, religious and cultural origin. Our programs, activities and initiatives of various agencies at all levels of the conference are deliberately made to evidence a holistic approach.
15. **Self Esteem**—We affirm the worth of all peoples and the value of inter-relationship in all of God’s creation. We are committed to upholding the dignity of all people/members through:
- Being culturally sensitive, non-judgmental and appreciative of differences among people.
  - Promoting Good Interpersonal skills and ability to build relationships.
  - Promoting open mindedness, maturity and responsibility among members.
  - Promoting flexibility and tolerance for one another.
16. **Respect for the Rule of Law**—We value the United Methodist Book of Discipline as the book of laws of the Church, which provides guidance, instructions, rules and regulations for all members and for the operation of our programs and ministries. In

accordance with the Biblical mandate to obey our leaders and submit to their authority (Hebrews 13:17), we are also charged to make requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving for kings and all those in authority (I Tim 2:1-2), and we are committed to respecting the laws of our nation.

## **Our Structure**

The structure and function of the Liberia Area of the United Methodist Church is a major contributing factor to both its numerical and spiritual growth. The structure is beautifully laid out for all Methodists within our *Book of Discipline*, which is revised every quadrennial. However, it is one thing to have a structure; it is quite another to implement that structure. And this is what we have endeavored to do. The following is a listing of the major groups along with their current populations.

The Conference United Methodist Youth Fellowship (CUMYF) is a fellowship of boys and girls. It ensures that young people are trained for leadership, taught the standards and principles laid down in Scripture and made to lead other young people to faith in Christ. The current membership of the Conference United Methodist Youth stands at 54,000.

The Conference United Methodist Young Adult Fellowship (CUMYAF) works in partnership with the Conference United Methodist Youth Fellowship and the Youth/Young Adult Department in implementing those activities that relate to young people's ministries. The CUMYAF, like the CUMF, coordinates with other Christian fellowships and ecumenical youth groups in promoting young people's activities. To date, the membership of the Conference Young Adult Fellowship stands at 43,000.

Like other organizations, the United Methodist Women do not only know God and experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ, but by developing a creative supportive fellowship. They expand concepts of missions through participation in the Global Ministries of the Church; they empower women on a massive scale by making them self-sustainable and literate; and they run a day care center and a skill's training center for pastors' wives and women of the community. Its membership stands at 39,000.

Known as the Methodist Men in the 1950's and 1960's, the United Methodist Men Organization (UMMO) was formed after the April 23, 1968 United Methodist Conference. The Conference United Methodist Men Organization of the Liberia Annual Conference, United Methodist

Church coordinates the activities of the district Men Organizations, which are also responsible to coordinate the local men units. The primary purpose of the United Methodist Men is to declare the centrality of Christ in the lives of men and in all their relationships. As creative supportive fellowship of men who seek to know Jesus Christ, to grow spiritually and to seek daily his will, the UMMO:

- Encourages knowledge of and support for the total mission of the United Methodist Church;
- Clarifies and speaks to the identified role of man in contemporary society; and
- Seeks commitment to discipleship, and engages in evangelism by sharing the fullness of the gospel in its personal and social dimensions.

Its current membership is 30,000.

We also have a vibrant and growing children's ministry with a current population of about 7,000.

As a result of its extensive ministries in cross-cultural evangelism and missions, the United Methodist Church now has a growing mission field in the Republic of Guinea. In addition of planting over twenty churches thus far, we have a clinic and school catering to both Guineans and Liberian refugees still residing in Guinea. The total membership of these churches is approximately 4,500.

### **Our Leadership**

Wes Griffin and the International Leadership Institute point out that, regarding leadership, "God looks for men and women who are biblically committed to cast vision, set goals, mobilize the Body of Christ and overcome obstacles in order to reach the nations for Christ."<sup>31</sup> This is what we of the United Methodist Church in Liberia are about. We seek to provide a leadership that is Christ-centered, evangelistically functional, spirit-filled, credible and accountable. This is done in cognizance of the fact that the quality of leadership makes or breaks the Church. The leadership inspires or frustrates the Church's mission; motivates and mobilizes or stagnates and demoralizes the people. Hence if the Church of Jesus Christ is thrive wherever it is planted, its leadership must personally know Christ; must be committed to the mission of the Church and must live in obedience to its teachings.

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<sup>31</sup> International Leadership Institute (ILI) *Notes*, 2007, p. 33.

## THE GOSPEL AND CULTURE

Culture and its practices are as diverse as its definitions in Africa. The cultures of groups have proven as major evangelistic inroads to reaching them for Christ. Allison Howell defines culture as “the things people learn and share in a group that will help them survive together.”<sup>32</sup> Thus the way to effectively learn and share things in a group is to use a common medium of communication understandable to all in the group. She therefore believes that language is an integral part of culture.

While I agree with Allison Howell, let me add that in Africa culture is also intertwined with the religious beliefs and moral values of the people. That is why the 1978 consultation on Gospel and Culture held in Willobank, Bermuda noted that “Culture is an integrated system of beliefs (about God or reality or ultimate meaning), of values, and customs (how “to behave, relate to others, talk, pray, dress, work, etc.) and of institutions which express these beliefs, values and customs”.<sup>33</sup> Thus, culture, as I understand it, is the way of thinking and behaving shared by a group, including the sum total of their language, world views, beliefs, values and pattern of social relationships. The culture of a people also has to do with their political structure, moral values and things they consider acceptable and not acceptable. This is true of the people of Liberia.

### The Culture of Community Life

One example is the culture of community life. Community life is a strong cultural practice within Liberia. It is a culture built on a covenant relationship. “There is a solidarity in the community among the living, the dead and future generations.”<sup>34</sup> This cultural practice enables everyone within a community to see themselves as belonging to one big family. That is why, until recently, the terms “cousins”, “nephews”, “aunty”, “uncle” were basically uncommon. One was either a father, mother, brother or sister. As a result, every elderly person was a parent to every child within the community; and did not need the approval of the biological parent before fulfilling a disciplinary responsibility to the children and youth.

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<sup>32</sup> Allison Howell, *A Daily Guide for Language And Culture Learning* (Nigeria: NEMA & ACTS, 2002), p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Tite Tienou, “Consultation On gospel and Culture”, Willobank, Bermuda, 1978, cited in *The Theological Task of The Church In Africa* (Ghana: ACP, 1990), p. 20.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur F. Kulah, *Theological Education In Liberia: Problems and Opportunities* (Georgia:SCP/Third World Lit. Publishing House, 1994), p. 51.

Another important value of this cultural practice is that it makes everyone his or her brothers' keeper, and restrains people from engaging in sinful activities. To commit sin is to break the covenant relationship with the community members and with the ancestors' spirits who not only provide guidance and protection, but effect disciplinary actions against offenders.

Understanding this cultural practice and utilizing it effectively provides an inroad for the Gospel among Liberian groups. They are easily made to understand that God, the Creator, planned mankind for His pleasure (Rev. 4:11). To commit an offense is to also sin against God the Creator. The people's acceptance of God's redemptive plan of salvation means entering into a covenant relation with God through Jesus Christ which ensures their membership in the big family of God (II Cor. 5:17; I Peter 2:9).

### **THE METHODIST CHURCH DURING LIBERIA'S CIVIL CRISIS AND NOW**

Liberia enjoyed relative political peace and stability for about a century and half before all of that was aborted on April 12, 1980 when a military coup brought to power a group of Liberians who were at the bottom of the nation's social economic, political, academic and intellectual ladder.

The venture of advocacy was risky and impregnated with negative consequences. Bishop Arthur F. Kulah of the United Methodist Church and bishops of the Episcopal and Catholic Churches were abused, intimidated and harassed for preaching morality and the rule of law. The society had at this time become obsessed with varying political ideologies, power struggles, corruption and greed.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the United Methodist Church, along with other leaders of the Christian community, survived the tests of time in their drive to correct societal ills.

When the nation was eventually reduced to a failed state under the Charles Taylor regime, the Church remained the beacon of hope and the only bridge over the troubled waters. The Church provided counseling and support services to many Liberians in dire need.

At an earlier stage of Liberia's crisis when politicians and warlords could not find a workable solution for peace and stability, the United Methodist Church in collaboration with other churches set the stage for the formation of an alliance between the Liberian Muslim Council and the Council of Churches resulting in the creation of the Interfaith Mediation Committee. This new body brokered the first peace among Liberian factions, first in Sierra Leone and later in The Gambia. These efforts led to an agreement to end the 1989-1997 civil war and the subsequent

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<sup>35</sup> Prince Y. Johnson, *The Rise and Fall of President Samuel K. Doe*, p.20.

elections, and the effort paid off again in 2005 when God in his sovereignty brought the 1999-2003 Liberian civil war to an end, and Madame Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a member of the United Methodist Church ascended to power as the first female President of Liberia and Africa. Under her leadership, the war-ravaged people of Liberia, in partnership with the Church and the international community, have begun to pursue the path that leads to peace, stability, development and progress.

Liberia is now at a state of reconstruction and recovery. Although its social and economic development is still at a low level, total recovery is inevitable if national leaders remain committed to honesty, hard work, transparency and accountability. As for the leadership of the United Methodist Church, the spiritual reconstruction of the hearts and minds of the people in post-conflict Liberia, in addition to physical reconstruction, remains our top priority. We therefore call upon our friends and partners for their continued support to the church and people of Liberia as we rebuild out broken walls.

## **CONCLUSION**

Indeed, the impact of evangelism and mission on Methodism in Liberia has been enormous. Our forefathers of the faith planted the seed of the Gospel; Merville B. Cox and other early missionaries watered the seed; our indigenous forefathers caught the vision and ran with it. Today the Lord continues to empower His people in their efforts to spread the Gospel.

There are still major challenges associated with the Church in its effort to do mission. Yet God has been faithful in sustaining His people amidst social, economic and political crisis. The survival and continued growth of the Church can therefore be attributed first to the grace of God. In spite of our disobedience and failure, God gave the Church and Liberia another chance. Secondly, the practice of evangelism and mission has impacted Methodism in Liberia based on its commitment to Scriptural integrity and doctrinal purity, the practice of Christian discipleship and submission to the control and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

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