

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis

Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

Master of Art Theology Thesis

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

5-1-2020

History of Lutheranism in Liberia: The Current State of Lutheran Churches In Liberia as a Result of Their History and Development

Edward Momoh Kollie

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, kolliee@csl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.csl.edu/ma_th



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kollie, Edward Momoh, "History of Lutheranism in Liberia: The Current State of Lutheran Churches In Liberia as a Result of Their History and Development" (2020). *Master of Art Theology Thesis*. 119. https://scholar.csl.edu/ma_th/119

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Art Theology Thesis by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

HISTORY OF LUTHERANISM IN LIBERIA:
THE CURRENT STATE OF LUTHERAN CHURCHES IN LIBERIA AS A RESULT OF
THEIR HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
Edward Momoh Kollie
May 2020

Approved by:

Dr. William Schumacher

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gerhard Bode

Reader

Dr. David Maxwell

Reader

© 2020 by Edward Momoh Kollie. All rights reserved.

This Thesis is dedicated to my wife Fatumata D. Kollie, and to my children: Afie, Francis, Moses, Mariama, Comfort, and Mazoe

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
ABBREVIATIONS.....	vii
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
THE LAND AND PEOPLE OF LIBERIA.....	1
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF LIBERIA	2
PURPOSE OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF LIBERIA BY THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY	3
THE INDIGENOUS LIBERIANS.....	5
THE FREE SLAVES OR AMERICO-LIBERIANS	5
ETHNIC GROUPS IN LIBERIA.....	6
SUMMARY	8
CHAPTER TWO.....	9
HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF LUTHERANISM IN LIBERIA.....	9
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN LIBERIA (LCL).....	10
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF LIBERIA (ELCL)	15
OTHER LUTHERANS IN LIBERIA.....	18
INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS	22
CHAPTER THREE.....	31
THE CURRENT STATE OF LUTHERAN CHURCHES IN LIBERIA	31
DOCTRINE.....	31
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN LIBERIA.....	31
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF LIBERIA.....	33

PRACTICES	37
ECUMENICAL STATUS.....	39
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO LUTHERAN GROUPS IN LIBERIA.....	41
CHAPTER FOUR	42
THE FUTURE OF LUTHERANISM IN LIBERIA.....	42
THE DEPENDENCE STATUS OF LUTHERAN CHURCHES IN LIBERIA ON MISSION PARTNERS	43
THE TRANSITION OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES FROM DEPENDENCE TO INDEPENDENCE.....	45
THE ROLE OF THE NATIVES IN HAVING THE CHURCH TO BE INDEPENDENT	48
THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN HELPING THE CHURCHES BECOME INDEPENDENT.....	50
CHAPTER FIVE	53
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	53
CONCLUSION	53
RECOMMENDATIONS	56
BIBLIOGRAPHY	59

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am especially grateful to the Almighty God for granting me the life and opportunity to have been able to go through this study. I appreciate my aunty (Mrs. Comfort K. Kenh) who inculcated into me the idea of education. I am also grateful to Rev. Amos Bolay and his wife (Rose Bolay) through whom I was called to the pastoral ministry. They introduced me to Christianity. I also want to extend special thanks to my wife and children for accepting my absence for the two and a half years required to complete this study. A profound thanks goes to Dr. Beth Hoeltke for her tireless effort as director of the Graduate School, for always helping us international students, and, most especially, for helping me with the type-setting of this thesis. I pray that God richly blesses you, Dr. Hoeltke.

As the saying goes, “To become a giant, one must sit at the feet of other giants.” Therefore, I thank Dr. William Schumacher, who served as my advisor during my writing process. Thanks also to Dr. Gerhard Bode and Dr. David Maxwell, who both served as readers of my thesis. They all helped in making this project a success. I also appreciate Mr. Joseph Harwell and Mrs. Joanie Harwell for their generous help to me and my family. I was always driven to and from service all through the two years and half; they also rendered to me some financial assistance to take care of my family back home. A special one to the Loums family who always took me to be one of them, as we lived together like one family. Finally, I would like to thank The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through the Global Seminary Initiative for sponsoring me to achieve this level of education. I also appreciate the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, who awarded me the opportunity to have this scholarship. A very big thank you is also due to Concordia Seminary for the opportunity to complete this study. A special thanks to Christ Memorial Lutheran Church in St. Louis, that highly welcomed me and took me in as one of their congregants.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACS	America Colonization Society
Ap	Apology to the Augsburg Confessions
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
ELCL	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia
LCL	Lutheran Church of Liberia
LCMS	The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
SA	Smalcald Articles

ABSTRACT

Kollie, Edward M. "History of Lutheranism in Liberia." Master of Arts Thesis, Concordia Seminary, 2020. 68pp.

This thesis presents a study of the society within which the church exists, how it was initiated by missionaries, including a historical analysis of the impact the mission status had on the Lutheran churches in Liberia. This thesis, in line with other scholars, points out ways mission churches established in Liberia were wholly dependent on their mission partners for support, propagation, and governing. The conclusions drawn lead to suggestions for ways the church may be able to graduate from the dependent status to viewing donations from mission partners as an added advantage. In addition, it shows the ways the local church needs to be involved fully, so that they will bring in things that are culturally appropriate and Biblically sound in the life of the church that will help them feel the church is within their context.

Through thorough research, this thesis presents a description of mission-established Lutheran churches in Liberia, followed by an analysis of these mission-established churches. This research results in an interpretation of what it means to be a mission church and what it means for a church to be independent of her mission partner.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LAND AND PEOPLE OF LIBERIA

It is indeed unique to begin this history of Lutheranism in Liberia with the land and people of Liberia. Understanding the land and people of Liberia provides a clear understanding of how the Lutheran Church can survive within the land and among the peoples of Liberia. This is based on the fact that Liberians are ethnically diverse in almost everything they do.¹

Liberia's relatively small population is ethnically diverse, consisting of about 18 ethnic groups. The relative share of the population of each ethnic group has not changed much over the last three censuses (1962, 1974, and 1984). The Kpelle and Bassa continue to be the first and second largest ethnic groups, with about 20% and 15% of the total population, respectively. The Belle, Dey, and Mende are among the smallest, each with about 0.5% of the total population. The Krahn, who appear to be well represented among Liberian refugees in the United States, made up 3.8% of the total population of Liberia in 1984.²

Alvin correctly observes that Liberia's relatively small population is ethnically diverse, but it is not presently composed of 18 ethnic groups, but 16. Looking at it technically, Liberia is composed of two groups of people: the indigenous/native Liberians, and the Americo-Liberians (Free Slaves). The indigenous Liberians are those whom the Free Slaves met in the land; while the Americo-Liberians refer to those free slaves who the American Colonization Society brought to the land that is today named Liberia.³

Indigenous Liberians are descendants of African ethnic groups who were already inhabiting the area when the first African American settlers arrived. Americo-Liberians are largely made up of descendants of three groups: 19th Century African American settlers who founded Liberia, freed Afro-Caribbean slaves who came to Liberia in the mid-1800s, and Africans captured on U.S.-bound slave ships by the

¹ Ethnicity is of great importance to the Liberian community. The people of Liberia live according to ethnic groups and follow the same pattern of their religious activities. Very few Liberians do not follow the system and practices of their ethnic background.

² Emmanuel Alvin, *Liberia: Art and Culture: The People and Tradition, History and Migration, The Liberia Civil War, Present Environment* (Alvinston Publishing, 2016), 5, 6.

³ From my studies of Liberia History, the indigenous Liberians speak languages from the Niger-Congo family of African languages such as the Kwa, the Mande-Fu, the Mande-Tan and Mel or West Atlantic.

U.S. Navy (enforcing a U.S. law against the importation of slaves) and sent back to Liberia.⁴

This then shows us that there are mainly two groups of people living in Liberia, the indigenous/native Liberians and the Americo/Freed Slave Liberians. The native Liberians are divided into sixteen ethnic groups.

The Establishment of Liberia

Liberia was founded by the America Colonization Society (ACS) in the year 1821. Before this time, however, people inhabited the land. According to Alvin, “There have been inhabitants in present day Liberia for at least 700 years.”⁵ We do not know exactly what the land was called before the arrival of the settlers. The settlers first named the capital, “The Pepper Coast,” then later “Green Coast,” then “Christo Polis” which means City of Christ, and finally “Monrovia” which means ‘Village of Monroe.’

The American Colonization Society was organized in Washington, D.C. in 1816; a suggestion was made that a home be found for the freed Negroes. There were then approximately 200,000 Negroes living in America. Three years later, March 3, 1819, the United States Congress authorized president James Monroe to claim any Africans captured from American or foreign vessels and arrange to restore them to their country and people. In 1820, a group of about eighty (80) persons set sail for Africa and landed in Sierra Leone. The English governor refused them admission, fearing the motives behind the enterprise. They moved to Sherbro Island where many died of fever. The next year, another group set out from America and landing at Sherbro Island found the remnants of the 1820 party. The combined group settled on Providence Island, near present site of Monrovia, Liberia on a site purchased by the American Colonization Society.⁶

This account not only records the establishment of Liberia by the ACS, who purchased land from the original inhabitants, but also notes the problem between the native and the Americo-Liberians. This conflict was due to the fact that the Americo-Liberians forced their American

⁴ Alvin, *Liberia*, 6. Kindle

⁵ Alvin, *Liberia*, 7. Kindle

⁶ Elsie Otto, *Lutherans In Liberia 1860–1960* (Iowa: United Lutheran Church Women and The Board of Foreign Missions of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1960), 5.

culture on the natives and treated the natives as inferiors. They ruled the natives for 133 (1847–1980) years and took most of the wealth for themselves and excluded the natives from higher learning. The suppression led to a coup d'état by the natives to take over governing from the Americo-Liberians.

Purpose of the Establishment of Liberia by the American Colonization Society

The American Colonization Society was founded in Washington, DC in December 1816. A suggestion was made that a home be founded for freed Negroes. According to the Massachusetts Colonization Society:

The foundation of the American Colonization Society owes its origin principally to the philanthropic efforts of General Mercer of Virginia, the Dr. Finley of New Jersey, the Rev. Samuel J. Mills, and a few others of kindred spirit. The American Colonization Society was organized for the sole purpose of promoting and executing a plan of colonizing the free people of color residing in America, Africa, or such other places as Congress shall deem expedient.⁷

This objective of the organization was based on the 2nd Article of the Constitution of the American Colonization Society. We are told by Ciment that, “One of the main purposes of the American Colonization Society (ACS) taking back free slaves to Africa was to find for the free slaves a home and for the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁸ In this light, Liberians have claimed that Liberia was founded on a Christian principle. The American Colonization Society also sought to establish a colony for the “free people of color” in America, “The object to which its attention is to be exclusively directed, is to promote and execute a plan of colonizing (with their own consent) the free people of color residing in our country.”⁹ Therefore, the settlers were prepared for service to God and to establish a civil government, including the power to

⁷ Massachusetts Colonization Society, *American Colonization Society, and the Colony of Liberia* (United States of America: Peirce & Parker, 1831), 3.

⁸ James Ciment, *Another America: The Story of Liberia and the Former Slaves Who Ruled It*, First Edition. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), chap. 1. Kindle.

⁹ Massachusetts Colonization Society, *American Colonization Society*, 3.

make laws for the community. The preambular clause of the 1847 Liberia Constitution states that:

Therefore, we the people of Liberia acknowledging with devout gratitude, the goodness of God in granting to us the blessings of the Christian religion, and political, religious, and civil liberty, do, in order to secure these blessings for ourselves and our posterity, and to establish justice, insure domestic peace, and promote the general welfare, hereby solemnly associate, and constitute ourselves a Free, Sovereign and Independent State, by the name of the Republic of Liberia, and do ordain and establish this Constitution for the government of the same.¹⁰

Liberia was founded as a Christian nation on Christian principles. This is evident due to the fact that:

- Liberia's birth, unlike that of other colonized African nations, occurred in the Providence Baptist Church. Liberia is a Christian nation. The Declaration of Independence was signed in this same church in 1847 by eleven men of the church, making Liberia a sovereign nation founded on Christian principles.
- To reinforce its Christian heritage, during the period of independence the capital was named Christo-polis, which means 'City of Christ.' This name was later changed to Monrovia in honor of President James Monroe who settled a debt owed by the Liberian Government to the United States.
- Another factor that sets Liberia aside as a Christian nation is her National Fast and Prayer day celebration. The purpose of this day is to coordinate national prayer for the spiritual purification and healing of Liberia. The celebration of this day honors Liberia's delivery by the power of prayer from political crisis with the British in the mid-1800s.

¹⁰ *The Constitution of the Republic of Liberia* (Monrovia, 1847), 6.

The Indigenous Liberians

Before the arrival of the free slaves, there were people living in the land. Between 1300 and 1700, people migrated to the land from other parts of the continent. These descendants of African ethnic groups were already inhabiting the area when the first African American settlers arrived. As stated by Alvin:

There have been inhabitants in present-day Liberia for at least 700 years. The Mel entered Western Liberia between 1300 to 1700, followed shortly by Kwa-speaking groups. The Mande speaking arrived in northwestern Liberia between 1500 and 1550. Early arrivals may have migrated to Liberia in search of fertile agricultural land, after the desertification of their former habitats. The instability that followed the collapse of the third great Sudanic empire- Songhai-around the late 16th century likely prompted an influx of migrants as well. In the 19th century, Samory Toure's conquests and eventual establishment of a short-lived empire in the area of present-day Mali, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, along with French colonial pacification campaigns in French West Africa, led to the movement of more people into the area that came to be known as Liberia.

According to Sampson, "The majority of the population belong to 16 ethnic groups, including the Kpelle, the Bassa, the Gio, the Grebo, and the Mano."¹¹ These 16 ethnic groups live according to their tribal or ethnic group. This is to say they have different ways of life. Their ways of traditional worship and their bush schools (Poro and Sanda societies) differ from one ethnic group to the other. They always enjoy doing things according to their ethnic group. This way of life has been brought to the Christian religion which has brought division into some churches. People in the churches in Liberia are comfortable when they are congregated by their ethnic/tribal group. A Bassa man wants to worship in a congregation whose pastor is a Bassa man. People also desire the national leadership of the church to be based on ethnic group.

The Free Slaves or Americo-Liberians

The free slaves/Americo-Liberians arrived in 1822. "They are made up of descendants of

¹¹ Sampson, Jerry, *Inside Liberia History and Crises Aftermath*, n.d., chap. 1. Kindle.

three groups: 19th century African American settlers who founded Liberia, free Afro-Caribbean slaves who came to Liberia in the mid-1800s, and Africans captured on U.S.-bound slaves ships by the U.S. Navy and sent to Liberia.”¹² According to Sampson:

Far less numerous, but of great political importance in the past, are the descendants of the freed slaves who immigrated from the United States to Liberia in the 19th century. These people, formerly called Americo-Liberians, are concentrated in the towns, where they have provided the country’s Westernized leadership and, for the most part, are adherents of various Protestant denominations.¹³

These free slaves/Americo-Liberians took up leadership of the country for 133years. They marginalized the indigenous population in the areas of education and the national wealth. The Americo-Liberians cunningly deprived the native Liberians of higher education by making the cost of higher education so exorbitant that the native Liberians could not afford it. Before the 1980s, the education for a native Liberian who grew up among his fellow natives would not exceed the sixth grade. The high cost of higher education, combined with an effort to exclude natives from government offices that could earn them good salaries, resulted in oppression for 133 years. This led to 14 years of civil unrest. Even after the 14 years of civil war, tension still exists among the descendants of free slaves and the indigenous Liberians. Today, many native Liberians are calling on the international community to help establish economic and war crime court in Liberia in order to try those descendants of free slaves who organized and supported the civil war in the country.

Ethnic Groups in Liberia

Ethnicity divides the indigenous people of Liberia, including their religious practices. During the Liberian civil war, extreme ethnicity led to ethnic violence and religious conflict. The Mano and Gio ethnic group were against the Mandigo and Grahn ethnic groups and vice-versa.

¹² Alvin, *Liberia*, 6. Kindle.

¹³ Sampson, *Inside Liberia History and Crises Aftermath*, chap. 1. Kindle.

The Mano, Gio and Krahn are mostly part of the Christian religion; while the Mandingoes are dominantly Muslims. Even within Christianity, especially in the interior, most worship within their ethnic group. For example, the Kissi man/woman prefers worshipping in a congregation that is predominantly of the Kissi ethnic group. This can also be seen in urban areas of the country. For instance, in Monrovia, you have congregations composed exclusively of the Bassa ethnic group; some congregations with the Kissi, Krahn, Grebo, etc. This situation has brought division in some denominations, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, which will be discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. As Sampson writes:

Besides the descendants of the early settlers, Liberia is peopled by about 28 ethnic groups(sic), each with its own language. They are believed to have migrated from the north and east between the 12th and 16th centuries AD, bring with them elements of Egyptian and Arabian culture, such as the spinning and weaving of cotton and the smelting of iron. Linguistically, the tribes may be divided into three main groups: the Mande people in the north and far west, the Kru tribes (Including the Krahn) in the east and southeast, and the Mel in the Northwest. The largest groups are the Kpelle, Bassa, Gio, Kru, Grebo, Mano, Krahn, Gola, Gbandi, Loma, Kissi, Vai, and Belleh.¹⁴

Excluding the Americo-Liberian, sixteen ethnic groups make up Liberia's indigenous African population, making up about 95 percent of the total. The sixteen ethnic groups are: Kpelle, Bassa, Mano, Klao (Kru), Grebo, Gbandi, Kissi, Loma, Vai, Bella, Menda, Dan (Gio), Krahn, Dei, Mandingo, and Gola. The Kpelle is considered the largest ethnic group in Liberia, followed by the Bassa, Gio and Kru, that are often considered fishermen; Grebo, Mandingo, who are often involved in trade and transport; then the Mano, Krahn, Gola, Gbandi, Loma, Kissi, Vai, Belleh, Mende and Dey. Based on their ethnicity, they are very diverse in almost everything they do, including cultural acts and their Bush Schools (Poro and Sandi societies). The poro and sandi societies are the bush schools that make up the boys and girls to the stage of maturity. Whenever a boy graduates from the Poro Society, he is now full grown to marry. Consummating the Poro

¹⁴ Sampson, *Inside Liberia History and Crises Aftermath*, chap. 6, Kindle.

society means that he has had good training that he is able to manage his own home. Likewise, a girl who graduates from the Sandi society, is able to do housekeeping.

Summary

Liberia was founded in the early 19th century by the American Colonization Society as a place for liberated slaves returning from the United States of America. The area was inhabited by the Mandingo and other groups. During the 1930s, a novel American-Liberian government abolished the still present slavery but continued to withhold rights from the native peoples. This government was overthrown in 1980 in a coup d'état carried out by a Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe and his men, who removed the Americo-Liberians from power and brought to power the natives, who became corrupt. Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe was a member of the Krahn ethnic group that fought against the Mano and Gio tribes. A civil war broke out from 1989 to 2004 during which many people were killed, some displaced, others fled to neighboring countries. The entire economy was destroyed. Samuel K. Doe who was the president of Liberia at the time and represented the native Liberians fought against the rebels of Charles Taylor, a descendant of the Americo-Liberians. Doe was captured by Prince Johnson and his men and was brutally killed on September 9, 1990. A transitional government was put in place in 2003 for a period of two years; followed by a transitional government put in place by the United Nation Mission. After the two years of transitional period, the recovery process of the economy of Liberia was still slow, and the security situation was difficult. All these factors impact the growth and decline of the churches in Liberia.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF LUTHERANISM IN LIBERIA

The Lutheran churches in the world, most of which are members of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), are the offspring of the 16th century Reformation within the Western Catholic Church. The central issue of the Reformation was the doctrine of justification by faith through grace alone, that God redeems mankind from the power of sin through the cross of Jesus Christ and bestows God's righteousness upon them. In this light, the Lutheran tradition observes the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, received and responded to in faith without any human merit, as central to the life of the church. The two Lutheran groups in Liberia trace their roots to the doctrinal controversies of the 16th century, as do other protestant churches present, including Baptists and Methodists. There are also large Pentecostal and native churches such as The Church of the Lord Aladura (an African church that originated in Nigeria) with headquarter in Nigeria, and the Anglicans.

The beginning of Christianity in Liberia can be credited to missionaries from America who came with the American Colonization Society (ACS). With the founding of the nation in 1821, Christian missions started pouring in. The Baptist Mission was the first that was established in 1822, followed by the Protestant Episcopal Mission, in 1830, and the Methodist Mission in 1832.

There are two main Lutheran bodies in Liberia, The Lutheran Church in Liberia, started in 1860 as a mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, which was established in 1978 as a mission church by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). In addition to these two Lutheran bodies, there are also other Lutherans congregations in Liberia which broke away from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia and call themselves the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia Synod (ELCLS). The two main bodies have some doctrinal difference which will be discussed in Chapter 3. The

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia Synod adhere to the same doctrine and practices. They both hold unto the Book of Concord as their confession of faith, yet remain separated due to ethnicity and leadership struggles.

The Lutheran Church in Liberia (LCL)

The first Lutheran church body established in Liberia was the Lutheran Mission in Liberia, which is now called the Lutheran Church in Liberia (LCL); the Lutheran Church in Liberia was started in 1860 by Morris Officer and Henry Heigard.¹ Officer and Heigard generated interest for establishing a mission in Africa through two articles in the Lutheran Observer. The first was on July 3, 1851, and the second on September 15, 1851. For the first article Payne writes:

On July 18, 1851, the following appeared in the Lutheran Observer: An answer wanted—It has long been a subject of thought in the minds of some members of the Lutheran church whether we should not have a mission in Africa. . . We earnestly ask, is the Lutheran church able and willing to establish a mission in Africa? Or, if suitable and willing men can be found, will the church send and support them?²

The second article also reads:

Mission to Africa: Two valuable and devoted young men at our Wittenberg institutions in Springfield, Ohio, are desirous to go to Africa as missionaries and labor for the enthrallment and regeneration of that benighted, much-abused, and long-neglected region of the world. Being Lutherans, and educated in the Lutheran church, they are anxious to go forth under the auspices of the church of their fathers and of their choice.³

But with these two articles, the ELCA did not show enough interest at this point to send the two to Africa as missionaries. However, Morris Officer found a way go to Africa. He signed a contract with the American Missionary Association of New York, a society of the Congregational Church, Officer met with the committee in New York City and a clear

¹ Harold Vink Whetstone, *Lutheran Mission in Liberia* (Hartford, CT: Board of Foreign Mission, 1955), 14.

² Roland J. Payne, *A Miracle of God's Grace: A History of the Lutheran Church in Liberia* (United States of America: Lutheran Church in Liberia, 2000), 9, 10.

³ Payne, *A Miracle of God's Grace*, 10.

understanding was reached that his employment by the Association would not hinder him from promoting the cause in the Lutheran church. With this understanding, Rev. Officer felt that he could represent his church in the missionary work on the West coast of Africa, and eventually open the way to establish the Lutheran church in Africa. The Association decided that Officer should go only for a year, and he sailed on Christmas morning in 1852, on the Mark Clark from New York City, in company with eight other missionaries bound for the same place. They landed in Sierra Leone where the Kaw Mendi Mission was already established. We are told by Payne that, "Officer had the hope to establish a Lutheran church in Sierra Leone, but it was not possible. At this time, he received a letter from Rev. Wilson of Monrovia, outlining the great opportunities for mission work in Liberia."⁴ After careful consideration, he decided to visit Liberia, and arrived in Monrovia on August 23, 1853. This visit lasted until the middle of September when he returned to Sierra Leone. Otto tells us that,

After a visit to Liberia, he wrote, "My mind is setting more fully on the plan of appealing to the Lutheran Church to establish a mission in Liberia." He completed his contract with the American Missionary Association in 1854 and returned to America. Officer seized every opportunity to interest the Church in opening a mission in Liberia. In June 1855, the convention of the General Synod appointed a committee to make arrangements to begin the work. For four years Officer traveled throughout the United States in everything that carries a man or walked many miles in all kinds of weather trying to awaken interest in the spiritual needs of Africa and presenting America's responsibility in meeting that need.⁵

Officer, who was a white missionary, grew more encouraged that it was expedient for the Lutheran church to have a mission in Liberia as he visited places along the St. Paul river and the present location of the Muhlenberg station of the Lutheran church. This is how Whetstone puts it:

The more I see of this country and the more I reflect on the work of missions in Africa, the more I become convinced that Liberia affords the best sphere for Christian enterprise that there is on the west coast. When I reflect on the fact that the greatest

⁴ Payne, *A Miracle of God's Grace*, 12.

⁵ Otto, *Lutherans in Liberia 1860-1960*, 8.

part of the work of civilizing Africa must be done by the black man, and that in the Lutheran church in America there are some such who could be useful and would be willing to engage in this work and that the church has the means of sending and sustaining those persons here, I think I could do most good by visiting our people, laying before them this matter plainly, and inducing them to undertake a mission in this field.⁶

Upon Officer's return to the United States, he persuaded his church to have a mission field in Liberia. According to Whetstone, "Mr. Officer stimulated the church not only through his speaking tours and many personal contacts, but through writings also. The two chief pamphlets which set forth his view appeared in 1855 and 1856. As we read from Otto: 'A plea for a Lutheran Mission in Liberia was published in 1855 and Western Africa, a mission Field in 1856.'" ⁷ In 1855, the church responded. During the June 1855 convention of the General Synod, Officer presented Liberia as a mission field. The General Synod examined his claims and set up a committee, which proposed selecting capable persons to prepare for such a mission; they also included a plan for the establishment of a training school. The complete plan for a mission in Africa was presented to the next General Synod. The General Synod then appointed a committee of five men, which met and outlined the details of the African mission. The General Synod appointed Officer as superintendent and gave him instruction to visit churches and raise support for the proposed missionary institute. Payne tells us that, "Rev. Officer was personally well received in his travels in the United States."⁸ Payne continues, "In May of 1857, the committee reported to the General Synod that although the fund raising was very slow, they had on hand about one thousand dollars in cash and about four hundred dollars in subscription which will be due in a few weeks."⁹

⁶ Whetstone, *Lutheran Mission in Liberia*, 6.

⁷ Whetstone, *Lutheran Mission in Liberia*, 8.

⁸ Payne, *Miracle of God's Grace*, 14.

⁹ Payne. *Miracle of God's Grace*, 14.

In 1857, the General Synod resolved to send Rev. Morris Officer to select a suitable site for the mission and to supervise its establishment. To this Whetstone writes:

At the meeting of the Synod in Pittsburg in 1857 the committee was continued but was instructed to confer with the Executive Committee of the Foreign Missionary Society and not to take any important step without consulting them. Reading, Pennsylvania, was selected as a good site for the proposed training school, but this plan was never carried through. They also resolved to send Mr. Morris Officer to Liberia in the fall of 1859 to select a suitable place for the mission and to superintend its establishment. In September of that same year the second missionary for Liberia, Mr. Henry Heigard of South Carolina, was appointed to accompany and assist him.¹⁰

The Foreign Mission Board made five recommendations for the establishment of the African mission. To this Payne writes:

The Foreign Mission Board of the General Synod recommended:

1. That the contemplated mission be located among the heathen population in the territory of the Republic.
2. That the plan of the work be to establish, under the superintendence of a white man, a small settlement of Christian colored people, embracing a preacher, a school teacher, and one or more farmers and mechanics, as the means of the church will allow.
3. That the heathen children be taken into the mission be taught, in connection with their religious training, the common branches of an English education, and also the common acts of civilization.
4. That as soon as practicable, some one of the missionaries acquire a knowledge of the language spoken by the heathen about the mission, so as to preach to the adult population, and also to understand more perfectly their modes of thought.
5. In conclusion, the committee recommends the continuance of the agency by Rev. Morris Officer, with a view to the permanent establishment of an African missionary institute.¹¹

At the 1859 meeting of the General Synod, the committee reported that they now had three thousand dollars in cash and recommended that the proposed mission school be established in Africa instead of the United States. During a joint meeting, the Foreign Missionary Society and

¹⁰ Whetstone, *Lutheran Mission in Liberia*, 13.

¹¹ Payne, *Miracle of God's Grace*, 14, 15.

the African Mission Committee agreed to locate the proposed mission and school in the Republic of Liberia, and to send Rev. Morris Officer and an assistant to Africa to select a site and begin a mission. They also appointed Henry Heigard as assistant missionary. With this, the platform was well laid for the establishment of the African mission. Officer and Heigard, having been equipped with the three thousand dollars and with backing from the General Synod, embarked on the journey for Liberia on February 23, 1860. We are told by Whetstone that, “Officer and Heigard, and the only passenger, Mr. Thompson, a Liberian returning home, arrived in Liberia April 5, 1860.”¹²

Officer had developed a plan for the mission work in Liberia during his time with the American Missionary Association in Sierra Leone. This plan was laid out in his personal journal. Whetstone quotes Officer:

My plan would be to form a small settlement, but to send only two or three families at first, who are pretty well informed and are willing to come and settle on some interior part where the soil is good, and where we can go without inconvenience; to have a minister with them, and to establish a school as soon as possible; to take as soon as fairly settled, so many children of the heathen as the company could well keep in their families, and have them attend school and labor with and for the families. This I believe to be the most successful way to civilize and Christianize these children. They must be brought into civilized places, and, if possible, into families. A movement of this kind would better the condition of the people of color, who would come out, would strengthen this rising republic, which I regard to the brightest star of promise in Africa’s canopy, and would at the same time be a direct and affectual missionary work.¹³

This plan, to establish a small colony of well-trained negroes from the United States and to bring into this community children who would be taught the virtues of religion, dominated the whole work of the Lutheran mission for many years.

The site for the beginning of the mission was established by Officer and Heigard on April

¹² Whetstone, *Lutheran Mission in Liberia*, 14.

¹³ Whetstone, *Lutheran Mission in Liberia*, 14, 15. Whetstone here takes a quotation from Officer’s journal as the plan was laid up by Officer.

27, 1860. They employed some natives to cut away the bush. The next morning, they took the men to the site where the clearing needed to take place. Officer then informed them of his mission that it is of good intention. He also told them of the need of having God's help to do right. According to Payne:

He proposed that they kneel down on the spot where they were to commence cutting and ask God's help that they might live in peace, and that the work might do great good to the people around. The headman, having interpreted to the others, answered that they all agreed, and accordingly they knelt down in the deep jungle and prayed to their Father for guidance and grace. Thus, on April 28, 1860, Morris Officer and Henry Heigard officially began the Lutheran mission on Liberia soil.¹⁴

Morris Officer and Henry Heigard started the Lutheran Mission in Liberia and did a lot to help the church grow. But their work also established a weakness in the church: the church was dependent on their oversea partner, since the missionaries provided all of the resources needed for the running of the church

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia (ELCL)

The Evangelical Lutheran Mission, established in 1978, was started at the request of Dr. Benjamin G. Dennis who was a board member of the Board of Missions of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Dennis was a Liberian, who received his university education in the United States of America. He married an American and became an American citizen and permanently settled in the United States. He then became a member of an LCMS congregation. He was selected to serve on the Board of Mission of the LCMS. According to Rev. Amos Bolay, “Dr. Dennis requested The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) to extend the Lutheran church to his hometown Vahun, Lofa County, Liberia.”¹⁵ Allen and Mary Konrad were the first missionary couple sent for the establishment of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission

¹⁴ Payne, *A Miracle of God's Grace*, 18.

¹⁵ Amos Bolay, “Inaugural Speech Extract” (presented at the Unification Conference, Christ Assembly Evangelical Lutheran Church, Monrovia: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, 2009), 1.

in Liberia. They were employed by the Board of Missions of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1977 to open a new mission outreach in Liberia. According to a report from Allen, “The Konrad family boarded the Freighter African Sun on June 27, 1978, at Pier #5, in Brooklyn, New York. After loading more goods in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Savannah, we finally set sail for West Africa on the 7th of July.”¹⁶ With many struggles, the Konrad family arrived at the Port of Monrovia on July 21, 1978. They reported that they were delayed at the Ducor Hotel for eight days seeking to get some sort of recognition for the mission between their home office and the Liberian president, but that did not materialize. They called on Bishop Payne of the Lutheran Church in Liberia to write up documents vouching for them so that their personal effects and mission supplies could be cleared from the harbor duty free. According to Allen:

The processing of clearing was interrupted on July 25. I and several other people from the synod (B. Dennis, W. Sohns, R. Suelflow, and E. Westcott) were to be special guests of the president at the Liberian Independence Celebration at Greenville. During my absence, my wife continued running to the various government offices to gather the necessary papers and signatures needed to get our goods released. On July 29. We finally drove out of the harbor with most of our goods and settled at a house in Oldest Congo town which had been sub-leased for a year from the Institute for Liberian Languages (Lutheran Bible Translators).¹⁷

They took off for Vahun on December 15 and arrived the next day because of the poor road condition. They spent the night at a place called Taninahun. The next day they entered Vahun by means of their trail bike they had carried with them. In Vahun, they met with the tribal chief, town chief, and the elders. After a lengthy discussion, a site was identified by the tribal chief for the construction of buildings for the mission.¹⁸

¹⁶ Donald H. Mueller, *Life and Mission in Vahun, Liberia, Circa 1982*, Debriefing (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1982), Concordia Historical Institute.

¹⁷ Allen and Mary Lu Konrad, "Debriefing Report," Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, 1978–1981 (St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1981), 3.

¹⁸ Konrad and Konrad, "Debriefing Report" 3.

The mission was established in three phases. The first phase focused on establishing themselves in the land where the LCMS had no mission work. A period of three years was estimated for the first phase. During this time, they worked to secure legal recognition of the mission from the Liberian government while they worked to find land upon which the mission facilities would be constructed. They had the idea of keeping the mission work out of Monrovia and keep it upcountry, because other denominations had already established their mission stations within and around Monrovia. They wanted a virgin area where they would do mission work and win more souls for Christ. The second phase concentrated on the establishment of churches. At this point they decided to open teaching stations to draw people in contact with the word of God. The third phase was the training of leaders. They organized study sessions to train and identify leaders so that they could be educated and ready for the challenge of pastoral ministry among their own people. According to Konrad:

The first phase would have to deal with establishing ourselves in a land where our church had no mission work. We would need time to obtain legal recognition of our mission from the Liberian government. Another side of the first phase was to establish a good relationship with the people among whom we were going to work. This might mean that we have some kind of identification with them in the area of agriculture by planting a small farm or raise some animals. Identifying with them in the area they know well, we felt it would give us an opportunity to sit down with the people on matters other than just religious and get to know them better. The next step would be to find ourselves some property on which to put up the mission facilities and then to construct the buildings we felt would be needed to do the job. Our idea was to keep the mission work out of Monrovia and concentrate it upcountry. The Guma District headquarters would also become the headquarters of our mission and would serve as a touch—down base for new workers and also to house any mission guests who might come to visit.

During the second term of service, we would concentrate on the establishing of churches. This would be the time for us to open teaching stations so that people would come into regular contact with the word of God. However, we were setting our sights on baptizing many people. Out of these converts would arise the church in Guma. This would be time for in—depth training and strengthening of those baptized. This would also be the time for us to work closely with the Christians in identifying their own potential church leaders.

The third phase would provide a new kind of challenge because this was to be the time for lay leadership training. We would spend this term of service in organizing study sessions to train the identified leaders so that they could be educated and ready for the challenge of the pastoral ministry among their own people. This would be a time for study of the Bible, digging into the doctrines of scripture, and looking at the practical applications of the word of everyday situations.¹⁹

The Evangelical Lutheran Mission church planned to be established as a mission church and train the indigenous who would later take over the church and make it their own. The natives would work in making the church independent through what they have been taught. In the first phase, the partners identified with the natives through agriculture, and later introduced to them formal education. These are two means through which the church can be independent. If the national takes serious the act of implementing agricultural and applying themselves to formal education, this may bring growth and development to the church.

Other Lutherans in Liberia

After the establishment of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Liberia, the church was run by the mission for quite some number of years. The mission had her headquarter in Vahun, where the Konarads were; and the church established another station later in Foya Tiagai where the Rodewalds' family worked. Later another station was established in the Voinjama District where missionary David More was assigned in the Kolliema area.

When the civil war broke up in 1990, there was a proliferation of Evangelical Lutheran Mission congregations because of the movement of people from one end of the country to the other. As a result of this proliferation of congregations, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia was born. There were four groupings: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia Synod also known as the ELCLS; the Universal House of Prayer Evangelical Lutheran Church also known as the UHPELCL; the Evangel Temple Evangelical Lutheran Church also known as

¹⁹ Konrad and Konrad, "Debriefing Report," 2.

the ETELC, and the Christ Assembly Evangelical Lutheran Church also known as the CAELC.

With the exception of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia Synod, the other three groupings grew from different denominations, but after study of Lutheran doctrine, they decided to become Lutherans. The Universal House of Prayer Evangelical Lutheran Church was commonly known as the Universal House of Prayer (UHP) and had no outside affiliation with any denomination. Before joining the Lutheran Church, the UHP Church practiced charismatic worship. Through her senior pastor (Rev. Amos Bolay), the UHP church got in touch with the Lutherans and started to study the Lutheran doctrine and decided to become a Lutheran by denomination. The Christ Assembly Evangelical Lutheran Church was formally called the Church of Christ. They also studied Lutheran doctrine and decided to become Lutherans. The same goes to the Evangel Temple Evangelical Lutheran Church. Formally, they were part of the Pentecostal Movement, but after studying Lutheran doctrine, they also decided to become Lutherans. These three previously independent groups were all recognized by their mission partner (LCMS Missionaries) as separate bodies under one denomination called Lutheran. The LCMS supported these four church bodies through her missionaries. In his inaugural speech on May 10, 2009, Bolay states:

The civil war of 1990 brought about phenomenal church growth and yet with some problems. As others became part of the church, they ended up with their own groupings. Hence the four groupings: 1. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia Synod (ELCLS), 2. Universal House of Prayer Evangelical Lutheran Church (UHPELC), 3. Evangel Temple Evangelical Lutheran Church (ETELC), and 4. Christ Assembly Evangelical Lutheran Church (EAELC). All of these occurred during 1990—2002. These churches that made up the four groupings, were unified on May 10, 2009 under the name and style: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia.²⁰

Bolay also wrote in his report to the delegates of the First National Convention that was held in Buchanan City, Grand Bassa County on May 24–27, 2012:

²⁰ Bolay, “Inaugural Speech 1–2.

Therefore, the work of church planting in Liberia started in 1978 in Vahun. Foya being so connected to Vahun District both geographically and culturally, the mission extended its work in Foya and later jumped to Voinjama area. While they were working in these areas mentioned, they selected few men to be their aids in their evangelistic and church planting work. However, they fled for their dear lives in 1990 when there was breakdown of law and order which caused insecurity in our country, when in fact the American government declared Liberia unsafe and subsequently requested her citizens residing in Liberia to leave immediately. This made many members of this faith to also be displaced or went into refugee life in neighboring countries. While in these areas, they spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ at which time Many people joined the church (Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Liberia); and despite the war situation, they planted churches. These areas include: Liberia, Guinea and Ivory Coast.²¹

As the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Liberia, many joined the fellowship of Lutherans and out of this fellowship of Lutherans were the four groupings of ELCLS, UHPELCL, CAELC, and ETELC. Today this body is known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia (ELCL).

In 2002, LCMS missionary Rev. David Landenberg, who was assigned to West Africa as coordinator for Theological Education, said to the four groups that it was now time that the indigenous take over the church as their own. He stated that the mission was now out of funds for the full support of the mission church. At this point, the LCMS was recalling her missionaries because the mission had no funds for their support in the field. In other words, the indigenous needed to make the church their own; taking over the support of the church, propagating the church of their own, and taking over full leadership. As a result, the four groups decided to unify. The process of unification was ongoing until 2009 when finally, the unification conference was held in the edifice of the Christ Assembly Evangelical Lutheran Church. At this time, there was an interim leadership set up to work on a draft Constitution and By-Laws and select a time and place for the first General Convention. This was to be done within the course of three years.

In the year 2012, the first convention was held in the City of Buchanan, Grand Bassa County. By the time of this first convention, some members of the then Evangelical Lutheran

²¹ Bolay, "The President's Report to the Delegates on the Interim Period," 1.

Church of Liberia Synod broke away from the unified body, under the name “Concern” and were later called the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia Synod. They are the other Lutherans in Liberia. The ELCLS like the ELCL, subscribe to the Book of Concord as their doctrinal book. They uphold all the practices of the ELCL, but are not part of the main body that is recognized by the LCMS, the partner that established the church; in addition, they have their own article of incorporation with the government of the Republic of Liberia. To this the interim leadership writes in their report:

As the faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church grew higher and higher in Liberia, many persons joined the fellowship of Lutheran and out of this fellowship in the mission field, four groups immersed namely Evangelical Lutheran church in Liberia Synod (ELCLS), Universal House of Prayer Evangelical Lutheran Church (UHPELC), Evangel Temple Evangelical Lutheran Church (ETELC), and Christ Assembly Evangelical Lutheran Church (CAELC) and had their respective connections with LCMS and were all yearning for organizing the church under one leadership. Their dream started realizing in 2006 when they worked out modalities of uniting the churches under a single leadership. Finally, in 2009, the four churches agreed to put unification process in place that will lead the total unification of these congregations. Therefore, we agreed to sign a memorandum of understanding to bring us together and prepared a master plan as our guide to carry on this all-important process. The church also agreed on an interim leadership to lead us toward the achievement of our goal (unification).²²

The four groupings came together under one umbrella and hosted a unification conference, put in place interim leadership for three years, and started working on a constitution and set a time for a convention to be held in Grand Bassa County. During the interim period, some members of the formal Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia Synod sought to break the unification because, “The constitution has been tempered with.” They explained that a portion of the constitution had been changed, but failed to point to a specific portion of the constitution that was changed. They succeeded to convince the old, who were illiterate and could not investigate the claim. With this, they succeeded in getting few congregations. They succeeded in getting

²² Bolay, “Delegates on the Interim Period,” 2–3.

three congregations in the Monrovia, including St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, St. John Evangelical Church and others. They also succeeded in getting all of the congregations in Grand Gedeh County and the congregations in the Foya District except for one (the Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Foya). At first, they called themselves Concern, and after the national convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, they adopted formal name The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia Synod. They have their own organization of leadership comprising of Bishop or President Rev. Nathaniel Taylor, Assistant Bishop or Vice President Rev. Zakpa Dweh, General Secretary, Financial Secretary, Treasurer, and other departmental heads. There had been many efforts made by the National Church (The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia) and her international partner (LCMS) to have these congregations come back to the larger body (The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia), but so far this has proven unsuccessful. The group is supported by one LCMS congregation in the United States, Faith Community Lutheran Church and some of their tribal group members (mainly Krahn) who live in the United States. These men reach out to LCMS congregations and raise funds to support the breakaway group in Liberia. There are mainly two tribal groups that started the breakaway: the Kissi and the Krahn. These two groups still comprise the majority of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia Synod.

International Partners

Lutheran work in Liberia began in 1860 by missionaries Morris Officer and Henry Heigard of the former Lutheran Church in America (LCA), which later became part of the ELCA. The mission originally grew slowly because of poor road facilities that made traveling from one place to another difficult; the missionaries didn't know the language of the people and struggled to communicate the gospel; adequate medical facilities were also lacking in most parts of the country. Over the last twenty years, membership has increased as the church has spread from the

Kpelle and Lorma ethnic groups to other ethnic groups in Liberia.

From its inception, the church went through three stages of growth. The first stage runs from 1860 to 1947. During this period, missionaries managed the affairs of the African Lutheran initiative. To this Sumoward writes:

What is today the Lutheran Church in Liberia (LCL) went through three stages of growth. The three stages: (1) full mission stage (2) mission church stage and (3) full church stage.

Missionaries managed the African Lutheran enterprise also referred to as the American Mission in Liberia from 1860 to 1947. During this period, the work and ministry of the mission were entirely in the hands of the missionaries, and therefore meant that the missionaries made all the decisions.²³

The missionaries in the mission field and the board for foreign mission observed the need in the second stage to establish a church that would carry out God's mission. This church needed to be an indigenous church.

The second stage runs from 1947 to 1965. The oversea partners (missionaries) catered to the needs of the people so much that they (missionaries) had the people not to give for the work of the church. Members of the congregations solely depended on the partners' support to the extent that they always feel the partners are the ones responsible for the support of the church. The missionaries did not allow or encourage the church not to be self-governing, but leader and governed the church. Consequently, this brought about a demand from the nationals that they needed a church to carry out God's mission which made it essential to include the name of a church in the missionary undertaking. To this Sumoward writes:

The missionaries on the mission field in Liberia and the Board for Foreign Mission realized the need for establishing a church to carry out God's mission because of the pressure and demand from the nationals. It then became necessary to incorporate the name of a church in the missionary endeavor. The leadership of the American Lutheran Mission possessed all the powers. Similarly, the Missionary Conference of

²³ Rt. Rev. Dr. Sumoward E Harris, *Come This Far By Faith: Historical Perspective of 150 Years of Existence April 1860 to April 2010* (Monrovia: Lutheran Church of Liberia, n.d.), 20.

the ALML (American Lutheran Mission in Liberia) made all the decisions for funding in the ELCL.²⁴

In this light, a new constitution and by-laws were approved by the constitutional convention in July 1947, which gave rise to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Liberia and which became partially the indigenous church from 1947 to 1965, when the Lutheran Church in Liberia became autonomous. This period is referred to as the second stage which is the Mission Church Stage. Again, we read from Sumoward:

Consequently, the constitutional convention adopted the new constitution and by-laws in July 1947, thus giving birth to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Liberia (ELCL), which operated from 1847 to 1965. According to the church history, this was the Semi-indigenous church period. The American Lutheran Mission in Liberia was still in existence alongside the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Liberia. The constitution provided that when the president of the ELCL was white, the vice president should be Liberian national and vice versa.²⁵

The Lutheran Church in Liberia was completely in the hands of missionaries which contributed to the church not being independent. The church was governed, supported, and propagated by the missionaries. The nationals had nothing to contribute to the church growth and development. This control may be caused by the need for quick results, which they could not get if the work or the church had been placed into the hands of the natives. Many mission established churches die down when the missionaries leave because of this practice of missionaries taking over every aspect of the church, not having the nationals to participate in any leadership role, and having the congregants not to pay tithes and offerings. This is how Hodges puts it:

In a family, a parent instructs, counsels and guides his son, all the while increasing the child's responsibilities and allowing more liberty in making decisions. Eventually the time comes when the son is capable of making his own way. In the church family, we make the mistake of training national workers in dependence. Therefore, we must

²⁴ Harris, *Come This Far by Faith*, 21.

²⁵, Harris, *Come This Far by Faith*, 21.

take steps to adopt indigenous principles, but we also must give national believers to find their own feet. Otherwise, they will suddenly feel orphaned.²⁶

The missionaries were sympathetic for the people because of their poor conditions. It can be noted that in this respect, the missionaries took seriously Paul's statement of giving generously in 2 Cor. 8:

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and by the will of God to us (2 Cor. 8:1–5).

We are told by Sumoward that, “In the mission church arrangement stage, the ELCL did not have a decision-making power of its own; it did not have the power of assigning pastors and other personnel. The leadership of the American Lutheran Mission possessed all the powers.”²⁷ From this one can see that there was a need for a national church where the nationals will take over governing, supporting, and propagating the church. If they should get additional support from their oversea partners, that will be an added advantage for the growth and development of the national church. Upon this backdrop, we are led to the third stage of growth of Lutheran Church in Liberia (LCL).

The church shifted from a mission church to that of a national/indigenous church on January 6, 1965, having Roland J. Payne as its first president/Bishop. This is the period or stage that the church had rapid growth and development because the nationals were greatly involved in the work. The natives had the Bible read in their own tongue, leadership and management of the church was in their own hands. The nationals were trained to carry out the management of the

²⁶ Melvin L. Hodges, *Indigenous Church Including Indigenous Church and the Missionary*, Revised. (Springfield, MO: Gospel, 2009). Kindle.

²⁷ Harris, *Come This Far by Faith*, 21.

church. The work of the church was spread to 14 of the 15 counties in the country. To this Sumoward writes:

On January 6, 1965, the Lutheran Church in Liberia was born with Rt. Rev. Roland J. Payne as its first president (position now known as bishop). The period known as the indigenous church started from 1965 up to the present (2010). This period ushered in 72 national pastors and one active missionary pastor. The Lutheran Church in Liberia has spread its mission and work to 14 of the 15 counties of Liberia through 48 parishes with 71,146 members (1997 Statistic as no accurate and complete statistics has been taken since the end of the war).²⁸

We are also told by Sumoward that there were many factors that contributed to the growth of the new church. To name a few, “The literacy and translation program serve as impetus for the growth of the LCL; the training of evangelists and literacy teachers and the preaching of the word of God among the people in their languages as well as using traditional music and musical instruments during worship help win new converts.”²⁹

It is just a mere saying that the Lutheran church in Liberia is autonomous in that the members of the church are claiming such status. But practically and logically looking at things, one may conclude that the church is still dependent on her oversea partner. The Lutheran Church in Liberia organizes social services organizations and these social service organizations greatly depend on the partner for financial support. To state an example, let us look at the Trauma Healing, Reconciliation and Peace Building Program that was founded by the Lutheran Church in Liberia in 1991 under Rev. Sumoward E. Harris. The goal of this organization was to contribute to the peace building process in Liberia through the strengthening of community and civic structures. The partner usually raises grants to aid the social service organizations. From these social service organizations, the church is helped by the fact that some of her pastors are on salary within these social service organizations owned by the church. Sometimes at a large extent

²⁸ Harris, *Come This Far by Faith*, 22.

²⁹ Harris, *Come This Far by Faith*, 22.

the church gets some level of support from these organizations. But these organizations end up dying down when the partner(s) supporting financially withdraw their support. We read in Sumoward:

The Lutheran Church in Liberia (LCL) began the Trauma Healing and Reconciliation work in 1991 because of the bloody Liberian civil war. It was then realized by its founder, Rev. Sumoward E. Harris now bishop, that rebuilding the physical infrastructure of Liberia without first healing the wound of the civil crisis would be building on a shaky and shallow foundation that could collapse at any moment. The work then started with the training of Lutheran Church in Liberia pastors, lay leaders, teachers and health workers in collaboration with the Christian Health Association of Liberia (CHAL). By early 1993, Lutheran Church in Liberia began implementing the program independently.

Later in 1995, the Lutheran Church in Liberia invited the Lutheran World Federation/World Service (LWF/WS) to join in the implementation of the trauma Healing and Reconciliation activities considering the broader humanitarian services that LWF/WS was called upon by the Lutheran Church in Liberia to provide to all victims and needy in Liberia. This brought in the Church of Sweden and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) as the biggest financial supporters of the Lutheran Church in Liberia Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Program. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) provided funding for few years. In 2006, The Lutheran World Federation/World Service (LWF/WS) withdrew leaving the program as a sole ministry of the Lutheran Church in Liberia.³⁰

With the withdrawal of the LWF/WS, the ELCA and other funding partners, the program closed. Harris says that one of the prime objectives of this organization was “To strengthen and empower community based organizations in order to continue and expand reconciliation and peace building work and to work towards contributing to the strengthening and revitalization of the National Security Network of Peace-building (NSNPB).”³¹ The church that is saying she is autonomous, still largely depends on her mission partner.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod established the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Liberia (today referred to as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia). The LCMS worked

³⁰ Harris, *Come This Far By Faith*, 38, 39.

³¹ Harris, *Come This Far By Faith*, 39.

through missionary Allen Konrad and his family to establish the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Liberia. From this mission work the “Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia was formed in 2009, which serves all sixteen tribes of Liberia in eleven of the fifteen counties.”³² Today the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia is a partner church of the LCMS. This means that the ELCL is in pulpit and altar fellowship with the LCMS. Like the LCL, the ELCL is dependent on her mission partner for support. To state an instance, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia started a social organization called the Lutheran Malaria Initiative. This social organization was sponsored solely by the LCMS. As the LCMS withdrew her financial support, the organization has died.

Turning to other Lutherans in Liberia, there is a group that broke away from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia and is supported by a congregation that is well known for giving support (Faith Community Lutheran) and few individuals such as Rev. Dr. Paul Mueller former LCMS missionary in the Foya Taingai area in the 1980s, Mr. Joe Boway a member of the Krahn Ethnic group who lives in the United States serving as missionary for the ELCLS, Linda Kurtz a member of Faith Community Lutheran Church, and Rev. Craig Michaelson a Pastor of one of an LCMS congregation.

The Christian churches in Liberia were established through the efforts of missionaries. These churches depended largely on their mission partners for support, their growth, and governing. Some of these churches have been turned over to the natives of the land and have become self-supporting, self-expanding, and self-governing; while some are still struggling to become autonomous. The Baptist Church, the Assembly of God Church, and others serve as examples. Some are still looking up to their mission partners for support. The mission partners had good intentions in the establishment of these mission churches and provided for many of

³² Bolay, “Inaugural Speech Extract,” 1.

their needs, with the result that the indigenous felt that they do not need to support the churches, but that their mission partners were responsible to support the churches. The indigenous were chiefly responsible for the growth and development, but they relied wholly on their mission partners for support. The mission partners took all the initiatives of support because they had compassion on the people they met. With these some churches were able to make use of the opportunity and after their mission partners left, their churches became autonomous. On the other hand, others were not efficient enough, and still depend on their mission partners for support and are struggling to keep the churches going. Viewing the other side of the coin, the missionaries also needed to teach the indigenous how the churches need to be supported after the mission leave. This failure to teach the natives how to be independent can also be looked at as a weakness on the part of the mission partners who established these churches. I have heard an American proverb which states that, "If someone asks for a fish, don't only give him/her fish, but teach him/her to fish." The missionaries had compassion on the people and took the initiatives for support of the churches, but they also needed to teach the indigenous how to support the churches after they will have left.

Henry Venn was an outstanding European missionary leader, thinker, and administrator of the nineteenth century.³³ He wrote instructions to missionaries on the relationship of the formation of churches to be independent after the missionaries leave. He writes:

The fundamental problem of modern missions has been how to bring into existence a new church through an external agency in such a way the members of that church assume full responsibility for its life and witness rather than remaining dependent indefinitely on the external agency. He continues with a metaphor, The Mission is the Scaffolding, the Native Church is the edifice. The removal of the scaffolding is the proof that the building is completed. You will have achieved the greatest success

³³ Wilbert R. Shenk, "Henry Vann's Instructions to Missionaries," *Missiology, An International Review* 5, no. 4 (October 1977): 467.

when you have taught your converts to do without you, and can leave them, for fresh inroads into the region beyond.³⁴

What Venn explains that the mission church should be made into an independent native church. He further states that mission was crowned with success only when a responsible church emerged. The missionary must always keep before him the grand object of a foreign mission: it is the raising up of a Native Church—self-supporting, self-governing, self-extending. The instructions from Venn to missionaries and the lesson learned from them, can be used as a template for the history and development for Lutheranism in Liberia, it can also be used as a guide for its future work.

³⁴ Shenk, “Henry Vann’s Instructions,” 481.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CURRENT STATE OF LUTHERAN CHURCHES IN LIBERIA

The two main Lutheran bodies in Liberia claim to be autonomous—the Lutheran Church of Liberia since 1965 and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia since 2012. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia Synod, a smaller offshoot, also claims to be autonomous. However, based on what the word autonomous connotes, including being self-governing, intelligent, sentient, self-aware, thinking, feeling, governing independently, one could say that these churches are still dependent on their mission partners for financial support and structure their leadership and constitution after the pattern of their partners. For example, they still depend on their mission partners for support of their pastors' education, depend on their partners for doctrine, which is not based on the African perspective, and practice the western worship style. Instead of establishing a biblically sound and theologically correct African theology, the Lutheran churches in Liberia depend on western theology, which is not always appropriate for their context. Instead of autonomous, Lutheranism in Liberia is still dependent on their mission partners. Below are the discussions of some of the points listed above.

Doctrine

The Lutheran church bodies in Liberia largely reflect the doctrine of the churches from which they began. What follows is an examination of each church body and their doctrine.

The Lutheran Church in Liberia

The Lutheran Church in Liberia is similar to her international partner, the ELCA in doctrinal practices. Doctrinally, the Lutheran Church in Liberia holds to ten great words that show who she is: Apostolic, Evangelical, Biblical, Sacramental, Confessional, Catholic, Ecumenical, Liturgical, Congregational, and Historical. Schmalenberger uses these ten words to

describe who Lutherans are:

The first word is Apostolic. This means that, the origin of the church is in the apostles and their tradition, practices, and faith statements. The second word is Evangelical. This means that we aggressively share the Good News and invite others. It means that one of the primary responsibilities of a Lutheran Christian is to invite the unchurched people to be baptized and to become a part of the family of believers. We see it as a responsibility of every member of the congregation to be an evangelist. He added that our belief about God is called a theology of the cross. We do not hammer away at people with questions like, “Are you saved, brother?” Instead we invite people to join us around the foot of the cross and enjoy the forgiveness that comes from it, which we all need. The third word is Biblical. This means that the basis of all our beliefs is the Bible. It is the final authority for all we do. We are not “Biblical Literalists.” That is, we don’t insist that the Bible dropped from heaven to us in its King James version. We don’t worship the Bible, but, rather, the Christ whom it reveals. We see the book as written by inspired people, but still humans, who were subject to error. We study God’s word; we teach God’s word throughout all of the parish education program and we try to follow our practice of ethics in the world. We are also Sacramental. We Lutheran Christians have only two sacraments in our church. Baptism is the way God adopts us into his family and gives us our second birth. Communion is the second sacrament and is the celebration of our membership in his family and his real presence with us now. We believe that a sacrament is something God does to and for us. The fifth word is Confessional. This simply means that we have written documents which state what we believe, and we hold them to be very important. The Bible is the first and foremost document that reveals what we believe. We have three creeds, a couple catechisms, and a primary document, called the Augsburg Confession, which was written in 1530. We are Catholic. This word means not that we are of a particular denomination, but that we believe we are a part of one, universal Christian church around the world. We hold to one baptism which is valid among all legitimate families of God. Through it we are baptized into the church catholic, or universal. We are also Ecumenical. This means that we recognize most other denominations, as well as our own, as God’s legitimate daughters and sons. There are few exceptions to this—cults such as the way, the unification church, and the Mormons. We see the Holy Spirit manifesting herself in many different denominations of God’s people. It is a rather beautiful thing that our needs for worship can be fulfilled in a variety of ways from the very formal to the very informal. All, nevertheless, are God’s people responding to His love and grace. We recognize each other’s baptism; we recognize each other’s worship experiences as legitimate; we recognize that this makes us actual brothers and sisters in God’s family. We are liturgical. Liturgical actually means the work of the people. We look upon it as a label of the kind of worship service we offer. We are Congregational. We Lutherans are congregational in this country. This means that the majority vote of the local congregation has the final authority of what will be the decisions of that congregation. The last word is Historical. This means that we are the church of the 16th century Reformation, and we see ourselves as always a reforming church in

every age. It means we continually change so that we might be the most effective witness for justice, peace, and the presence of God in the community in any age.¹

It is good to note that some of these ten words are not doctrinal, but rather practices of the church. But they are listed under doctrine because in an interview with the special assistance of the Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Liberia on May 4, 2019, he stated that this is the belief of the Lutheran church in Liberia. The Lutheran Church in Liberia recognizes two sacraments, namely Baptism and Lord's Supper. We are told that even though they marry, bury, confirm and have confession, but these are not considered sacraments. The Lutheran Church of Liberia believes that through baptism God forgives sins and delivers from death. To this Schmalenberger writes:

Baptism is our new birth. First we are born into the world from conception by two human parents. That is where we get our family name, and is when we become a part of—an addition to—the human race. At baptism, we are reborn (born Again) into a new family with heavenly Father. So then we get our Christian name.²

The Lutheran Church in Liberia also believes that the Lord's Supper is a sacrament and a means of grace. They say they are not like the Reformed churches that have a tradition that says it is a memorial feast. The Lutheran Church in Liberia believes in the Real Presence when it comes to the Lord's Supper. They say the bread is the Body of Christ and the wine is the Blood of Christ. To this we read Schmalenberger:

We Lutheran Christians call our idea about communion “The Real Presence.” We believe the bread and wine actually stay bread and wine. However, we are confident Christ is really present in that bread and wine. That is, we are sure that when we take the bread and wine into our bodies, we are actually allowing that bread and wine to carry Christ's presence into our body and into our fellowship of communion.³

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of

¹ Jerry L. Schmalenberger, *Lutheran Christians and Their Beliefs* (Lima, Ohio: C.S.S., 1984), 1–6.

² Schmalenberger, *Lutheran Christians and Their Beliefs*, 8, 9.

³ Schmalenberger, *Lutheran Christians and Their Beliefs*, 15.

Liberia Synod are like their oversea partners in doctrinal practices. The ELCL states that she is a confessional church like her mission partner the LCMS, and thus upholds the Book of Concord as her doctrinal book. This is to say that statements of the Augsburg Confession, the Large and Small Catechisms are fully upheld as doctrine by the ELCL. The ELCL believes that justification comes from God by divine grace alone, through faith, on account of Christ alone. Christ is the focus of the entire Holy Scripture and that faith in him alone leads to eternal salvation. The ELCL abnegates any effort to ascribe salvation to anything other than the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To this we read in the Smalcald Article part II of the Book of Concord:

That Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, “was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification” and he alone is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”; and “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” furthermore, “All have sinned,” and “they are now justified without merit by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ... by his blood.”⁴

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia also holds that there are three Means of Grace, namely the Word (Written and preached) and the Sacraments (Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper). Through these the Holy Spirit gives the gift of God’s grace, works faith in the believer’s life, works forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ’s death on the cross, and grants eternal life and salvation to the believer. The ELCL holds a position that the sacraments were instituted by Christ Jesus that combines a promise in God’s word with the physical elements (water, bread and wine). In lines with the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the ELCL also accept that Confession and Absolution is called a sacrament. The ELCL accepts this because it was instituted by Christ and has his promise of grace, even though it is not connected to a physical element. The ELCL includes in her worship services a time of confession and absolution. It has been taught to members that confession has two parts: First that we confess our sins, and then we

⁴ Smalcald Articles 2, II, 1–3 in Kolb, Robert and Wengert, Timothy J., eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000). 301

receive forgiveness from the pastor as it is from God Himself.

Like her partner the LCMS, the ELCL believes that in the doctrine of the sacramental union, there is the Real Presence: the Body and the Blood of Christ are truly present in, with, and under the elements of bread and wine. It is held that the bread and wine in the Supper are Christ's true body and blood. To this we read in the Book of Concord: "concerning the Lord's Supper it is taught that the true body and blood of Christ are truly present under the form of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper and are distributed and received there. Rejected, therefore, is also the contrary teaching."⁵

The ELCL also believes and teaches that the Holy Scripture has two central teachings—the Law and the Gospel. The law is what the Bible demands us to do and not to do in order to gain salvation. But because we have a bound will, that is to sin, it is impossible for humankind to completely obey the law. Thus, the Law implies inexcusable consequences of God's wrath, judgement and damnation. On the other hand, the Gospel is the promise of free salvation from God to sinners. The Gospel saves. Both the law and the gospel are necessary gifts from God. The Law shows us our sins and points us to the gospel in which the forgiveness of sin is promised because of the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Thus, we read in the in the Book of Concord:

Here we maintain that the law was given by God, in the first place, to curb sin by means of the threat and terror of punishment and also by means of the promise and offer of grace and favor. All of this failed because of the evil that sin worked in humankind. Some, who are enemies of the law because it prohibits what they want to do and commands what they do not want to do, became worse because of it. On account of this, insofar as they are not restrained by punishment, they act against the law even more than before. These are the coarse, evil people who do evil whenever they have an opportunity. Others become blind and presumptuous, imagining that they can and do keep the law by their own powers (as has just been said above about the scholastic theologians). This attitude produces hypocrites and false saints.

⁵ Ap X, 1, 2 in Kolb and Wengert, 184.

The foremost office or power of the law is that it reveals inherited sin and its fruits. It shows human beings into what utter depths their nature has fallen and how completely corrupt it is. The law must say to them that they neither have no respect any god or that they worship foreign gods. This is something that they would not have believed before without the law. Thus they are terrified, humbled, despondent, and despairing. They anxiously desire help but do not know where to find it; they start to become enemies of God, to murmur, etc. This is what is meant by Romans 4:15: “The law brings wrath,”⁸² and Romans 5:20, “Sin becomes greater through the law.”

The New Testament retains this office of the law and teaches it, as Paul does and says, in Romans 1:18: “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all” people. Also Romans 3:19–20: “So that ... the whole world may be held accountable to God” and “no human being will be justified in his sight”; and Christ says in John 16:8: the Holy Spirit “will convict the world of sin.”⁸⁴

Now this is the thunderbolt of God, by means of which he destroys both the open sinner and the false saint and allows no one to be right but drives the whole lot of them into terror and despair. This is the hammer of which Jeremiah speaks: “My word is a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces” Jer. 23:29. This is not “active contrition,”⁸⁶ a contrived remorse, but “passive contrition,” true affliction of the heart, suffering, and the pain of death.

This is really what it means to begin true repentance. Here a person must listen to a judgment such as this: “You are all of no account—whether you appear publicly to be sinners or saints. You must all become something different from what you are now and act in a different way, no matter who you are now and what you do. You may be as great, wise, powerful, and holy as you could want, but here no one is righteous, etc.”

To this office of the law, however, the New Testament immediately adds the consoling promise of grace through the gospel. This we should believe. As Christ says in Mark 1:15: “Repent, and believe in the good news.” This is the same as, “Become and act otherwise, and believe my promise.” Even before Jesus, John the Baptizer was called a preacher of repentance—but for the purpose of the forgiveness of sins. That is, John was to convict them all and turn them into sinners, so that they would know how they stood before God and would recognize themselves as lost people. In this way they were to be prepared for the Lord to receive grace, to await and accept from him forgiveness of sins. Jesus himself says in Luke 24:47: “You must preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in my name to the whole world.”

But where the law exercises such an office alone, without the addition of the gospel, there is death and hell, and the human creature must despair, like Saul and Judas. As St. Paul says: “The law kills through sin.” Moreover, the gospel does not give consolation and forgiveness in only one way—but rather through the Word, sacraments, and the like (as we shall hear), so that with God there is truly rich redemption from the great prison of sin (as Ps. 130:7–8 says).

Now we must compare the false penance of the sophists with true repentance, in order that they both might be better understood.

We now want to return to the gospel, which gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world (which is the proper function of the gospel); second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters.⁶

In this light, the ELCL holds that the Old Testament is important to the Christians' life in that it points us forward to the cross of Christ just as the New Testament points backward to the cross.

The ELCL holds that all false teachings contrary to Holy Scripture are of the anti-Christ and is opposed to the true Christian life. Consequently, she stands opposed to such teachings and its teachers.

Practices

Practices of churches in Liberia derive from their mission partner churches overseas and the context they find themselves. Some are dogmatic in their practices while others practice *syncretism*⁷ into their worship services and their Christian life. The African style of worship is always contemporary. Lutheran traditional worship has only a hint in most Liberian Lutheran worship. Instruments used by westerners are expensive for some of the Liberian Lutheran congregations. Some interior congregations can only raise up to US \$10.00 (Ten United States Dollars) for offering during a Sunday worship service. To this Jacobson and Aageson write:

Economic struggles exacerbated by globalization, the aftermath of Structural Adjustment Programs, and bad management of national economics all affect people's lives, and women and children bear the brunt. These circumstances ask for specific prayers, liturgies, songs, and litanies that are contextually African. I do not believe

⁶ SA III, 127, 128 in Kolb and Wengert, 319.

⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Kindle. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 110.

that the Lutheran Book of Worship, created for Lutherans with different needs in the United States, is adequate for the needs of the people of Africa. A future that does not seek to change this familiar scenario of mission churches runs the risk of diminishing the impact of the Lutheran churches in the lives of Africa communities.⁸

The LCL practices the liturgical pattern of worship after their establishing partner the ELCA. The LCL also practices some rites after her international partner such as the rite of marriage, burial of the dead, confession, ordination of pastors, confirmation. The Lutheran Church in Liberia employs an episcopal and congregational governance. The church has its episcopal head as bishop, while the congregation plays a central role in the decision making process. The church has a congregational governing also because congregation has the right and power to make decisions without central interference as long as it does not contradict the constitution of the LCL.

The ELCL practices many things after her mission partner, the LCMS. The pastors/clergy of the ELCL wear clericals, albs, and stole, which are sometimes referred to as ecclesiastical garments. This is purely a practice which had been copied from their mission partner. The order of worship is always a mixture of Western and African. For example, there is singing of loud African praise songs and drumming, which will have congregants to dance and sweat. Without this mixture, congregants are not going to be satisfied with the worship style. Thus, in every worship service of the ELCL, you will find contemporary and a traditional worship going on at the same time. The ELCL practices infant baptism which is based on Acts 2:38–39:

And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.’”

⁸ Alrand Jacobson and James Aageson, *The Future of Lutheranism in a Global Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 29.

The ELCL also rejects all secret societies such as the Poro and Sandi societies (these are also referred to as bush schools). They also reject the UBF, which is a secret cult in Liberia, the Freemasonry, and all other secret cults whose teachings are in conflict with the Holy Scriptures. To this we read in Eph. 5:11–12, “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.”

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia practices closed communion. It is always announced during the time of communion in their worship services, that “We have closed communion in that we believe that the bread and wine is the Body and Blood of Christ, and we do not serve cool aid water, but rather we serve wine and the Bible has taught us that if anyone eats or drinks without recognizing the Body and Blood of Christ, he/she eats and drinks condemnation unto himself/herself.” The ELCL does not allow pastors of other denominations to teach nor preach on her pulpits. However, few of her pastors preach in the pulpit of other denominations whenever they are called upon to do so. What you hear from these pastors is that “We have the truth, we need to share it with even the heretics when they call us to do so.”

Ecumenical Status

The ELCA states that because of the division that existed in the ninetieth century, there was a quest for unity in the Christian church by the twentieth century. Since God called he church of to be one, there should be unity in the Christian faith. God’s people need to be together and carry out their callings. To this we read from Rusch:

The twentieth century brought continuous, active, and official involvement of churches, including predecessors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in the quest to overcome Christian division and, by God’s Spirit, to express the visible unity of Christ’s people. The ecumenical movement needs to be seen as the stirring of

Christians under the Spirit's prompting to disclose to those around them God's call for the church to be one.⁹

The Lutheran Church in Liberia reflects the views of the ELCA in its ecumenical relationships. The Lutheran Church in Liberia believes that it is good to make apparent the unity given to God's people in living together in the love of Christ and living with other Christians of other denominations in prayer and action to express and preserve the unity which the Spirit gives. To this Harris writes:

As the church is local, national and global through her ecumenical attachments and interactions, the LCL has relationships with the following partner churches and mission body: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Church of Sweden, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Germany Danish Evangelical Mission. The Lutheran Church in Liberia also enjoys similar relationship with the following Christian bodies: (a) All African Conference, headquarters Nairobi, Kenya; (b) the World Council of Churches, headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland; (c) the Liberian Council of Churches, headquarters in Monrovia, Liberia; (d) the Lutheran World Federation, headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, and (e) the Lutheran communion in Central and West Africa with headquarters presently in Garoua, Cameroon.¹⁰

This shows that the Lutheran Church in Liberia is like her mission partner, the ELCA. The pursuit for ecumenism is of vital importance to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As we read in Rusch:

This ecumenical quest means more to the ELCA than the establishment of friendships among Christians of a sympathetic and tolerant understanding of other churches. This church lives by the unity that the Spirit of God gives. The ELCA is an expression of Lutheran unity in that it brings together three predecessor church bodies. It understands the joy and the challenge of the ecumenical adventure.¹¹

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia like her international partner, the LCMS, maintains her position as a confessional Lutheran body by giving prominence to the importance of full agreement in the Biblical teachings. Therefore, the ELCL is not associated with

⁹ William G. Rusch, *A Commentary on "Ecumenism: The Vision of the ELCA"* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 39.

¹⁰ Harris, *Come This Far By Faith*, 48.

¹¹ Rusch, *Commentary on "Ecumenism,"* 13, 14.

ecumenical organizations such as the Liberia Council of Churches (LCC), the Association of Evangelicals of Liberia (AEL), the World Council of Churches or the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). However, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia is member of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) which is made up of over 30 Lutheran churches worldwide that supports the confessional doctrines of the Bible and the Book of Concord.

The Difference between the Two Lutheran Groups in Liberia

If the two Lutheran groups are not observed carefully by their practices and doctrines, one may almost feel that they are the same. But it is good to note the difference between the two. The Lutheran Church in Liberia ordains women to the pastoral ministry; the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia does not ordain women to the pastoral ministry. The Lutheran Church in Liberia allows for other denominations to preach and teach on her pulpit, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia does not permit such. The Lutheran Church in Liberia is committed to all forms of ecumenisms, the Evangelical Lutheran church of Liberia seeks confessional and doctrinal unity. The Lutheran Church in Liberia has open communion, while the Evangelical Lutheran church of Liberia has closed communion. Finally, the Lutheran Church in Liberia holds the Book of Concord as a historical book, while the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia holds the Book of Concord as a doctrinal book. The two Lutheran bodies both have the same mixture of Western and African worship style.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FUTURE OF LUTHERANISM IN LIBERIA

There is a great future for the Lutheran churches in Liberia, but this future depends on how the church will conduct itself regarding the contemporary challenges such as marginalization of the poor who are not able to speak for themselves, helping the needy financially, and how well the church identifies herself with the people. In Liberia, the Lutheran church needs to identify with the people by helping to speak on their behalf to government authorities who are wrongly treating their fellow men. There are some who cannot afford to hire a lawyer for themselves. The church needs to take the lead for such people. The church needs to be the voice of the people wherever they are speechless. Liberia is often identified as one of the poorest countries in the world due to her fourteen years of brutal civil war. According to Jacobson and Aageson, “Poor people are marginalized, excluded, stigmatized, and they are voiceless. To be church is to be present with people in these circumstances, giving them hope for tomorrow and being their voice with those in authority.”¹

A thorough examination of Christianity in Liberia reveals that almost all members of all Christian denominations are living in two worlds—the world of tradition and the world of modernity. Lutheranism in Liberia is also caught between these two worlds. These two worlds, if understood rightly, can be of help for the future of Lutheranism in Liberia. If these two worlds are not rightly followed, it could cause the decline of Lutheranism in Liberia. Tradition cannot be more important than scripture; but traditions that are culturally appropriate and biblically sound should be incorporated into the church, which will bring growth and development for the church. Following the past traditions of the church by depending on others for her support will bring

¹ Jacobson and Aageson, *Future of Lutheranism*, 31.

decline to the future prospect of the church. One cannot have a good prospect of the church without looking at these two priorities. The church must have a theological future and a sociological future. The church's theological future involves having a seminary to train pastors and lay leaders for the church; while the church's sociological future involves day care schools, hospitals, agricultural programs, and other recreational activities run by the church. In this contemporary time, people are joyful with social activities.

In other words, what is the aim of the church; and what the church might look like in the future? Putting it another way again, what is the alternative. To this we read in Jacobson and Aageson,

For the church, then, trying to converse with her own future will always invite a look in two directions—that of theological priority, what the church should look like (telos), and that of sociological possibility, what the church might look like (Future—alternative).²

The church with a future is that church that has been taken over from missionaries and the nationals are in full control of almost all its undertakings. A church will remain dependent if it is still in the hands of mission partners. They will have to raise money from their home congregation(s) for the support of the mission church.

The Dependence Status of Lutheran Churches in Liberia on Mission Partners

Lutheranism in Liberia was started through missionary enterprise as observed in Chapter 1. Whetstone noted that, “Lutheranism was started in Liberia during the Nineteenth Century.”³ This is the period during which the freed slaves were taken back to their land of color. The churches have survived on the partners since their foundation. This is a disease that have killed most mission churches that have solely depended upon their mission partners for support. When the

² Jacobson and Aageson, *Future of Lutheranism*, 132.

³ Harold Vink Whetstone, *Lutheran Mission in Liberia* (Board of Foreign Missions of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1955).

partners leave, the churches closed. People usually ask, “How will we manage if the missionaries will leave?” I believe this is not the right question to be asked. The right question to be asked is, how will the church survive if the missionaries leave? Regarding the beginning of Christianity in Africa, Kanyoro (a Kenya and feminist theologian) writes:

Christianity in Africa is a direct result of foreign missionary endeavor with two major historical waves, one at the end of the fifteenth century and the other in the nineteenth century. The Lutheran churches made their way to Africa during the second wave, with the arrival of European and North America, missionaries.⁴

Every mission should aim to establish a strong church that will survive after the missionaries had left. Hodges states that “A convincing test of effective parenting happens to children after they leave home and are no longer dependent on their parents’ leadership.”⁵ The Lutheran churches in Liberia is a direct opposite of what Hodges described. The Lutheran churches in Liberia have depended upon their mission partners for support in all areas of ministry. The churches have depended on their mission partners in such that they have patterned everything such as writing of constitution, leadership structure, some worship styles, and even dress code, all copied from missionaries. The church wholly depends on her partner for all levels of support, including finances for all projects, buildings, social programs, and education programs. This is the way the dependency starts: when the missionary arrives, he starts the evangelism; after gathering few members, he establishes the congregation, firstly in the home of one of the members, then purchases land for the construction of a church building, hire workers for the construction, after the construction, he trains men for the work of the church, he then raises money to pay these men. To some extent, the missionary builds schools, hospitals, and much more. All the money for these projects is brought from the missionary’s home church. There is no contribution from the natives. There are some missionaries (I don’t know if this is a

⁴ Jacobson and Aageson, *Future of Lutheranism*, 27.

⁵ Hodges, *Indigenous Church Including Indigenous Church and the Missionary*, Kindle Edition.

mandate from back home) who do not even allow the natives to put in offerings. His feelings are that these people are poor and cannot afford to provide for themselves. Thus, he provides for them all that is needed to have the work moving. To this Hodges writes,

Here is a mission's agency, sincerely devoted to assuming a creditable share in world evangelism. Missionary candidates and funds are available for developing the field in question. Land is purchased, and extensive buildings erected—missionary homes, churches, schools, hospitals, dormitories, medical clinics and other outreaches. Workmen are hired, and provision is made for youth who enter school. When workers are trained, they are placed on salary with funds from the home office. The missionary, whose time and energies are fully occupied with the business of managing the vast community, anticipates that this will probably be his home for years to come, so he provides for the extras that make the plan comfortable and convenient.⁶

This makes the missionary the master of the establishment. He is then in control taking up all leadership roles. The natives are controlled by him because he has the finances. After many years of running the church in this manner, the natives start to feel the church is not self-governing and that they have nothing to contribute to their own church. The natives are feel that they are just been controlled by foreigners, and do not have any say in church matters.

The Transition of the Lutheran Churches from Dependence to Independence

The mission church cannot succeed in becoming an independent church if the mission partners stick to their ways of life and feel that the native has nothing to offer. The locals need to be involved fully so that they will bring in things that are culturally appropriate and biblically sound into the church that will make them feel that the church is within their context. Some culturally relevant things includes music, worship styles, and liturgy. From the history of the establishment of the Baptist church in Liberia, Baur tells us that, “The Baptist church did not make progress in Liberia because it looked down on the natives as inferior and felt they have

⁶ Hodges, *Indigenous Church Including Indigenous Church and the Missionary*, Kindle Edition

nothing to offer the church.”⁷

Proverbs 22:6 teaches, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it.” This portion of scripture can be applied to the beginning of the church established by the missionaries. The new converts needed to be trained not only in the spiritual areas of the ministry but also how the church can support itself when the missionaries leave. The church needs to make a transition from being a mission church to that of an indigenous church.

Shenk notes:

A fundamental problem of modern missions has been how to bring into existence a new church through an external agency in such a way the members of that church assume full responsibility for its life and witness rather than remaining dependent indefinitely on external agency.⁸

After the missionary leaves, the church needs to be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-expanding. Shenk observes, “The missionary must always keep before him the grand object of the foreign mission: ‘It is the raising up of a Native Church—self-supporting, self-governing, self-expending’.”⁹

Following the great commission of our Lord Jesus Christ, the missionaries came and established the church. It needed to have been clear to the missionaries that they would one day leave to go back home and that the church would be left in the hands of the natives who would have to manage the affairs of the church. Instead, the missionaries came and established the church, training the natives to be dependent while they were still around. This appeared to have been a good start, but they needed to prepare for a time of transition. In so doing, they needed to teach the natives to be independent, which would help the church to survive when they leave.

⁷ John Baur, *Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Africa* (Nairobi: Daughters of St. Paul, 1994), 113–14.

⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk, “Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn: A Special Relationship?,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (October 1981): 481.

⁹ Shenk Article, “Anderson and Venn,” 481

This is how Melvin Hodges puts it:

Assuming that the missionaries are in favor of following indigenous principles, the second step is to prepare the nationals for the changes to come. As missionaries, we are largely responsible for their viewpoint by training them to depend on us. We must now retrain them in independence and initiative.¹⁰

This transition can be made by the Lutheran Churches in Liberia. Lutheranism in Liberia must engage in a new trend of engaging themselves in raising their own finances for the support and up keep of the church, and set up their own leadership pattern. External support should be viewed as an added advantage instead of having it to be their primary source of support. This would result in the church being a self-supporting, self-governing, and self-expanding native church. Let me use a metaphor to illustrate this. Construction engineers when putting up a building, they first laid the foundation, then proceeded in raising up the walls; at a certain level, they build up scaffolding to assist them in raising up the walls to a roof level. After the walls reached up to roof level the scaffolding is then removed; this shows that the walls have been completed. In the same way in the establishment of the mission church, the mission partner(s) serve as the scaffolding for the church, enabling the completion of the construction of the building. The Native Church is represented by the walls of the church that have been made complete; the leaving of the missionary(ies) shows that the building has been completed which means the church is able to stand on her own not depending on outside support. This metaphor is read in the Shenk's article like this:

A mission was crowned with success only when a responsible church emerged. The missionary must always keep before him the grand object of a foreign mission: "It is the raising up of a Native Church—self-supporting, self-governing, self-extending." The Mission is the scaffolding; the Native Church is the edifice. The removal of the scaffolding is the proof that the building is completed. You will have achieved the greatest success when you have taught your converts to do without you, and can leave them, for fresh inroads into the 'regions beyond'.¹¹

¹⁰ Hodges, *Indigenous Church Including Indigenous Church and the Missionary*, Kindle Edition.

¹¹ Shenk Article, "Anderson and Venn," 381.

The church claiming to be autonomous, needs to be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-expanding. Thus, if Lutheranism in Liberia is autonomous, then a transition is to be made from dependency to independency. In this light, Lutheranism in Liberia needs to put in place ways and means such as teaching her members on Biblical giving, following the patterns laid up in the book of Acts, and the pattern followed by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 8. The members need to note that where your money and resources are there you can speak freely and make decisions. In so doing, the natives need to put their money into the work of the church. With this they can put their own money to use as they wish and can further extend in other areas as they wish to do so. With additional support from international partners, that can be looked at as added advantage for the development of the church. Lutheranism in Liberia needs not focus her attention on too much foreign money. Too much focus on foreign money cannot help a church to graduate from dependency. The church will continue to be dependent if she cannot raise her own funds to carry out her work. The development of the church should rest solely in the hands of the members. Hodges let us to know that:

A frequent hindrance to the development of the indigenous church is the introduction of outside funds into the structure of the work, resulting in a church that depends on foreign aid for its support and advancement. This weakens the spiritual and moral fiber of the church, kills the initiative of national believers, and dulls their sense of responsibility.¹²

The Role of the Natives in Having the Church to be Independent

The natives/indigenous have key role in having the church to be independent. The church cannot be successful in being independent if the natives will not play major role in bringing it to independence. The natives need to put in their resources, their talents, their time, and strength. They need to contribute to the welfare of the church. Just as they had been supporting other social organizations and their native societal organizations, they need now to transfer those

¹² Hodges, *Indigenous Church Including Indigenous Church*, Kindle Edition location 385.

support to the church. The responsibility for the development and support of any organization should rest on those who are members of that organization. To this it is written in the Shenk's article:

The people of Sierra Leone and Abeokuta [Yorubaland] must be taught that it is the law of Christ that His people should pay for their religious instruction and ordinances; that the primitive rule was one-tenth of their produce, and in sacrifices, first-fruits, and other offerings, a still further proportion.¹³

The natives are encouraged to give, even a little of whatever they get so that the church can be self-supported. It is the responsibility of the natives to cultivate the gospel that has been planted so that it will produce the native church. The church in Liberia needs to be like the soil in Liberia that does not need artificial fertilizers to grow crops. Whatever seed drops in the soil in Liberia, grows automatically. In like manner, Lutheranism in Liberia needs to be self-supported, self-governed, and self-extended by the natives. Shenk states that, "The native church should begin training and sending its own missionaries."¹⁴ The natives can engage in agricultural projects, run Christian day care schools, stage rallies, which will help them support the work of the church. The natives need to have their own seminary to train their pastors or cooperate in a culturally appropriate and locally supportable way by helping their pastors to learn their mother tongue so that they will be able to preach the gospel effectively. They need to focus mostly on the teaching of Christian stewardship focused on Christian giving. They need to note the importance of "giving from" rather "giving to." When we say "giving from," we mean one gives from all that God has blessed you with. This has nothing to do with the church saying, "We have a need and we want members to help fill in this need." On the other hand, "giving to" means giving when church calls on her members to fill a present church need. The church is well supported from giving from rather than giving to. It is good that wealthy church members make

¹³ Shenk, "Anderson and Venn," 482.

¹⁴ Shenk, "Anderson and Venn," 482.

some good donations while need has not yet arisen; it is also good that middle-earning church members make donations when the need has not yet arisen, and it is good the poor church members put in their widow's mite, such as offering their talents, time, and strength for the support of the church.

The Role of International Partner in Helping the Churches Become Independent

The international partner plays a major role in helping the church they have turned over to the natives to be independent. Mission partners, like parents who bring up their children to become responsible people, train their children to being self-supported, self-governing, and self-expanding, so that as they leave their parents, they are able to survival by themselves. In the same way, the missionaries should train the natives to be able to take good care of the church after they will have left.

Mission partners must not leave the mission church when it is not yet mature to take care of herself. That would be like parents sending away their premature child. The man that is independent today was never left alone early on when he was not yet ready to take up responsibilities. Rather, he was nurtured by his parents and was taught on how to be independent. The Shenk's article puts it this way:

We must not leave our infant churches too soon; we must not be occupied about them too long. A self-responsible church was not an isolated body. The withdrawal of the missionary did not sever ties with the Church universal. The church was under episcopal supervision from its early days and this continued whether or not the missionary was present. Through the bishop both an historical and temporal relationship was maintained with the universal church.

The young church was initially given the forms of church life brought by the missionary. As it increasingly gained in strength and self-reliance, it would evolve a national character.¹⁵

The mission needs to not stop her support abruptly, since this may result in hindrances to

¹⁵ Shenk, "Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn," 482-83.

the growth and expansion of the church they will have planted and left with the natives. If the natives do not have the know-how of maintaining the church such as the up keep of the building, finances for the up keep of church supplies and evangelism, the church may end up dying and many of the converts may end up going back to their old ways of life.

Missionaries wanting the church to become a native or independent church, are making the best decision for the church. But they need not immediately cut off all support and tell the natives that the church has now reached the stage of being self-supported, self-governing, and self-expanding. Instead, missionaries should allow the nationals adequate time to take up the initiative of being independent. The missionaries should then begin to train the nationals on how to up keep the church. To this we read from Hodges:

Some missionaries decide that the work should become indigenous, announce that the work is self-supporting from that time forward, and suddenly cut off all worker support. But the problem is greater than a worker's financial support. Initiative for evangelism and leadership must spring from within the national's own spirit and needs time to develop.¹⁶

The mission partners should train the natives in both the spiritual life and the physical life of the church, bringing them to maturity and carefully leading them to be self-reliant.

When some missionaries leave the church in the care of the natives show favoritism, which creates divisions in the church. They support one group that they have previously worked and leave out the other group. In this they will always try to raise support for one group and having the other group left out. Mission partners can help the church become independent by promoting unity among the natives—not favoring one group and leaving out the other(s). It is good that the mission work with one national body. There is a Liberian saying: “United we stand, but divided we fall.” This saying is very true. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia is suffering in this way today because of division. The church's progress has been slowed because of such division.

¹⁶ Hodges, *Indigenous Church and the Missionary*, Kinde Edition.

The mission needs to be able to speak with all of her home congregations not to support any congregation of her partner church that is yearning for division with her national church body. If this is addressed, the natives will be united and will work together for the growth and development of the National Church.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In conclusion, the establishment of Christian missions in Liberia was done through missionaries' efforts. As we read in Chapter Two, The Baptist Mission was the first that was established in 1822, followed by the Protestant Episcopal Mission, in 1830, and the Methodist Mission in 1832.

Lutheranism was established in the mid-nineteenth and the late twenty centuries. The first Lutheran body was established in 1860 and the second Lutheran body was established in 1978. Their two partners, the ELCA and the LCMS, had good intentions. They were very generous to their new converts because of the poor conditions they found them in. Instead of having the nationals to support the church, the missions supported, governed, and expanded the church. The new converts were not taught Christian giving. So, the mission was seen as the proper supporter of the church. This has made the process of transition to independence difficult. Many of those who started the church with the missionaries accused national leaders of pocketing funds claimed to be sent by mission partners. They say all works of the church was sponsored by the mission. They believed that the mission has not yet ceased their support from the church. Consequently, when they are told to support national budget, they feel that national leaders want to rob them because the mission partners are still supporting the works of the church.

However, some of the mission-established churches in Liberia have now become autonomous in a real sense. To name a few: the Baptist Church is now autonomous. She raises her own funds for the support of the church; and feels partner support is an added advantage for the support of the church. The Assembly of God Church is also one of the mission-established churches that has become autonomous. The United Methodist Church is also striving to be

autonomous. They are funding every project of their own. Their partner support has become an added advantage in that they are not waiting on the mission partners to send funds before carrying out projects. As an American man would state this maxim, "If a man always asked for fish, do not only give him/her fish, but teach him to fish." They were taught by their mission partners how to fish. The mission partner helped them to begin Christian day care schools in almost all of the counties in the Republic of Liberia where they have their congregations. They help them established an Ecumenical seminary where they have other denominations sending their pastors for theological studies. They also established a university that is helping them. Their Christian day care schools, their seminary and their university provide them money to run church projects. Notwithstanding, their partner still is of help to them. There are still many churches struggling to graduate from the stage of dependency; but for this study I limited myself in pointing at two, the Lutheran Church in Liberia and the Evangelical Lutheran church of Liberia.

As has been stated earlier, the Lutheran Church in Liberia claims to be autonomous since 1965, but we still see that almost all of her projects and activities are not carried out without her oversea partner's (ELCA) support. All of her social ministries such as hospitals, schools, counseling program, etc. are being sponsored by the ELCA. There is a decline in these ministries whenever the partner withdraws support. The partner sometimes tried to impose some of their Western will, such as homosexuality, on the Lutheran Church in Liberia which brought some tension between the ELCA and the LCL. Abruptly, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America withdrew her support from the Lutheran Church in Liberia because of her failure to accept the idea of homosexuality. This tension has caused one of the social ministries of the Lutheran Church in Liberia to collapse, the Trauma Healing and Reconciliation social ministry of the Lutheran Church in Liberia. Other social ministries, such as the health ministry (Phebe Hospital) has been turned over to the government of Liberia for management because the Lutheran Church

in Liberia could not afford to manage the hospital because of finances. From these, one can clearly see that the church is not entirely autonomous. The church is still dependent on her partner.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, which claims to be autonomous since 2002, is like the Lutheran Church in Liberia when it comes to this claim. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia still greatly depends on her mission partner, the LCMS, when it comes to support of most of her undertakings. Some social ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia have died down because of the withdrawal of partner's support. The Lutheran Malaria Initiative, which was responsible for malaria control and was run by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, has died down because the partner withdrew her support. This was a social ministry that was sponsored by the LCMS. The LCMS withdrew her support because of the lack of funds. In addition, many chapel construction projects came to a halt when the partner withdrew her support of roof funding. However, there are still few chapels being constructed and roofed by the natives

Consequently, Lutheranism in Liberia is struggling to transition from a mission church to an independent Church. An independent/indigenous church must be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-expanding. If a church establishes a social ministry and is not able to finance that ministry, with the result that the ministry has to be taken over by another entity, can such church claim to be self-supported? To be independent is to be self-supported. Having help and gifts from friends and others should be an added advantage but not be depended upon. The church cannot depend on outside funding to carry out her ministries and then claim to be independent. The ministries would be shut down if the outside funding is not received.

Transition can be made by the Lutheran Churches in Liberia if Lutheranism in Liberia can raise their own funds for the support and up-keep of the church, and set up their own leadership

pattern. External support should be seen as an added advantage instead of their primary source of support. In so doing, the church will grow to be a self-supporting, self-governing, and self-expanding native church. The church should be able to organize programs that will help her to raise funds for the support of the church. The church should teach her members Christian giving and that the members should practice Christian giving. Giving must not be based on situations that may arise, but rather, giving must be from whatever God has blessed a person with. To term this another way is that giving must not be based on “giving to” but rather giving must be based on “giving from.”

Recommendations

I recommend the following for possible considerations by Lutherans in Liberia and their mission partners in the United States of America:

- That the natives need to put in their resources, their talents, their time, and strength. By this I am not saying that the natives should do this through fear of the law, but through the motivation of the Gospel. Let their giving be from all that God has blessed them with and not always giving to need that arises. In other words, I am saying giving from what God has blessed you with should be more accepted than giving to situation(s) that arise in the church. The Bible teaches us that the Corinthians gave according to their means and even beyond their means (2 Cor. 8:3). The churches need to contribute to the welfare of the church. As they were in support of their social organizations and their native societal organizations, they now need to transfer those support to the church. The support of the church should rest on the members of the church who are achieving the benefits.
- That the natives will put in place a worship that will call for their African beats and as such, their congregations will not need expensive Western instruments.

- That members of the church will take seriously agricultural projects, such as cash crops, animal breeding, etc. that will bring about development of the church. As it is known in Liberia, agriculture is one of the fastest ways of getting wealthy. If the Lutheran churches in Liberia can undertake rice farming (rice is the staple food for Liberians), rubber farming, cocoa farming, chicken breeding, pigs breeding, one can imagine that within five years of productions, Lutheranism in Liberia will become grant giver to other Lutherans around the world.
- That Lutherans in Liberia, have all of their children attend their Christian day care school where Christian giving is taught to every grade level, so that the knowledge of Christian giving will be planted in the hearts of their children and they will grow up in the practice of Christian giving.
- That the partners will revisit their decisions of leaving the church when the indigenous were not yet properly trained and equipped to take care of themselves. Since they were taught by the establishing missionaries to be dependent, they need more teaching to take them from that state of dependency to being independent.
- That missionaries will stop playing political games between the natives which causes division among the natives and is serving as a hindrance to the growth and development of the church. Some of the missionaries are in the habit of painting some leaders of the National Church bad to their home congregations and presenting others to be good. This is bringing total division among the natives which has divided the church.
- That partners will help with grants to initiate agricultural projects. These grants will help the natives to shift from subsistence farming to merchandise farming. Partners can help with the purchase of farming equipment that will enable the natives to do merchandise farming.

- That the partners will work in collaboration with the natives to establish a confessional Lutheran seminary in Liberia where pastors will be trained for preaching Law and Gospel. Thus, pastors of Lutherans in Liberia will be able to make proper distinction between Law and Gospel.

Finally, I believe that if these recommendations are accepted and both partners and natives work toward them, Lutheranism will take a new shape in Liberia and that the church will no longer be dependent, but become an independent church.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alvin, Emmanuel. *Liberia: Art and Culture-The People and Tradition, History and Migration, The Liberia Civil War, Present Environment*. Alvinston, 2016.
- Baur, John. *Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Africa*. Nairobi: Daughters of St. Paul, 1994.
- Bolay, Amos. "Inaugural Speech: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia." Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, 2010.
- . "Inaugural Speech Extract." Christ Assembly Evangelical Lutheran Church, Monrovia: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, 2009, 3.
- . "President's Report to the Delegates on the Interim Period." Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, May 25, 2012. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, 11pp.
- Ciment, James. *Another America: The Story of Liberia and the Former Slaves Who Ruled It*. First Edition. New York: Hill and Wang, 2013.
- Constitution of the Republic of Liberia. Monrovia, 1847.
- Grenz, Stanley J., David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling. *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012. Kindle.
- Harris, Rt. Rev. Dr. Sumoward E. *Come This Far By Faith: Historical Perspective of 150 Years of Existence April 1860 to April 2010*. Monrovia: Lutheran Church of Liberia, 2010.
- Hodges, Melvin L. *The Indigenous Church and the Missionary*. Revised. South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009.
- . *Indigenous Church Including Indigenous Church and the Missionary*. Revised Edition. Springfield, MO: Gospel, 2009.
- Jacobson, Alrand, and James Aageson. *The Future of Lutheranism in a Global Context*. Augsburg Fortress, 2008.
- Jerry, Sampson. *Inside Liberia History and Crises Aftermath*, n.d.
- Kolb, Robert, and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000.
- Konrad, Allen, and Mary Lu Konrad. "Debriefing Report." Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia, 1978–1981. St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.
- Massachusetts Colonization Society. *American Colonization Society, and the Colony at Liberia*. USA: Peirce & Parker, 1831.

- Mueller, Donald H. "Life and Mission in Vahun, Liberia, Circa 1982." Debriefing. Missouri: Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, 1982. Concordia Historical Institute Archives.
- Otto, Elsie. *Lutherans In Liberia 1860–1960*. Iowa: United Lutheran Church Women and The Board of Foreign Missions of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1960.
- Payne, Roland J. *A Miracle of God's Grace: A History of the Lutheran Church in Liberia*. United States of America: Lutheran Church in Liberia, 2000.
- Rusch, William G. *A Commentary on "Ecumenism: The Vision of the ELCA."* Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1990.
- Schmalenberger, Jerry L. *Lutheran Christians and Their Beliefs*. Lima, OH: C. S. S., 1984.
- Shenk, Wilbert R. "Henry Vann's Instructions to Missionaries." *Missiology, An International Review* 5, no. 4 (October 1977).
- . "Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn: A Special Relationship?" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (October 1981), 5.
- Whetstone, Harold Vink. *Lutheran Mission in Liberia*. Hartford, CT: Board of Foreign Mission, 1955.