

**A MISSIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE
EVANGELIZATION OF THE MANO OF NORTHERN LIBERIA**

By

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare the work of this dissertation is original work and I have not previously in part or entirety submitted this work for any other qualification or degree. To the best of my knowledge, I have attributed credit to those whom it is due and have endeavored to produce a work of original thought and intent.

Signature: Timothy Earl Williams

Date: December 2014

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a missiological assessment of the evangelization of the Mano of Northern Liberia. The study considers the historical record of Liberia, the transmission of Christianity through the Americo-Liberian community, and the movement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to and through the Mano of Northern Liberia.

As a foundation, a theoretical and missiological framework of evangelization is explored on a biblical, theological, and social understanding. How does one measure the extent and evangelization? Definitions and theories are presented along with expressions of evangelization. In regards to transmission, what was the approach of the initiating missionaries? How and through what impetus did a transition occur to local agents? Understanding evangelization involves identifying the contextual process resulting in the community of God expressed as the local church.

This dissertation argues that the intent of the American Colonization Society and the immigrants who sailed to Liberia in 1822 was to establish a Christian presence in Africa that would serve as an impetus for evangelization of the continent. The Americo-Liberians, however, became entangled in a cultural Christianity that proved to be a barrier to evangelization of the indigenous people of the region. Other barriers included geographical isolation, the societal structure of governance, and the absence of a contextual witness. Sociological analysis is given to the all-inclusive nature and governance of the Poro Society which stymied the evangelization process.

This study explored the influencing factors towards evangelization of the Mano and Gio and the acceptance of the good news of Jesus Christ. The influencing factors included the collapse of the Liberian governmental structure, the empowerment of local agent through theological education, the role and necessity of leadership caused by the coup, and the subsequent diaspora of the Civil War. Over 50% of the Baptist Churches among the Mano and Gio were started after the coup in 1980 and during the civil war which lasted from 1989 – 2004.

This study utilized the methodology of qualitative researching through interviews, observations, and empirical surveys to evaluate the process of evangelization. The first gospel witness came to the Mano and Gio in 1926. The next fifty years of evangelization revolved around missionaries, mission stations, schools, and humanitarian enterprises. More recently, the Gospel has spread rapidly through the influence of contextual witness and local agents. The delimitations of the study focused on the role of Baptist Churches affiliated with Nimba Baptist Union. Prior to 1970, there were few indigenous led, linguistically Mano or Gio Baptist churches. Today, there are almost a hundred churches and missions affiliated with the Nimba Baptist Union, most started after the coup and during the war.

A crucial component of the study was to determine whether or not this was a contextual indigenous movement of evangelization. The evidence of such a movement is determined by the presence of churches in the local villages, acts of personal and community transformation associated with the church, and reproductive patterns in regards to leadership and church starting. The movement of evangelization was a collaborative effort of the missionaries and local agents facilitated by political, social, and spiritual transitions. On this basis, the study proposes an Interpretative Model of Evangelization to serve as a useful tool in attempting to understand how to interpret the extent of evangelization.

From this study, it is clear that evangelization is an imperfect process, but the movement towards contextualization of the gospel infuses deeper levels of transformation. As the Apostle Paul concluded in the *Acts of the Apostles*, the Gospel continued unhindered (Acts 28:31). The unhindered manner did not reflect the absence of barriers, but the onward movement propelled by the Holy Spirit, through proclamation of the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and by local empowerment through contextualization of methods, message, and leadership. The study is evaluative in nature and has implications for missiological strategy, cross-cultural understanding, and contextual methods of evangelization.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie proefskrif is 'n sendingkundige assessering van die evangelisasie van die Mano-stam in Noord-Liberië. Die studie ondersoek die geskrewe geskiedenis van Liberië, die oordrag van die Christendom deur die Amerikaans-Liberiese gemeenskap en die verspreiding van die evangelie van Jesus Christus aan en deur die Mano-stam van Noord-Liberië.

Om 'n grondslag vir die studie te lê, is 'n teoretiese en sendingkundige raamwerk vir evangelisasie ondersoek vanuit 'n Bybelse, teologiese en sosiale perspektief. Dit is gedoen deur die volgende vrae te beantwoord: Hoe meet 'n mens die reikwydte van evangelisasie? Definisies en beskrywings van, asook teorieë oor, evangelisasie word hiervoor aangebied. Wat was die benadering deur die aanvanklike sendelinge om die evangelie aan ander oor te dra? Hoe en deur watter impetus het oordrag na plaaslike agente plaasgevind? Om evangelisasie te verstaan, moet die kontekstuele proses geïdentifiseer word wat lei tot die gemeenskap van God, soos uitgedruk deur die plaaslike kerk.

In hierdie proefskrif word daar geargumenteer dat die oogmerk van die American Colonization Society en die immigrante wat in 1822 na Liberië gevaar het, was om 'n Christelike teenwoordigheid in Afrika te vestig wat sou dien as 'n impetus vir evangelisasie van die kontinent. Die Amerikaans-Libiërs het egter in 'n kulturele vorm van Christenskap verstrik geraak wat 'n hindernis gevorm het vir die verspreiding van die evangelie onder die inheemse bevolking van daardie streek. Ander hindernisse was geografiese isolasie, die gemeenskapstruktuur van die regering en die afwesigheid van 'n plaaslike getuie. Die allesomvattende aard en regering van die Poro-gemeenskap, wat die evangelisasieproses gestuit het, is gevolglik in hierdie studie geanaliseer.

Hierdie studie het verder die faktore ondersoek wat evangelisasie van die Mano- en Gio-stamme, asook hul aanvaarding van die blye boodskap van Jesus Christus, beïnvloed het. Hierdie faktore sluit in die ineenstorting van Liberië se regeringstruktuur, die bemagtiging van plaaslike agente deur teologiese opvoeding, die rol en noodsaaklikheid van leierskap wat deur die staatsgreep veroorsaak is en die diaspora na aanleiding van die burgeroorlog. Meer as 50% van die Baptistekerke onder die Mano- en Gio-stamme is gestig na die staatsgreep in 1980 en tydens die burgeroorlog wat van 1989 tot 2004 geduur het.

In hierdie studie is daar van kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodologie, deur middel van onderhoude, waarnemings en empiriese opnames, gebruik gemaak om die evangelisasieproses te evalueer. Die eerste evangeliese getuie het in 1926 die Mano- en Gio-stamme besoek. Vir vyftig jaar daarna het evangelisasie om sendelinge, sendelingstasies, skole en humanitêre inisiatiewe gewentel. Meer onlangs het die evangelie vinnig versprei as gevolg van die invloed van gekontekstualiseerde getuies en plaaslike agente.

Die afbakening van hierdie studie was om te fokus op die rol van die Baptistekerke wat met die Nimba Baptist Union geaffilieer is. Voor 1970 was daar min Baptistekerke wat deur mense van die inheemse bevolking gelei is en waar daar in Mano of Gio gepreek is. Vandag is daar amper 'n honderd kerke en sendinggenootskappe wat met die Nimba Baptist Union geaffilieer is. Meeste van hierdie kerke is na die staatsgreep en tydens die burgeroorlog gestig. 'n Belangrike komponent van die studie was om te bepaal of hierdie 'n kontekstuele, inheemse evangelisasiebeweging was. Bewyse van so 'n beweging sal wees die teenwoordigheid van kerke in plaaslike dorpieë, persoonlike en gemeenskapstransformasie wat met die kerk geassosieer word en reproducerende patrone met betrekking tot leierskap en kerkvestiging. Die evangelisasiebeweging was 'n samewerkingspoging tussen die sendelinge en plaaslike agente wat gefasiliteer is deur politieke, sosiale en geestelike oorgangstadiums. Op grond hiervan, stel die proefskrif 'n interpretatiewe model van

evangelisasie voor om te dien as 'n nuttige hulpmiddel om die omvang van evangelisasie te probeer verstaan.

Uit hierdie studie kan daar duidelik gesien word dat evangelisasie 'n onvolmaakte proses is, maar dat dieper vlakke van transformasie bewerkstellig kan word, namate die evangelie gekontekstualiseer word. Soos die apostel Paulus ook in die Handeling van die Apostels opmerk, het die verspreiding van die evangelie onverstoord (soos in Handeling 28:31) in Liberië voortgegaan. Dié onverstoorde wyse het egter nie die afwesigheid van hindernisse weerspieël nie en die voorwaartse beweging het plaasgevind danksy voortdrywing deur die Heilige Gees, deur die verkondiging van die blye boodskap van die evangelie van Jesus Christus, en as gevolg van plaaslike bemagtiging deur middel van die kontekstualisering van metodes, die boodskap en leierskap. Hierdie studie was evaluerend van aard en hou gevolge in vir die bewerkstelling van sendingkundige strategieë, transkulturele begrip en kontekstuele evangelisasiemetodes.

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*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that believing you may have life in His name.*
(John 20:31)

First and foremost, deepest gratitude is extended to Almighty God who is my sustainer, refuge, and peace. It is through Him that all things are accomplished and He alone is worthy of praise. To God be the glory!

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My inspiration for this dissertation is from my Mother and Father, Earl and Jane Williams. They left home in 1968 to move to Liberia to serve as missionaries among the Mano and Gio of Liberia. They invested themselves to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to those who had not yet heard the good news. I am inspired by their Christ-like faithfulness in ministry and their deep love for one another and others. During the course of this dissertation, both of my parents developed Alzheimer's disease. They will not be able to read or be aware of the finished project, but I hope that my calling to follow Christ is a testimony of their amazing life and witness.

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This work is dedicated to my mother and father who gave their life to proclaim the good news in Yekepa and the surrounding region, so that the Mano and Gio of Northern Liberia would hear and know the Good News of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many witnesses will testify of your faithfulness to the glory of God.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACS	American Colonization Society
BBC	British Broadcasting Company
BWA	Baptist World Alliance
CDC	Coalition for Democratic Change
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency of the United States
DALITA	Dan Literacy and Translation Association
ECOWOS	Economic Community of West African States
ECOMOG	Economic Community Monitoring Group (military)
ELWA	Radio Station of the Sudan Interior Mission agency
FMB	Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HAE	Harvard African Expedition (1926-1927)
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
ICOWE	International Congress on World Evangelization
IMB	International Mission Board was previously FMB
LAMCO	Liberian American-Swedish Mining Company
LBMEC	Liberian Baptist Missionary and Education Convention
LBNDL	Liberia Baptist Native Direct Conference
LIM	Liberian Inland Church and Mission
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NDPL	National Democratic Party of Liberia
NIV	New International Version of the Bible
NKJV	New King James Version of the Bible
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
PRC	People's Redemption Council

SIM	Sudan Interior Mission
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
TEE	Theological Education by Extension
TWP	True Whig Party
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement of Liberia
UNIMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UP	Unity Party
US	United States of America

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE

1.1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The introductory chapter of the dissertation summarizes the thesis, delineates the motivating factors, and considers the background pertinent to the research question. A theoretical and missiological framework of evangelization is introduced as foundational to the research, followed by a discussion of the utilized methodological approach. The chapter concludes with a summary of each chapter of the dissertation.

This research is a missiological assessment of the extent of evangelization of the Mano people of Northern Liberia and considers the question: *What influencing factors have led to a movement towards evangelization of the Mano of Northern Liberia and to what extent have they been evangelized? How have the Mano and Gio responded to the evangelization process?*¹

This dissertation explores the barriers, influencing factors, and sociological realities that impacted both the resistance to the Gospel and the movement towards acceptance of the good news of Jesus Christ by the Mano and Gio. The research is evaluative in nature and considers the conceptual framework of evangelization as well as theoretical arguments toward contextualization. This research considers implications for missiological strategy, cross-cultural understanding, and contextual methods of evangelization, concluding with an evaluation of the missiological observations.

¹Using the language and thoughts in *Qualitative Researching*, this dissertation seeks to solve the intellectual puzzle (Mason 2002:17-18) of how the Gospel came to be known among the Mano and Gio and how they received it. From an epistemological position (:16), one can attempt to know the history, barriers, transmission, and influencing factors of how the Gospel moved through the cultural maze of the history and people of Liberia. As evangelization occurred, one can uncover ontologically, the effects or impact (:14) of evangelization by qualitatively measuring beliefs, attitudes, behavior, perceptions and interpretations of what has been received. This research question engages historical context and sociological realities with the merging of quantitative and qualitative empirical research of the evangelization of the Mano and Gio.

1.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

The Republic of Liberia was borne out of the initiative of a philanthropic organization, the American Colonization Society (ACS), beginning with the arrival of freed slaves in 1822 from the United States of America (Clifford 1971:22). The immigrants arrived to the coastal region of West Africa now known as The Republic of Liberia, but were preceded by others referred to as indigenous people of Liberia. This terminology identifies those who came to Liberia prior to the founding of the Republic. The immigrants who came from the United States (US) brought with them a Christianity that became intertwined in a way of life as a cultural Christianity.² A major analysis of the research considers how cultural Christianity positioned itself as a barrier to evangelization toward the indigenous of Liberia. This barrier is demonstrated in chapter three in the historical narrative and in chapter four regarding the development of Christianity in Liberia. These chapters establish the narrative of the blending of church, politics, and civilization in the formation of a nation. This political and religious dualism impacted evangelization in a detrimental manner.

In *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch (2011:305-306) discussed the idea of nationalism and Manifest Destiny as intertwined towards a culturally driven Christianity. The presented theory was that the missionary enterprise proceeded with an assumption of cultural superiority paired with a notion of being God's chosen people to proclaim good news to the world. This pairing led to a coherence in religion and government that contributed to the notion of Manifest Destiny.³

²Carroll (2001:xvi). Thomas Reeves argues that Christianity in America tends to be convenient, upbeat, easy, and compatible. Culture overwhelms faith, producing a cultural deviation of Christianity. Carroll states that this definition is only partially accurate as many Christians are sincere and devoted in faith. Cultural Christianity may represent both Christians and non-Christians who function in a setting that minimizes the expectations of faith in favor of cultural practices. This was reflective of the cultural Christianity in regards to the practices of the Americo-Liberians.

³Bosch (2011:305) described Manifest Destiny as a historically recent phenomenon and a product of nationalism. Manifest Destiny comes from the notion that people see themselves as the standard-bearer of taking the Gospel to the end of the earth, while embracing a sense of cultural superiority. He also argues that there was an organic link between colonialism and manifest destiny. Liberia presents a unique representation of this phenomenon because they were never colonized by a European nation.

A foundational tenant of this research establishes that the cultural Christianity and Manifest Destiny exhibited in Liberia was a unique brand and a coherence that impacted evangelization. The detailed historical narrative of Liberia (chapter three) and the establishment of Christianity (chapter four) are necessary components to understanding evangelization of the Mano and Gio. The historical developments of Liberia both prevented and then facilitated the flow of the Gospel.

Liberia was one of two nations in Africa never colonized, nor were the missionaries from colonizing nations; most came from the US and Canada. In African studies, colonial expansion mentality is often assumed, but in Liberia that is an inaccurate assumption. Many of the missionaries and evangelists to Liberia would have been anti-imperialists who hoped for an independent nation and who saw independence as an opportunity towards indigenous evangelization. Norman Etherington described this nuance in *Social Theory and the Study of Christian Missions in Africa*.⁴

The Gospel came to Liberia with the freed slaves. The leaders of the venture came with both a feeling of superiority and with a sense of a responsibility to evangelize what they would have referred to as the heathens, pagans, natives, or tribes.⁵ This kind of evangelization would have been spiritual in nature, but assumed a certain level of civilizing. This was consistent with how Bosch described missions in the wake of the enlightenment. He stated that the church tended to view the Kingdom of God as “...the crown of the steady progress of Christianity” (Bosch 2011:342).

⁴Etherington (1977:33) stated that social theory must take into account missionary background, beliefs, and strategies. The missionaries of Liberia cannot automatically be associated with the colonial expansion mentality of European missionaries. Liberia was a unique missionary context. Studies of this nature in missiology should be “longitudinal, comparative, and interdisciplinary, but formidable obstacles stand in the way.” He stated that anthropologists prefer traditional societies uncontaminated by outside influences and they are hesitant to unravel the complexities of the interaction of missionary and local agents. Other theorists lack the experience in religious history, contextualization, and linguistics to engage the process. A contribution of this research is that it engages the topic at precisely this complicated and complex point of departure.

⁵Many of these stated terms would be considered to be very inappropriate in current discourse; however, they were quite common in literature on the subjects during colonial expansion. This reflected an attitude of superiority of culture and often led to methodologies that imposed cultural practices, standards, and values as though they were equivalent to the missionary mandate.

In the course of time, nationalism took center stage and evangelization was marginalized. This shift of priority led to a cultural Christianity which became a hindrance to evangelization rather than a proponent of proclamation. *A Century of Survival* described cultural Christianity of the Americo-Liberians in this way: “It is fashionable on Sunday and on State occasions to turn out in high hats, canes, and long tail coats. Although Americo-Liberians are great church goers, many are sexually promiscuous and have children by numerous concubines. Americo-Liberians disdain manual labor. Officials walk down the streets of Monrovia followed by ‘*small boys*’⁶ carrying their briefcases” (Buell 1947:7).

Buell’s quote may be considered a pejorative statement shaded by the author’s own cultural perspective, but his observations spoke to an emerging cultural Christianity where to be Liberian was to be Christian. This cultural identification was ethnically associated with Americo-Liberians and alienated indigenous Liberians both politically and religiously. The effects of this cultural identification have been visible politically, socially, and religiously throughout Liberian history.

An equally significant barrier of evangelization was the societal structure of the Poro Society that existed among the Mano and to a lesser degree, the Gio. Understanding the all-inclusive nature of the Poro Society was important to evaluating the evangelization process. Wonbenyakeh (May 2009)⁷ and Gbengan (June 2011)⁸ stated that the Poro Society was the greatest barrier towards evangelizing the Mano. John Apeh (1989:1-2) theoretically affirmed this perspective in his explanation that the understanding of social structure is critical to evangelization.

⁶“*Small boy*” was a common term for an adolescent male who functioned as a servant or courier and implied a lower status. The son of elite would not be referred to as a small boy. The term is still widely used and still carries the same meaning.

⁷Moses Wonbenyakeh is a key leader of the Baptist work of the Mano and Gio. He has served as a church planter, evangelist, and pastor, as well the coordinator of the Nimba Baptist Union. Wonbenyakeh has been described as the most significant catalyst for church starting among Baptist Churches in the region (Williams, September 2010).

⁸Eleazar Gbengan is a professor at the African Bible College in Yekepa. He is a leader in the establishment and growth of the Christian Church Fellowships throughout the region and has a missiological mindset in the areas of evangelization, Christian unity, and social responsibility.

This research identified five influencing factors towards evangelization of the Mano including local leadership, missionary influence, theological education, the Liberian Civil War, and the movement of the Holy Spirit. The quantitative analysis demonstrated that significant growth took place in the number of churches started during the civil war. Quantitative research sampled churches in Lower and Upper Nimba County and concluded that 46.5% of the identified Baptist churches (see 9.1 and 9.2) were started after the civil conflict began in 1989. The absence of a missionary presence affirmed the indigenous nature of the growth and evangelization. Enoch Wan (2003:1) discussed two related missiological trends exhibited in diaspora which will be considered in more depth: The emergence of mission opportunities and the potential in mission participation.

1.3 RESEARCH MOTIVATION

This research was undertaken because of the interest in the significant movement towards evangelization of the Mano and Gio over the last thirty years. This growth is demonstrated in the statistical number of churches started in that period and specifically, during the extended period of the civil war (1989-2004),⁹ but also in the qualitative analysis¹⁰ of the contextual transformation. The qualitative analysis based on observations, interviews, and surveys revealed dynamic patterns, expressions, and activities that were the result of contextualization of the Gospel.

The term evangelization has generally been used to identify a process of evangelism that happens in a particular region or group of people. A foundational component to

⁹Appendices 9.1 and 9.2 represent the collected data of the identified Churches in Upper and Lower Nimba among the Mano and Gio who are affiliated with the Nimba Baptist Union. The number does not constitute all churches, only those that were identified and verified with statistical information. The identified churches represented 60 of the approximately 100 churches, missions, and new church starts. This information was compiled by Moses Wonbenyakeh and Tim Williams.

¹⁰The qualitative analysis of this research revolves around interviews and the conversion narratives that speak to transformational impact of evangelization, specifically addressing the research question of how the Mano and Gio responded to evangelization. Qualitative interviewing generally involves in-depth, semi-structured, and loose forms of interviewing and is an interactional exchange of dialogue. In qualitative researching, one does not necessarily have sequenced script, but may prefer a fluid and flexible structure that can expose and expound on revealed themes (Mason 2002:62).

this research is the establishment of a theoretical understanding of evangelization. This component is developed extensively in chapter two.

According to Bosch (2011:11), “Evangelism is the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe him, calling them to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sin, and inviting them to become living members of Christ’s earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit.” This definition is normative to this research however, this study contextualizes the definition by identifying expressions, bridges, and hermeneutical understanding of these theological concepts. For example, this research identified reconciliation (see 2.6.3) as a contextual bridge of evangelization to the Mano.

Evangelization is the response of the church to a fundamental calling to be Christ’s witness in humility and in dependence on the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to incarnate the good news of Jesus Christ (Guder 2000:206). The good news came to the Mano and Gio and they assumed the role of evangelizing agent as witness.

Another image describing the same process is of God establishing a new order in and through Jesus Christ. This new order is a new way in which God invites or calls people to renounce all alternatives and embrace the reality of a transformed relationship in Christ (Clayton 1998:42-44). Evangelization is an activity of God, empowered by the Spirit, facilitated by man, leading to a transformative community of followers of Christ. This research qualitatively identifies the transformative nature of the churches as a result of the evangelizing process.

The interest in studying evangelization was borne out of a personal missionary heritage. The parents of this researcher, Irvin Earl and Jane Ann Williams, served as missionaries to the Mano and Gio of Nimba County from 1968 – 1997. The Williams were among early Southern Baptist missionaries appointed to this region by the Foreign Mission Board (FMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Raised in

a missionary environment, this researcher developed a passion for learning about the movement of evangelization and the transformative activities of God.

This researcher was born in Louisiana, USA. At the age of two, his family moved to Liberia. For the next 20 years, he lived in this area and became familiar with the way of life, as well as the missionary and evangelism efforts. Though shaped by a family of Western values and culture, he was also contextually shaped and influenced by the Liberian culture. Impacted by life experiences, he committed himself to ministry and was ordained to the Gospel ministry in 1986 by Kingsville Baptist Church (SBC).

An appropriate question would be to consider whether or not a fair and balanced treatment of the subject can be given by a person with close personal connections and intrinsic biases towards the missionary perspective. While the question is certainly valid, Etherington (1977:31) argues that this kind of research is limited precisely because relatively few have an intimate enough knowledge of the people, culture, and disciplines to pursue studies of social, historical, and mission theories in these settings. This researcher brings to the discussion an understanding of the culture, a network of relationships, and a missiological disciplinary background.

The educational background and pastoral experience of this researcher provided an adequate framework for considering missiological implications of this study. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Religion from Louisiana College and received a Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. After degree completion, he served as the pastor of Cross Roads Baptist Church for eight years; a single staff rural Louisiana congregation.

His second ministerial assignment was a two-year stint with the International Mission Board (IMB) to serve as a church starting strategist in the Northwest Province of South Africa. This role was in partnership with the Baptist Union of South Africa. During this tenure, he enrolled at the University of Stellenbosch and completed the degree of Master of Theology with emphasis in Missiology in 2002.

Following completion of the South African assignment, he assumed the role of church starting coordinator for Western Canada. He was responsible for recruiting, mobilizing, and starting churches on behalf of the Canadian National Baptist Convention.¹¹ He also served as Professor of Church Starting at the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary in Cochrane, Alberta, responsible for teaching and research in the area of church starting and missions.

Most recently, this researcher assumed the current role of Senior Pastor of Williams Boulevard Baptist Church in Kenner, Louisiana, adjacent to the city of New Orleans. The church is a multi-ethnic, multi-racial Southern Baptist congregation with an approximate membership of 500. All of these assignments have contributed to a learning and motivation towards a greater understanding of evangelization.

1.4 RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

Indigenous groups such as the Mano live in academic anonymity. As a relatively small group of people in a less significant political arena, very little of the history, culture, politics, and faith has been recorded. Benjamin Dennis, an anthropologist who studied the neighboring Gbande, stated that the small size and anonymity of linguistic groups made it almost impossible to obtain study grants. Since these groups do not represent political problems, they are often overlooked in mainstream research. “There are few significant anthropological or sociological studies about any group in this area of Liberia or perhaps any area of the hinterland” (Dennis 1972:xiv). This is still representative of the limited literature on groups in Liberia and other West African countries and this research is a contribution in light of this reality.

This research contributes to a specific awareness of a particular group and a global awareness of the diversity of the peoples of the world. The narrative is theologically significant, demonstrating a contextual continuation of the movement of God, from

¹¹The Canadian National Baptist Convention was formerly the Canadian Convention of Southern Baptist, but recently incorporated a name change.

the day of Pentecost,¹² across geographical and cultural boundaries, to penetrate the hearts of people with good news. The *Gospel of Luke* referred to this good news in the birth of Christ. “Then the angel said: “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-12, NKJV).

The *Epworth Commentaries: The Gospel of Luke* (Lieu 1997:16) made a connection of the angels’ proclamation to the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6 that a child will be born to us. Jesus came to us; an inclusive term for all people. Should not the people of God reflect an inclusive Gospel? The inclusive song included glory and peace. Glory draws attention to the honor of God while peace is a reflection of what man experiences, apart from fear, in relationship with God. “Peace in the biblical tradition is not the absence of conflict, but wholeness in relationship between people and God, one another, and between all the created order.” Evangelization must bring to those who receive the message, a view towards God, but also of peace and goodwill to humanity. The vessel of peace is addressed in the theoretical framework (see 2.6.1).¹³

This study also considers the transformative role of the church in evangelization. The church impacted the local context in positive and transformative ways. This impact also included the role and engagement of women. Roberts (2006:185) stated that women often were a part of Christian movements and found a mitigating of the

¹²Guder (2000:206) makes reference to this process: “The Holy Spirit began the conversion of the church at Pentecost and has continued that conversion throughout the pilgrimage of God’s people from the first century up to now. The conversion of the church will be the continuing of the work of God’s Spirit until God completes the good work begun in Christ.”

¹³A distinction of this research is what Maluleke (1996:1) described as the distinction of the Gospel versus Christianity. In *Black and African Theologies in the New World Order*, Maluleke challenges proposals of Sanneh and Bediako that revolve around this distinction. This dissertation argues with Sanneh and Bediako who advocated that the Gospel is inclusive and unchanging for all people.

The inclusive language of Luke 2:10-12 of *all people* and Isaiah 9:6 *born to us* speak to a Gospel message that is timeless and contextually relevant. It does not come out of one culture and into another as one of superiority, but the same Gospel is encountered by each. Colonialism and Christianity as a cultural religious entity distorted the Gospel message, but culturally distorted transmission has been true in many settings. Sin and human frailties cause Christianity to be used inappropriately, but the transformative Gospel finds indigeneity in those who embrace the Gospel. This researcher disagrees with the conclusion of Maluleke (1996:1) who described this distinction as a fantastic dualism.

pressures of patriarchal societies. This was true in the Mano and Gio as women served in leadership roles, engaged the oppressive practices of the culture, and were women of faith and prayer. This is explored and interwoven throughout the narrative of this study.

The hope is that this study contributes to a greater awareness of the Mano and Gio, reflecting on the transformative, spiritually empowered journey of evangelization, and promoting a dialogue about the missiological processes of inculturation.¹⁴

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION

The general initiating question of this research: Why was Christianity able to be seen as a central part of what was referred to as a Christian nation, but unable to significantly penetrate many of the indigenous groups of Liberia? The specific question of this research: *What influencing factors have led to a movement towards evangelization of the Mano of Northern Liberia and to what extent have the Mano and Gio been evangelized? How have they responded?*¹⁵ At a communal level, has the evangelization resulted in contextually transformative communities? Evangelization, understood from a biblical perspective, is both an individual and a community commitment which all Christians are instructed to pursue (Mugambi 1989:13).

This research broadly considers evangelization, but focuses more narrowly the movement of evangelization of the Mano of Northern Liberia. The quantitative research measured the numerical growth of Baptist churches in the Nimba Baptist Union, while the qualitative interviewing measured responses and activities within the

¹⁴Inculturation is the incarnation of the Gospel into a culture (Luzbetak 1988:69) resulting in a mission community or church (Guder 2000:193). Bosch (2011:458) views missions as inculturation and identifies this as an important model of contextualization. This view holds that "...the Christian faith never exists except as translated into a culture." The Jesuits were significant as an early proponent of the concept which is routinely now accepted in Protestant circles. When one studies early liturgy and context, it is obvious that the faith was not seen through the lens of a universal church standard, but as a practice of the Greek, Roman, Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian, or any other local context. It was not until Constantine that religion began to presuppose the cultures from which it existed. This topic will be highlighted using the thoughts of Bosch and the ideas of the vernacularized translation from Sanneh.

same group. The Mano are the primary consideration, but realizing that the Mano and Gio are often seen as inseparable, they are both considered throughout. For clarification, this research identifies the similarities and differentiating characteristics of these two groups of people, but often considers the groups synonymously.

The research began with a quantitative position that almost all of the local led churches of Mano and Gio communities have been started since 1970 and especially those with local leadership in ethnically indigenous villages. Of 29 identified Baptist churches in Lower Nimba, only 7 were started before 1970. Of the 29 identified churches in Upper Nimba, only 4 were before 1970 and only 1 would have been considered a contextually Mano congregation.¹⁶ Currently, the total number of Baptist affiliated churches (not including Mid-Baptist Mission and Independent) would be estimated at about 100 churches, missions, and church starts.

Almost two-thirds¹⁷ of the identified Baptist churches were started after 1980 and the civil war (1989-2004). This research explores the correlation of evangelization to the political instability, civil war, and the transformative impact of the church in a time of crisis. This is discussed further in regards to evangelization and refuge (see 2.6.2). Bosch's mission paradigm theory¹⁸ provides a framework to explore the paradigm shift in the landscape of Liberia as the result of the coup. How did the various historical political shifts impact the changing mission history in Liberia?

The measurement of extent focused on the presence of churches rather than identifying numbers of conversion. Guder (2000:144-145) stated that evangelization

¹⁶A contextually Mano congregation refers to churches established in the village setting where Mano and Gio social structures are in place.

¹⁷Statistics of the identified Baptist Churches started after the coup in 1980 included Lower Nimba (51.7%) and Upper Nimba (82.7%).

¹⁸Lewis and Steyn (2003:101) engaged Bosch's mission paradigm theory to critique mission education in South Africa. This same theory could be used to evaluate the paradigm shifts of Liberia from a culturally Christian nation to one where religion and faith become the responsibility of the indigenous leaders by virtue of the coup. The transition from a paradigm in crisis to a new one emerges as a reconstruct that alter fundamentals and requires new methods, applications, and understanding. This paradigm shift is evaluated historically and sociologically in chapters three and four and is also viewed as a contributing factor to the evangelization of the Mano and Gio.

was better measured by churches than numerical numbers of converts. The movement of openness to Christianity in the Mano village represented a major shift of a people previously demonstrating great resistance to evangelization efforts. The presence of indigenous churches within a contextually Mano or Gio community and the observance of transformative impact reflect a greater depth of contextualization.

In the early years (1941) of missionary efforts, Missionary Tom Jackson described what he perceived as an extended movement of evangelization. “To complete our task, we must see this land dotted with churches of the saints, enabled by the Holy Spirit to carry on with the work of the Gospel by themselves” (Gautier 1995:18). From Jackson’s missiological perspective, missionary expansion was a common assumed outcome. The perception assumed an appearance similar to Western ideals of physical church buildings with steeples dotting the landscape. Mission stations, civilizing processes, and education were priorities. Jackson’s writings, however, also reflected a conviction of proclaiming the Gospel message. He embraced the concept of living among the people, learning the language, and translating the Scriptures in a contextually translatable manner. He understood that to proclaim required incarnation.

Denominationalism¹⁹ in Liberia was a product of the missionary enterprise and was a barrier of evangelization. This barrier is discussed in light of the chaos caused, but also juxtaposed against the context of the all-inclusive nature of the Poro Society. The context called for cooperation, but denominationalism created division. For the Mano and Gio, transformation reflects an inclusive church. The isolating presence of denomination flowed against the context of life (Gbengan, June 2011).

¹⁹Denominationalism has created a fractured church in Africa. This fracturing exists throughout the world, but is more apparent in Africa because it conflicts so starkly with the all-inclusive nature of many of the cultural and social structures such as an indigenous autonomous village. Denominationalism is discussed as a barrier (see 6.7) of evangelization. Kobia (2001:295) states in *Denominationalism in Africa* that ecumenism has had limited impact in unifying Africa’s fragmented church. This researcher would argue that one must not vie for the unifying of Africa’s church, but for the unifying within the inculturated context as Bosch (2011:458) explained of the early church. This research attempts to show that the local setting has been impacted by denominationalism, but has also been impacted by transformative unity resulting from contextual leadership.

The evangelization of the Mano and Gio people revolved around several key questions: What was the societal framework of the Mano and Gio and why did that structure function as a barrier? How did the evangelization process overcome the structure of the Poro Society? What aspects of worldview contributed to resistance to the Gospel and how did the Gospel message eventually engage their worldview? The evangelization of the Mano and Gio revealed that the impact of politics, community structure, cultural identification, and spiritual beliefs adversely affected evangelization, but those same functions served to empower when engaged contextually. Apeh (1989:1) stated that evangelizing agents “need to be sensitive to the social structure of his receptors.”

1.6 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The background of this study links the theology of evangelization (chapter two) with the development of the history of Liberia and Christianity (chapter three). This formula provides a framework for understanding the barriers and the influencing factors that led to the evangelization of the Mano and Gio in Liberia.

Sanneh (1993:74) employed a similar strategy exploring what he calls the two powerful currents that led to the awakening of communities and individuals towards a translating effect of the Scriptures. The two currents included the establishment of colonial rule and the missionary goal of establishing the spiritual Kingdom. He calls this the African crucible and argues that the antidote to colonialism was actually found in the freeing element of the Word of God engaged through vernacular translation. This study argues that the overthrow of the Liberian government in 1980 and the subsequent presence of indigenous Christianity had the same freeing effect of a ground-swell movement towards evangelization of the Mano and Gio. For Liberia, the freeing was not in the political arena (see discussions of Gifford in chapter four), but in the realm of cultural Christianity which had prevented evangelization.

This study focused specifically on the evangelization of the Mano of Liberia and to a lesser degree the Gio. Liberia has approximately 16 ethnically indigenous groups of people²⁰ in addition to the Americo-Liberians and the Congo. The various groupings have their own language. The people groups of Liberia are generally discussed in a collective context, but the specificity of this research is an important contribution.

The earliest converts among the Gio began around 1926, but were based around mission stations and dependent on a missionary presence. Initially, converts and churches among the Gio were more prevalent and receptive than among the Mano,²¹ but there was minimal evidence of an indigenous reproducing movement of churches similar to what has been taking place in recent years.

The life of the Mano revolved around secret societies. The societal structure was the most significant barrier to Christianity penetrating the indigenous village. Neither the governmental relationships nor the missionary enterprise effectively transcended that contextual divide. In the historical Mano tradition, the village chief had a governance role related to family, town, and community disputes, but significant issues were appealed to a tribunal of the Poro Society, centralizing control through the societies (Harley 1941:6). The evangelization of the Mano and Gio was a work of trial and error, beginning the first missionaries, but the political process was also slow and perilous because of the inability to penetrate the social structure.

An example from the limited writings on the evolving process of understanding the Mano and Gio would be *The Case of the Unreturned Goat* (Sevareid 1993:75). This deliberation was a legal case study to understand how the processes of the Mano and Gio functioned and were understood through specific legal renderings. The case was a cross cultural understanding of the legal evolution in the judicial system. Likewise,

²⁰*Liberia in Perspective*. 2010. [Online]. <http://fieldsupport.lingnet.org/products/cip/Liberia/liberia.pdf>.

²¹Gbengan (June 2011) indicated that this was because the Poro was strongest among the Mano and the Society structure, borrowed by the Gio, was generally a weaker version of the Poro Society.

this research observed transformation through evangelization while in the shifting dynamics of missionary influences, culture changes, and socio-political disputes.

Mano refers to a specific group of people living in Liberia on the border of the nations of Guinea and Cote D'Ivoire. In this study, Mano refers to the ethnicity of those within the border of Liberia unless otherwise indicated. *The Ethnologue Report: Languages of the World*²² identified the language of the Mano people as Mann. Other names used for the language or people included Maa, Mah, Mano, and Mawe.²³ The report indicated Mano as a Liberian language with 185 000 speakers and 71 000 in Guinea. The Mano form part of the Mande grouping in Liberia.²⁴

In contrast, *The Ethnologue Report* listed Dan²⁵ as a language of Cote D'Ivoire with smaller groups in Liberia and Guinea. Dan has been commonly referred to in Liberia as Gio and the language is spoken by 150 000 to 200 000 people. The Dan came out of the Mande grouping and was traditionally a warlike people with a famous warrior named Gio. The people in Liberia became known as the Gio, but they are aware of being the Dan, originating in Guinea and Mali (Hallihan 2011:21).

The Mano (Ma) and Gio (Dan) are separate groups of people and are often indistinguishable in the villages by outsiders, but are easily distinguishable among themselves. The Mano are closest to the Gio whom they often refer to as their *small brothers* (Zetterstrom 1976:16). This research provides collaboration of the few academic sources available on the Mano and Gio and attempted to add to that collection through anecdotal evidence, surveys, interviews, and observations.

²²*Enthologue Report*. [Online]. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=jct. (May 2009).

²³*Ethnologue Report*. [Online]. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=mev.

²⁴Partor. 1998. *The Significance of Cultural Naming Among the Mano Tribe of Liberia*. Nigeria.

1.7 CONCEPTUAL AND MISSIOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Building a healthy missiological understanding of evangelization requires key theological elements. This research explores the theological concepts of mission, proclamation, transformation, and community as central component. Evangelization must be measured or identified by the matured community of faith in transformation.

First, **mission** must be seen in light of the centrality of God or with an understanding of the concept *missio dei*. Mission is the activity of God, derived from the nature of God and shaped by the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Bosch 2011:339). This research considers the activity of God in relation to the life and church of the Mano and Gio. How do the Mano and Gio understand their conversion? The qualitative analysis of the conversion surveys provides a glimpse into a contextual understanding of the evangelization or mission(s) process. Mission is the activity of God, but missions considers the manners, ways, and means for which the Gospel came to and the extent to which it was received by the Mano and Gio. Evangelization flows out of the activity of God in and through the lives of people.

Bosch (2011:185) identified six historical paradigms of mission beginning with the apocalyptic paradigm of the church and concluding with the emerging ecumenical paradigm. Each of the paradigms reflected a broader sense of how the church viewed the mission or missions in the missionary process. *Transforming Mission* traces the mission history within the paradigms of history defined in a worldview schematic by Kung. This allows one to recognize and extrapolate the influences of particular periods on the missiological paradigm. In a similar fashion, this research establishes a historical framework of the nation and a contextual understanding of the development of Christianity in order to identify the flow of evangelization in context.

In the emerging paradigm, Bosch (2011:398-399) explores mission as the activity of God. In the past, mission has been variously interpreted as the activity of saving people from damnation, as civilizing people into a particular manner, or as an expansive activity of the church, denomination, or State. Now, however, mission is

being viewed in the context of the activity, work, or sending of God. In Bosch's view, then evangelization is the fulfilling work of the sending activity.

From the process of evangelization, which flows out of the activity of God, comes Christ's earthly community.²⁶ A mini-theory of the research is the question of whether conversion and Christian community has begun to take place among the Mano and Gio people and does that existence reflect a transformative activity of God. To be stated another way: Is the activity of God being embraced contextually and resulting in people and community transformation? Qualitative interviewing is necessary to consider Christ's earthly community through a contextual lens.

The contextualization of Christ's earthly community is demonstrated by the presence of local churches, individual and communal transformative activities, and ongoing evangelizing. To study this blending, one must utilize both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The transformation described is consistent with a paradigm change that takes place over time rather than a sudden switch as described by Lewis and Steyn (2003:101) and is based on a reconstruct within culture.

As the church is sent by God, **proclamation** must naturally take place. The death and resurrection of Christ were the presupposition for the mission to those who had not heard or believed. Matthew's Great Commission must be understood less as a command and more as proclamation (Vicedom 1965:41). Mission must not be reduced to a programmatic presentation concluding with a sinner's prayer, but a call to repentance that results in conversion. Calling toward conversion leads to engaging the activity of God resulting in personal and communal transformation.

In light of this reality, one must distinguish between mission as the activity of a Trinitarian God and of missions. Newbigin asserted that mission is the entire task for which the Church was sent into the world. Missions is the activities undertaken by

²⁶Bosch (2011:483) referred to the church as Christ's earthly communities. He stated that community is the primary bearer of mission. This dissertation recognized that the measurement of extent must focus on this community as the church is God's bearer of missions rather than individual conversion.

human activity to bring the Gospel to places where it is not heard and to create a Christ-centered presence in places with no such presence (Scherer 1994:20).²⁷

Bosch (2011:128) utilized various theologians to describe the views in regards to whether Paul's conversion on the Damascus Road experience was alteration, transformation, or conversion. Bosch argues against theologians such as Stendahl, who would regard the Damascus Road experience as exclusively toward his calling and not as a point of conversion. The researcher would affirm the third view of the conversion of Paul. Paul experienced a fundamental change in his perception of Christ and his understanding of salvation. This view was the basis of the conversion survey to identify characteristics of conversion.²⁸

How did proclamation happen among the Mano and was the message received? What role did missionaries and local agents assume in the proclamation process? What influencing factors led to receptivity? How did the civil war and diaspora create climate for receptivity? In spite of or because of the civil war, the growth of the church among the Mano and Gio seemed to be an emphatic answer of yes!

A framework of sending and proclaiming, empowered by the Holy Spirit, leads to personal transformation. The Holy Spirit initiates "action to evoke faith, enable response, and empower the mission of witness" (Guder 2000:65). The role of the Holy Spirit is discussed (see 7.7) in regards to the influencing factors towards evangelization. Evangelization cannot take place without the work of the Holy Spirit.

Transformation involves spiritual and personal change, but must also reflect a changing community. A contextual emphasis was to consider the formation of the communities of faith and observe how churches reflected a transformative presence in community. "This transforming impact is what the biblical images of salt, leaven, and light are all about" (Guder 2000:85). Four key transformational vessels were central

²⁷Scherer (1994). Chapter 2 of this compilation, *The Logic of Mission*, was written by Leslie Newbigin.

²⁸See the compiled thematic results of the Conversion Narrative surveys in the Appendix (9.3-9.9).

to the theoretical framework of how the message of Christ was transmitted to the Mano and Gio. The four vessels were peace, refuge, translation, and community. Can the process of evangelization be seen in light of these vessels? (See 2.6.1-4).

The conversion surveys and interviews revealed a glimpse of a greater narrative; the encounter of a people with a Holy God. The hermeneutical assumption is that people experienced transformation as the result of proclamation, the movement of the Holy Spirit, and the receptivity of one believing. During the interviews, one leader recounted the transformative story of his mother's salvation and how it affected his life and decision to follow Christ. The abbreviated story of his mother is as follows:

My mother was given to an older man as a child bride in the custom of the Mano. Through that unbalanced relationship, she was at times abused and mistreated. During her adolescence, she heard the Gospel message preached in a nearby town by a Liberia Inland missionary. The good news of Christ made a powerful impression on her life and she accepted the message and was converted. After her conversion, she fled to the nearby Christian mission in fear of reprisal. She was brought back several times, but eventually was able to stay and follow her heart in living life as a follower of Christ. I was born into a Christian home of a godly woman.

This leader's testimony of conversion flows from the story of his mother who taught the stories of the Bible. The story that he remembered as influential to his own salvation was of Queen Esther and Mordecai. He fondly recalled hearing the story through the old visual method of flannel graph images. Through that narrative, he came to the realization that he wanted to follow Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Today, he serves in key roles of church and denominational leadership. This process demonstrated the flow of the Gospel from the earliest days of witness.

Case studies, surveys, observations and interviews are interspersed to demonstrate that evangelization is the Gospel of Jesus Christ in transmission to people in need of salvation. The researcher contends that these narratives reflect the transformative message from the *Gospel of John*. "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it

more abundantly (John 10:10, NKJV). Jesus used triads as literary devices in the positive (way, truth, life) and in the negative (steal, kill, and to destroy). The hermeneutical assumption is that the implication of conversion was transformative, more than salvation or damnation. The Gospel phrase “more abundantly,” understood from the Greek means “that which goes way beyond necessity.” John points towards the transformative quality of the life in Christ (Borchert 1996:333). This basis for the conversion narratives anticipated uncovering patterns in the local context.

In understanding mission, proclamation, and transformation one must consider historical perspective, being cognizant of how people viewed and participated in mission. Missiological strategy and methodology can be an influencing factor or a resistance for evangelization. An example of this would be cultural reductionism, which happens when the culture takes the Gospel hostage, often when confronted with collaboration of power, wealth and influence (Guder 2000:194).

Reverend Lott Carey was on the initial journey to Liberia and led a group on the first ship to establish Providence Baptist Church. As a minister and early governor, Carey had as a stated goal to preach the Gospel to the (native) people of Liberia (Fitts 1978:18-19). This terminology reflected a paradigm where mission was seen as proclamation with a view towards civilizing. William Carey, the Father of modern Missions, viewed evangelization through a similar lens in the *Propagating of the Gospel among the Heathens* (Bosch 2011:286). William Carey went to India in 1793 and Lott Carey to Liberia in 1822, so a similar philosophy and terminology is evident.

This terminology is seen throughout the historical aspects and has often revealed an inherent danger of views of superiority and prejudice, but there must be a degree of restraint in applying labels, because semantics may mislead one into applying motives which do not always apply. Many missionaries fought for the poor, oppressed, and deprived, but were also a product of their time in language, philosophy, and understanding. To evaluate language in light of today’s understanding does not lend itself to accurate understanding of historical missions.

Basic information and statistics about the Mano and Gio were gathered from the Joshua Project²⁹ which is an initiative that highlights ethnicities of the world with the fewest followers of Jesus Christ. The Joshua Project contends that information and statistical data of people groups is critical for understanding and fulfilling the Great Commission. The Joshua Project articulates a purpose statement that the Gospel must be preached to all nations as a prerequisite to the Second Coming, referencing John's vision that there will be present those from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people before the throne of God (cf Revelation 5:9, 7:9-10, Matthew 24:14).³⁰ The Project has many proponents, including the IMB, who reshaped their missionary enterprise towards a people group approach.

Whether one accepts this eschatological and theological framework or not, caution must be exercised in how strategies are shaped by people group identification. By definition, people groups can statistically appear to be a fixed determined entity; however, groups have many blends, overlaps, and nuances that render a precise definition impossible. For example, the Mano of Liberia, Guinea, and Cote D'Ivoire reflect many different realities, culturally and linguistically, so are they one or three? By utilizing statistical data to identify groups of people and the presence of the Gospel, one must recognize the danger of taking classification processes into theology. This researcher contends for caution in some of the theological implications of viewing missions and methodology through the lens of people groups.

²⁹The Joshua Project is included in a critical review, *Corporate Metaphors and Strategic Thinking: "The 10/40 Window" in the American Evangelical Worldview* (Rynkiewicz 2007). In his criticism of the Joshua Project, he states that "...they are a century behind in their thinking and their terminology" (2007:221-222). He further states that because they are not trained anthropologists, their logic and processes are not valid. This research agrees that many of the metaphors and strategic thinking that he addresses are permeated with Western values; however, Rynkiewicz misses a specific understanding of the Joshua Project, even if one does not agree with the point of view. The Project is a gathering model in that it does not convey verified social sciences for statistics and information. It does not purport to be an exact science, but a gathering of information for like-minded mission organizations to utilize in strategies and objectives. This dissertation uses the Joshua Project to reflect current information on the Mano and Gio because there are so few sources that give any information about the Mano and Gio in a common forum. The information is generally considered, but is not intended to be definitive or speak to support of the nature or purpose of the Joshua Project.

³⁰The Joshua Project. [Online]. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/joshua-project.php>. (November 2012).

In *Bridges of God*, McGavran (1957) introduced and advocated the homogenous unit principle stating that reaching people most similar was the best method of evangelism. Culturally, the concept makes sense that people receive the Gospel best when presented from someone of similar culture. However if the propagation of the Gospel exclusively utilized the homogenous principle, would that not lead to segregation? Does the text in *Revelations* imply inclusivity or exclusivity? This research advocates recognizing where the Gospel is not, but does not advocate the use of people groups as a limiting definition of subsets within the Christian community.

The Bible revolves around the narrative of God sending His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to become the redemptive path for humanity, to be the cornerstone of the church, and to implement the task of evangelization. Evangelical Christians and Southern Baptists have highlighted the Great Commission as a driving missionary mandate and central component of living a missional life (Reid 2009:6).

The Great Commission is viewed as being implemented beginning from Jerusalem, then to Judea, through Samaria, and proclaimed to the ends of the earth. Proclamation is the heart of the Gospel message of salvation. The criticism is the Great Commission can become viewed as the sole biblical basis for evangelization to proclaim the Gospel to every tribe, tongue, and nation. Bosch (2011:57-58) speaks to this from the standpoint that it is often used in a way that supersedes the rest of the Gospel. He advocated for recognition that the Great Commission does not exist in isolation, but as an embracing of the transformative qualities of the entire Gospel. How we live expressed in the Beatitudes reflects more than a conquest of souls.

Reid countered this assertion by Bosch in pointing to the explicit use of the term evangelize in early English and German translations (Reid 2009:25). This debate is presented in more detail in regards to the definition of evangelism. A general statement would be that there are dangers in moving too far with an inclusive or exclusive definition of evangelization and interpretation of the Great Commission. Each side of the debate seemed to point to the other side as having moved too far.

While there is a grand debate on evangelization that is theoretically and hermeneutically nuanced, one must also meet the reality of frail humanity. The Gospel is often proclaimed from a variety of imperfect missions, motives, and influences evidenced by the continuing mission paradigms. God, however, seems to have used the frailties of man and his flawed methods to evangelize the Mano and Gio people to the glory of God. To be certain, those flaws created unintended barriers, but can as well be transcended by the power of the Holy Spirit. While this research may critique methods and understandings of local agents, missionaries, denominations, it is with the realization that God uses all manner of frailty for his glory.

This research was written from the positive assumption that the proclamation of the Gospel and the evangelization of all people are appropriate and mandated by God. Missiology must evaluate the effectiveness of proclamation, the properness of methodology, and the recording of the historical account, but they may also embrace the effects of the transformative power of the Gospel enabled by the Holy Spirit.

1.8 THE BIBLE IN TRANSLATION

The Bible is essential to evangelism. The hermeneutical assumption is that the proclaimed narrative flows out of Scripture in written, verbal, and non-verbal communication. The agent of conviction, the Holy Spirit, is revealed in Scripture and served as the agent of scriptural inspiration. The Gospel must be proclaimed in the spoken word until translation takes place, whereby people receive the Scriptures in their heart language with contextual understanding. The endurance of the Gospel in a culture depends on long term contextual viability which requires the Scripture.

Welmers (1953:545), a missionary linguist in West African language study, stated that language is the most basic tool of a Church in proclaiming the good news of salvation. The one who comes proclaiming the Gospel must do so honestly, respecting customs, manners, and laws of those to whom he or she has come. He must come to tell the story in a way that is grasped and in a language that is understood.

In the arena of Black and African Theology, the concept of the Bible as equal to the Word of God is a chief axis of debate and departure. How does one view the Bible and is it the Word of God? Maluleke sets himself apart by describing the debate as a theological pitfall in Africa. He identifies Bediako, Mbiti, Mugambi, and Sanneh as being supportive of the Bible as equal to the Word of God and takes it a step further to say that they are uncritical of it (Maluleke 1996:5). He states that this equation is a dangerous form of naiveté and has done more harm than colonialism (:6).

Sanneh's (2009:1) perspective in his thesis of *Translating the Message* is that the translated Bible is central to the Christian message and all theology. His view will be discussed in more detail (see 2.6.4). This researcher takes his stand alongside those who argue for equating the Bible as the Word of God. Maluleke (1996:4) makes an unfortunate statement that "Sanneh is being used by some white theologians to dig out often tarnished images of their forbearers in order to heap praises upon their missionary ancestors." This statement is unfortunate because it uses race to imply that Sanneh's view becomes a platform for validating ills of the past. The statement is used to marginalize Sanneh's view and minimize the view of white theologians who may side with Sanneh. This researcher sides with Sanneh that the Bible and translation is central to understanding and receiving the message of God.

A key thread of this research is the task of understanding the process of Bible translation toward the Mano and Gio. Who were the contributors? What were the barriers? How has it progressed? What impact did the translation have? The conversion surveys qualitatively reveal patterns and understandings of the translated message in context. The unpublished letters³¹ and journals of missionaries Tom and Billie Jackson and June Hobdy Jackson are crucial to that process. The Jacksons were catalytic translators of the Mano and Gio Bible.

³¹(Gautier 1995). *In the Hollow of His Hands: The Life and Letters of Tom Jackson*. These letters and journals are a collection of documents gathered for the purpose of celebrating the life and legacy of Tom Jackson. They were not formally published, but were made available at various mission events. They included amazing personal insights into the missionary life and translation of the Bible.

Much of the work of translation has gone undocumented. The three main contributors are no longer living: Tom and June were murdered during the civil war and Billie died previously after a lengthy illness. This research highlights their missionary and translation contributions as well as the transmission of the task to local agents. Hallihan's (2011:28) article on the Dan Bible informs that the Dan Literacy and Translation Association (DALITA) with the Liberia Inland Mission (LIM) are working towards a revision of the New Testament, and the completion of the Old Testament. DALITA is led by David Dunah, the former National Assistant Secretary General of the United Inland Church. As a local agent, he started Bible translation with the Jacksons in 1958 in Nimba County. After the civil war, Dunah felt a need to continue the work. The process of Bible translation for the Mano and Gio continues and there is anticipation that the Bible will be completed soon.

Brief mention is also given to Samantha Mero in regards to Bible translation. Mero is working as a Bible translator of the Mano of Guinea. Mero stated: "The Mano people of West Africa are one of the many linguistic groups still waiting to hear the life-giving words of the Bible in their own language."³² Mero gives credit to the Mano of Liberia for beginning the evangelization process among the Mano of Guinea. This speaks to the extent of evangelization as instrumental in cross border proclamation.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research is initiated from Osmer's (2008:4) four core tasks of theological interpretation. The point of departure is the gathering of descriptive-empirical³³ information that enables the research to discern various patterns, dynamics, and responses in context to discern and interpret what is taking place.

³²Mero, Samantha. Facebook: *Reaching the Mano*. (11 November 2011).

³³Osmer (2008:4). The descriptive-empirical task is the first of four core tasks that assist in practical theological interpretation. The gathering of information is necessary to interpret various dynamics, patterns, and episodes within a contextual setting. In this research, the task of gathering is facilitated by qualitative interviewing (Mason 2002:62) that is "in-depth, semi-structured, or loosely structured forms of interviewing." This format creates an interactional exchange of dialogue.

Quantitative data is gathered to establish the presence of contextual churches, but the research is more interested in the qualitative interviewing which speaks to hermeneutic of how the Gospel is proclaimed and received. Qualitative researching allows for a broad consideration of understanding and experience to be integrated with the daily life, social processes, and institutional impact (Mason 2002:1).

This research gathering process descriptively introduces the Mano and Gio of Northern Liberia within a broader context as might be engaged in a sociological research, but is then interpreted as a hermeneutical theological study to guide the analysis and interpretation. Osmer (2008:4) states that the interpretative task must draw on the various disciplines and theories to better understand and explain what is occurring. These theories must remain open to the complex nature and peculiarities of people and events, but provide understanding into complex narratives while retaining a sense of the difference between proposed theory and described reality.

After presenting the descriptive-empirical information gathered and attempting to understand and interpret how the people have responded to evangelization, a practical evaluation of the various conclusions are presented. This research concludes in a evaluative manner by proposing practical tools towards understanding contextual evangelization. This process is the pragmatic task where one has reflected on understanding and emerged with possible theoretical considerations (Osmer 2008:4). Various tasks are interactive and engaging and dictate a blending of the social sciences in order to use value laden information in conjunction with ethical, theological, and practical dimensions (:11).

The dissertation begins with the formulation of a theoretical framework of evangelization. This formulation is based on answering the question: What is evangelization and how can one measure the extent of evangelization? The methods involve scholarly literary reviews, comparisons of various theories on evangelization, and observation of contextualization. This theoretical framework serves as a parameter for understanding and interpreting evangelization.

The second element of study is the historical assessment. How has the nation of Liberia developed and through what means did the engagement of Christianity interact with the historical narrative?³⁴ Various scholars utilize this type of approach by blending mission history with historical paradigms. Bosch (2011) developed a mission history through the use of Kung's paradigms of history. Sanneh (1983:xvii) demonstrates this engagement by examining the religious impact of West African Christianity. He states that there is a need to "...treat African Christianity as a legitimate tributary in the stream of Christian history." If this statement is accurate, then the Mano and Gio narrative flows into the evaluation of evangelization.

The Societies that initiated the establishment of Liberia were formed with a view towards Christianizing and civilizing Africa (Wold 1968:53). Though that view may sound patronizing, it was the missionary sentiment of the day. Christianity came to Liberia with the immigrants, but so did some of the mind-set of the years of slavery and segregation. Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Leymah Gbowee³⁵ (2011:8) stated: "The awful irony was they (Americo-Liberians) did to the indigenous people exactly what had been done to them in the United States. They set up separate schools and separate churches. The indigenous people became their servants." Gbowee is of Kpelle origin, one of the indigenous groups of Liberia. This interaction is fundamental to the analysis of evangelization of the indigenous people of Liberia.

This research utilizes literary review as a method towards evaluation. The academic literature discussing the role of Christianity in Liberia is reviewed and evaluated.

³⁴Walls (1996:146) advocates for the importance of interdisciplinary studies in order to accurately engage the missionary movement. He states that mission history and church history do not present different periods, but different histories. With that in mind, one must uncover the political history of a nation, but then attempt to determine how Christian history flows within that narrative impacting the movement of evangelization which unveils a shaping practical theology.

³⁵Gbowee was one of three recipients of the shared Nobel Peace award in 2011 for advocating peace to end the Civil War. All of the recipients were women and two were from Liberia.

Specific emphasis is given to the rebuttal of *Christianity in Doe's Liberia*.³⁶ Gifford's work is often used as the source about Christianity in Liberia, but this researcher contends that Gifford painted an inaccurate picture. The concluding factors towards ending the civil war and rebuilding the nation seem also to rebut Gifford's thesis. This research provides an alternative view to Gifford's opinion.

The next phase was a descriptive-empirical approach to the Mano and Gio. The sociologically descriptive aspect of this research relates to the role of the Poro Society. Zetterstrom (1976) and Harley (1941) were anthropologists who took non-religious approach. Zetterstrom produced several sociological papers on the way of life of the Mano, while Harley, a missionary, doctor, and anthropologist wrote on various aspects of the Poro Society. These writings were utilized in understanding of the Mano and Gio and social structure. One must incorporate a blending of theology and sociology in order to assess and consider the barriers that prevented evangelization, and then the influencing factors towards evangelization.

Mason (2002:16) states that the Epistemological Position is the knowledge or evidence that the research is trying to uncover or investigate. This research demonstrates through evidence gathered that the evangelization process of the Mano and Gio has and is taking place and seeks to uncover evidences that reveal the extent to which that theological dimension has occurred. The empirical study of the conversion narratives is a significant aspect of the research. The surveys details responses reflecting experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and understanding of the self-identified recipients of the Gospel among the Mano and Gio. The synthesis of this reality is presented in the concluding observations. The qualitative research methods included surveys, interviews, observations, and gathering evidence consistent with Mason's definition (2002:62).

³⁶*Christianity in Doe's Liberia* by Paul Gifford is an inaccurate portrayal of the role and presence of Christianity in Liberia. This is discussed in the form of a rebuttal in chapter four and supported through various reviews, literary analysis, and anecdotal evidence.

Although qualitative interviewing was the primary method of the research, quantitative research was used to identify churches in order to establish a contextualization of the church. Mason (2002:4) states that the qualitative and quantitative do not need to represent stark contrast or an either/or proposition. The two practices may be integrated provided one has established what is intended.

This research utilizes quantitative data to consider numerical values of the churches that have been started and applies those to a historical timeline (Mason 2002:14). The scope of the research was narrowed to the Baptist in Nimba County because of familiarity with the Baptists, the unusual amount of church growth, and because they represent the largest segment of evangelical presence. This quantitative research measured the presence of churches rather than evangelistic conversions. The indigenous presence of churches reflects contextualization³⁷ within a people, region, or culture (McGavran 1970:6-7) more accurately than conversion numbers.

The number of Baptist Churches in Mano and Gio villages was significant to understanding the extent of evangelization. Early missionaries established mission stations, schools, and hospitals, but had limited effectiveness in penetrating the local village through church starting and local leadership. The formulation of these statistics included a cursory observation of other churches, but focused mainly on the Nimba Baptist Union for a consistent sampling.

With that quantitative foundation established, the next step of research gathering was of the qualitative nature to conduct interviews with leaders of the churches to identify barriers of evangelization, influencing factors, cultural characteristics, examples of transformation, and observations for the why of the main question of extent. The intention was to gather information and observations to explore patterns and themes

³⁷Contextualization is a significant topic that will be covered throughout this dissertation. The challenge of relating the Gospel to culture is captured in method and perspective in this topic. This topic is a part of an evolving understanding of engagement where the Gospel and the church connect in a local context (Scherer and Bevens 1999:42-3).

of evangelization. These qualitative interviews provide an opportunity to explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring (Osmer 2008:4).

A tool towards the exploration of patterns and themes involved the development and implementation of a sampling survey of Christians in the region. In order to be able to account for the language barrier, three key leaders were enlisted to help with the survey process. The leaders who assisted in the survey gathering were Wonbenyakeh, Partor, and Bask Johnson. Each was instructed in the format of the survey and asked to assist in surveying 10 – 20 individuals who were self-identified Christians. The sample was gathered through volunteer participants. Emphasis was given to the personal conversion narrative, influential persons towards conversion, and transformational qualities of conversion. This conversion narrative established the ontological³⁸ perspective of the impact of evangelization and how people responded.

Conversion, and to a lesser degree baptism, were key themes. In Kaplan's overview of conversion to Christianity of people in Ethiopia, he identified essential practices and characteristics of the conversion. Kaplan said that baptism and the bestowal of a Christian name were essential rites for people wishing to embrace Christianity (Kaplan 2004:379). The research among the Mano and Gio did not reveal the bestowal of a Christian name as important. Almost all surveyed participants were baptized by immersion, but baptism was not viewed as an act unto salvation.

With regard to the question of identification, baptism represented an important step for the Mano and Gio because of the presence of the societal structure. Baptism demonstrated a higher level of commitment as a public identification (Gbengan, June 2011). The practice of baptism demonstrated consistency through the civil war which indicated that the practice was an important part of how the church perceived itself. The surveyed participants were asked if they had been baptized and by what method.

³⁸The ontological perspective is the nature of the phenomena, entities, or social reality being investigated. Though it may be difficult to grasp, it can be discerned through identifying attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, perspectives, and a host of subjective patterns (Mason 2002:14-15).

With regard to conversion, the intent was to hear narratives that revealed patterns of message and belief. The survey question gave the participant an opportunity to express the story of conversion in their own words. This allowed for patterns that might reflect dualistic views, works-based salvation, missionary influenced ideology, or other thoughts that may have attached themselves to conversion. The narratives were self-identified personal conversion and transformation.

The final step of the empirical research was through personal observations. Many Mano and Gio villages were visited with Wonbenyakeh and other leaders. Attending worship services, associational conferences, literacy schools, and other functions provided sufficient opportunities for observation. This researcher also participated in several weeks of mobile medical clinics and optical examinations as a humanitarian opportunity in the course of the project. These observations provided insight into the culture and anecdotal evidence of activity of the churches. Mason (2002:55) states that ethnographers have led the way in utilizing observation as a method towards understanding through first hand experiences and reflection.

In the descriptive empirical research, special interest was given to studying the unique growth among the Mano and Gio churches started during the civil war. Since there were limited scholarly sources, almost all of the information was gathered from primary source conversations. Though not always verifiable, the collective information provided a better understanding of the extent of evangelization.

This raises the question: How does one identify the pattern in the movement of God through empirical research? In defining evangelism, Bosch (2011:430) is careful to articulate that evangelism is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit using our witness to make God known. Evangelism is that dimension of the activity of the church which offers every person and community a valid opportunity to be reoriented to "...embracing Christ as Savior and Lord, becoming a living member of his community, being enlisted in his service of reconciliation, peace, and justice on the earth, and being committed to God's purpose." In a broader context, it is the

movement of God among a group of people. He further cites Appiah-Kubi and Torres (:434) as stating that knowledge is not conformity of the mind, but a process of transformation and construct of a new world. All of this becomes a part of identifying the movement of God while recognizing patterns in line with the Word of God.

An example of the subjective identification of the moving of God is highlighted (see 7.7) as Bediako (1994:92) introduces the historical narrative of the Glebo Prophet William Harris in Liberia. It was said that over 100 000 responded to the good news of salvation during an eighteen month period. Harris and his accompanying team went from village to village along the coastal communities preaching the Gospel. And encouraging people to turn to the one true and living God, to be baptized and forgiven by the Savior. Chapter seven will explore this phenomenon.

In the final analysis, the conversion narratives are explored to consider patterns and themes of contextual conversion. Patterns such as belief statements, persons influencing conversion, personal response and transformation, and community are considered. Themes of freedom, peace, and life change are identified (see 9.5-9.9).

1.10 SUMMARY

In summary, this research assesses and measures the extent and response of evangelization of the Mano and Gio. In the process, historical barriers to the Gospel were identified along with and influencing factors towards conversion. This movement resulted in church starting and reflected transformation of towards Christianity. The research contributes to the academic literature on the subject and highlights a group of people largely neglected by academic circles. The documentation of the Mano and Gio churches becomes a part of the accessible missiological record. Finally, the research provides information for those engaged in studying the spread of the Gospel to all people and presents an Interpretative Model of Evangelization (see 8.3).

1.11 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

This research has been divided into eight chapters, developing a progression of understanding from a national consciousness towards a local indigenous context. Chapter one provides a comprehensive introduction to the dissertation including motivation, significance, question, background, and methodology of the research.

Chapter two explores a theoretical and missiological framework of evangelization. To grasp the theological and missiological impact, a foundational understanding of evangelization is necessary. This chapter defines, explains, and exegetes terms, theories, and concepts crucial to understanding the extent of evangelization. This chapter introduces historical patterns and theological bridges of evangelization. The concept of translation is established as a theoretical basis and Engen's (Scherer 1994:1) theory of the pattern of the process of evangelization is explored. This chapter concludes with a summary of how evangelization is the reason of the church.

Chapter three is a historical review of the establishment of the Republic of Liberia, providing an understanding of a unique history, but also demonstrating development of cultural Christianity and its impact on evangelization. The social, political, and religious history of Liberia contributed to a cultural Christianity that paralleled the historical divide between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous people. The chronology includes a pre-Liberia examination, the formation, development, and collapse of the Republic, and the subsequent civil war. A significance consideration was the impact of the 1980 coup that toppled the Tolbert government and the civil war that emerged in 1989. The chapter concludes with the re-establishment of Liberia under the first freely elected female President in Africa, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

Chapter four examines the role of Christianity in Liberia. The chapter begins with a rebuttal of *Christianity in Liberia* to demonstrate a flawed understanding of the dynamics of evangelical Christianity failing to influence the political landscape. The national formation of Liberia was intertwined with Christianity from inception because of the role of the Colonization Society, establishing a dual competing context.

Christianity became a part of the cultural fabric of the Americo-Liberians and proved to be a barrier towards the evangelization of the indigenous people in Liberia.

This chapter also explores the domestic and foreign engagement of Christian denominations in Liberia. Primary consideration is given to the role of the Baptist in Liberia because of the early missionary involvement, but also the significant partnership between the Liberian Baptist Missionary and Education Convention (LBMEC) and the missionary agency of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in Liberia. Other Christian denominations are briefly considered in formation and presence. Consideration is given to the discussion and debate of denominationalism as a product of Western Christianity and ill-fitted for the Mano and Gio context.

Chapter five makes a transition from a national perspective to local contextual consideration. This overview explores the origin, history, sociological development, and structure of the Mano and Gio way of life. The key investigation revolves around the social structure of the Poro Society and how it affected the evangelization process. This reflects the blending of the sciences of sociology and theology to evaluate a particular context. Key symbols discussed of the Poro Society include initiation, the devil, and the role of the oracle tree. Social theory is discussed in regard to evangelization, culture, and the role of local agents (Etherington 1977:31).

This chapter also evaluates how Christianity engaged the Mano and Gio people toward a process of evangelization. Evaluation includes the various missionary groups, the Upper Nimba Baptist Association, and the sociological impact of the civil war. Who were the early missionaries? What barriers did they encounter? What characteristics of the social structures were important to understand engagement? How did this transition process occur from missionary to local agents? What impact did the civil war have on the evangelization of the Mano and Gio?

The chapter concludes with a theoretical application of Muller's (2006) practical missiological theory on a biblical worldview. Muller presents his theory of biblical

worldview as hinging on the responses of guilt, shame, and fear. This theory is used to potentially identify a worldview perspective of the Mano and Gio and to consider if that theory was demonstrated in the response of the Mano and Gio to evangelization.

Chapter six introduces the extent of evangelization and five barriers that existed in the Mano and Gio context that provided resistance to the evangelization process. This discussion speaks directly to the research question because it asks the missiological question of why the Gospel was present, but not able to penetrate the Mano and Gio culture. The barriers are each treated in a format that identifies the barrier and considers correlations or examples that expound on the topic. This chapter concludes with observations about the barriers, but also pointing towards the transition from the barriers towards influencing factors of evangelization.

Chapter seven follows the discussion of barriers by addressing the influencing factors that turned people towards being receptive to the Gospel message. What were the influencing factors towards evangelization of the Mano and Gio? As barriers were minimized or removed, the evangelization process increased. This chapter explores the influencing factors, evidences of transformation, and the important role of local agents and missionaries in the evangelization process. The descriptive empirical task leads one to a meta-theoretical assumption (Osmer 2008:9, 48) about the research project. Based on the research question, qualitative interviewing, sociological considerations, and history of Liberia, these are the factors that seemed to have brought about an evangelization process.

The eighth and final chapter of this dissertation is presented in three sections. First, a theoretical and scaffolding matrix is proposed to consider the extent of evangelization. This researcher suggests an Interpretative Model of Evangelization. Second, observations are made from the conversion narrative responses and how this speaks to the unfolding evangelization matrix. Finally, the chapter concludes with contributions of the research and a closing summary and statement about the research.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL AND MISSIOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF EVANGELIZATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

What is evangelization? This research proposes to establish a theoretical definition and missiological framework of evangelization to serve as a structure to evaluate the extent of evangelization and how the Mano and Gio responded. This chapter defines and explains terms, theories, and concepts crucial to understanding evangelization.

Beginning with a conceptual and theological definition, evangelization is parsed to consider its various dimensions. Van Engen's (Scherer 1994:1) pattern for the process of evangelization of the unreached is considered as well an introduction to social structure, missionary approaches, and the impact of local agents. These elements are crucial to evaluate how the evangelization process has occurred in transmission. These are components in the narrative of the Christian faith that one must observe to have a perspective of the historical transmission. Walls (1996:xiii) uses this approach to build a narrative for the missionary movement in Christian history. He considers the Christian faith from a historical perspective, the contextual transmission as it relates to Africa, and the impact of the missionary movement on both parties.

Evangelization is both theoretical and practical. Evangelization is a process that involves a spiritual reality of conversion, but also involves translating the message into a new culture and contextualizing the message so that it is heard as relevant to the recipient. These translating activities might be called bridges of the Word of God that enable contextual transmission of the Gospel. Evangelization and peace, refuge, reconciliation and translation are considered as bridges of context. This framework will serve as the parameter for interpreting expressions of evangelization.

In *Translating the Message*, Sanneh (2009:1) argues that from its origin, there was a need to translate the Word of God out of the original languages and into the language of the hearer. This action serves to engage the new culture in a way that relativized the Gospel in a new context. Though the disciples of Jesus were not necessarily ready to yield contextual control, evangelization in translation overpowered the resistance. Translation has been a key to the growth of Christianity in Liberia (see 2.6.4).

Evangelization always initiates through a proclaimer. Bevans and Schroeder (2004:13) identified seven stages of missions in *Acts*, each an expanding proclamation. As the evangelization moved out from a missionary platform to local agents, expressions of evangelization became evident in contextual form. This raises the question of how contextualization was understood? How does missiology address theory and theology in practical forms? This theoretical and missiological framework moves one towards the ability to exegete the process and extent.

The presupposition of this research assumes evangelization has and is in the process of taking place among the Mano and Gio. The intent is to explore how that happened and then to measure the extent to which evangelization has occurred. Evangelization processes manifest themselves in unique contextual ways through needs, life circumstances, social structures and belief systems. Evangelization magnifies characteristics of God, resulting in transformative qualities. Sanneh (2009:158) points out from an African context, that there was no need to establish groundwork for the concept of God, because the awareness of God was already present.

Christian evangelization is a Holy Spirit driven process. This research identifies manifestations of the Spirit as the process of God reconciling the Mano and Gio people to Himself. In the parable of the Lost Son, the prompting of the Spirit utilized the downcast and despondent nature of the son to “bring him to his sense”³⁹ and

³⁹Stein.1992. (Luke 15:17). “Came to his senses” is a Hebrew/Aramaic expression for repentance. This term refers not only to a mental process that causes a person to think more clearly about his or her situation, but also towards a moral renewal involving repentance.

caused him to return home. Themes such as peace, refuge, reconciliation and translation become evident. This research presupposes that every culture group is separated from God until proclamation occurs and that each culture receives the Gospel through vessels that arrive at a contextually relevant point of need.

Evangelization also involves the developing process of the community of God expressed in the local church. Bevans and Schroeder (2004:8) state that mission of the church is not expansion, but integrating men and women into a community as an expression of God in the world through preaching, serving, and witnessing. The dissertation explores the presence and transformational impact of churches through interviews, case studies, theological patterns, and conversion narratives.

This chapter concludes with a summary of evangelization and consideration of how these conceptual and theoretical definitions create a path towards a missiological assessment of the evangelization of the Mano and Gio.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION

Evangelization is generally used to identify the process of carrying out evangelism of a particular region or group of people, but most definitions also render an accompanying theological framework. “Evangelism is the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in Him, calling to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sin, and inviting them to become living members of Christ’s earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit” (Bosch 2011:11).

Evangelism can be defined more narrowly as proclamation. Proclamation is both an expression of saying and doing, not limited to a verbal expression. The activity of evangelism expresses a particular message of God’s saving work of grace to those who do not believe in order that those hearing might receive and accept the message. Within the practical activity of proclaiming is a spiritual process of repentance and conversion. As a person(s) repents of sin, forgiveness is made full and one becomes

adopted into the family of God. This new life enables a journey towards serving others in the power of the Holy Spirit and in relation to Christ's earthly community. Evangelization is the whole activity of the community of faith in proclamation.

The terms evangelism and evangelization can be similar, however, evangelism has more commonly been used by the Evangelical community, while evangelization has been preferred among the Catholic community. Some scholars consider the terms interchangeable, but Barrett and Johnson (2001:679) made more of a distinction, stating that though many view evangelization and evangelism as synonyms, the understanding of these terms is complex and must be more uniquely defined. Evangelism represents more of the activity of the church, while evangelization reflected witness, implying spontaneous unorganized sharing of faith by adherents.

Evangelism is a broadly used term in the Christian community. The term may narrowly refer to the activity of soul-winning or broadly representing activism in areas of social ministry or political action (Guder 1985:134). Though evangelism is profoundly theological, the usage has commonly been about activity. Evangelism has also been perceived in ways that are not desirable. The tension, baggage, and association of the term have created barriers. In modern language, the isms can project hostility and attach a negative meaning. Examples with negative connotation might include racism, sexism, consumerism, and nationalism. With Guder (1985:134), evangelization is preferred when referring to "the saying of the gospel."

Guder's narrow definition may express well the content of *Be My Witness*, but it is uncertain whether it suffices as a suitable description of evangelization, thus, a more expanded definition is warranted. This research presupposes that evangelization is the process of proclaiming the Gospel, through saying and doing, that some might hear and respond to the Gospel message, being moved by the Holy Spirit. Those who receive the message identify themselves with Christ through His redemptive act in conversion. The converted person(s) become a part of Christ's earthly community, fulfilling the transforming activity of God in the world.

The International Congress on World Evangelization (ICOWE) produced the Lausanne Covenant in 1974.⁴⁰ The Covenant was a statement attempting to reflect a biblical perspective of the activity of evangelism or evangelization. At the time, the ICOWE was the largest body to convene on this subject discussing processes, methods and resources for world evangelization (Scherer 1992:253).

The covenant affirmed mission as the activity of God and defined the relationship: “We affirm our belief in the one eternal God, Creator, and Lord of the world, Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, who governs all things to His purpose and will. He has been calling out from the world a people for Himself and sending his people back into the world to be His servants and witnesses for the extension of His kingdom, the building up of Christ’s body, and glory of His name” (Scherer 1992:254).

Evangelization is the activity of people called out by God to be His witnesses, bringing glory to God and adding to the Kingdom. Evangelization involved the social reality of identification where one changes direction (Newbigin in Scherer 1994:16), renounces all alternatives (Clayton 1998:42), and repents unto conversion (Bosch 2011:11) to engage the redemptive work of Christ as a part of His earthly community.

Evangelization flows out of mission. Theologically, mission is the activity of God calling people to repentance and conversion. Practically, mission must be understood as sending of man by God to proclaim the good news. The sending of proclamation is more than a mandate. Newbigin interprets mission as an explosion of joy. Rather than the traditional burden of the mission mandate, evangelization must be the explosion of joy that cannot be suppressed at the news that the rejected and crucified

⁴⁰The Cape Town 2010 movement affirmed the declarations of the previous Lausanne Covenant in the preamble of the articles. The affirmation included remaining committed to the task of bearing witness to Jesus Christ and all his teaching. This included awareness of those not yet reached, but also a fresh discovery of the holistic nature of the biblical message and mission. The affirmation also included commitments to expressing core biblical truths of the Gospel in the ever-changing world of our own generation. <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/ctcommitment.html#p1> (October 2013).

Jesus is alive. The message must be an explosion of life giving, changing, joyful, proclamation. Keeping silent would have been inconceivable for Paul: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16) (Scherer 1994:16).

Evangelization is a process. Firstly, evangelization is shaped by theological delineations of the message being proclaimed. Secondly, evangelization identifies the messenger as proclaimer. Thirdly, evangelization considers the recipient of the message, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the response of the message. Fourthly, evangelization considers the identification of the resulting community of God and of the new proclaimers. “That process (witness) involves sending, a spoken word and living witness, the moving work of the Holy Spirit, a movement towards identification with Christ, and an incorporation into a community of God that continues that witness is the whole process of evangelization” (Guder 1985:136).

The Holy Spirit facilitates the Gospel as a message for all people. In spite of cultural and human limitations, the Spirit enables the message across boundaries, calling people to faith. The Holy Spirit stirred, convicted, and drew people to respond to the message evidenced in the Scripture on the day of Pentecost. Evangelization cannot be understood without the Holy Spirit as a process agent. “Christians have always recognized the central role of God the Holy Spirit in evangelization” (Barrett and Johnson 2001:699).

2.3 THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL EXPRESSIONS

A theology of evangelism begins with a core description. According to the ICOWE, to evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus died for our sins and was raised according to the Scripture.⁴¹ Jesus, now the reigning Lord, offers the forgiveness of

⁴¹1 Corinthians 15:3-4 was cited as the scriptural basis for this theological description.

sins demonstrated on the cross.⁴² With forgiveness of sin, the liberating gift of the Spirit is received by all of those who repent and believe⁴³ (Scherer 1992:254).

Newbigin noted that almost all proclamation of the Gospel scenes in *Acts* happened in response to question. Proclamation was a prompting influence. She cited the examples of Peter's Pentecost message, Philip with the Ethiopian, and Peter's meeting of the household of Cornelius. In each spiritual situation, something present prompted the call for explanation (Newbigin in Scherer 1994:16). She saw a pattern proclaimed on the day of Pentecost. Something was happening that prompted the crowd to ask, "What is going on here?"⁴⁴ Peter responded by proclaiming a narrative of the work of God that had been happening since the beginning. The work of God was continuing and was being fulfilled because of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Peter's sermon climaxed with the citing of Psalms 110 (Acts 2:34), prompting the question of 'how do we respond?'⁴⁵ Peter's response was that one must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus.⁴⁶

Newbigin's commentary on the phrase, repent and be baptized, focused on change, identification, and incorporation. "To repent is to do a u-turn which enables you to believe what is hidden from sight, the reality of the presence of the reign of God in the crucified Jesus. To be baptized is to be identified with, incorporated into that which Jesus did when He went down into the water of Jordan as one of a company of sin-burdened men and women and so inaugurated a mission that would lead Him through His great encounter with the principalities and powers to its victorious climax on the cross. To be baptized, is to be incorporated into the dying of Jesus, so as to become a participant in His risen life and share in His ongoing mission to the world" (Newbigin in Scherer 1994:17). This explanation was a microcosm of the evangelization process, extending to being the people of God in community and a witness to that message.

⁴²Acts 2:32-39 cited as the reference.

⁴³John 20:21 cited as the reference.

⁴⁴Acts 2:12 (Paraphrase).

⁴⁵Acts 2:37 (Paraphrase).

⁴⁶Acts 2:38 (Paraphrase).

Evangelization is a spiritual reality of the movement of God. The ICOWE stated definitively that: “We believe that we are engaged in constant spiritual warfare with the principalities and powers of evil who are seeking to overthrow the Church and frustrate the task of world evangelization. We believe in the power of the Holy Spirit. Conviction of sin, faith in Christ, and new birth and Christian growth are all His work (Scherer 1992:254). Do men and women see their conversion as a movement of the Holy Spirit? Is there recognition of a spiritual battle for the hearts of all people?

2.3.1 Word Study

The Greek word *euangelion* means good news. *Euangelion* is used both as a transliterated word and as a word in translation.⁴⁷ A transliteration is the rendering of a foreign word into a given language using corresponding letters, thus evangelism. Evangelism, derived from *euangelion*, is translated to me the conveying or announcing of good news (Geisler 1986:494).

Euangelion was commonly used to describe the good news brought from a messenger to his commander of a victory in battle (Carpenter and Comfort 2000:294). This explanation was consistent with Kittel’s (1985:267) explanation of the corresponding word in the Old Testament being used for the good news of a military outcome.

Kittel (1985:267) identified four basic forms of the Greek word that illustrated usages: *euangelizomai* [to proclaim good news], *euangelion* [good news, Gospel], *proeuangelizomai* [to proclaim beforehand], and *euangelistēs* [evangelist]. In the *Gospel of Mark*, *euangelion* was used by Jesus to illustrate that He was the content of the message.(Kittel 1985:270). Jesus was the embodiment of good news. “The beginning of the Gospel (*euangelion*) of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As was written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘Look, I am sending My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way. A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make His paths straight!’” (Mark 1:1-3, HCSB).

Most of the New Testament references to the good news come after the Gospels in Paul's letters. Paul's use of *euangelion* demonstrated that the concept had become fixed. 2 Corinthians 8:18 and Philippians 4:3 and 15 referred to the act or activity of proclamation, but 1 Corinthians 9:14 referred to the content of the good news. This twofold meaning was apparent in Romans 1:1, where Paul is "set apart for the Gospel of God,"⁴⁸ with the ensuing clause describing content (Kittel 1985:270-71).

2.3.2 Proclamation

Evangelization is the proclamation of the Gospel message of salvation. This process is not simply the encouraging of people to embrace a cultural religious form, but reflects a theological process calling people to salvation in Christ. The biblical message begins with a messenger, but the Holy Spirit stirs the hearts of the people.

How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" But they have not all obeyed the Gospel. For Isaiah said, "LORD, who has believed our report?" So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:14-17, NKJV).

The message of salvation in Christ Jesus originated with God, was pronounced in the Holy Scriptures, and empowered by the Holy Spirit; however, the messenger was necessary for proclamation. Paul's missionary journey reflected the missionary calling to proclaim Christ near and far. Paul stood before ordinary people; vast audiences in Athens (Acts 17), governors like Felix (Acts 24), and Festus (Acts 25), and with all manner of people. Paul proclaimed that salvation came through faith in Jesus Christ. Commentators indicated that this passage paralleled the proclamation of the Gospel message to Israel and then to the Gentiles (Broadman 1970:237).

⁴⁸Romans 1:1 (NIV, 2011).

How is salvation obtained or transmitted? Millard Erickson (1998:904) described three basic theological perspectives of salvation in regards to transmission. First, some viewed salvation as a physical process. This practice was generally true of sacramental systems where grace was believed to be transmitted by taking into one's body the bread of the Eucharist which is the body of Christ. Although there was some dependent belief, grace was substantially received through a physical external act.

A second perception of transmission was that moral action was the basis of salvation. Salvation was less the activity of an institution or a transmission process, but a belief and practice that altered daily life. This view of salvation was consistent with the social gospel movements and in some examples of liberation theologies. Salvation was often seen through the lens of secular or political activities (Erickson 1998:904).

The third idea of transmission was that salvation was mediated by faith. Salvation was not an external activity, nor the result of moral action, but was appropriated to a person by faith on the accomplished work of Christ on the cross. Though a person accepts grace, the recipient is passive in the saving process (Erickson 1998:409).

In missiological practices, McGavran moved the function of missions away from isolating mission stations towards the idea of evangelizing groups of people through proclamation. His methodology presumed that people receive the message most readily through similarity of culture, linguistic, and social background. There is merit to this principle in that local agents present the Gospel best in context, but the local church limited to that context would be contrary to the biblical narrative. The Gospel proclamation is not to focus on creating churches of like-minded people, but inviting people into greater context (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:261-262).⁴⁹

Proclamation is for those far and near. Proclamation is not defined by the success or failure of converting men and women. Evangelism is proclaiming the good news of

⁴⁹This discussion by Bevans and Schroeder of the homogenous unit principle was a reflection of the concepts introduced by McGavran in *Bridges of God* (1957). This debate has significant implications for the church, evangelism, and missions.

Jesus Christ; it is not about methodology, but a reconciling message of God. “Anything which undermines human dignity should be an offence to us. Is anything so destructive of human dignity as alienation from God through ignorance or rejection of the Gospel?” (Stott in Bevans & Schroeder 2004:355).

2.3.3 Conversion

The theological process of conversion begins with a proclamation of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Robert Coleman (1980:1) described this first step as the “revealed Word.” The Gospel does not originate at the point of human reason, but through a Scriptural revelation of God empowered by the Holy Spirit. Evangelism is anchored in the theological fact that God has spoken redemptively to humankind, both generally and specifically through the Bible.

To the one who hears the message, there is a Holy Spirit stirring of conviction. In Acts 2, Peter proclaimed the good news and the people were “pierced to the heart,” and cried out in response, “Brethren, what shall we do?” This piercing of the soul was the work of the Holy Spirit. Vincent’s *Word Studies in the New Testament* (1887): Acts 2:37), indicate a literal translation of “they were pricked,” (*katenygēsan*); the only New Testament reference. This word was also used in the *Septuagint*, referring to the grief of the sons of Jacob at the dishonor of Dinah (Genesis 34:7). A literal rendering might be “broken in heart” or “to prick with a sharp point.”

Peter’s response to the query of the people was almost programmatic. Peter presented four essentials of the conversion experience (Acts 2:38):

1. Repentance
2. Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ
3. Forgiveness of sins
4. Receiving of the Holy Spirit

These essentials were normative to the salvation process as described elsewhere in *Luke* and *Acts*. To interpret this process as mechanical would be incorrect, but this passage demonstrated a response pattern in Scripture (Polhill 1992:116).

There were similar proclamations and responses in the *Gospels* and in *Acts*. Luke described a conversion experience of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. He was baptized, but there was no actual mention of receiving of the Spirit. The resulting joy of the Ethiopian eunuch could be interpreted as evidence of the gift or presence of the Spirit. It was clear that baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit were normative to the experience of following of Christ in the early church (Polhill 1992:116-117).

Erickson (1998:946) stated that the Christian life was by nature a representation of a life that is lived differently. There was a contrast between being dead in sin and a new life in Christ. The act of turning from one's sin through repentance and turning to a new way of life in Christ is conversion. This theological foundation of conversion is essential to understanding evangelization of the Mano and Gio. The conversion surveys of the Mano and Gio believers articulated a contextual conversion experience with evidence of conviction and response (see 9.4-7).

2.3.4 Repentance

In conversion, several specific processes happen on a human and spiritual level. The conversion experience is initiated by the movement of the Holy Spirit, leading to the action of repentance, and resulting in a new birth or spiritual transformation.

Man's response to the piercing activity of God is an act of repentance based on acknowledging separation from God caused by one's sinfulness. Coleman (1980:2) described this step as the predicament of humanity. Humanity has set itself up in God's place. The sinful nature of all humans, except Christ demonstrates a separation from God and an eternal predicament. The predicament of humanity is precisely why evangelism was necessary. Evangelism addresses the heart of sin, human rebellion, and the subsequent punishment of death that is the future of all people.

The activity of repentance involves recognition of the sinful predicament of humanity and the engagement of the resulting act of restoration through forgiveness as a sovereign act of God. In a religious context, the action is usually referred to as a confession to God, ceasing to continue the willful acts of sin, and resolving to live according to a God given way. Repentance typically includes an admission of guilt and a promise not to repeat the offence. Repentance may also involve an attempt to make restitution or reverse the harmful effects of the wrong.

In the Old Testament, repentance was represented in two action verbs: *shub*, which was to return or to turn back, and *nicham*, which conveyed the idea of feeling sorrow or to change one's mind. In the New Testament, repentance was the Greek word forms of *metanoia*, *metanoeo* and *metamelomai*. These words were a compound of the preposition *meta* (after, with) and the verb *noeo* (to perceive or result of perceiving or observing). The idea conveyed was that after one observes and comes to a conclusion, there is a resulting changing of heart (Wood 1996:1007).

A description of repentance can be observed in the prodigal son. The son had a realization, abandoned the course he was following, and returned home to submit to his Father (Lea 199:119). That change of heart was why *metanoeo* was often translated as to turn around. This word stressed an emotional aspect, a feeling of being remorseful, or a regret of having done wrong. *metamelomai* was also used regarding Judas being seized with remorse after he saw that Jesus condemned based on his betrayal, conveying an emotional experience (Erickson 1998:947).

Repentance is a moral and spiritual change of attitude toward God which turns an individual from sin to God and is a prerequisite for salvation (Erickson 1998:947). The teaching of repentance is prevalent in the Bible. John began his public ministry with a call to repentance. (John 3:3-7). *John* described John the Baptist's role as one sent from God, to be and bear witness, so that through Him all might believe (John 1:6-8). John's role was to serve as a witness, calling people to repentance.

And he (John) went into all the regions around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for remission of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the Prophet, saying: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His path straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; and the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; All flesh shall see the salvation of God.”⁵⁰ (Luke 3:3-6, HCSB).

Peter called for a response of repentance on the day of Pentecost. In *Acts*, at the Beautiful gate of the Temple, Peter used that language again: “Repent then, and return to God, that your sins may be wiped out, that time of refreshing may come from the the Lord” (Acts 3:19, NIV). The constant references to repentance in Peter's preaching may have indicated a greater need for repentance with those who had been party to the crucifixion of Christ. Paul stressed emphatically that change must take place for those who received Christ.

2.3.5 Transformation

Conversion, followed by transformation, was emphasized in the New Testament. Examples of calling people to repentance and transformation included Nicodemus, the rich young ruler, Zacchaeus, Lydia, the Jailer, Cornelius, King Agrippa, Felix, Festus, and many more. Some responded to the Gospel and experienced transformation, while others did not respond. Paul's salvation narrative was related three times in *Acts*, additionally, at least four times in the epistles. Paul used his conversion narrative as a transformational theme to proclaim the good news all the way to Rome.

In the New Testament, we only find the word conversion in Acts 15:3 (HCSB). “When they had been sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, explaining in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and they created great joy among all the brothers.” The Greek word, *epistrophe* has the meaning of turning or returning to God (Myers 1987:233).

⁵⁰John the Baptist was referencing Isaiah 40:3-5.

Upon the basis of transformation as an outward expression of salvation, one may attempt to quantify the extent of evangelization through observations of a transformed life. Observed transformation is a subjective matter, but can be considered in a general and consistent manner (Peace 2004:8). In Paul's testimony to King Agrippa he stated "they should repent and turn to God and to demonstrate repentance by their deeds" (Acts 26:20, NIV). The potential flaw of this observation would be the distinction between spiritual transformation and activity resulting from legalistic living. This possibility can be mitigated by the expressions of accompanying joy.

Christian conversion constituted significant differences in understanding among Christian traditions. This is studied extensively in other works, but can be defined in the following categories: Conversion through personal decision, socialization, or liturgical acts (Peace 2004:8). While these categories overlap, they represent a broad perspective of Christian tradition. For the purpose of this research, personal decision was viewed as the narrative of conversion. Personal conversion is also used to reflect personal transformation, but then impacts communal transformation as well. This is a core component in the Interpretive Model of Evangelization (see 8.3).

The criticism of personal decision is generally about method. The idea of conversion as a method occurs through a presentation of the facts of the Gospel and the recipient affirms the presentation by a sinner's prayer.⁵¹ Though this is often the practice, the biblical expression of personal conversion involves a spiritual movement, a conscious repentance, and a purposeful turning to Christ as Lord. This research survey attempted to consider how participants viewed their own conversion and whether they incorporated transformation into that identity.

Religious scholars have a wide variety of understanding of the rubric of conversion. Scholars like Arthur Darby Nock have commonly made a distinction between

⁵¹The conversion narrative (see 9.6 and 9.8) was designed to consider the patterns of understanding including whether conversion was viewed in a limited form of a sinner's prayer or as a transformative work of the Holy Spirit.

dramatic transformation, which involves the complete abandonment of previous beliefs which is conversion, and the acceptance of new beliefs and practices alongside existing beliefs, which is adhesion (Kaplan 2004:375-376). The research did not uncover patterns of syncretism or adhesion. There are seemingly cases of adhesion where people accepted a new faith and added that to their own cultural religious system, but this was not generally evident among the Mano and Gio. Kaplan stated that the existence of adhesion should not blind us to the numerous examples of people who have accepted new faith in an authentic manner.

2.3.6 Baptism

Transformation is a process of spiritual activity and the work of the Holy Spirit. Baptism plays a role in that process as a symbolic identification of transformation.

Like conversion, there are varying opinions about baptism. The linking of baptism with the forgiveness of sins can be problematic, specifically based on Acts 2:37-38. A literal rendering of the verse is: “Repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for / on the basis of the forgiveness of sins (Polhill 1992:117). The word in dispute is the preposition *eis*. This word could indicate that baptism is required for salvation or interpreted as the basis for a person being baptized. Generally speaking, both *Luke* and *Acts* link forgiveness with repentance, and not baptism. This particular passage would be the only one that linked the two actions; therefore, contextually it would seem that baptism is on the basis of repentance, not the action that produces forgiveness.

Baptism was an important part of this research because of the delineation between baptism as an entrance into the Church, a common practice among the Americo-Liberians, and baptism as an act of obedience in response to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and of repentance to those who believe. In the Evangelical community, an understanding of baptism is more important than the method of implementation. Immersion represents the message of the death, burial, and resurrection, however, the

baptizer and the locale are less important. This research focused within the Baptist church context and there was a strong consistency in the method of immersion.

2.4 HISTORICAL VIEWS OF EVANGELIZATION

Within each denominational group there are nuances of evangelism. For the purpose of general clarity, this section addresses the contrasting evangelization views of Evangelicals and Catholics. These two views distinguish how evangelization would have been approached differently in regards to evangelizing Africa.

2.4.1 Historically Evangelical

Evangelism is a biblical theme representing the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. Proclamation is a primary responsibility of the believer. "Evangelism focuses on the proclaiming of the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God in Christ, including the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ" (Manser 1999:8424). This definition of evangelism is closely associated with evangelicals. Evangelical denotes "a tradition within Protestant Christianity emphasizing the authority of the Bible, personal conversion, and the doctrine of salvation by faith in the Atonement."⁵²

Evangelical thought began to emerge following the reformation with the introduction of the Methodists in England. The growth of the evangelical segment of doctrinal position can be traced through the various denominational histories of the Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and others. At the IOCWE, there was evangelical representation from both the Western and non-Western world.

Missions is the church fulfilling the activity of God by taking the good news where there was no presence. The completion of this process has sometimes been defined on the basis of conversions while others have emphasized societal change such as eradication of social wrongs, provision of education, medical access, and economic

⁵²Soanes and Stevenson. 2004. *Concise Oxford English dictionary* (11th ed). Oxford Press.

stimulus. These views form the foundation of debate for what is evangelical in regards to evangelism.

An interesting consideration was Paul's statement (Romans 15:23) emphasizing that he had completed his work. What did Paul mean by stating that he had completed the work? He had certainly not converted the population, nor eradicated social and economic problems, so what had he done? Paul had preached the Gospel message and left behind communities who accepted the Gospel message and were being transformed (Scherer 1994:20). This verse is significant as a biblical example of the extent of evangelization among the Mano and Gio. Has the Gospel been preached? Were people converted? Have communities of men and women been established to carry on the work of evangelization? This research will argue that in the case of the Mano and Gio, the answer is an affirmative. This concept conveys what has historically been understood as the evangelical position on evangelization.

2.4.2 Historically Catholic

Historically speaking, the Catholic Church has favored the term evangelization. In addition to terminology difference, Catholicism has also seen the process of evangelization very differently.

Pope Paul VI wrote: "To evangelize is first of all to bear witness, in a simple and direct way, to God revealed by Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, to bear witness that in His Son God has loved the world - that in His Incarnate Word He has given being to all things and has called men to eternal life."⁵³ The complex act of evangelization was the deepest identity of the church (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:7).

This definition seems similar to an evangelical definition; however, evangelization in the Catholic tradition was more a transmission akin to the passing of tradition of the Church. This did not negate the importance of personal commitment, but emphasized

⁵³Pope Paul VI. 1975. [Online]. *On Evangelization in the Modern World*. Papal Encyclicals.

membership of the church. This research did not encounter significant emphasis on membership in the church vis-à-vis identification. There was much more identification with spiritual conversion. There has not been a significant Catholic presence in Liberia and the resulting evangelization of the people has not resulted in a historically Catholic perspective of baptism, membership, and the transmission of blessing through the church or priestly traditions.

2.5 PATTERNS OF EVANGELIZATION

Van Engen's chapter on the *Impact of Modern Ecclesiology on the Local Church* (Scherer 1994:1) provided a pattern for the process of evangelism for a particular group of people that has been previously unreached. The pattern demonstrated a possible pattern of the Mano and Gio.

1. Evangelism leads to conversions of local people.
2. Initial gatherings led by outside leadership.
3. Leadership training involves indigenous leadership.
4. Regional and national structures begin to be formed.
5. Specialized ministries grow inside and outside the church.
6. Indigenous missionaries are sent local, nationally and internationally.

In every context, there are patterns towards evangelization, but also barriers to Christianity and the evangelization process. Those barriers might include social structure, established religious belief system, cultural forms of Christianity, or the absence of contextual expressions.

A major barrier of evangelization has been the barriers between groups of people. This barrier was evident in the New Testament between Jews and Gentiles. Jesus, in his death, abolished the dividing barrier in the process of making peace. The Jews did not cease to be Jews, nor Gentiles to be Gentiles, but their ethnic differences were no longer a barrier to fellowship. Even though Jesus removed barriers, culturally those barriers were still functional. Paul publicly rebuked Peter because of his action of withdrawing from the table with Gentile believers. Functional homogeneity has persisted as a barrier of the church (Scherer 1992:261).

Cultural Christianity in Liberia was akin to the establishment of an Americo-Liberian homogenous unit church. The result of that establishment was an alien church that was a barrier to faith to those of a different context. There are many historical examples of ethnic conflict between people groups, racial segregations, and caste systems that perpetuate inequality and systems that relativize injustice. These types of divisions have been natural human barriers to evangelization (Scherer 1992:261).

In current examples of cultural Christianity, author and apologist David Platt stated that "We're living in a day when it means almost nothing to be a Christian." Recent statistics revealed many self-professed believers were "...marginally committed to Jesus." Many "...culturally identify themselves as Christians and biblically are not followers of Christ."⁵⁴ Note that the author considers the idea that "we" represents inclusion, but in reality, it relates to an exclusive audience.

In the Lausanne Papers, a forum discussion resulted in papers related to *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians*. Nominal Christian was used as a term for a person who had culturally been exposed to and accepted the name of Christian, but who had not responded in repentance to faith in Jesus Christ. A broader definition might state that they were in fact, professing Christians, but living in a culturally adhesive relationship. A person may be religious, church member, and give intellectual assent, but does not embrace Christ in the manner described in the definition of evangelism.⁵⁵

Cultural Christianity is when Christianity identifies itself with a particular culture. To be a specific culture is to be Christian. This leads to ideologies such as manifest destiny and to political forms of theocracies and these adhesions become barriers. Christianity in Liberia demonstrates that until 1980, there was a cultural Christianity that identified itself with the Americo-Liberian. To be Americo-Liberian was to be Christian, which alienated indigenous Liberians from being recipients of the Gospel.

⁵⁴Discussion of American cultural Christianity referenced from an article by David Platt. *Casual, Cultural Christianity Is Leading People to Hell*. Christian Post. March 2013.

⁵⁵Lausanne Occasional Papers. 1980. [Online]. *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians*. June. <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/66-lop-23.html> (August 2013).

A Christian wedding or funeral was the cultural practice of Americo-Liberians. This mind set was a significant barrier to the spread of the Gospel.

2.5.1 Social Structures and Evangelization

A key element of research was interacting with the social structure of the Mano and Gio. A part of the evangelization necessitates an encounter with social structure and affects the transmission of the Gospel. Churches must be dynamically conditioned to the socio-cultural environments of the receptors. Apeh (1989:5) advanced his assertion of social structure in the missionary and church starting setting by recognizing the role of social structure exemplified in the New Testament. Contextualization and social structure are foundational to being able to contextualize both the message and the messenger. Failure to recognize the importance of social structure often results in a barrier of evangelization, as was the case in Liberia.

Social structure governs the way that people interact and relate. “People are social beings, born, raised, married, and usually buried in the company of their fellow humans. They form groups, institutions and societies.” Societies can be studied on three levels: interpersonal relations, the relations of groups, and of the society as a whole. Social structure is the way that relationships are organized with one another in order for the building of societies (Glasser 1976:61).

Within the Mano and Gio, this organization was true of both the general society and of the establishment of the Poro Society to govern a way of life. The social structure proved to be a resilient barrier to both the political agenda of the Americo-Liberians and the theological pursuits of missionaries. Part of the barrier was a failure to understand and engage the social structure in a way that allowed for dialogue and transmission. By not recognizing cultural parameters, an opportunity for witness was lost. Chapter five reviews this issue in regards to the social structure of the Mano.

2.5.2 Missionary Approaches to Evangelization

There has not been a perfect missionary method or contextual expression of the church. In the New Testament, the Church had to be corrected some 150 times.⁵⁶ One must be cautious to avoid idealizing an expression that fails to recognize contextual tensions and challenges. The church must be attentive to mistakes of the past, but cannot succumb to the theoretical perfect contextualization (Root 2011:3).

A consistent criticism of missions has been the frequently exported Gospel accompanied by an alien culture that has created a conflict for the new church. Within that cultural baggage has been hyper-emphasis of theology, denominational structures, and practices of polity and worship. Each oaffected missionary efforts.

A common theological criticism has been the reduction of evangelization to the question of saving of individuals' souls from perdition. This emphasis was thought to have dominated Protestant and Missionary practice. Clearly, eternal consequences cannot be left out, but Newbiggin stated that she did not find that this perspective occupied the center of biblical proclamation (Sherer 1994:23). This researcher feels this criticism to be overstated and that Newbiggin's view would constitute greater missionary representation than has been historically represented.

Another common conflict of missionary evangelization has been the isolationism rooted in theology. Uka discussed the dangers of confining the Gospel within the limitation of bureaucratic organizations and pointed out how denominationalism negatively affected African missions. Using Nierbuhr's work on *Social Sources of Denominationalism*, he argued that the institution was static, but the Gospel was dynamic. Denominational institutions reflected peculiar interests and prejudices, thus contributing to divisions that were not indigenous to the people. Imported

⁵⁶This thought was according to theologian Walter Elwell as cited in *Evangelism and the Early Church* by Jerry Root. Lausanne World Pulse. December 2011.

institutionalization was the net result of denomination. The shift from authentic evangelization to bureaucratic institutions created compromises and contradictions.⁵⁷

Evangelization is often viewed as a missionary discussion. Evangelical Christians understood the mandate to go into the world and make disciples. The missionary followed his or her calling to another place to propagate the Gospel. In responding to God's call, the missionary encountered cultural barriers that raised questions: Was the missionary prepared for a contextual understanding? How was the missionary affected by the political manifestations of the sending nation? Was the missionary able to effectively communicate and did the recipients receive the intended good news? The discussions of these questions revolved around the missiological perspectives of the missionary. Early patterns of evangelization reflected missiological perspectives of missionary praxis, but ultimately, that role becomes encapsulated in the role of the local agent.

2.5.3 Local Agents and Evangelization

Garrison (2004:187) has written extensively on church planting movements in the context of evangelization. Garrison identified the active presence of local leadership as a key characteristic in every movement. Missionary strategists often use this axiom to remind missionaries to develop local leaders. The aim must be to transfer the driving force of the evangelism vision into the hearts of those being reached. Though most early documentation is done by and about foreign agents, the presence and activity of local agents has always been catalytic to effective evangelization.

In *Mission and Empire*, Peggy Brock described the spread of Christianity through the British Empire and how it depended only at first on foreign missionaries. Brock stated that the local agents, who were recent converts to Christianity, soon outnumbered the foreign-born missionaries. According to statistical data, the 10 000

⁵⁷Adamo and Enuwosa. 2004. [Online]. *Missionaries go home: The integrity of mission in Africa*. http://www.missionstudies.org/archive/conference/1papers/fp/Adamo_&_Enuwosa_Full_paper.pdf

official missionaries employed by British societies at the turn of the twentieth century represented a high-water mark of European missionary mobilization, but that figure was dwarfed by the legions of local agents (Etherington 2005:132).

Any discussion of missions in Africa that ignores the sheer number of regional evangelists misrepresents the grassroots dynamics of evangelization. The foot soldiers of the advance of the Gospel have always been local agents. Mission statistics affirmed their existence, even though their voices were rarely heard. These local men and women not only proclaimed Christ among their own communities, but also volunteered to take the message to peoples of neighboring cultures and languages (Etherington 2005:132). This concept was demonstrated, not only among the Mano and Gio of Liberia, but also in regards to going to the Mano of Guinea.

At the heart of this debate is the discussion of contextualization. Bosch (2011:231) states that the indigenization model of contextualization presents itself as either translation or inculturation. The arriving missionaries' struggled with the task of being able to translate the Word of God into a culture and to adapt to new forms rather than importing foreign forms. The recipients receive the message as presented, but receive the Gospel into cultural form rather than adopting the imported forms. Translation and inculturation must happen for evangelization to flourish.

2.6 VESSELS OF EVANGELIZATION

Evangelization involves processes whereby particular aspects of a person's life enable a bridge towards the Gospel message. Salvation is a holistic reality, but often meets a person's life at a particular point of need. Four key bridges of evangelization have been identified for consideration as significant to this research. Evangelization as a message of peace, refuge, reconciliation, and translation were contextual bridges evident in the movement of the Mano and Gio. The bridges were not separate or in addition to salvation, but were the particular message linked to salvation in the contextual understanding of the recipient. Reception is the goal of the missionary

message so relating to and discovering bridges towards the receptor is essential to evangelization (Apeh 1989:6). Each of these bridges were encountered through research surveys, anecdotal evidence, and interviews. These themes and patterns have been interjected throughout the dissertation.

2.6.1 Evangelization and Peace

The wholeness that God desires to bring through the evangelization process is appropriately embraced in the scriptural notion of shalom. God as peace and peace with God forms the evangelization message. Shalom embraces peace, truth, and justice through conversion, but in the context of transformation (Rice 2007:4).

Jehovah-Shalom was the name given by God to Gideon to commemorate the appearance of the Lord to bring peace to the people of Israel. Gideon's name was "The Lord is our peace" (Achteimeier 1985:483). Various biblical characters experienced a resulting peace as the effect of an encounter with God. The evangelization of people associated with a fear-based worldview (see 5.8.4) often result in converts who emphasize finding peace with God.

Love (2008:1) stated that "there must be a strong congruity between our message (the Gospel of peace), our mandates (peacemaking and evangelism), and our manner (the way we carry out the great commission)." He rejected the idea of peaceful, peace-keepers, and peace-loving as personality types in his description of peacemaker, but emphasized that peacemakers were those who sought to resolve conflict, build bridges, call for peace, and work towards the end of marginalization (:4). Peace must be a spiritual wholeness and then expressions of the activity of a peaceful person. Evangelization finds peace between man and God, but that advocacy for peace must become a way of life. Paul's exhortation (Paraphrase of Romans 12:18) was that the church in Rome should, if possible, live at peace with everyone.

Evidence of this expression of peace in the conversion surveys were the individuals who self-identified changes in life from being a difficult person, to one recognized in

the community as one who strives for peace in the family and community. The transformative quality of peace reflected evidence of evangelization.

A person of peace is a term in evangelization that refers to those who are in a place of unbelief and yet seem receptive to be that bridge from the Gospel message to the unreached community. A person who receives the messenger becomes the person of peace (Love 2008:6). In the Mano and Gio context, the local evangelist always emphasized developing peace through respectful introductions with leaders. This was an inclusion of peaceful process that missionaries often contextually failed to understand or follow. When examining the implications of peace and evangelization, one must recognize the triune manifestation of peace in regard to the one who is saving. “Jesus is our peace. Jesus makes peace. Jesus proclaims peace” (:11).

2.6.2 Evangelization and Refuge

Another vessel of evangelization was the presence of God as refuge. The word translated as refuge is related to shelter or protection from danger or distress. The word was more common in the Old Testament in regards to shelter from wind and rain, a hiding place, or a figurative place of safety. God was depicted as refuge. The Psalmist (41:2) declared God as refuge in times of trouble (Myers 1987:877).

A key element of this research was the impact of the Gospel in times of war. How did the Gospel impact people in crisis and displacement? Faith communities became a refuge for the weary, an escape from societal initiation, and the uncertainty of a societal collapse. God, His Word, and community become refuge and security.

Through the world conflicts many have been many displaced persons. In describing a refugee (displaced person), the term generally relates to one who has left a country of origin because of war, persecution, natural disaster or calamity. Working with the displaced is a holistic ministry that deals with the whole challenge. There is a biblical mandate to proclaim good news, but also to care for the poor, disenfranchised,

broken, and displaced (Rice 1980:4-7). This is Christ as refuge. Christ as refuge was central to the Mano and Gio experience of evangelization during the war.

The disciples did not recognize that they were a new and separate entity until they recognized the scope of mission. The community of believers slowly and painfully recognized that the Gospel was going elsewhere as the Holy Spirit led the messengers and the messages towards Samaritans, God-fearers, and Gentiles. The diaspora became evangelization and refuge (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:10).

2.6.3 Evangelization and Reconciliation

The Christian faith is an affirmation that God is in the process of reconciling us to himself through Jesus Christ! As God reconciles humanity unto himself, humanity becomes a part of the community of God and of faith. Okure (2006:105) states that Paul's purpose in writing to the community in Corinth was a plea to reconcile with God and with each other.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (II Corinthians 5:17-21, NIV).

Reconciliation was not just an important focus of evangelization, but the essential ministry of evangelization. Evangelization was the process of reconciliation between man and God. Men and women were to be agents and ambassadors, in word and deed, of the message of reconciliation (Birdsall 2007:1)

Humanity was created for fellowship with God, however, because of rebellion and sin against God, a spiritual separation from God and His blessings occurred. In light of that separation, Jesus came as the incarnate one to take away sin and the ensuing

judgment through His death on the cross. By faith in Christ, men and women can be forgiven and restored to a personal and eternal, relationship with God.

Reconciliation is a central tenet of evangelization. Reconciliation is restoration and renewal of broken relationships beginning with God (Okure 2006:111-112). God reconciled himself to us through Christ and gave us a ministry of reconciliation. Paul first embraced reconciliation by accepting Christ personally, but then, by becoming an ambassador of reconciliation (:114). A reading of the text would be incomplete without becoming recipients and ministers of the reconciliation of God in our own living context. (:117) Evangelization and reconciliation are linked together. Paul was certainly not always successful in the ministry of reconciliation, but it remains a living active part of what evangelization and ministry embraces.

Evangelization embraces reconciliation. A bridge for evangelization becomes the sharing of concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society, liberating humanity from oppression. Reconciliation to God cannot be separated from reconciliation to one another. “Christ, who *is* our peace, *made* peace through the cross, and *preached* peace to the divided world of Jew and Gentile. The unity of the people of God is both a fact and mandate. God's plan for the integration of the whole creation in Christ is modelled in reconciliation of God's new humanity.”⁵⁸

If reconciliation is at the center of faith, and if faith must permeate society, than the question of a church leader during the Rwandan genocide is relevant: “Many of my parishioners participated in killing. How do we form Christians who say no to killing?” (Rice 2007:4). Evangelization that does not embrace reconciliation is no Gospel message at all. In understanding the mission of the seventy in Luke’s Gospel, there was a distinct emphasis on creating community, emphasizing sharing, healing, serving, and loving as a reflection of the Kingdom of God. “Christians are saved to save, reconciled in order to reconcile” (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:8).

⁵⁸ Cape Town Commitment 2010. <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/ctcommitment.html#p2-2> [Online] (October 2013).

2.6.4 Evangelization and Translation

“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31, HCSB). Evangelism was revealed in the written Word of God, serving to reveal and to proclaim the good news of the saving grace of a Triune God. The Gospel must be translated into both an understandable language and content.

Borchert (2002:319) concluded that how one views the signs of *John* establishes a pivotal point of understanding. The signs point toward a personal transformation of life, not merely acceptance of creedal forms. Jesus is the only adequate way of salvation. The proclamation of that good news in translation is a necessity.

When engaging a new linguistic setting, one must be conscious that the evangelization process flows through translation. The translation is cultural, contextual, and linguistic, and necessitates both a transmitter and recipient. Sanneh (1993:239) stated that “It is impossible in the field to embark on learning the mother tongue for the purpose of reproducing in it the greatest of texts without opening at the same time, channels of mutual transformation in the deeper cultural hinterland of both recipient and transmitter.”

This process of learning the mother tongue is a deeply contextual dialogue illustrated in those who have devoted themselves to translation. Sanneh (1993:239) recognized the principle role of translation and the impact of evangelization when he stated that, “It would be hard to indicate how anything else has done more to induce changes in the forms of Western Christianity itself than feedback effects, the tacit dimension, of translating the Scripture into non-Western language. Translation is marked by sheer diversity and range of materials appropriated; the figures, color, music, artistic styles, idioms, and tones that are adopted into usage. This process had a combined effect that has left its mark on the practice of Christianity. Translation demands a special case for Bible translation, vis-à-vis the ethnographic projects of anthropology.”

During the Christian expansion of the nineteenth century, it was assumed that churches on the mission field would be modeled on churches at home. The tendency was to produce replicas. One could see the architecture, prayer books, liturgies, dress, instruments, hymns, decision processes, committees, and superintendents were exported into the mission (Scherer 1992:264-65). Over time, the missionaries and the local agents wrestled with the translatability of all of these things. The culmination was to embrace the message through translation rather than form, and whether the missionaries embraced this idea or not, translation imposed it.

Translation is much more than a technical process of converting language. Sanneh (2009:57-58) contends that missionaries undertook Bible translation without reckoning the fact that translation would not spare assumptions and motives. The translation then invigorated culture and the Christian message within culture. It is a fundamental vernacular restructuring of the message and rejects the conformity imposed by Western colonial and church influences. Sanneh (2009:252) further maintains that the Christian movement has an acceptance of cultural and linguistic diversity, while contrasting that with Islam which mandates linguistic conformity.

This researcher agrees with Sanneh (2009:194) that translation is at the core of evangelization. By embarking on the journey of transmitting the Gospel in the heart language, an ethos is stimulated that lays a foundation for religious change, even in sometimes marginalized society. Translation represents the flow of the Gospel through missionary and local agents alike from the biblical narrative to the hearts of people. Incorporating an understanding of God of culture to the God of the Bible brought about a translating effect towards conversion. Wonbenyakeh (May 2009) affirmed the great respect and openness of the older people when the Gospel is spoken or presented in translation. This translation is not just a linguistic matter, it becomes God's voice in the symbols, beliefs, and images of the people.

2.7 SUMMARY

Evangelization is the *raison d'être* of the church.⁵⁹ Mission is evangelization and evangelization is mission. The two concepts can be defined and distinguished, but cannot be fully understood apart from the tapestry of the Gospel. Proclamation must happen by missionaries and local agents through an enabling of the Holy Spirit. Translation takes place and the Gospel is received, imperfect as the translation may be, prompting a conversion experience. Conversion leads to the formation of Christ's earthly community that continues the proclamation that transforms.

Pope John Paul VI expressed that the complex act of evangelization was the church's deepest identity. Later, Pope John Paul II taught that missionary activity "belonged to the nature of the Christian life."⁶⁰ While the Catholic doctrines represent a vastly different perspective of the means of salvation, the grappling with the mission of God and evangelization as a process and necessity, are similar.

Evangelization is the activity of God. The activity of God incorporates the process of proclamation, conversion, repentance, transformation, and baptism. There are many factors that influence the evangelization of persons including the presence of missionaries, the role of local agents, the social structure of the society, and the message in contextual translatable forms. The message of salvation is then facilitated by attributes such as the peace, reconciliation, refuge and translation. As that process happens, Christ's earthly community is empowered to be a transformative witness.

For the Mano and Gio, the transmission of the Gospel began with the arrival of the Christian immigrants from the United States. The barrier, however, was the inability to translate the Gospel beyond cultural and political blinders. Thus, for 150 years, the

⁵⁹Bevans and Schroeder. 2004. (7). The Theological Advisory Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences proposed that "the church is a community of disciples being witness to the Risen Lord and his Gospel. Therefore, the process of evangelization is the *raison d'être* of the church."

⁶⁰Ibid. The Pope Paul VI quote was from his 1975 Apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, while Pope John Paul II's statement was in the 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*.

good news was not received by the Mano and Gio. The coup in 1980 began a cultural transformation that affected the transmission of the Gospel towards contextualization.

Chapter three explores the history of Liberia and the syncretism of politics and religion that served to hinder transmission of the message. The history of Liberia and the mission history were intertwined. The historical timeline and influences of the development of the nation must be understood to recognize the paradigm shifts that influenced the flow of the Gospel. The flow of evangelization to the Mano and Gio was a long and arduous journey with many perils along the way.

CHAPTER THREE

LIBERIA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

To understand the main question of the evangelization of the Mano and Gio, one must understand the history of Liberia. This chapter describes the history of the founding of the Republic of Liberia, the chronological development of the nation, and the Christian influences that shaped the religious climate toward evangelization. Walls (1996:xvii) stated that "...the divine saving activity can be understood in terms of translation. Divinity is translated into humanity, but into specific humanity, at home in specific segments of social reality." To understand the transmission of the Gospel one must see and know the people, the place, and the history.

The purpose of this chapter as it relates to the research question is to establish a basic chronology of events in Liberian history. The history will demonstrate that this is largely a record of the Americo-Liberian historical narrative, but that a collision happened in 1980 to force the indigenization of both politics and religion. These historical events prevented evangelization of the Mano and Gio until the coup and then facilitated the evangelization process toward the standpoint of general openness. This historical presentation is not intended to be revisionist or rewriting of history, but to constructively piece together the important elements that influenced its development and shaped the construct of the nation.

Liberia has a long unique history, but little was known of the geographical region before the ships arrived with immigrants to settle this new land. Though this was representative of the region before 1822, it continued to be an ironic dichotomy of Liberia. The recorded history of Liberia is almost exclusively the perspective and

legacy of the Americo-Liberians, while little was written about the establishment, growth, and progression of the ethnic groups of over ninety percent of the people.

This dichotomy, which included the heritage of Americo-Liberians, but excluded the groups indigenous to Liberia, was influenced by access to education, the perceived value of historical documentation, and the perspective of those who undertook the recording task. One must acknowledge, however, that the Americo-Liberians were themselves marginalized before arriving in Liberia and producing a historical record was an important endeavor. The unintended consequence was the marginalization of the indigenous groups and the lack of both historical and political representation that continued for more than a century. Gbowee (2011:8)⁶¹ stated that “The awful irony was that they (Americo-Liberian) did to the indigenous people exactly what had been done to them in the United States. They set up separate schools, separate churches. The indigenous became their servants.”

3.2 BEFORE THE COLONISTS

Oliver Davies (1967:214) wrote a fascinating book about *West Africa before the Europeans*. Davies explored the various empires of West Africa and wrote chapters on the Paleolithic, Neolithic, and early Iron Ages; detailing the archaeological records of West Africa. With all of the wealth of information of pre-colonial heritage West Africa, however, “nothing is known about the prehistory of Liberia.” There are only three insignificant mentions of Liberia in his study of the historical West Africa.

The Harvard African Expedition (HAE) of 1926-1927 was important to the academic record pertaining to the interior of Liberia. The purpose of the expedition was to conduct a biological and medical survey of an African region of which little was known. Sir Harry Johnston was cited in *Liberia* (1906), as having stated, “The interior of Liberia is still the least known part of Africa.” Maugham echoed that

⁶¹Leymah Gbowee was one of three recipients to share the Nobel Peace award in 2011, advocating for peace to end the Liberian civil war. All of the recipients were women and two were from Liberia.

sentiment in 1920: “Liberia, although normally only twelve days removed from the United Kingdom is nevertheless the one portion of West Africa of which the least is known to us” (Strong 1930:3).

Most of the groups of people in the region were related to other people from neighboring countries. Some groups have oral traditions of migrating many years ago, but there is a lack of reliable documentation (Clifford 1971:55). So much time has elapsed, that elders of the various Mano and Gio villages visited did not have a sense of where their people came from to be settled in the shadows of the Nimba Mountain range.⁶² Some of the ethnic groups who settled northern Liberia were believed to have come over the mountains from the plateau of the interior of Africa. Other groups could have migrated to the region after the fall of the three major Kingdoms of West Africa. The Kingdoms were the Songhai in the fifteenth century, Mali in the thirteenth century, and Ghana in the ninth century (Clifford 1971:55).

Liberian historian Abayaomi Karnga stated that the first inhabitants of the region were often referred to as *Jinna*, a term used synonymously with pygmies or little people (Sirleaf 2009:1). *Jinna* was a common term in folklore, but also in animistic practices intended to instill fear. The children were told that if they went into the forest, “the *Jinna*⁶³ would get them.”

In the history of seafaring explorers, it was believed that Hanno, the Carthaginian, sailed as far south as the Cape Mount coastal region of Liberia between 520-470 A.D. Other documented accounts indicate that two Norman ships may have landed in 1365 A.D. to trade pepper in Cape Mount and Grand Bassa. The region became known as the pepper or Grain Coast, in contrast to the Gold Coast of Ghana. Pedro de Sintra

⁶²Wonbenyakeh (June 2011) stated that in his youth, he vaguely remembered some of the elders talking about their place of origin, but there is little knowledge among the current elderly of where the Mano and Gio came from before arriving in the Nimba Mountain Range.

⁶³As a child (this researcher) living in Yekepa around 1975, children were told that the *Jinna* was looking for his lost baby and any child not wearing a key was susceptible to being taken. This story had enough influence that almost all of the children in the town wore a key around their neck to ward off the *Jinna*. This warning may have also been associated with discoveries of ritualistic killings.

sailed the coast in 1461 and indications were that Sintra named Sierra Leone to the West and visited Cape Mount and the Mesurado River. The Portuguese influence was evidenced by names of the rivers like the St. Paul, St. John, Cess, and Sanguin Rivers. Explorers named Cape Palmas for the abundance of palm and the Cavalla River for the abundance of Mackerel (Clifford 1971:56-57).

The Liberian coast was not popular with the sea merchants from Europe. An interesting observation about pre-Liberia was the lack of any major slaving kingdoms. The coastal people, specifically the Kru, traded with early ships, but prided themselves in never having been enslaved. The Kru were good seamen and valued by the European captains as loaders, pilots, and seamen. They were successful in ivory trade and bought guns to defend themselves (Davidson 1969:248). The Kru generally refused to sell slaves and were “known to grieve to death or commit suicide rather than endure slavery.” The absence of slave trading may indicate why the recorded history was limited. The slave trading was more abundant in other places, and would have brought awareness, interaction, and records. With an individualistic spirit, the Kru were the last to submit to the Government of Liberia (Clifford 1971:60).

“Liberia’s first indigenous group was probably the Dei. While some scholars believe that the Gola were the first indigenous ethnic group, the Gola tradition states that they were met by the Dei people when they first arrived.” Scholars estimate that groups of people began to arrive in the region between 1 100 and 1 500. Those who settled the region were marked and shaped by isolation. Though Liberia is a small country, the isolation was not of distance, but of the dense rain forest which imposed itself on the scattered population. The forest was difficult for habitation and the archeological record easily disappeared with growing rain forest (Handbook 1972:24).

Historians agree that it is impossible to accurately identify the pre-Liberia interior population. Statistics generally estimated one million Liberians, but those figures were repeated for 100 years! The inaccurate data was compounded by a lack of

geographical boundaries.⁶⁴ There was always a question of what constituted Liberia. Even after the Republic was formed, the colonial French were able to explore and claim 2 000 square miles originally claimed by Liberia (Clifford 1971:34).

Against this backdrop, the US Schooner Alligator, sailed into the mouth of the Mesurado River with Captain Stockton claiming, “This should be the site of our colony. No finer spot on the coast” (Foote 1854:115). Though a US Navy ship, it represented the interests of the ACS and its lead representative, Dr. Eli Ayers.

3.3 SETTLEMENT OF LIBERIA

The settlement of the coast of Liberia by freed slaves from the US was the culmination of a series of legislative acts by the US congress, assisting the formation of ACS. The society was formed for the purpose of settling “free persons of color” on the African continent. The US government did not directly fund these ventures, but they allowed the Navy to render assistance (Handbook 1972:9-10).

Contrary to widely held belief that Liberia was the first colony established by freed slaves, John Kizel had already established a colony in Sierra Leone. Kizel was a slave from South Carolina who had joined the Revolutionary War on the side of the British. He received support to establish a colony on Sherboro Island and arrived in Sierra Leone in March of 1820. Kizel expressed the opinion that “...people of color in the United States would ultimately return to Africa. Africa is the land of black men, and to Africa they must and will come” (Foote 1854:115).

In regards to the formation of ACS, there were differing motivations for the formation. Some religious adherents adopted the idea of repatriation because it seemed to be an excellent plan for spreading Christianity to Africa. Some proponents wanted to rid the US of all black people as soon as possible and this seemed a logical

⁶⁴Innis (2007:6) affirms the lack of verifiable statistics. Liberia’s religious statistics are estimations and the unrest and civil war have impeded further attempts to gather accurate data. For the purpose of this research, all presented statistics should be considered estimation unless stated otherwise.

solution. Others, who were pragmatist, felt as though black people would be happier living in Africa, free from racial discrimination. American leaders like Daniel Webster, Francis Scott Key, Henry Clay, and Bushrod Washington were among the founders of ACS (Sirleaf 2009:3).

Under the leadership of two white agents and with 88 passengers, the first ship, Elizabeth, set sail for West Africa in 1820 (Cooksey 1931:173). The original plan was to settle at Sherboro Island, but that plan was blocked by Keizel. A year later, Captain Stockton, Ayers, and seven immigrants sailed along the coast of West Africa to find another place to settle (Foote 1854:115).

3.3.1 Arrival of the Alligator

On 12 December 1822, the USS Alligator, anchored off the coast of Cape Mesurado. They landed without weapons to demonstrate a peaceful presence and sent a messenger to King Peter of intentions to purchase land. After a long *palaver*,⁶⁵ King Peter rejected the offer to buy land stating that, “If any man settled there, King Peter would die and his woman would cry plenty” (Foote 1854:115-116). This phrase was used over a century and a half ago, but is not uncommon today, in Liberian English,⁶⁶ to say that a person would cry plenty.

Persistence won the day as the local kings eventually consented to the sale of land receiving goods valued at approximately \$300.00 USD. The land consisted of 36 along the Mesurado and about three miles between the Mesurado and Junk River. The deed for the land bore the marks of: Kings Peter, George, Zoda, Long Peter, Governor, and Jimmy, along with Stockton and Ayers (Foote 1864:115-116).

⁶⁵*Palaver* is a Liberian English term used to describe an argument, negotiation, or animated conversation. *Online Etymology Dictionary* (2010).

⁶⁶*Liberian English* is the English slang of Liberia. It is linguistically divided into categories, but basically represents the informal common slang with unique metaphors, idioms, and words.

There are conflicting descriptions of the negotiations process. Some accounts of the land purchase would suggest the deal was completely fair, while others would say that the agreement was coerced and at the end of a gun. A common description of the coerced version stated that Stockton persuaded King Peter with a gun to his head (Sirleaf 2009:4). This seems improbable because of the number of persons involved and the resulting acrimony. There are no primary accounts of coercion, and therefore, the differing descriptions can be assumed to be implied perspective.

The immigrants bought the initial piece of land in a negotiated settlement and additional land later. The colonists were not in a position to have forced the people to surrender their land. The purchase demonstrated that the immigrants bought the land, but the other kings who made up the leadership were upset and sought to impeach King Peter for having sold the land to strangers, who ironically, thought that it would interfere with slave trading (Foote 1854:116-117,122).

King Boatswain, a well-respected leader in the region, was called in to mediate a settlement. Boatswain ruled in favor of the colonists who had purchased the land. His statements indicated "...the bargain had been fair on both sides and that he saw no grounds for rescinding the contract." Boatswain directed a comment to King Peter: "Having sold your country, you accepted payment, you must take the consequences." A final consent made on 28 April 1822 was signed by 17 kings and 34 half kings who consented to the ruling (Foote 1854:121-122).

Though the descendants of the Americo-Liberians have been criticized for the mistreatment of the indigenous people, in the early years of the colony, the indigenous people continually violated terms of the agreements. It does not justify subsequent actions of oppression by the Americo-Liberians, but it is disingenuous to paint the conflict as one-sided in the early years. The Americo-Liberians had some advantages, but they literally built a place to belong.

The small coastal communities grew with the arrivals of the Nautilus, Strong, Hunter, Vine, Cyprus, Norfolk, Indian Chief, Randolph, and the Fidelity. William and Rosabelle Burke sailed to Liberia and later wrote: “Persons coming to Africa should expect to go through many hardships, such as are common to the first settlement in any new country. I expected it and was not disappointed or discouraged at anything I met with; and so, far from being dissatisfied with the country, I bless the Lord, that ever my lot was cast in this part of the world” (Sirleaf 2009:14).

By 1867, 13000 immigrants had arrived. ACS was modestly successful in repatriating black Americans. The small colony eventually received the name Liberia, at the suggestion of Robert Randolph Gurley. Gurley was a clergyman, an advocate, and a driving force of ACS. He also recommended the township at Cape Mesurado as Monrovia, in honor of the President James Monroe (DuPlessis 1929:93).

The early immigrants had a level of diversity as some came voluntarily through ACS, but others were forcibly included. Slave ships that were rescued at sea brought and liberated those people to the colony. Those rescued from slave trafficking were primarily from the Congo River region, so the settlers dubbed these the Congo people. The term Congo has often been used interchangeably with Americo-Liberians, but represented a people who had a uniquely different heritage (Dunn 2001:83).

Two key battles between the settlers and the local groups were fought in the early years. On 11 November 1826, the colony was attacked by a force of approximately 800 people. Jehudi Ashmun, a Methodist minister and early agent, was down with fever and his second-in-command, Lott Carey rallied the forces. Elijah Johnson, a legendary military figure, brought the canons to bear and defeated the attacking groups. There was an estimated 100 colonists (Foote 1864:123-125).

A second wave of the attack on the colony came just a month later on 2 December 1826. A quote describing the event from the colonist vantage point stating: “The colonists received them with that bravery and determination which the danger of total

destruction in defeat was calculated to inspire” (Foote 1864:127). A young widow from Georgia saved the day when she manned the canons at a crucial moment. When the attack was repelled, the colonists reportedly had only three rounds of ammunition left. This act of heroism was celebrated as Matilda Newport Day (Clifford 1971:17).

The accounts of the battle and role of Matilda Newport have been questioned. In the cleavage of Americo-Liberians and indigenous-Liberians, this particular celebration was a flashpoint that provoked a sense of mistreatment and disrespect. Recent articles attempted to discredit the role of Newport as a myth. An article in *The Perspective* analyzed the early immigration ledgers and came to the conclusion that the person identified as the woman from Georgia was Matilda Spencer, later to be married to Ralph Newport. The extent of her role in the battle would be impossible to determine beyond the traditions that currently exist.⁶⁷

The colonists won the battle and proved resilient. The Liberian kings grew tired of a war they were not winning and signed a truce aboard the British Schooner, Prince Regent (Foote 1854:127). A season of peace and prosperity was emerging, depending on how one measured peace and for whom the prosperity belonged.

3.3.2 Early Years of the Settlers

The new colonies faced many challenges from the initial settlement until the Declaration of Independence. One of the key influences of the early colonists was the struggle against slavery. Between partnerships of the colonist, the Royal Navy, and the US Navy, pressure was put on slave trading along the coast. Many clergy who came to the colonies led the way in this movement, demonstrating the role and strength of early Christianity. Ashmun led the movement to shut down various slave trading points and established settlements like Mills and Caldwell to harbor escaped slaves. Stating that Liberia quelled the slave trading would be overly ambitious, but slave trading was reasonably halted within the jurisdiction (Foote 1854:133-136).

⁶⁷*The Perspective*. [Online]. www.theperspective.org/2004/jan/matildanewportmyth.htm (Sept 2011).

Ashmun was an early leader at the colony. Upon his death, the epitaph of Ashmun stated that “he united the qualities of a hero and statesman.” He led the colony for eight years and established a system of governance, laws, and an economy (Foote 1854:123-124). Ashmun recommended Carey be made the permanent agent and governor of Liberia. The transition to Carey, the Baptist preacher, was historic as he became the first black leader of Liberia (Fitts 1978:56-58). This was to become a pattern with a Methodist or Baptist clergy as the leader of the nation. Years later, Liberia’s most influential President, William Tubman was a Methodist lay preacher, followed in the Presidency by William R. Tolbert, Jr., an ordained Baptist minister and President of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA).

Carey was a significant figure related to the discussion of the impact of Christianity. The process, role, and motivation of Carey’s life as a pastor, missionary, and colonist made him an important consideration. His goal was to preach the good news of Jesus Christ in Africa. Carey never intended to be only a pastor to the Americo-Liberians, but desired that the good news of salvation be proclaimed throughout the continent. Carey had a heart to see all people evangelized (Fitts 1978:15-18).

Carey was born in Charles City, Virginia in 1780 and became a born-again believer in 1807. Carey’s theological perspective of being born-again was consistent with this dissertation’s theological premise. When the question is posed of the extent of evangelization, it referred to the same hopes held by leaders such as Carey that the people groups of Liberia would hear and receive the good news (Fitts 1978:11).

Sometime during 1807, Carey attended a service at First Baptist Church and heard a Gospel message by Reverend John Courtney from the *Gospel of John* on the conversion of Nicodemus. Carey was moved to accept Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord by the power of the sermon and the moving of the Holy Spirit. He was baptized, joined the First Baptist Church, and was ordained to preach the Gospel among the black population of Richmond. Carey became a great preacher of early American Christianity. Colin Teague stated that, “He considered his brother Carey, the greatest

preacher he was in the habit of hearing.” He further stated, “I don’t hear any of you white ministers that can preach like Lott Carey” (Fitts 1978:13-16).⁶⁸

Carey was a part of the initial group to Liberia. While on that journey, they formed Providence Baptist Church, citing the role of the providence of God. The Church was a spiritual barometer of Liberia and the first government offices were in the Church edifice. Carey had a stated goal to preach the Gospel to the people of Africa. Years later, President Tolbert preached at the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia.⁶⁹

The colony grew with a steady influx until the end of the Civil War in the US. Additional colony ventures resulted in settlements at Cape Palmas, Bassa Cove, and the mouth of Sinoe River. By 1838, all the colonies, with the exception of Maryland, had formed into the Commonwealth of Liberia (Handbook 1972:11).

3.4 THE LAND OF LIBERTY

Liberia has never been a colony of the United States and the American Government has never been willing to regard Liberia in that manner (Clifford 1971:21). Various misconceptions have led to the common referral of Liberia as an American colony. Some of those misconceptions were born out of ignorance and others of a pejorative intent. HAE referred to Liberia as the only “Negro Republic in Africa and was founded in 1821 as an American colony” (Strong 1930:4). This historical statement, though inaccurate, has been continually referenced.

Gifford (1993:231) incorrectly referred to Liberia by stating: “In geo-political terms, Liberia was a client state; one might say a colony of the United States.” Gifford understood that to be a factually inaccurate statement, but used the phrase repeatedly, forming a prejudicial and biased perspective. Such characterizations reflect a weak understanding of Liberia’s heritage or a purposeful attempt of political bias.

⁶⁸Cited from W.J. Simmons (1968). *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive, and Rising* (507).

⁶⁹Tabla, Francis. (Unpublished letter). “*What in the World is God up to with First Baptist Church Richmond, Virginia and Liberia, West Africa?*” (Pastor, Ebenezer Church, Minnesota).

During the rapidly moving colonization of Africa by European nations, political pressure grew for control of the region. The European powers refused to recognize Liberia's presence as a sovereign state. In 1843, the British requested clarification on the US role in Liberia, and they responded with no official political relationship with the commonwealth, but indicated a desire for its well-being. These external pressures began to move Liberia to becoming a sovereign state (Clifford 1971:21).

Simon Greenleaf of Harvard University was brought in to guide Liberia through a constitutional convention.⁷⁰ By 26 July 1847, The Declaration of Independence was signed at Providence Baptist Church in Monrovia. It read:

We the representatives of the people of the commonwealth of Liberia, in convention assembled, invested with the authority of forming a new government, relying upon the aid and the protection of the Great Arbitrator of human events, do hereby in the name and on behalf of the people of this commonwealth, declare a free, sovereign, and independent State, by the name and title of the Republic of Liberia (Clifford 1971:22).

The Liberian flag was patterned after the flag of the US. The eleven red and white stripes were symbolic of the eleven signers of the Declaration. The blue field represented the continent, and the one white star with five points symbolized Liberia as the only black republic existing on the African continent, the Lone Star (Clifford 1971:25). The declaration was signed, the flag was flying, and in rapid succession, England, France, Prussia, Belgium, and Brazil acknowledged the independence of Liberia. Ironically, the US was slow in recognizing independence (Foote 1864:181).

Joseph Jenkins Roberts, a young military officer who had risen quickly in the ranks, was inaugurated on 3 January 1948, as the first President (Clifford 1971:26). Liberia

⁷⁰An unusual feature of the constitution was "that no white man should become a landholder in Liberia and that full rights of citizenship should be enjoyed by the colored men alone" (Foote 1864:151). Americo-Liberians took precaution to protect their Republic from colonizing nations, but did not adopt similar protection for those indigenous to Liberia. Many years passed before all Liberians had the right to vote and function within the political structure.

was settled through the process of uniting various colonies. The Saint Paul River colony, the Bassa Cove settlement and the Mississippi colonies became the nucleus, but the Maryland colony down the coast at Cape Palmas remained independent. Later, facing threats from the British and French, and conflict with local Grebo chiefs, the Maryland colony decided to become a part of the republic (Sirleaf 2009:24).

3.4.1 Turbulent Times

Liberia became a republic in the midst of the colonization of Africa. The turbulent years are often dated as 1880 – 1920, but could incorporate those years until the induction of President Tubman in 1944. The turbulent times were characterized by instability and transition. The growth of the nation was a slow tedious process. Hillary Wright Johnson became the eleventh President of Liberia and was the son of one of the original settlers, Elijah Johnson. He was the first President to actually be born in Liberia and marked a transitioning nature of the nation. No longer was Liberia the product of immigrants from the US, but was being led by a generation who only knew Liberia (Sirleaf 2009:9).

During the turbulent years, cultural Christianity began to take root among the Americo-Liberians. Buell described a way of life where culture blended with Christianity. At the same time, He also quoted Harley, working among the Mano and Gio in the isolated region of the Nimba Mountain range at the Methodist station in Ganta: "...with respect to Mano people, except for the suppression of war, slavery, human sacrifice, and similar evils, and the assumption of political control by the Liberian government, the culture of these people remains today, essentially unchanged" (Buell 1947:7). There was a stark contrast between the way of life of the descendents of freed slaves and those who occupied the Nimba region. These two perspectives reveal the contrast of the forming worlds. The recorded struggle for survival was of the Americo-Liberians to see the newly formed government stay the course as a nation. Not until after the mid-twentieth century, did the local people become a role player of significance or reflected in the historical or literary scope.

The great issue of the turbulent years became economic viability. The political establishment was trying to maintain a certain standard of living, while also trying to maintain a government. The result of this effort was a dependence on foreign aid and accumulated debt. In that discussion would be room for conversation on the culture of corruption, lack of transparency, and the abuse of governmental powers by the elite ruling party. Liberia began to move away from men with altruistic motivations like Ashmun and Carey, and became more of a reflection of political aspirations.

The financial debt situation in Liberia became serious, drawing the attention of the US Congress which authorized an investigation and sent a study commission in 1909. As a result of the study, Liberia was granted a \$1 700 000 loan. The loan helped in the short term, but plagued Liberia until the Tubman administration (Clifford 1971:38).

A major embarrassment of the turbulent times for the government was the indictment of slave trading. The controversy stemmed from the indication that officials were sending Liberian slaves to work on the coffee plantations of Fernando Po, a small Spanish Island (Clifford 1971:39-40). The controversy was tainted by motives of personal ambition, but had enough legitimacy to spark an international furore.

The slave trading controversy had at least two extenuating factors that contributed to the tension. First, many of the reports originated with Thomas Faulkner, a defeated Presidential candidate. Second, the controversy was being publicized by the media of Great Britain who resented Liberian labor on the various Islands off the coast of West Africa, undercutting its own cheap labor plantation in the Gold Coast. Was this an outcry of injustice or a politically motivated scandal? Vice President Allen Yancy was forced to resign, followed by President Charles King, who had served for ten years. The scandal left a scar on a nation founded on freedom (Handbook 1972:18).

The turbulent years took a turn in 1926 as Liberia entered an agreement with the Firestone Rubber Company, granting a major concession of land for the planting of rubber trees. Firestone was combatting the dominance of Malaysian rubber and

Liberia seemed like a good partner. Two agreements were signed: One was for a 99 year lease on one million acres of land at six cents per acre and the other agreement was for a \$5 000 000 loan freeing Liberia from all international debt and restoring economic viability (Handbook 1972:20).

This type of external financial agreement was a double-edged sword. The move to sign an agreement with Firestone was a good deal at the time, but in later years, the people felt as though Firestone was taking advantage of Liberia. Firestone became a source of wealth for the elite, but did little for the indigenous population who did much of the work, but lived in poverty. Firestone could have played a more significant role in the quality of life, but did not do so and was exacerbated by the corruption and misuse of funds in government. There was no political will to drive corporations towards community development to serve the impoverished.

Besides the financial gain, there was another key impact of the agreement with Firestone. For all of the talk of Liberia being a US colony, they never really had a vested interest. Although there were many private and public ties, the US was not a major advocate, but this changed in the Firestone agreement. The US now had an economically vested interest. Firestone was important to the US and the owners of the company were well connected in the governmental hall (Handbook 1972:20).

Liberia had no role in World War I, however, with World War II, Liberia found itself on the World's stage. The Germans had controlled almost all of North Africa and into the West African regions. Senegal, the French colony, had fallen into the hands of the Axis. Liberia became a strategic ferrying point from South America to the African continent for the allies. President Edwin Barclay and President-elect Tubman visited the US on the invitation of President Theodore Roosevelt. As a result, Liberia and the US signed an agreement to build an airbase which became Roberts International Airport (RIA). The airport was to serve as a ferrying point for the US Air Force crossing from Brazil to West Africa and up to the North African theater. The tip of Brazil and the coast of Liberia are the closest connection between the continents.

This agreement later expanded to include the development of a major port (Handbook 1972:20-21). One of Tubman's first actions was to end a pretense of neutrality and declare war against Germany and Japan. Liberia also switched from the British Sterling to the US dollar which became an economic boom (Clifford 1971:50).

3.4.2 Open Door Policy

The Open Door era began as Liberia inaugurated William Vacanarat Shadrach Tubman on 3 January 1944, as the seventeenth President. Tubman was to become the most celebrated President, serving into a seventh term before his death in 1971 (Clifford 1971:95). Affectionately known as "Shad," Tubman won the Presidency with a combination of charm, charisma, and political acumen. He was from Maryland County which represented a spreading of the political power. He recognized the growing divide in the country, and issued a statement that forbid the use of the term, "Americo-Liberians" on the basis that "We are all Liberians" (Sirleaf 2009:24).

The early despair of Liberia was depicted by Lawrence Marinelli (1964:4-6) in *The New Liberia*, when he stated: "What could several thousand impoverished Americo-Liberians do, quartered as they were in a few towns along the Atlantic coast and faced with almost a million natives who were still living in the middle ages?" This was the consensus for the first 100 years, but all of that was beginning to change. In a speech to the Legislature, Tubman introduced his Open Door Policy: "We shall encourage foreign capital investments for the development of our country's resources on a co-operating basis according to priorities." This economic policy proved successful. The national budget of 1944 was \$1 000 000. Twenty years later, the national budget was \$50 000 000 with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$200 000 000 (1964:7).

Another economic contributor was the arrival in 1964 of the Liberian American-Swedish Mining Company (LAMCO) to begin mining the high grade iron ore in the Nimba Mountains. This brought to mind the quote of the first President, J.J. Roberts,

when he stated of the interior: “Ore was found so pure as to be capable of being beaten into malleable iron without the process of smelting” (Foote 1864:172).

This researcher lived in the town of Yekepa from 1968 – 1983, and his parents were residents of Yekepa until 1997. Yekepa was the mining town built by LAMCO. The original Mano village at the foot of the mountains was referred to as Old Yeke Town. Though the partnership with LAMCO is sometimes criticized as an example of exploitation, this researcher feels the company brought great value to the region. The company provided education, medical care, clean drinking water, vocational training, and other valuable services. LAMCO had a much more environmentally and socially healthy perspective than other multi-national companies like Firestone. Thousands of Liberians benefitted from vocational training and advancement in the company.

In 1980, after the coup, President Samuel K. Doe created a quasi-national company called LIMCO to take over the majority ownership. The goal was to provide more royalties to the country, but it did the opposite. Services to the region were reduced, there was no pressure to do more, and the company became a shell of what it was and simply lined the political pockets. Later, the civil war destroyed an incredible amount of infrastructure and resulted in trained Liberian workers of the industry fleeing to other countries. Hundreds of skilled managers and workers, trained by LAMCO, now live in Europe and the US. Today, Mittal Steel is resuming operations of the mining venture, but optimism about this venture is low.

In 1962, the United Nations statistical bulletin indicated that Liberia had enjoyed the greatest percentage of per capita GDP. President Sekou Toure of Guinea recognized the importance of Liberia by stating: “Nobody can ignore the fact that the star which marks the Liberian national emblem has been shining more than a century, the sole star which illuminated our night of dominated people” (Clifford 1971:107). In the decades of 1950 and 1960, Liberia received almost \$278 000 000 of foreign aid, the result of the cold war and political alliances.

The economic growth of Liberia was only one side of the coin. The flip side was the rampant corruption and the failure to incorporate the population. In an independent economic study, *“Growth without development,”* the report cited the overwhelming international assistance, the profitable returns of transnational corporations, and other sources of revenue as being grossly mismanaged. The administration saw tremendous growth, but cronyism and corruption plagued the government (Clower 1966:72).

3.4.3 Shifting of Public Opinion

Tubman was easily the most dominant figure of Liberian politics. He was succeeded by his Vice-President, the well-respected Dr. William R. Tolbert, Jr. Tolbert was a veteran of 27 years in the administration and his role with indigenous Liberia made him a popular choice. The transition was in a calm atmosphere, but all was not well. The tension between the government and the people was rising.

The next ten years proved to be a shifting of momentum in Liberian politics. Although some refer to the transition as a shifting of public opinion, a more accurate description would be the growing voice of the marginalized to be heard. Tolbert probably recognized this more than he has been given credit for. He was working to unify Liberians, but progress was slow and difficult (Handbook 1972:v).

Frankel used the term “civilized” to describe the ruling elite. To be civilized was not clearly defined, but indicated any of the following: Education, white collar jobs, and membership in a mainline denominational church. To be civilized involved a western style of living, education, churchmanship, and other subjective criteria. Ten percent of the population would have been considered civilized by 1971. There was a distinct divide between the two classes of the civilized and uncivilized (Handbook 1972:ix).

This was a very significant observation, because it implied that the role of formal membership in a mainline denominational church was a criterion for what would identify a civilized person. This created the perception that Christianity was equated with an Americo-Liberian cultural heritage. Evangelization in Liberia could not take

hold because it was not contextualized beyond the Americo-Liberian community. After the overthrow of the government in 1980, the contextualization of Christianity for indigenous Liberians began to happen.

Tolbert made many changes towards an open society. He eliminated the requirement of the Tubman regime that civil servants be required to pledge one month's salary to the ruling True Whig Party. He eliminated some of the cronyism and was able to reduce Liberia's outside dependence and introduced informality in Liberian politics. Political change, however, was too slow in coming and was compounded by the extent to which the ruling families controlled Liberia. Tolbert introduced an anti-corruption commission, but some in his family and close associates were the main offenders. Gifford (1993:8-9) cited several abuses and conflicts of interests among Tolbert's extended family. Tolbert's crucial issue was the attempt to balance the movement for change, while seeking to pacify those in the TWP who were very happy with their own level of control. Global issues also affected Tolbert's ability to govern, such as the sharp rise in oil prices and the cost of staples like rice that created further destabilization. The 1979 rice riots were seen as the first explosion of open discontent that was a foreboding announcement.

The Tolbert Administration ended in the early morning hours of 12 April 1980, now commonly referred to as Redemption Day. The Executive Mansion was taken by military action of a group of 17 enlisted soldiers. Tolbert was shot and disemboweled by some of the soldiers who successfully completed the coup d'état. When Gifford wrote his book in 1993, he stated that details about exactly what was planned and what took place have never been clearly divulged. Since then, many bits and pieces of information have come to light, but many questions of preparation, support, and implementation remain. The coup was puzzling considering the enlisted men who pulled off this significant action. The most important unanswered question was, with whom did the idea originate and who devised the plan?

This researcher was attending the American Cooperative School in Monrovia at the time of the coup. Many of the families of Liberian classmates suffered loss of life or irreparable harm in the wake of the regime change. The Father of this researcher, Earl Williams, was the chair of the Southern Baptist Mission and was on his way to meet with Tolbert the morning of the coup. The gunfire, chaos, and several corpses alerted him to the events and he was diverted from going to the Executive Mansion. As he arrived into the outskirts of Monrovia, he was accosted by soldiers claiming to be in control of the government. He convinced one of the soldiers to accompany him to the Congo Town Baptist Mission, where he stayed until the coup became apparent.

This researcher's family lived between the world of the Americo-Liberians and the Mano and Gio people. As citizens of the US, the family interacted through school and other relationships with Americo-Liberians. As missionaries, the family lived in Nimba County, worshipped with the Mano and Gio, and experienced life in their context. The family saw the divide, tension, and oppression, but was still surprised by the events because of Liberia's peaceful existence. The televised execution of the parents of classmates was a staggering experience. Thirteen officials of the Liberian government were executed by firing squad.⁷¹

The coup marked the end of over a century of non-violent transfer of power and rule by the True Whig Party of Liberia. Liberia found itself on a collision course with a civil war that was to destroy every fabric of Liberian heritage. It would be nine years before the civil war, but the stage had been set. Many Americo-Liberians and internationals fled the country to find safety. There was a shifting of control across every facet of Liberian life. The control of the Americo-Liberians had ended, but a new struggle for control of Liberia was beginning.

⁷¹Sirleaf details much of that process in *This Child Will Be Great*. Other books, such as the *House at Sugar Beach* by Helen Cooper, give perspective to the chaos and transition of Americo-Liberians.

3.5 THE NEW STRUGGLE

The People's Redemption Council (PRC) announced itself as the new ruling body. The PRC was led by Master Sergeant Doe, the highest ranking of the 17 soldiers. They were joined by opposition parties such as the Movement of Justice for Africa, the People's Progressive Party, and those that had opposed governmental policies. Many of the political prisoners arrested the previous year after the rice riots became partners in the government (Gifford 1993:17). This was the first significant involvement of government by those not of Americo-Liberian heritage.

Gifford's description of the new coalition was interesting, because one of those implicated as openly opposed to particular government policies was the current President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. In her memoir, she described the predicament of survival. Her boldness to oppose wrong government policies spared her life, but her coerced assistance to the new administration caused many to implicate her as a part of the ruthless regime change. History has vindicated her as not being a cohort.

The coup of 1980 was seen as a victory by most of the people of Liberia who felt excluded from the government. While this researcher agonized with classmates over the loss of parents, jobs, and roles in the government, the Mano and Gio and other indigenous people were thrilled. For weeks following the coup there was dancing in the streets. Doe's announced intentions of ridding the country of corruption, returning to civil rule, and a free country for all Liberians were enthusiastically received. The slogan popularized by Doe was "in the cause of the people, the struggle continues." Gbowee (2011:17) recounted the song sung in the streets about the new leader: "The native woman has borne a son, and he has killed the Congo People!"⁷²

Years before, in Tubman's attempt to bring about unification, one observer noted that:

⁷²The term "Congo" generally referred to anyone who was of the elite or the Americo-Liberian population, although that was not technically accurate.

Few have recognized the forces which have been unleashed by President Tubman's Unification Policy or identified them with the processes which have been at work in Liberian culture throughout the history of the nation. Old factional struggles inscribed in new practices help determine the boundaries and inter chiefdom rivalries, now took on tribal form (D'Azevedo 1969:1).

These were prophetic words, indeed! Those recognized pressures led to the death of Tolbert and to the first "country man"⁷³ (of indigenous origin) to become the Head of State of the Republic of Liberia (Ellis 1999:219).

The euphoria of the new regime was short-lived as the economy began to collapse. Underneath the change was the reality that at the head of the government was a man who was functionally illiterate, had no conception of political power, and was driven by accumulation. According to Amos Sawyer, Doe's first six years were categorized by a government which raped and plundered to accumulate wealth (Ellis 1995:9). Doe's political ambitions grew. There was internal chaos and significant external pressure of cold war positioning by the super powers, US and Russia. China entered the fray by building a national soccer stadium on the outskirts of Monrovia.

By 1984, Doe had lost significant popular support. It is difficult to summarize the decade under President Doe or single out specific events. One of the greatest contributing factors to the decline would be that the President, his family, and many from the Krahn people group, secured for themselves a place at the trough of wealth. Rather than focus on nation building, the corruption and cronyism changed names. Liberians not in favor were oppressed, ostracized, or killed.

Key political events impacted Liberia beginning with the attempt to return to civilian rule. Doe established the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) and announced his intentions to run for President, contrary to his own newly developed constitution. A protest by the students at the University of Liberia resulted in

⁷³"Country man" and "civilized" were two pejorative terms used to distinguish Americo-Liberians from the indigenous people. Later, the terms became a method to mock that distinction.

brutality and the rape of the campus by soldiers (Gifford 1993:17-20). During the decade after the coup, there were several other attempts that resulted in the death of those who were a part of the original PRC. The most notable coup attempt was by Thomas Quiwonkpa. He had previously been the General of the Armed Forces, but was alleged that his popularity led to his dismissal by the President. On 12 November 1985, it was announced that Doe's government had been overthrown by a military coup led by Brigadier General Quiwonkpa. A strategic miscalculation led to Doe regaining control, resulting in the death and public display of the body of Quiwonkpa.

Quiwonkpa was a son of the Mano and Gio people of Nimba County and that resulted in reprisal killings (Gifford 1993:21-22). Leaders of the Mano and Gio disappeared and were killed. This researcher and his Father saw where groups of people were hung on the hillside of Mount Nimba. The reprisals would pave the way for what would become the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) that led to civil war.

These events were preceded and precipitated by the 15 October 1985 elections between Samuel K. Doe and Jackson F. Doe, no relations. Jackson Doe was of Gio origin and was contesting for the Presidency. The British Broadcasting Company (BBC) carried various reports indicating that Jackson Doe had won by a landslide of 70 percent of the popular vote. Samuel Doe, however, allegedly compromised the election through a series of orders that resulted in being declared the victor by 50.9 percent. Blaine Harden, the US Ambassador, described the gloom as that which "compared to the national gloom the day JFK was assassinated" (Gifford 1993:22).

3.5.1 Second Republic

In this environment, the Second Republic of Liberia was inaugurated on 6 January 1986. Liberia began to spiral into a dismal trail of abuses that led to anarchy. Many authors sketched the abuses ranging from constitutional neglect, human rights violations, and alleged murders that took place in the Doe regime. *Promise Betrayed*, released by a Lawyers Committee on Human Rights, detailed some of those abuses.

From a historical standpoint, it is not necessary to discuss the Doe regime except to say that the road to anarchy had begun. It is important to note that though the original overthrow was a reflection of the tension between Americo-Liberians and the indigenous people, the dynamic of the tension changed over the next decade. Ellis (1999:216) noted in 1989, that the Americo-Liberians were not the primary target of reprisal in the civil war. This political bias set the stage for ethnic confrontation.

3.5.2 Reduced to Anarchy

On 24 December 1989, approximately 100 trained soldiers came across the border into Liberia to attack government soldiers in Butuo, a village in Nimba. For most, the incursion did not even register as it seemed like a strange rumor. No one could have imagined that this incursion would result in the destruction of a nation (Ellis 1999:75).

The indigenous people of Liberia have been characterized as people of the spirits. Dreams, prophecies, and witchdoctors were a way of life and strange stories circulated about the spirit world. One such story conveyed in *The Mask of Anarchy*, was of a woman who gave birth to a baby during the Christmas season who began to immediately speak English. “The baby predicted that a deadly rain would fall on Christmas day. The baby announced that it did not wish to live in such a violent world, at which point the precocious child gave up the ghost and returned to the dead.” Many people began to link this story of a coming devastation with what became known as the Nimba incursion (Ellis 1999:75).⁷⁴

3.5.3 Civil War

There are books written to describe what transpired from that day in 1989. The myriad of events are staggering as a modest estimate of over 250 000 people were killed since 1989. President Doe was captured and brutally murdered by Prince

⁷⁴Ellis (1999) cited the source of this material as James Youboty, *Liberian Civil War*. (5).

Johnson and his band of men, a break-off faction from the NPFL. The torture was captured on video tape and was widely accessible for public viewing (Ellis 1999:9).

Medicine Sans Frontier reported in 1990 that over 50 people a day were dying of starvation and disease in Monrovia. Six hundred, mostly women and children, were brutally murdered by security forces at a Red Cross center at a Lutheran Church (Ellis 1999:2). This researcher was present for an interview of a woman who survived the encounter who stated that she saw the President participate in the massacre. Doe's presence was never verified, but the massacre was a defining tragedy of horror.

The NPFL, which initiated the Christmas Eve attack, was led by Charles G. Taylor. Taylor had a degree in economics from the US. He briefly served in Doe's Administration as the Deputy Minister of Commerce, but fled to the US in 1983, accused of embezzling \$900 000. Taylor was later arrested on unrelated charges of embezzling funds at a Massachusetts hospital. According to news accounts, he was able to escape from a maximum security prison. That seemed unusual and unexplained, but recently documents have indicated that he was an informant for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and they had a hand in his being able to escape.⁷⁵

Taylor found his way to West Africa, recruited a military team, and was trained in Libya in preparation for the overthrow of the Government. This was a partnership of convenience as Gaddafi sought to destabilize US allies in Africa and saw Taylor as a pawn, while the CIA was using Taylor as access to information on Libya. Taylor and his militia made the initial incursion followed by the recruitment of hundreds of Mano and Gio men and boys to form the rebel army. As the NPFL gained ground, Doe's forces responded by looting, raping, killing, and burning Mano and Gio villages. These atrocities by government soldiers strengthened recruiting and within a year, the NPFL had systematically taken over most of Liberia (Gershoni 1997:69).

⁷⁵http://articles.boston.com/2012-01-17/metro/30632769_1_courtenay-griffiths-charles-taylor-war-crimes (September 2012).

The beginning of the civil war took place between the periods of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the first Gulf War conflict between the US and Iraq. The turmoil of that era in which traditional rules of international relations were changing led to the lack of concern about the growing conflict in Liberia. Hundreds of people would be slaughtered without ever making the evening news. To the rest of the world, it was an insignificant bizarre conflict. It was said that the Civil War in Liberia was “carried out by fighters who did their best to look like freaks, and it formed a marked contrast to the high tech battles of the Gulf War in 1990” (Ellis 1999:17-18).

The world has become better acquainted with the atrocities that took place in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The use of child soldiers, the role of mind-altering drugs, and the greed for diamond resources created a bizarre image. During the war, the Western media was baffled by the ruthlessness of the conflict. The best description of this perception was a report by Keith Richburg published in the Washington Post. Richburg was a respected African-American reporter trying to inform African-Americans about the real nature of a place that they had a tendency to romanticize.

Welcome to Liberia, scene of one of the wackiest, and most ruthless, of Africa’s uncivil wars. It is a war with a general named Mosquito, a war where soldiers get high on dope and paint their fingernails bright red before heading off into battle. It is a war where combatants don women’s wigs, pantyhose, and masks before committing some of the world’s most unspeakable atrocities against their enemies. It’s the only war that hosts a unit of soldiers who strip off their clothes before going into battle and calls itself the “Butt Naked Brigade.” It’s a war where young child soldiers carry teddy bears and plastic baby dolls in one hand and AK-47’s in the other. It is a war where fighters smear their faces with makeup and mud in the belief that “juju” West African magic will protect them from the enemy’s bullets (Ellis 1999:18).

One journalist stated that the Liberian civil war topped and surpassed all other wars in the intensity, depravity, savagery, barbarianism, and horror (Ellis 1999:21). If this was the case, one must consider how a country could have fallen to this depth if it were founded on religious and moral principles. This dichotomy is a very complex discussion. In hindsight, many outside forces were sustaining the war. Those who

pillaged the country for resources, greed, and power, desired destabilization, and contributed to the chaos. It is difficult for those in stable societies to understand the tyranny that can take place at the hands of a few. People suffered horrifically, but there was little hope or recourse for the population.

3.5.4 Political Factions

The civil war of Liberia lasted approximately fifteen years (1989 – 2004), with various stages of conflict and factions. This overview will not attempt to describe all of the conflicts, but briefly categorize the various political factions and stages.

The initial invading force was led by Taylor and a group of commandoes trained in Libya, but later consisted of mostly non-trained combatants of the Mano and Gio communities. The NPFL was in conflict with the Krahn-dominated government of Doe. As the conflict escalated, the NPFL splintered into three groups including the NPFL, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) led by Prince Johnson, and a smaller movement led by Elmer Johnson, a Liberian who had served in the US military. Later, E. Johnson was purportedly abducted and killed by his own troops on orders from Taylor (Sirleaf 2009:172-177).

As the war grew and the NPFL gained control of most of Liberia, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWOS) entered the conflict. ECOWOS was a collection of West African governments acting in an unprecedented manner to intervene. In partnership with western nations, they implemented ECOMOG, a military monitoring group. A five-nation contingent brought a cease-fire agreement (Bajul Accord) resulting in a divided country with the NPFL holding significant territory, but Doe still holding Monrovia (Sirleaf 2009:182-183).

The Banjul Accord cease-fire eventually fell apart and ECOMOG became a willing advocate of the Doe regime. After a stalemate, fighting resumed and the various rebel factions pushed towards Monrovia. During this time, INPFL captured, tortured, and executed Doe. It is unknown whether ECOMOG intentionally or inadvertently

contributed to this situation. Sirleaf addressed in her memoirs the nuances of this time period and the various engaging entities.

The next phase of the war saw the emergence of the United Liberation Movement of Liberia (ULIMO), a collection of government soldiers that had fled during the early part of the war. This new entity resulted in factions that splintered into the Krahn-dominated ULIMO-J headed by Roosevelt Johnson and the Mandingo-dominated ULIMO-K, headed by Alhaji Kromah (Sirleaf 2009:206-207). ULIMO became the primary opponent of the NPFL. This conflict ended with the Cotonou Accord which resulted in the seating of the National Transitional Government of Liberia.

With a pseudo transitional government in place, steps were put in place for a national election. The 1997 elections were contested by Taylor and Sirleaf. Taylor won the election by a substantial margin and became the President. The process of the election was disputed as fraudulent and manipulated by the rebel leader. There was fear of continued conflict if Taylor was not elected. This was the origin of the street jingle, "You killed my ma, you killed my pa, I'll vote for you."

The election of Taylor marked the first end of the civil war and the international community tried to put a good face on the election. The former US President Jimmy Carter, representing the Carter Center, stated that he was proud of the elections. This statement led some to question the credibility of the former President. Sirleaf recounted a visit from Carter where he encouraged her to work with the Taylor government. Sirleaf stated, "I was astonished. There was no way in the world I would work with Taylor after all the death and destruction he had caused" (Sirleaf 2009:219). Her distress and refusal was later vindicated by Taylor's total disregard for the rule of law. Carter desired democracy, but demonstrated an inability to understand the contextual issues of the conflict. Carter's judgment in political situations has continually been suspect. In view of the Hague trial of Taylor, one wonders how Carter would now view his opinion of the Liberian conflict.

At his inauguration, Taylor promised not to be a wicked President, but the saga of conflict and oppression continued. The regime was filled with corruption, continued deterioration, and the emergence of new conflicts. The war in Liberia was a stain on the continent and a dismal account of the world response. The war was evidence of political machination, greed, and global agendas colliding in a third world country.

3.5.5 End of Taylor Regime

There is not much value to be documented in the Taylor administration. It was a bizarre turn of event that Taylor would be fraudulently elected fueled by the fact that all that Liberians wanted was for the fighting and poverty to stop (Gbowee 2011:70). The regime was a short-lived government and prolonged hardship. Taylor did little to bring the people out of chaos and poverty. Like Doe, Taylor was consumed with wealth and power. There was speculation of criminal activities and suspected drug rings operating with impunity. Large concessions were handed out to rogue enterprises and illegal deforestation of the Sapo National Forest. The blood diamond conflict escalated in Sierra Leone, which eventually led to the arrest, trial, and conviction of Taylor (Sirleaf 2009:205).

With all of the chaos, a new insurgency group emerged, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a compilation of the fragments of ULIMO-K and ULIMO-J. ULIMO received support from Guinea and drew Liberia back into conflict. The conflicts were threatening the stability of the whole region. US President George Bush, on his first visit to Africa, made the statement that “Taylor has got to leave” (Sirleaf 2009:227-236). Bush has often been conveniently criticized on the international stage, but in regards to Liberia, where were the voices of Great Britain, South Africa, France, Germany, China, Russia, and so many others?

As chaos descended once again, West African nations were meeting in Ghana to formulate a resolution. While this meeting was in progress, a war crimes court of the UN issued an indictment against Taylor for “bearing the greatest responsibility” for

crimes in Sierra Leone. Though he was not arrested, the end was near. Through a series of convoluted events, Taylor was allowed to go into exile in Nigeria. Later, Taylor was arrested, taken to Liberia, then Sierra Leone, and then whisked off to The Hague for a war crimes tribunal. The trial of Taylor in The Hague was completed with a guilty verdict in 2012. A National Transitional Government was inaugurated under Gyude Bryant. Stability was brought to Liberia by a transnational military venture, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

3.6 THE NEW LIBERIA

The political process resumed in 2005, ending the violent conflict that had ravaged the nation. There was much devastation, but also a glimmer of hope. The culmination of this sequence of events was a Presidential election, followed by a run-off on 8 November 2005. Over 20 political parties contested the election producing a truly grassroots campaign of one of the most free and fair elections in West Africa.

The world was captivated by the Presidential election run-off. The former African, European, and World soccer player of the year, George Weah was vying for the Presidency against Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a political veteran. Sirleaf was the candidate for the Unity Party and Weah for the Coalition for Democratic Change. Many considered the Sirleaf victory a surprise, coming from underdog status to defeat the popular folk hero. The final tally was Sirleaf (59.4 percent) and Weah (40.6 percent). In many ways, this was the African post-conflict election that broke the mould. The broken mold was not just that a woman won the presidency or that a world football star came in second place, but it was also the absence of a warring force presence or an overbearing incumbent (Harris 2006:375, 378).

3.7 ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF

In her autobiography, Sirleaf conveys a story told by her parents about an old man who came to see the new baby and convey best wishes in a typical Liberian fashion.

My Mother brought the old man into the room where I lay kicking and screaming on the bed. As the story goes, the old man took one look at me and turned to my mother with a strange expression on his face. "Oh Martha," he said, "This child shall be great. This child is going to lead." Over the years and as the path of greatness unfolded, whenever I reflected on the prophecy of the old man, my scientific orientation of self-determination would clash with the Presbyterian teachings of predestination I had received. Which one, I have long wondered is the way life really is? (Sirleaf 2009:7-8).

On 16 January 2006, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson was inaugurated as the President of Liberia. This was an amazing turn of events for the devastated country. Sirleaf was the first freely elected female President and she would share the Nobel Peace Prize. Her inauguration was attended by leaders including South African President Thabo Mbeki, many Heads of State, and a delegation from the US that included First Lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (Sirleaf 2009:269-270).

President Sirleaf inherited a monumental task. Most Liberians were living on less than 50 cents a day. Because of the length of the war, the illiteracy and unemployment rates were at least 70 percent. The infrastructure had all been dismantled, looted, or neglected. There was a great deal of disunity, discontent, and division. There was also still the Taylor issue who was in exile and would be dealt with in the early years of the Presidency (Sirleaf 2009:276).

Travelling Liberia today, in a peaceful environment, one realizes that Liberia was not a nation filled with hate and conflict. The war was not driven by deep-seated hate, animosity, or tribal genocide. There were definitely tensions and enough to cause a coup or even a civil war, however, the impact of many outside forces on a small nation had a significant effect. Liberians were pawns in a different conflict engaged by men like Taylor, groups like Al-Qaeda, and nations jockeying for power like Libya, China, and the US. When all of that pressure subsided and civilian rule was re-established, newly elected President Sirleaf was left with a monumental task.

Sirleaf is affectionately known on the streets as “Ma Ellen.” She completed her first term of six years and was elected for a second term. Sirleaf easily won a second term against Weah. This researcher visited the country five times from 2005-2011 and has observed progress and stability, but there is much to be done.

UNMIL still has a modest peace-keeping delegation, but the nation has remained conflict free. There are physical evidences of a brutal conflict, but the attitude of the nation and people is hopeful. Infrastructure is being rebuilt. Liberia will require a slow and steady rebuild, but it seems Ma Ellen has been up to the task. A significant symbolic event was the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Sirleaf, Gbowee, and Tawakkol Karman, “for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women’s rights to full participation in peace-building work.”⁷⁶ Gbowee’s story was also significant because she and Sirleaf represented the ethnic divide seen in history.

3.8 CONCLUSION

This is an attempt to briefly explain the history of Liberia to answer the question: In the midst of all of this carnage, did the church survive? Contrary to Gifford’s pre-war assertion, the Christian faith proved resilient and flourished. The church survived the coup and the civil war. Instead of being diminished, the church was embraced contextually and grew rapidly. The extent of evangelization could be studied and evidenced in many of the ethnic groups of Liberia. This narrative is a testimony of a nation that has “prayed the devil back to hell.”⁷⁷

Liberia’s future is summed up in these words: “Let us be proud that we were able to rise above our intense political and other differences in a renewed determination as a people to foster dialogue instead of violence, promote unity rather than disharmony, and engender hope rather than disillusionment and despair.”⁷⁸

⁷⁶ http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2011. [Online]. (January 2012).

⁷⁷ *Pray the Devil back to Hell* is the title of a DVD documentary of the peace movement by Gbowee.

⁷⁸ <http://worldmap.org/maps/other/profiles/liberia/Liberia%20Profile.pdf>. (April 2012).

CHAPTER FOUR

CHRISTIANITY IN LIBERIA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The dichotomy of Liberia has always been the distinction between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous people. The freed slaves returned to Africa and brought with them a life, culture, and faith very different from those who were the indigenous Liberians. To understand the merits of this study, one must grasp the context of Christianity in Liberia in order to recognize how the transmission of the Gospel came to Liberia and what prevented its flow to the indigenous people of Liberia.

This chapter delineates a historical perspective of the development and expansion of Christianity in Liberia. The perspective begins with a rebuttal to *Christianity in Doe's Liberia* as a springboard to addressing Liberia's Christian heritage. The chapter considers the implications of cultural Christianity and isolation as barriers of the indigenous. Christian expansion of the denominations is summarized with emphasis on the role of Baptists. This is important to the research question because the Baptists are a significant influencer in the evangelization of the Mano and Gio. The chapter concludes with a cursory glance at the future of Christianity in Liberia.

The Americo-Liberians brought to Liberia Christianity adopted in their lives in the US. This faith evolved and became integrated into the fabric of Americo-Liberian culture. Christianity became a defining cultural activity and created a religious heritage that did not contextually penetrate other groups. There are few works that engage the uniqueness of the Liberian religious heritage. *West African Christianity*, which is a significant treatment of the origins of Christianity in West Africa, discusses Liberia only briefly and only minimally engages the issues beyond pointing out the divide between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous people. Sanneh (1983:97), like many others, defaulted to the typically expressed sentiment that Liberia in theory

was not a colony of the US, but “the reality was a little different.” This researcher argues that because of Liberia’s uniqueness apart from colonialism, there is a heritage, history, and debate that should be explored more deeply without defaulting to commonly held assumptions, and would disagree with Sanneh on this point. What was the scope of Christianity in Liberia from the beginning of the formation of the Republic of Liberia? Why was Christianity able to be seen as a central part of what is often referred to as a Christian nation, but unable to penetrate many of the ethnic indigenous Liberians including the Mano and Gio?

This chapter seeks to introduce some of those debates and demonstrate how the flow of the Gospel came to and permeated early Liberia. Influential persons are highlighted as well as the changing sentiment towards evangelism that happened. This introduction is contrasted with the indigenous Liberians, who had their own forms of spirituality and religion. Understanding the quasi-religious cultural divide enables one to understand both the barriers that existed for the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ and also those processes which served to facilitate a movement towards evangelization. This speaks to the main question of the research in the evangelization of the Mano and Gio.

4.2 A REBUTTAL

This chapter serves as a rebuttal to some of the basic premises outlined in Gifford’s *Christianity and Politics in Doe’s Liberia*. Just prior to the civil war, Gifford (1993) wrote a book in which he conducted a broad, but surface level examination of the various Christian groups and concluded that the spiritual movement sweeping Liberia was the result of a Christianity imported from America which did not address the reality of the people. He was not referring to the Christianity of the Americo-Liberians, but a new developing spiritual reality.

Gifford opined that the revivals sweeping Liberia were American imposed and artificially generated. His underlying conclusion was that the Christianity of Liberia

was artificial and failed Liberia because it did not pursue a political overthrow of the corrupt Doe regime. He narrowly defined the phenomenon as fundamentalist evangelical Christianity, but broadly addressed it as Christianity in Liberia.

Ellis (1995:16), in his study of ethnic and spiritual violence, affirmed that during the Doe years there was growth in evangelical and spiritual churches. He stated, however, that Gifford's interpretation that this phenomenon was a flight from reality and a refusal to take political action was an inaccurate portrayal. Ellis took a much deeper look into the subject and the spiritual aspects of power that shaped Liberian Christianity. The influence and scope of power and spirituality will be discussed in this chapter and also in chapter five on the subject of the Poro Society.

Ekechi (1995:154) included the fact that Gifford seemed oblivious to the literature of West Africa detailing impetuses for the phenomenal growth of new religious movements. He was critical of linking the growth with America and Latin America with no evidence for the continental leap, while ignoring Rosalind Hackett and others who demonstrated regional factors for the rapid spread movements in West Africa.

A challenge to studying subjects such as Liberia and Christianity has been the lack of literary sources, especially related to the indigenous groups. Gifford's was one of the few scholarly attempts and has become referenced as authoritative. While this researcher found some research helpful, he felt compelled to rebut the conclusions as one that has not seriously considered the historical Christianity of Liberia. More troubling seemed to be the injection of significant bias, demonstrated in this rebuttal.

Gifford (1993:2-3) used David Martin's *Tongues of Fire: the Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* and David Stoll's *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth*, which emphasized the spontaneity of the Christian revival in Latin America, as a basis for his theory. Gifford stated that Stoll and Martin were generally positive about the social effects of Christianity in Latin America, but argued that Liberia was a situation where "Christianity was at least

a contributing factor in the oppression, impoverishment, and destruction of an entire country.” He further stated that there was a correlation to Liberia’s spiritual revival that was controlled, funded, and orchestrated by the US.

Gifford’s conclusions are not supported by factual evidence. There was an appalling lack of consistency and an obviously biased treatment against the subject of Christianity in Liberia. Gifford seemed to only present evidence that supported his theory, writing for the purpose of condemning American fundamentalism rather than researching tenets of the Liberian faith. The real tragedy was the title of *Christianity in Liberia* while the greater agenda was debunking American fundamentalism. His approach subjected Liberian Christianity to a secondary role and in that, failed to understand the real dynamics of Liberian history, spiritual movement, and the vacuum created by the destruction of social order.

Gifford failed to recognize the two hundred year history of Liberian politics and the form of national or cultural Christianity. The most dubious statement was when he stated that during the Doe years the number of American missionaries increased proportionately to the increase in Christianity in Liberia. “One might say Christianity was one of the means used to achieve these United States foreign policy objectives” (Gifford 1993:239). No evidence was given to back this conspiracy claim and this researcher was surprised that scholarly reviews allowed these kinds of claim to go unchallenged. To imply that the evangelical missionary presence was an arm of the US foreign policy was without merit. African scholars like Sanneh and Bediako consistently speak of the explosive growth of the Gospel in West Africa and have never attributed that growth to a foreign policy of the US government.

Gifford overlooked five significant factors in his writing which were crucial to understanding the role that Christianity has played in the history of Liberia. Each of these factors was necessary to understand the importance of this research.

4.2.1 Christian Heritage

The historical record of Liberia conveys a long and rich Christian heritage, but from a national perspective, the breadth was limited. Christianity was the faith of the Americo-Liberians who never consisted of more than three to five percent of the population. The Americo-Liberians were the ruling class and there was an appearance of a nation of Christianity, but that did not accurately convey the spiritual reality of all Liberians. Ellis cited the religious affiliation (1986) as being 15 percent Christian, ten percent Muslim, and 75 percent traditional religions. The Christianity of the Americo-Liberians represented a small population segment. Though the Americo-Liberians brought a form of American Christianity with them, the truth is that they developed a faith that is unique to the Liberian heritage.

4.2.2 Effects of the Coup on the Church

The second overlooked factor was the impact of the coup on the religious infrastructure. Every denomination⁷⁹ was intricately tied to the government through the True Whig Party. President Tolbert served as the President of the Liberian Baptist Missionary and Education Convention. Vice-President Bennie D. Warner was the presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church. Reginald Townsend, the chairman of the TWP, was the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church. On 12 April 1980, all of that changed. Tolbert was murdered, Warner went into exile, and Townsend was one of 13 leaders publicly executed.

Many Americo-Liberians fled the country including those who served in church and denominational leadership. Records, finances, and leaders of every major denomination were interrupted. Most denominations were dependent on Americo-Liberian funding for support. Gifford does not seem to take this shift into account. The decade of the eighties was a time of church reformation. For the first time,

⁷⁹Gifford (1993:58) ironically referenced each of these leaders of both politics and religion, but missed the dynamic of the collapse of the denominations as the result of the coup in 1980. Significant leadership infrastructure had to be rebuilt. For those denominations to have survived and flourished speaks to a revival that was moving in an indigenous nature across the Christian spectrum.

indigenous Liberians were thrust into leadership and conventions were trying to become self-sufficient. Leadership of the denomination was a new experience. This, and the uncertainty of the future, led to what was described as a sweeping revival. There was a contextual freedom of faith that sparked a spiritual movement. This researcher was surprised to find scant scholarship invested into the discussion of the significance of the coup⁸⁰ on the indigenization of Christianity in Liberia.

The decade following the coup was a time of total transformation. The churches and leaders were not in a position to have experienced leadership to oppose Doe or impact major social change. Many of the indigenous leaders initially celebrated the change of government because of the corruption and oppression of the previous leaders. As the corruption and oppression of Doe became apparent, the more established leaders were instrumental in speaking out against the regime. President Walter Richards of the LBMEC and Archbishop Michael Francis of the Catholic Church both spoke out, but Gifford (1993:83) dismissed those as the response of individuals.

4.2.3 Ruthlessness of Military Regimes

Gifford failed to acknowledge the ruthlessness of military regimes such as the one lead by Doe. Having grown up in New Zealand and later attending Harvard University, Gifford may not be fully aware of the challenges of resisting a ruthless regime. Yes, it should be done, but such action requires great courage and often takes many years for viable resistance to develop. Consider a list of ruthless dictators and ask how many of those were brought down within their first decade by peaceful church resistance or any other kind of peaceful movement.

Revival was sweeping Liberia in part because of the helplessness of the people in the political realm. During that time there were also attempted coups which exacerbated

⁸⁰Bishop Jon Innis (2007:27) barely referenced the significance of this event in his work on *Evangelism and Mission: Their impact on United Methodist in Liberia*. This may be due to the influence of the Americo-Liberian heritage in mainstream Methodism in Liberia or some other reason. This researcher hopes that others will consider and expand on this theme in the future.

the instability. Many of those who support the Quiwonkpa coup were immediately killed. Did the church lack a full understanding of social justice in Liberian Christianity? Absolutely, but that was in part, because of the form of social and political Christianity that had existed in Liberia for over 150 years. It was not an indictment on fundamentalism, but the absence of contextual evangelization of the majority of the Liberians due to existing cultural Christianity.

Tonkin (1994:51) remarked that from the knowledge of Liberia's history, the churches would not have been structurally receptive to Liberation Theology as Gifford suggested. Most importantly, she also countered that Gifford did not consider the recipients of the message or how they understood it. He sketched political and historical corruption and blended that with the missionary presence, without engaging Liberian local agents about their perspective. He focuses on how the message was presented rather than how it was received. He assumed the message was received in an ethnocentric and asocial way. Though this topic was not directly addressed by Sanneh, it is in stark contrast with his theory on the impact of translation.

4.2.4 Role of Evangelical Missionaries

Gifford failed to properly evaluate the role of missionaries. For example, in Upper Nimba County, there were minimal numbers of missionaries, but a growing number of churches. At the time of his writing, there was only one Southern Baptist missionary, but over 50 churches affiliated with the Baptist Association. The churches were self-sustaining with local leadership and many were formed without missionary involvement. To imply that the missionaries were propagating American policy interests and were in control of the church was a failed understanding. This researcher has never known or heard of even one missionary in the region who was in any way connected to the policy interests of the US government.

Gifford's (1993:306) bias was reflected in his use of the quote that cited President Ronald Reagan's years as a "reemergence of the know-nothingism of the Reagan

years.” This politically slanted quote discredits his work as an honest evaluation of Christianity in Liberia. He seemed to be focused on discrediting American conservative Christianity and conservative politics. To imply that the spiritual movement in Liberia was purely a movement of American fundamentalism was disrespectful to Liberians. The spiritual movement that he linked to Liberation Theology from Latin America was the opposite of American fundamentalism, and yet, he intellectually linked them, assuming Liberians had little or no indigenous input in this sweeping spiritual revival movement.

Rweyemamu’s (2012:5) dissertation on the assessment of conversion method and impact of the Haya in Northwest Tanzania, described precisely the same kind of sweeping movement in a different context where revival movements occurred as Christianity became embraced in contextual ways. He spoke of the East African revival movements which most regarded as an indigenous movement.

Gifford’s (1993) work represented a biased view and did not present an accurate portrayal of Christianity in Liberia. His repeated statement of the lack of inculturation of the missionaries was, in equal measure, a fair assessment of his own writing. Tonkin (1994:451) concluded that the notion of a mass American missionary and evangelical takeover was misguided. She advised that the significance of the spiritual revival movement would be judged in the future and her observation was to the point of this research. The message of Christ expanded in the absence of missionaries.

4.2.5 Spirituality of the Nation and Church

In hindsight, one can observe the remarkable role of Christians in the face of tyrants like Doe and Taylor. Ultimately, women of faith, movements of prayer, peaceful protests, and local Christian leadership led to the movement for peace.

Gbowee (2009:27) relied on faith in God to resist the oppressive wicked powers to bring about peaceful resolution to a brutal conflict. Her story documented in *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* won the award for best documentary at the Tribeca Film Festival

and she was later awarded a shared Nobel Peace Prize. Her remarkable statement was “What man, what gun, can withstand a prayerful woman who is ready to stand up – or should I say, sit down for what she believes in?” In the midst of a great civil conflict fueled by many outside political entities in partnership with tyrants, the church was a growing and resolving presence. The church became the presence of Christ through visiting the sick, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, and giving drink to the thirsty. The church continued education where there were no schools and took in orphans where there was no government. The church empowered people in the midst of hopelessness. The decade following Gifford’s book proved that his assessments of the church were wrong and misguided.

The Liberian culture has always functioned with beliefs rooted in spirituality. The Mande-speaking people, who make up half the population, were anchored in a spiritual and political power structure called the Poro Society. The Americo-Liberians had their churches, but they also had secret societies like the Freemasons and the United Brothers of Friendship. The Muslims and Mandingos had forms of spiritual and political brotherhood. As structures collapsed, the fluid church filled the spiritual vacuum, causing a movement of God across the nation. This phenomenon of a Spirit-filled movement in the midst of collapse speaks directly to the research question. The church became the place of spiritual hope and refuge. Ellis (1995:22) concluded the discussion of spiritual power by stating that though Gifford would say it was desperate irrelevance, but it was the opposite, the church offered the only holistic and realistic solution to Liberia’s desperate and perilous situation.

Gbengan (June 2011) commented that the church responded to Doe and the war, just not in the time frame or manner suggested. The evangelical churches played an important role in bringing peace. A significant conference of evangelical churches was held in Danane in the push for peace. In the aftermath of the war, the evangelical church was instrumental in being an advocate of hope, rebuilding the nation, and community reconciliation. Innis (2007:27) credited the initiative of the

United Methodist church in setting the stage for the formation of an alliance between the Liberian Muslim Council and the Council of Churches that contributed to the brokering of the first peace among Liberian factions.

All of these observations and criticisms were pointed out to establish a foundation to present a clear understanding of the origin, development, and transformation of Christianity in Liberia. This will lead to two key questions to this research:

- 1) What was the scope of Christianity in Liberia from the beginning of the formation of the Republic of Liberia?
- 2) Why was Christianity able to be seen as a central part of what is often referred to as a Christian nation, but unable to penetrate many of the ethnic indigenous Liberians including the Mano and Gio of Northern Liberia?

4.3 CHRISTIANITY AND NATIONALISM

Liberia was one of the only avowed Christian nations in Africa. The Constitution stated: “We, the people of the commonwealth of Liberia, in Africa, acknowledge with devoted gratitude the goodness of God in granting us the blessings of the Christian religion” (Clifford 1971:149). The constitution was produced with constituents who were exclusively Americo-Liberians. Christianity would be considered the religion of the State and intertwined from the founding days.

Early Christian leaders like Ashmun and Carey had significant impact.⁸¹ In contrast, institutional Christianity for much of the history was a cultural rather than a missionary endeavor. Christianity in Liberia was rarely concerned with evangelism or social activism, but served as a segment of life in civilized⁸² society. The Americo-Liberians did not pursue missionary work, leaving that role to foreign missionary organizations. There were many Americo-Liberians who valued evangelism, social

⁸¹ *West African Christianity* only briefly considers Ashmun and Carey in the political and religious history of Liberia. This researcher believes that while Sanneh’s (1983:92-105) treatment is brief and informative; there is a greater narrative that laid the foundation for Methodist and Baptist thought, influence, and role in Liberian Christianity.

⁸²“Civilized” referred to the term associated with those who were educated and a part of the elite.

justice, and equality for all. The intent is not to marginalize those who carried the banner well, but they did so in the midst of a failed church missionary institution.

Christianity was a role in the government's plan to civilize society, but not necessarily to evangelize. This perspective was seen in the Tubman and Tolbert administrations that pursued aggressive political expansion. They recognized that missionary endeavors could provide schools, clinics, hospitals, and humanitarian provision. After the collapse of the government, Christianity became contextualized and fulfilled the role to provide a spiritual answer for life.

The formation of Christianity began on the first ship as it steamed its way across the Atlantic Ocean towards Africa. They were leaving the land of birth, to seek a better way of life in the land of their ancestors. The Baptist and Methodist Churches were formed on the journey, while the Episcopal Missionary Society did not have enough members to constitute, but were represented (Wold 1968:53).

ACS was formed with a view towards Christianizing and civilizing Africa. That may sound patronizing, but was the sentiment of the day. The sending churches envisioned Liberia as a beacon of hope for Africa. Unlike nations with vague deistic references, Liberia had a clear theistic alliance (Wold 1968:53). Most of the first Liberian colonists were Christian and early leaders had influence on the establishment of the colony as pastor of the colonists, missionary to the indigenous people, and as administrators and health officials for the colony (DuPlessis 1929:96).

Lott Carey⁸³ arrived in 1821. Days before sailing, Carey wrote a letter to the General Convention of the Baptist denomination expressing his thoughts:

We have no other way to express our gratitude to the board but through you. We feel very much rejoiced that we have now to communicate to you, that our long beclouded prospect of getting to Africa has opened

⁸³Note that there is a variance in literature of the spelling of Lott Carey and Cary. Primary sources do not provide a conclusive spelling. This research used spellings in accordance with the source cited.

upon us. We expect to leave here with our families tomorrow morning on our way to Norfolk, there to remain but a very few days, before we shall hoist our sails for Africa in the brig Nautilus, with our Bibles and our utensils, and our hopes in God our Savior (Fitts 1978:14).

In similar manner, Carey delivered a powerful, final, and provocative sermon based on Romans 8:32. He spoke with deep emotions and great responsibility:

I am about to leave you and expect to see your faces no more. I long to preach to the poor Africans of the way of life and salvation. I don't know what may befall me, whether I may find a grave in the ocean or among the savage men, or more savage wild beasts on the Coast of Africa; nor am I anxious about what may become of me. I feel it is my duty to go; and I fear that many of those who preach the Gospel in this country, will blush when the Savior calls them to give an account of their accounts of their labors in His cause, and tell them, "I commanded you to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature, the Savior may ask where have you been? What have you been doing? Have you endeavored to the utmost of your ability to fulfill the commands I gave you, or have you sought your own gratification and your own ease, regardless of my commands? (Fitts 1978:20).

In the early years, every denomination had a goal to reach the indigenous population. Two early missionaries, William Mylne and William Crocker, began their work by studying the Bassa language. They were regarded as thoroughly mastering the language and saw themselves ministering exclusively to the indigenous (DuPlessis 1929:96). Missionaries were criticized as not being willing to embrace the language and culture, but this cannot be said of many of the early missionaries to Liberia.

An early attempt of missionary activity was through five young men from Switzerland with the Basel Mission. They arrived in 1828 with an object of ministry to reach the youth of the Bassa and Vai. The ministry was unsuccessful and the Liberian Mission was abandoned. Kissling was one of the young men and before many missionary proponents had given the matter serious thought, was promoting the notion that the chief aim of missionary efforts should be to reach and train local converts as teachers and pastors (DuPlessis 1929:97-98). Though the mission was not successful, Kissling

was on to a key missiological strategy. This research demonstrated that the evangelization was impacted by equipped local agents.

Initially, church and religious development were seen in a very positive light. Alexander (1971:13-14) stated that he believed that the non-believers of Africa would be converted and it would be through preaching of the Gospel and the support of the colonies. He noted that both the Methodists and Baptists were engaging the people of the coast with success. The process of evangelization was recognized as a priority, but it was derailed by politics, apathy, and an increasing cultural climate of elitism. As the republic grew, modest efforts of evangelization were thwarted by indifferent Americo-Liberians. Kissling complained of passive resistance of the colonists to missionary efforts to promote moral and spiritual welfare (DuPlessis 1929:98).

R. C. Cust asked the question in 1891, “Have the Christian Liberians exercised salutary influence over the indigenous natives of the country?” His answer was: “No impression religious, moral, or social has been made by the educated Negroes of either community.” He qualified his statement by stating that about 30 000 Kru or Grebo people had been partially evangelized, but to the credit of Missionary Societies rather than local churches. He commented that it was to the indictment of the colonists that nothing had been done to uplift the indigenous people for whom they should feel politically and morally responsible (DuPlessis 1929:107).

4.4 CHRISTIANITY AND ISOLATION

Since the arrival of the immigrants “...the cultural and geographical isolation has been a factor in the slow spread of Christianity” (Wold 1968:27). The Americo-Liberians controlled the institutions, but did not effectively seek to build a bridge to those who were in geographical and cultural isolation. The isolation continued until the Tubman years when an effort was made to open isolated regions. The indigenous people lived in isolation apart from the development of the nation (Wold 1968:27).

By 1931, the growth of Christian work was taking shape. There were 11 Protestant missions identified and one Catholic mission, with five of these denominations under African leadership. The groups operating in Liberia were the Methodist Episcopal, Protestant Episcopal, United Lutheran, Pentecostal, Assemblies of the World, Seventh Day Adventist, Assembly of God, Lott Cary Baptist Missionary Society, Foreign Mission Board of National Baptist Convention, African Methodist Episcopal, and the Native Presbytery Mission (Cooksey 1931:179-183).

Criticism of the lack of real evangelistic effort towards indigenous Liberians persisted. Cooksey's critique was:

It is doubtful if this can be called evangelization. Competent observers have made exceedingly severe criticism of the type of Christianity which has sprung up. After a hundred years, no real evangelization of the hinterland peoples has taken place (Cooksey 1931:185).

In the assessment of evangelization, there was also much criticism of the missionary work and the lack of collaboration. On the one hand were the Americo-Liberian churches with little missionary zeal, and on the other hand, foreign missionaries who were coming in and going directly to the remote indigenous areas without any connection to mainline churches. An observer stated that "There is no vision, no discipline, and no authority in the churches. Many of the missionaries are very discouraged and only a few serve for any length of time" (Cooksey 1931:186). The isolation was not only of the indigenous people, but also of those who sought to evangelize the populations in those regions.

4.5 CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

Liberia was becoming a nation of cultural Christianity with a lack of commitment to the missionary movement. Thomas Jefferson Bowen, an early Baptist Missionary to West Africa, commented in 1849 on his trip to Monrovia that "a large portion of the people are religious. Many of them, no doubt are true Christians; but others are too much like certain professed believers in other countries" (Wold 1968:132).

A few class distinctions are important to better understand the cultural identity in early Liberia. The people group classifications would be the following:

1. The first group was classified as the *indigenous people*. Originally, they were pejoratively referred to as natives, heathens, or aborigines, but were simply ethnic people of Liberia in the geographical region before the founding of the nation. This group represented over 85 percent of the people (Wold 1968:27).
2. The second group was classified as the *Congo*.⁸⁴ This group of people originated as recaptured slaves. The US and Great Britain, in an attempt to stymie the slave trade, would capture shiploads of slaves. With no clear way to determine place of origin, many were brought to Liberia and given freedom. Many were from central Africa and other coastal regions, thus the term Congo (Wold 1968:27).
3. The third group of people was classified as the *Americo-Liberians*, descendants of the early settlers from America. This term distinguished those who were of settler origin rather than local origin. Though referring to this group as the Congo people was not uncommon, technically, that was inaccurate (Wold 1968:27).

The Americo-Liberians were the elite of Liberia. They came with education, support of the ACS, and with the intent to found a nation. In time, the elite class became the intertwining of culture and Christianity as a way of life and it became fashionable to be both Christian and elitist. A politician attended church for votes. A business man was on the church role because it established his business as reputable. Births, weddings, and deaths of the elite were the responsibility of the church, so membership was a necessity. The church was the social and cultural apparatus.

The missionary strategy of using the immigrants to Liberia as a way to evangelize the local groups never happened because there was almost no healthy social contact between the elite and indigenous people. The contact that did happen, often involved the moving of a person from their village to Monrovia to serve as a servant for the

⁸⁴Sanneh (1983:72-73) refers to the Congo as the recaptives. He speaks of them in relation to their resettlement in both Sierra Leone and in Liberia. He explores the possibilities of what might have been had the church engaged these recaptives in a manner towards evangelization and proclamation.

elite in exchange for education and opportunity. Liberia did not actually govern the interior until after World War I, and it was after World War II that the interior became accessible. The churches were social institutions of the elite. Cultural Christianity led many to identify Christianity with a foreign culture (Wold 1968:54-56).

Culture and Christianity were inseparable in government. Many of Liberia's political leaders were church members, church leaders, or pastors, and yet, throughout Liberia's history were patterns corruption, moral laxness, indifference towards the indigenous people. Involvement in secret societies became a way of life for political leaders. Not all of the leaders of the nation or church were hypocritical in their faith, as many were godly devoted leaders, but historically, Liberia was a culture of Christianity rather than an expression of faith (Wold 1968:13).

4.6 INDIGENOUS OF LIBERIA

A review of the historical literature of the Liberian people is basically a history of the Americo-Liberians and the development of the Republic. The history is incomplete because little or no information is presented about the various ethnic groups.

The HAE noted that Liberia, specifically the interior, had escaped the notice of the chroniclers and storytellers who had written so much about other parts of Africa. The report was excellent reading if one desired to know more about the way of life of the people, unfortunately very few historical events and observations were recorded. Most of the writing tended to be sociological and ecological (Strong 1930:3).

Who were the indigenous people? Liberia extends inland for about 200 miles, but it had thick dense forest with dangers, illnesses, swamps, streams and every other kind of obstacle. The villages lived completely in isolation (Clifford 1971:65). Thus, when answering the main question, a key measurement is the local village. What was the extent of evangelization in the local villages? This identification functions as a barometer of the extent of evangelization in this study. This indicator is the central function of the Interpretative Model of Understanding Evangelization (see 8.3).

Indigenous Liberians, like most other Africans, have been deeply religious. Discovering Liberians who did not believe in the spiritual realm would be very unusual. Atheism was and is non-existent in Liberia. The spiritual beliefs were not necessarily a systematic belief system, but a belief and reverence for the spiritual nature and realm of life. Object and events are connected and explanations exist in natural or supernatural terms (Clifford 1971:73).

In Liberia, there are sixteen major indigenous groups and a number of smaller ones, but few are found exclusively in Liberia (Clifford 1971:60). Sometimes, groupings do not reflect the diversity. For example, the Krahn are made up of sub-groups that do not necessarily go together, but have been linked with political ramifications.

This was a listing of the people group as recorded in the 1962 census. These figures were not concrete and were later sub-divided, but this was how they were statistically recorded at that time (Handbook 1972:ix) and (Clifford 1971:60).

Kpelle	211 081	Bassa	165 856
Gio (Dan)	82 208	Grebo	77 077
Mano (Ma)	72 122	Loma	53 891
Krahn	52 552	Kru	40 413
Mandingo	29 750	Vai	28 898
Gbandi	28 599	Belle	15 460
Dey	5 396	Mende	4 974

Note: Ellis (1999:xix) listed the following additional groups: Kissi, Gola, and Sapo, while excluding Mende.

One of the important aspects of the indigenous village life of the people was the Poro and Sande societies. The Mende claimed to have originated this practice of societal structure. The society served as a social structure for the people and the village and there was a lengthy initiation process as boys and girls came of age. The society involved a lot of secrecy and some occult practices (Clifford 1971:62). The Society structure is instrumental to the research question of barriers of evangelization.

Various people groups incorporated themselves into the political Republic over time. The coastal people began to assimilate into what would be categorized as civilized culture by the Americo-Liberians, much earlier than the interior groups. As early missionary work expanded along the coast, many of the people and village chiefs would send their children to mission schools. Missionaries who came in were required to operate schools. Up until World War II, missionaries ran eighty percent of the schools. This was usually the first step of assimilation (Clifford 1971:86-87).

One of the real difficulties in unifying the two groups was the social culture which emphasized the distinction. The Americo-Liberians were determined to maintain a different way of life and so they cultivated a façade that brought with them the formal clothing with top hats and frocks. The colonists had a language style, plantation manor homes, and a religious culture that was for the purpose of distinguishing themselves from the indigenous people. The community of the Americo-Liberians was not a completely closed community. Some were able to gain some level of admittance with adequate educational standards, marriage, and assuming the Christian faith (Clifford 1971:54). The indigenous groups, however, were trying to maintain their heritage, social structure, and language centered at the hub of the local village.

4.7 GOSPEL ENGAGEMENT

Most of the spread of the Gospel came through missionary endeavors. The denominations were integrated with the Americo-Liberian and indigenous Liberians, but even within that context, there was a level of separation and control.

The challenge to a thorough understanding of the evangelization process involved the absence of a chronology missionary activity. There were a number of missionary and national groups engaging Liberians and later the Mano and Gio. To accurately assess the evangelization process, each missionary effort would need to be thoroughly examined and by those with enough access to provide a historically accurate record. The missionary efforts of the Inland Mission, Mid-Baptists, Methodists, and others

would warrant such research. This researcher recognizes the improbability of one person having that kind of access and so the hope is that over time, adequate research would be done to create a public archive of missionary and denominational records.

As a contribution to that overall missionary research both in Liberia and among the Mano and Gio, this dissertation focused on the missionary efforts of the SBC in Liberia through the FMB. Southern Baptists had a missionary presence in Liberia and engaged in a partnership with the LBMEC. This relationship, ironically, contributed to both an influencing factor and a barrier in the process of evangelizing the Mano and Gio. The following represent an extended examination of Baptist in Liberia and the SBC partnership, followed by a brief note about various other denominations. This section regarding Baptist involvement in Liberia also includes various independent Baptist groups and the inter-relationship that sometimes existed.

4.8 BAPTISTS IN LIBERIA

The partnership of the LBMEC with the missionaries of the FMB of the Southern Baptist Convention has had a unique role in Liberia. Missionaries have traversed the world seeking to make an impact for the Kingdom of God. The question that often goes unanswered would be: What impact did they make? This research project attempts to begin to answer that question in regards to the 40 years of missionary involvement in Liberia by the Southern Baptists from 1960 – 2000.

In 1960, Baker James Cauthen (President, FMB) and Cornell Goerner (Africa Secretary) proceeded to Liberia to explore the possibility of re-entering Liberia. The discovery trip was the result of a meeting at the Baptist World Alliance in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil at which they met with Dr. Tolbert who was serving as the President of the BWA, President of LBMEC, and Vice-President of Liberia. The two men were invited to survey Liberia with the intent to reopen mission work (Cauthen 1970:170). After visiting Liberia and days of prayer and consultation, the men were led to a moment at the Ducor Hotel that Goerner describes:

Just before leaving Monrovia, Cauthen and Goerner knelt on the carpeted floor of their suite at the Ducor Hotel and joined in a prayer led by Tolbert that God would guide the FMB in a decision to be made at its next meeting, when Cauthen was to bring a recommendation that a mission program be launched in Liberia at the warm invitation of the LBMEC. It was no surprise to anyone that the vote was an enthusiastic affirmation (Goerner 1980:1).

The historic decision to return was the renewal of a partnership that had been dormant since 1876 (Cauthen 1970:170). This, like many other missionary efforts was a barrier and an influential factor. In one sense, because of the relationship with Tolbert and the LBMEC, there was a *carte blanche* access for the missionary efforts and proclamation of the Gospel. On the other hand, it was a partnership with the Americo-Liberian elite which was flush with implications that proved to be a barrier.

An astute historian would immediately recognize the irony of the partnership between these two entities. Liberia was established as a colony by and for freed American Negro slaves. At the same time, Southern Baptists were in the process of forming into a convention primarily over the issue of slave ownership.

In the US, Baptists from the North and South were aligned as the Triennial Baptist Convention which was founded in 1814. However, in 1840, the American Baptist Anti-Slavery Convention was formed by the northern states with the purpose of calling for the exclusion of any missionaries or candidates who were slave holders (Cauthen 1970:15, 20). After a protracted struggle, delegates from the Southern States met in Georgia to organize themselves as the Southern Baptist Convention.

The purpose of the newly formed SBC was delineated in the preamble:

We, the delegates from the Missionary Societies, Churches and other religious bodies of the Baptist Denomination in various parts of the United States, met in Convention, in the city of Augusta, Georgia for the purpose of carrying into effect the benevolent intentions of our constituents, by organizing a plan for eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the whole denomination in one sacred effort, for the propagation of the Gospel, agreed to the following rules, or fundamental principles (Southern Baptist Convention, Annual, 1845:3).

The SBC was formed for the purpose of having the freedom to express its evangelistic and missionary zeal, however, it “does not erase the fact that an ethic condemned by history, the institution of slavery, was the catalyst of change” (Cauthen 1970:7). The long relationship of the SBC with Liberia in light of the challenges of race relations in the US is an interesting study. One hundred and sixty years later (June 2012), Southern Baptist messengers elected Fred Luter as the first African-American President of the SBC during the annual convention in New Orleans. This researcher has the privilege to know Dr. Luter and attend that historic event.

Jesse Fletcher described the early history of American Baptist in the US as being a result of the Great Awakening. Before that, there were relatively few American Baptists, and most were in the North. One exception was a small group of Baptists who had migrated to Charleston, South Carolina in the late 1600s, the earliest known Baptist work in the southern US (Cauthen 1970:4-5). This regional presence would change with the Great Awakening. The religious movement saw the rise of Separate Baptists in the South and within a period of 30 years become a predominant religious group in the southern states. This new denominational presence brought with them a great missionary and evangelistic zeal which became the foundation of the SBC. Fletcher cited an example of this zeal in Sandy Creek, North Carolina where the church later became the mother church to 42 new churches (Cauthen 1970:5).

The missionary spirit that emerged with the impact of the Great Awakening revolutionized Baptists. In 1792, a Baptist cobbler in England, William Carey, set sail for India to preach the Gospel. This marked the beginning of a modern missionary era and set the Baptist missionary movement into motion (Cauthen 1970:6-7). This movement would lead to the formation of the Triennial Convention. The birth of Baptist missions was intertwined with the movement to establish a colony in Liberia. In 1815, Lott Carey formed an organization called the African Missionary Society in Virginia. Carey and Teague were inspired by the *Latter Day Luminary* and surrendered their lives to missionary service. Assisted by the Triennial

Convention and outfitted by the African Missionary Society, Carey and Teague were aboard one of the first ships sailing for Liberia, forming Providence Baptist Church.

After the SBC was formed, they established the Foreign Mission Board in Virginia. No explanation was ever given about the choice, but it coincided with the creation of the African Missionary Society in Richmond, which initiated mission work in Liberia. Eventually, Southern Baptist would become involved in Liberia (Cauthen 1970:23).

Southern Baptists quickly embarked on a missionary enterprise. With the formation of the SBC, the convention agreed that missionaries already serving would be able to choose which convention to affiliate to. John Day,⁸⁵ a missionary in Liberia, decided to relinquish his affiliation with the American Baptist in favor of the SBC. At the time of his appointment in 1846, he was serving as a judge and had a business, but also gave full attention to missionary service. A. L. Jones was also appointed, but he died before news of his appointment reached Liberia. By the following year, two more colonists were appointed as missionaries. B. J. Drayton was appointed in 1844 as the first missionary sent from the US to Liberia (Cauthen 1970:137-138).

One of the early appointees to West Africa was Thomas Bowen who served as a missionary to the Yoruba speaking people in what is now Nigeria. Bowen had a difficult tenure for a variety of reasons and only served for six years. Bowen spent some time in Monrovia on his way to Yorubaland and he “was impressed by what he saw of the settlement which he believed had the making of a great nation” (Bowen 1858:xiii). Bowen also began to recognize the cultural Christianity that would become pervasive and a barrier to evangelization. He observed that there were four churches in Monrovia including the Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian (Wold 1968:132).

⁸⁵Sanneh (1983:103) highlights Day as a significant contributor to early Christian work and theology in Liberia. Day served as a cabinet maker by trade, a Supreme Court Justice for Liberia, and as a minister of the Gospel in the new land. His family tragically died of illness early upon their arrival. Day was praised as a person of great integrity, reinforcing the notion that many early leaders were inclined towards both Statehood and responsible churchmanship.

Serious changes to the work in Liberia began to take place. By 1856, the SBC had assumed all responsibility of missionaries in Liberia as the American Baptist Missionary Union and the Northern Baptist Board discontinued work in Liberia. Shortly thereafter, the Civil War broke out in the United States in 1861. For a period of five years or more, all of the missionaries in Liberia and Sierra Leone were cut off from support, but continued their work (Cauthen 1970:140-143).

In 1871, the Board commissioned A. D. Phillips to survey West Africa as a part of a fact-finding mission. While in Liberia, he engaged eight men to continuing serving as mission workers with limited financial assistance. Soon afterwards, Phillips resigned his post and most of the Liberian missionaries were dismissed because of internal problems. There were 20 churches still in operation, but many of the schools had closed because of limited financial assistance. Phillips replacement, W. J. David, returned to Monrovia in 1876 to settle all accounts and to close the Liberian Mission. The FMB, for the next 71 years, concentrated on missions in Nigeria. The SBC would not return to Liberia until 1960 (Cauthen 1970:143-144).

With the end of the relationship with the SBC, the LBMEC was formed in 1880 and Joseph Cheesman was elected President. The lack of foreign assistance was a blessing in disguise as it made Baptists the most independent denomination in Liberia, but also hindered missionary expansion because of the lack of initiative in the area of evangelization (Wold 1968:64).

It is important to understand the different streams of Baptist tradition in Liberia in order to accurately assess the evangelization efforts. There are three primary groups of Baptists in Liberia. The first group of Baptists was those who were a direct historical presence from the colonists led by Carey and Teague. They had no white missionaries until the partnership with the SBC through the LBMEC in 1960. This group formed the LBMEC and is the largest Baptist group (Wold 1968:61).

The second group of Baptist were those of independent churches and missionary groups. These would include groups like Dr. Horton, Mother George, and others led by black Baptist missionaries, most of who became naturalized Liberians. Some eventually linked with and related to the SBC missionaries, but not with the LBMEC. Several missionaries and independent groups were loosely related to the National Baptist Convention, USA. National Baptist supported Klay Mission, Suehn Industrial Academy, and built the Carrie Dyer Memorial Hospital. The National Baptists had an influence, but were not considered a leading presence in Liberia (Wold 1968:65).

One of the most beloved missionaries figures in Liberian Baptist religious history was a lady affectionately known as Mother George. Eliza Davis George served for many years with the National Baptist Convention, but later independently with limited support from a few American friends (Cauthen 1970:171). George was a native of Texas and it was said that in her childhood, she had a dread of spending her life in missionary service in Africa. She arrived in Liberia in 1913, working primarily in the southeast among the Kru-speaking population in Sinoe County. George founded the Elizabeth Native Interior Mission which became well known for schools and training of young leaders (Partor 1998:65). In 1961, George was 85 years old and had established a network of many churches including about 13 in the Greenville area. She turned over some of her work to arriving Southern Baptists (Wold 1968:67).

The first couple appointed specifically for Liberia by Southern Baptists under the new partnership with the LBMEC was John and Betty Carpenter. They initially served in partnership with the ministry of George and there was significant growth of churches. The Southern Baptist missionaries brought the independent churches together, although some chose to maintain their autonomy (Cauthen 1979:171). Many years later, Carpenter served as the first President of the Liberian Baptist Theological Seminary (LBTS) and brought to that institution a healthy understanding of engaging the indigenous people of Liberia. Many of the seminary trained leaders of the Mano and Gio were influenced by the leadership of Dr. Carpenter and LBTS.

Dr. and Mrs. Horton also came to Liberia as missionaries through the National Baptists and founded an independent Baptist mission, the Baptist Native Direct Conference. They worked among the Bassa people and started the influential Saint Simon Baptist Church. The NBC later withdrew their support, but the Hortons remained and became Liberian citizens. They planted many churches among the Bassa people. They, like Mother George, later partnered with the incoming Southern Baptists because of old age and ill health (Wold 1968, 43). There are a number of other independent Baptist works, but these were among the more prominent.

This research question is about the extent of the evangelization of the Mano and Gio, but it is important to understand the missionary and national relationships. The missionary movement among early Baptists was by those who were Americo-Liberian and tended to function from within that society. The missionary groups from within the community tended to be less critical of the status quo which alienated the indigenous Liberians. The missionaries were bi-vocational and connected to the Americo-Liberian community. This would be one of the reasons why the LBMEC was confined to the English speaking communities on the coast. The Baptist pastors did not have the financial support to embark on interior missions and build stations like the foreign missionaries of the Mid-Baptist or Inland Church (Wold 1968:63).

The Baptist denomination was one of the few that attempted to be self-supporting. A comparison revealed that in 1855, the Methodists received foreign missionary subsidy of \$24 000 USD, while the Baptist only \$4 000 USD. By the end of the Civil War in the US, the LBMEC was receiving no support at all. In 1875, records reveal that Providence Baptist Church assessed each adult male member 12 ½ cents to try to be self-sustaining. A financial comparison in 1951 between the NBC and LBMEC was telling: The LBMEC had an annual budget of \$42 000 with \$7 600 from abroad. In contrast the National Baptist was sponsoring schools and hospitals to the tune of \$100 000 and another \$40 000 to the Lott Carey Mission. All of these aspects played a role

in the Southern Baptists decision to partner with the LBMEC who at the time, were much less dependent or tied to outside relationships (Wold 1968:64).

In 1948, following World War II, the Advance Program was launched by the FMB. The goal was to expand to as many new fields as possible, including Liberia. By 1960, Cauthen and Goerner, were on their way to Liberia (Cauthen 1970:170). Goerner wrote an article for the Centennial celebration of Ricks Institute and conveyed this development in an unpublished work.

The reunion took place under the apparent guidance of God! By chance, skeptics might say, the President of the LBMEC took a seat on a plane from New York to Rio de Janeiro to discover that the man next to him was also going to the Baptist World Alliance meeting in Rio. Dr. Baker James Cauthen identified himself as the executive secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC. Dr. William R. Tolbert, then Vice-President of the Republic of Liberia, could hardly believe his ears! He had just left the United States reluctantly, regretting that there had been no time in his busy schedule in Washington and New York to communicate with the Southern Baptist organization, since he had come to feel definitely led to propose some joint projects in Liberia. The long plane ride provided the opportunity needed, and an animated conversation between the two followed. By the time they reached Rio, a plan was being formulated.⁸⁶

The FMB began to move quickly to facilitate the new work. Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Poe were missionaries assigned to the neighboring country of Guinea, but were unable to gain a permit of entry. They were waiting in Monrovia for instructions from the FMB and were re-assigned to become the first Southern Baptist to return to Liberia. During the years of the Open Door policy, it was a requirement that all mission organizations be involved in education. Therefore, it was agreed that the initial way Southern Baptists could assist was to strengthen Ricks Institute, a school on the outskirts of Monrovia. Poe was made Principal and financial assistance from the Board quickly improved the facilities and quality of the school (ASBC 1962:130-134).

⁸⁶Goerner, Cornell H. *Southern Baptist in Liberia, 1960-1980*. (Unpublished).

The Carpenters were officially appointed in December of 1960 and arrived in Greenville in Sinoe County. At that time, there were no connecting roads and a boat or plane was necessary to reach the region (ASBC 1963:142).⁸⁷ The Carpenters initially assumed the work of an aging Mother George who had established a number of churches among the Kru and were able to draw these groups together in a healthy spirit of fellowship in cooperation with a goal towards remaining self-sufficient and being evangelistic (Wold 1968:68-69). Sinoe was one of the first outlying areas of Southern Baptist work to experience growth. The number of churches increased from 17 to 27 in a short span of time. Carpenter instituted a school for pastoral training and built facilities for a book store with a reading room (ASBC 1963:142).

The initial FMB strategy in Liberia involved focusing on the interior regions. The FMB were expected by its partnership to support education which it did through Ricks Institute, but it quickly began appointing missionaries for evangelism to the interior regions. The question of consideration for the FMB missionary presence in Liberia was: Would it fall prey to the same forces that saw other groups aim at the interior, but in the end, spend most of the resources on the coastal cities?

In the first official action of the Southern Baptist Mission in Liberia, a couple was requested and assigned to Sanniquellie in Nimba County (ASBC 1962:134). This was significant to the research question because it was the first attempt to engage the Mano and Gio people by Southern Baptists even though other groups such as the Mid-Baptists and Liberian Inland Mission were already engaged. Agnes and William Mueller, one of the first couples to arrive, were initially appointed to Ricks Institute, but shortly thereafter were assigned to Nimba. They were followed by the Grossmans who opened the work in Yekepa. Both couples only stayed a few years before transferring, but were instrumental in starting the work in Yekepa.

⁸⁷ASBC is the Annual Southern Baptist Convention report by year.

By 1963 Liberia had 13 missionaries and had missionaries in Saniquellie and Tchien. The mission work in Tchien was started by Carolyn and Bradley Brown, but a year later, they moved to Lower Buchanan. Tchien would prove to be a difficult place for Southern Baptists. In Buchanan, the Browns and Ted and Bea Cromer partnered with the LBNDC that consisted of 30 churches founded by Horton. They worked to train pastors and start new churches to reach the Bassa (ASBC 1965:143).

Baptist missionaries continued to arrive in Liberia throughout the decade. Margaret Fairburn came to work alongside the Women's Missionary Union of the LBMEC. She began Girls Auxiliary, Royal Ambassadors and Sunbeams which were traditional SBC programs. Fairburn also initiated an embryonic Baptist Student Union group which developed in Monrovia for college students. Many years later, Fairburn would transfer to Zwedru in Grand Gedeh to plant churches. Though there is limited documentation, Fairburn's work in Zwedru seemed to have tremendous results.

Other early missionary arrivals for Southern Baptist included Robert and Pat Bellinger, to serve as teacher, business manager and treasurer of Ricks Institute. Lawrence and Alice Hardy arrived in 1967 to take the lead in the work among men and boys. Lawrence Hardy developed a strong Royal Ambassador program that assisted many of the indigenous churches across Liberia. Kenneth and Joyce Nicolson arrived in 1967. Kenneth served as the Principal and a teacher of Ricks Institute and later became the academic dean for Ricks Institute Junior College. Joyce was involved in the music program of the school. Earl and Jane Williams were appointed in 1967 and arrived to work in Nimba County. The Williams spent almost 30 years serving the Mano and Gio people in Upper Nimba.

Most of the above missionary records are based on an unpublished mission log compiled by Bellinger for Means in his 1986 report. The list was not intended to include all missionaries and should not be considered exhaustive. Southern Baptists would have a strong missionary presence for 40 years. The missionaries would

remain through an overthrow of the government, the collapsing of the economy in the eighties, and a small presence through the horrific civil war of the nineties.

The two primary institutions that Southern Baptists were involved with were Ricks Institute and the Liberia Baptist Theological Seminary. From a missionary perspective, trying to analyze the impact of the investment into those two institutions towards evangelization would be an important task. A survey of LBTS graduates would likely reveal an important link to the growth of the number of Baptist churches. The quantitative data gathered during this research indicated that a crucial component to the evangelization of the Mano and Gio was trained indigenous leadership. One other important, but less known component was the Baptist Publishing House. The Publishing House was responsible for the publication of correspondence courses, Bible study curricula and TEE courses as a significant role in discipleship development and resource contextualization.

In the early years, there was an attempt to reach indigenous Liberians by assigning missionaries to regions outside of the Americo-Liberian influence in Monrovia. However, over the years, more missionaries were assigned to Monrovia. The Southern Baptists probably poured too many resources into works like Ricks Institute which continued the Americo-Liberian influence and neglected the indigenous regions. The mission did continue to try to expand by assigning missionaries to Lofa, Bong, Mano River, Grand Gedeh, and other places. Expansion was difficult. Even though extreme isolation of the early years had been reduced, it was not mitigated. Individual families in difficult places seldom produced lasting results.

The Seminary had a similar struggle. It was controlled and influenced by the LBMEC and struggled to maintain an identity as a training presence for evangelization. The leadership of Carpenter helped to provide a strong missionary framework. Many students came from Nimba County and were trained as leaders and then returned to be

a part of the evangelization process in Nimba,⁸⁸ but the LBMEC never grasped the missionary mandate. It wasn't until after the coup that indigenous Liberians began to have significant influence at the convention or seminary level. The Upper Nimba Baptist Association forced the process, to some degree, as it broke away from the Macedonia Baptist Association. After that shift, churches from Nimba began to send leaders to attend LBTS and many returned as key pastors and leaders; this became significant as an influencing factor towards evangelization of the Mano and Gio.

Mt. Nimba Baptist Church was started in 1964 in Yekepa. This church became the strongest and most influential Baptist Church in all of Liberia in regards to evangelization. From 1978 through 1989, 150 people⁸⁹ were being baptized annually. With all the impact and influence of the church, only recently did the church host the LBMEC Convention (2012) for the first time. Mt. Nimba consistently was the largest Sunday School and Bible teaching church program in Liberia.

At the beginning of the civil war in 1989, most Southern Baptist missionaries were withdrawn as the conflict escalated. Eventually, most were evacuated with the exception of those like the Williams who were able to remain behind what constituted the rebel lines. Several other missionaries functioned along the border of Cote D'Ivoire and Liberia. Williams alternated between living in Yekepa and in the displacement camps in Cote D'Ivoire. The Williams eventually retired in 1997.

Southern Baptists ceased their work in Liberia during the civil war and did not return. As a missionary agency, the IMB shifted to an unreached people group focus and that decision was the rationale behind ending 40 years of missions in Liberia. The perspective of the IMB was that Liberia was evangelized to the point that Liberian Christian groups could continue that process. This researcher believed that Southern

⁸⁸An informal list of graduates of LBTS from Nimba County was compiled for this research, but was not included in the appendices because this researcher did not feel that he had permission to publish unverified and an incomplete listing. This list may be viewed by contacting the researcher.

⁸⁹Statistical records were kept by Rev. Earl Williams of the ministry of Mt. Nimba Baptist Church. These discussions were held in various conversations with Williams.

Baptist made a humanitarian and strategic error by not maintaining that relationship at a complimentary level. As a nation coming out of 15 years of war, Southern Baptists did not have a presence to assist in the rebuilding process. Many Liberian leaders felt abandoned in the hour of greatest need by the Southern Baptist Mission in Liberia. Individual Southern Baptists and friends have taken it upon themselves to go back and try to help in the rebuilding of a nation, but the IMB did not coordinate or participate in that process. Missionary agencies need to be careful not to forsake long-standing relationships in trying to establish a strategic protocol. Western ideology often underestimates the relational impact of decisions made in a strategy vacuum.

Evaluating Southern Baptist work in Liberia would require significant research. Drawing preliminary observations as this research has done is possible, but to fully engage the topic, there would need to be more extensive research. Some specific questions that would need to be pursued would include:

- Who were the missionaries in Liberia representing Southern Baptists?
- When were they appointed and how long did they serve?
- What was their assigned task and what changes took place in the assignment?
- Where did they serve and for how long did they serve with each assignment?
- Who were the assigned groups of people to which they focused?
- Did the missionaries attempt to learn the language? Were they successful?
- What steps were taken to become familiar with the culture?
- What was the original goal in each assignment?
- What methods were used to achieve those goals?
- Where disciple-making relationships evident through their efforts?
- How much were the goals hindered by their Americo-Liberian relationship?

The goal of Southern Baptists was always to facilitate the process of evangelism and start a church planting movement among the target people(s). In a vision statement of the International Mission Board's Leadership Team in 1998, they said, "We will facilitate the lost coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ by beginning and nurturing Church Planting Movements among all peoples" (Garrison 1994:7). Although this

mission statement reflects a more current vision, Southern Baptists have recognized missionary work as an evangelistic and church planting enterprise.

The broader research narrative is to ask whether that process happened in Liberia among various people groups. We cannot say with certainty without a thorough research of each group of people that were engaged in partnership with Southern Baptist and the local partners. The importance of this author's dissertation is the value of an engaged research process to determine how the Gospel was transmitted to a particular people and the extent to which evangelization took place.

This researcher can state with certainty that the extent of the evangelization of the Mano and Gio increased dramatically from 1960 to the present and that the small Southern Baptist missionary presence contributed significantly to that growth. The following chapters will demonstrate the verifiable ways in which the missionary and local partnership impacted the spread of the Gospel among the Mano and Gio.

All of the research gathered indicated that there has been a move toward Christianity by the Mano and Gio in the last half century and more particularly, in the last 25 years. Several of the denominational groups can claim a portion of responsibility for that work, both expatriate and nationals. The research would indicate that it is a compilation of the work of many and indicative of the work of the Holy Spirit. To answer the main question, this research demonstrated that there has been a movement of the Mano and Gio towards evangelistic receptivity of the Gospel. How that happened will be demonstrated in the following chapters of this dissertation.

4.9 SUMMARY OF DENOMINATIONS IN LIBERIA

The Methodist denomination was the strongest early denominational influence. The Methodists were one of the founding churches and was established in 1833 by Melville Cox, the first Methodist missionary outside of the US. This formed the first Methodist Episcopal Church in Africa (Innis 2007:14) They also shortly thereafter established the College of West Africa in 1839.

The Methodists had a few interior mission developments with the most impactful being the Ganta mission station of George and Winifred Harley. The Harleys were appointed by the Board of Foreign Missions to start a medical and humanitarian work in Ganta in 1926. They were the first missionaries in the barely governed northeast Liberia and established a hospital, leper colony, and technical school. Harley was a graduate of the Yale School of Medicine and obtained his anthropology training at the Kennedy School of Missions. He practiced medicine in Ganta for over 30 years (Adams 2009:18 and Clifford 1971:87).

The Methodist Church had basically three strategic thrusts of missionary efforts. The first effort was the churches of the Americo-Liberians in Monrovia. The second thrust was the churches among the Kru who experienced an evangelistic response. The third thrust was the interior missions, which was the mostly humanitarian and institutional work in Ganta and Gbanga. For many years, Liberia was the only foreign outpost for the Methodist Church of the US (Wold 1968:72, 80-81).

The Episcopal Church was best known for Cuttington College and the Divinity School in Cape Palmas, founded in 1889. Cuttington College was later moved to Suakoko in Bong County. The Church growth patterns were tied to schools and represented a small, but stable presence. Early missionary workers produced a Grebo dictionary, along with the Gospels of *Matthew* and *Mark*, demonstrating an early evangelistic direction (Clifford 1971:87 and Wold 1968:83-84).

An interesting revelation of Wold's (1968:84) research was of John Payne who worked with the Grebo. Payne seemed to have learned the Grebo customs and language quite well. One Sunday, he preached a strong sermon against fetishes. In a single village, 15 men burned their fetishes. The result was the establishing of many churches in that small region. Rapid expansion has usually occurred where there has been a dedicated evangelist who learned the culture and language. The breaking down of barriers often resulted in the spread of the good news in specific groups, while nearby groups remained unresponsive.

Payne and his wife, white missionaries with the Protestant Episcopal Church, arrived in 1838. Under his charge, four white missionaries and eight national pastors worked effectively in evangelization. He is fondly remembered for his support of local leadership development. Under this umbrella came the Prophet Harris who will be discussed later, but who had significant impact towards evangelization. Harris and his prophetic message among the Grebo was considered one of the significant early indigenous movements in West Africa (Sanneh 1983:102).

The Lutheran missionary work was almost all the result of foreign missionaries. Although the Lutherans have had the strongest numerical missionary presence, they had the least success in assimilating the indigenous people into viable growing churches. The Lutherans were very active in Lofa County and along the Saint Paul River. Dr. Frank Laubach worked out a visual method of teaching the alphabet in eight languages – Bassa, Mano, Gio, Kpelle, Kru, Vai, Goa, and Grebo (Clifford 1971:88). Statistics revealed in 1966 that there were more Lutheran missionaries than national pastors (Wold 1968:93-97). Sanneh makes no mention of the Lutherans in his discussion of the development of religious impact in West African Christianity.

The Catholic Church has not had much success, even with a long presence. In recent years, they have had a stronger presence because of the schools established (Handbook 1972:xli). The Catholic presence was largest among the Kru. Archbishop Michael Francis was a key outspoken opponent of the Doe and Taylor regimes (Gifford 1993:86). During the civil war, five Catholic missionary nuns were tragically killed by Taylor's soldiers. Liberia has had a consistent, but small Catholic presence. The Order of the Holy Cross was established in Bolahun. It is recorded that after 40 years, no indigenous person had become a monk, nun or priest (Wold 1968:93-97).

The Assemblies of God missionaries arrived from the US and Canada in 1908 on Christmas Day. The Assemblies made a concerted effort to go to the indigenous people rather than the English speaking communities of the coastal settlements (Wold

1968:112). The Assemblies of God recently celebrated a centennial celebration in Liberia.⁹⁰ They claim 400 churches in Liberia, but a reading of their history does not reveal a significant presence or influence in the Liberian context. Recently, there has been a greater presence and especially during the sweeping revivals since the coup.

Though not a denomination or church, the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) had a significant impact on Christianity in Liberia. SIM is best known for Radio ELWA in Liberia which began broadcasting in 1954. At the beginning of the civil war Liberia had five transmitters in Liberia and was broadcasting in about 40 languages across West Africa, including many of the Liberian dialects and languages. ELWA regularly broadcasted programs in English and 14 different Liberian languages. ELWA has been a significant expression of evangelical Christianity in Liberia through missionary efforts, radio broadcasts, and humanitarian work (Gifford 1993:104).

Almost all of the denominations in Liberia are connected to the US and Canada. Gifford makes much about this, but the reason was that Americo-Liberians have always maintained ties in the US which made a natural bridge for those aspiring to missionary service. As an English-speaking, non-colonial, independent republic since 1847, it was easy to gain entrance to Liberia and it was considered quite safe. Liberia was the only country on the African continent that had so many ties, connections, and similarities to the US, and by extension, to Canada.

More recently, there have been many other arrivals including Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah Witness, Ba'hai Faith Groups, Pentecostals, African Independent Churches, and other independent self-styled groups (Clifford 1971:88). In addition to the Christian presence, various figures have been given for the Muslim presence, listed between 10-20 percent. There would be various figures because of the lack of clear separation from what represented followers of the Muslim faith and those of traditional religious beliefs. Muslims who migrated several hundred years ago and

⁹⁰<http://paocafrika.wordpress.com/2008/12/17/liberia-assemblies-of-god-centennial-celebrations> (July 2012).

settled in the Vai areas were much more syncretized than other predominantly Muslim countries. The Mandingo and Vai represent the largest portion of the Muslim presence, with the Vai as high as 90 percent.

Liberia is considered much more churchied than the neighbors of Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire or Guinea. If Protestant and Catholic memberships are included, Liberia has approximately 12.6 percent. In contrast, Sierra Leone has 3.2 percent and Guinea has 1.3 percent. Ivory Coast has a similar number to Liberia of 13 percent, but reflected a high Catholic affiliation because of the French influence (Wold 1968:14).

4.10 CHRISTIANITY AND THE FUTURE

Liberia has always been described as a nation of vast potential to be evangelized. However, that potential seemed never to have been realized. "In a land favorable to the Christian religion, where mission work has been carried for many years and national churches have long been in charge, how is it possible for the Christian religion to stop precisely among those who are most Christianized?" Wold (1968:10, 15) stated that "Church growth has not taken place in Liberia to the extent that might have been expected, or in proportion to the existing potential, but my studies lead me to believe that Liberia is on the brink of tremendous turning to Christ."

How accurate was his assessment? Based on Gifford's (1993) report of spiritual revivalism that began in 1980, Wold was quite accurate, though he may not have recognized the extent to which the political regime and cultural Christianity stifled Liberian evangelization. Not until the overthrow of the government did evangelism began to flourish. The fall of the First Republic opened the door for Christianity to be a faith of all the people rather than a carrot of the elite.

In the twentieth century, the influx of missionaries to the interior region did not result in the planting of significant numbers of churches. Research indicated that neither faithful mission station work, nor dynamic charismatic worship resulted in church growth. Barriers were in place that hindered the anticipated movement. As those

barriers began to fall, the Holy Spirit began to move among the churches and among the people who had been contextually isolated from the good news of Jesus Christ.

A hindrance to evangelization was the methods of church starting and evangelism. The Gospel was not presented in the heart language through contextual and relevant methods. The Gospel needed to be relevant to the social structure, but was not. The Gospel message was bound by cultural identification. By 1968, Wold (1968:123) was speaking of the great social upheaval. The opening of the country to new roadways, expansion of education, and the mobilization of the people resulted in change. He indicated that “whole sections are ready to turn to Christ in movements that promise to be amazing in proportions and vitality.”

The long history of cultural Christianity in Liberia had proven to be a great obstacle for evangelization. The presence of missionary groups made inroads, but lacked a comprehensive movement because of many of the barriers of a pseudo-Christian way of life. How did these dynamics affect attempts to evangelize the interior? What cultural changes happened as the result of the political overthrow and the subsequent slide into anarchy? Could the most devastating chapters in Liberia’s history prove to be the greatest measure of Christian growth in Liberia?

All of these considerations lead into a study of a specific area of Christianity in Liberia: the evangelization of the Mano and Gio of Northern Liberia. The scope of this study was limited, but there was evidence to indicate that the evangelization process touched many regions. The struggles of the civil war proved to be an expanding of faith, even in their darkest hour. This is consistent with the biblical pattern of Gospel expansion in the midst of upheaval, persecution, and chaos.

On that day a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria. Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply over him. Saul, however, was ravaging the church. He would enter house after house, drag off men and women, and put them in prison. So those

who were scattered went on their way preaching the message of good news. Acts 8:1-4 (HCSB).

Acts 8 is a transitional section, providing a conclusion to Stephen's martyrdom and an introduction to the witness of the Christians who were dispersed from Jerusalem as a result of the persecution following Stephen's death. Polhill (1995:210) and other scholars makes much of the unleashing of the message as it begins to move among the Hellenist world. In much the same way, the researcher sees a parallel in how the Gospel was freed from restraint and began to move among the indigenous of Liberia. More specifically, the event of the coup and the diaspora of the civil war moved the Gospel into the villages and lives of the Mano and Gio of Northern Liberia.

The following chapter considers the specific context of the Mano and Gio. Who were the Mano and Gio? What was their social structure and why did it have such importance to the research question? Who began to engage the Mano and Gio with the Gospel message and how did they respond?

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MANO AND GIO OF NORTHERN LIBERIA AND EVANGELIZATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a descriptive introduction to the Mano and Gio of Northern Liberia. The defining feature of the heritage of the Mano and Gio has been the social structure and specifically, the Poro Society. This chapter will evaluate the role and impacts of the social structure as a shaping factor of life and a barrier to evangelization. This evaluation requires a blending of the sciences. Qualitative interviewing provides a methodology for revealing patterns, mini-theories, and dynamics of evangelization in the blending of sociology and theology.

In addition to qualitative interviewing, this chapter incorporates the limited scholarly literature on the Mano and Gio. Three primary sources include the writings of Harley (1941), Zetterstrom (1976) and Partor (1990). The unpublished memoirs of missionary Tom Jackson (Gautier 1995) are also reviewed.

The chapter also considers the evangelization process by evaluating the various engaged church and missionary entities. The Liberia Inland Church, the Mid-Baptist Mission, and the Nimba Baptist Union are primary considerations. These missionary enterprises and the resulting indigenous organizations and leaders were the initiating groups in the evangelization of the Mano and Gio. Also considered are examples of Christian women who acted transformatively in regards to oppressive practices of the society (see 5.5.1).

Finally, this chapter explores Muller's (2006) worldview theory based on a biblical hermeneutic related to hamartiology. Muller's theory speaks to an understanding of how people receive the gospel from within a perceived worldview.

The Mano and Gio of Northern Liberia form part of the Mande grouping located in north-central Liberia. Groupings of this nature are generally characterized by geographical region, distinctive culture, and political structure or a common solidarity that sets them apart from outsiders (Partor 1998:7). The Mano and Gio are separate, but often indistinguishable by outsiders. Historically, villages were homogeneous, but recently have been more integrated. Linguistically, the Mano are the closest to the Gio whom they often refer to as their “small brothers”⁹¹ The consensus is that the linguistic Mande entered the area from the Northern Savannah around the fifteenth century. (Zetterstrom 1976:16).

5.2 MANO OF NORTHERN LIBERIA

The ethnology report identified the language of the Mano people as Mann. Other names used were Maa, Mah, Mano, and Mawe.⁹² Ma was a name given to them by the Bassa and literally means, Ma-people in Bassa (Sevareid 1993:66). The HEA report indicated that the Mano call themselves Ma-mia (my people). The report referred to them as the Mah and the Americo-Liberians called them the Mano (Schwab 1947:23). Liberians are aware of variations, but refer to the people as Mano. President Sirleaf used Mano and Gio in her memoirs (Sirleaf 2009:2).

The Mano people are surrounded geographically by the Gio, Bassa, Krahn, and Kpelle along with the Republic of Guinea and Cote D’Ivoire. A significant group of Mano-speaking people reside in Guinea centered near the towns of N’Zerekore, Lola, and Yomou. This research briefly discusses the Mano of Guinea and the impact of Christians from Liberia. Evangelization of the Mano in Guinea began with Liberians who crossed the border to share the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to their neighbors, but extended to church starting by displaced Liberians who fled the war.

⁹¹*Small brother* is a commonly used term that refers to affection rather than a biological relationship.

⁹²Ethnologue Report. [Online]. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=mev.

This research briefly examined the Bible translation efforts of Samantha Mero who lives in the abovementioned region of Guinea. Mero is attempting to translate the Bible into the Mano language of Guinea. Since Guinea is French speaking, the Mano of Guinea have been influenced significantly by the Guinean French.

The Mano in Liberia consist of three chiefdoms:

1. The Sanniquellie-Mah Chiefdom included the Bein, Gaa, Sei and Yamein clans.
2. The Saclapea-Mah Chiefdom included Gbana, Gbei, Lao, Lissono and Zaan clans.
3. The Yarwin-Mehn-sonoh Chiefdom included the Mesono, Yaawein and Zenla clans.

The Mano were traditionally not a hierarchically organized people, but a linguistic grouping. The clans and chiefdoms were political-administrative units imposed by the government. The town was the largest political unit in Mano structure. Historically, neither the people nor towns were integrated into a chiefdom or state. This was evidenced in a quote describing the conflict between groups: "For example, people in Sanniquellie could not even venture as far as Sakimpa, three miles away, without the fear of being captured or killed" (Sevareid 1993:66).

The Mano has approximately 185 000 speakers and about 71 000 speakers in Guinea. The statistics were from 1995, however, since that was during the civil war, it is difficult to ascertain the accuracy of statistical information. How could those numbers have been compiled when it was impossible to have accurately surveyed villages and towns? Many of the organizations that gathered that kind of statistical data often estimated the numbers without sources of accurate statistical information.

5.3 GIO OF NORTHERN LIBERIA

In contrast to the Mano, the Dan or Gio were listed as a language of Cote D'Ivoire with smaller groups in Liberia and Guinea. The language is spoken in Liberia by 150 000, which would make it approximately the same size as the Mano. Other names used for the Dan are Gio, Da, Gio-Dan, and Dei. There are considered to be three dialects: Upper Gio, Lower Gio, and River Cess Gio. Although academically referred

to as Dan, the Liberian people refer to the language and people as Gio.⁹³ The HAE reported that the people referred to themselves as the “Ge.” A linguistic question would be the extent to which Mano and Gio were considered similar, but had different countries of origin.

5.4 ETHNIC GROUPING AND PROXIMITY

Unlike West African neighbors, Liberia was never colonized by a European nation. The freed slaves who settled in Liberia were mostly in coastal settlements and did not integrate with the indigenous people. The interior of Liberia remained politically autonomous until the twentieth century. The interior people groups functioned in practical isolation. Groups like the Kissi, Loma, Gbande, Mano and Gio and other forest peoples had closer relations with the people of the savannah to the north than to the southern coastal settlements of Liberia (Ford 1992:51-63).

In an economic study on the Kola production and settlement mobility among the Gio, Ford (1992:52) brought to light some of the original influences. The kola distribution network of the Gio extended from the wooded savannah south of Touba to Man at the beginning of the forest in Cote D’Ivoire. The network extended southeastward into the more dense forest around Tappita. He attributed the distribution network to be a function of the expansion that remained intact following the breakup of the Mali Empire. The various ethnic groupings shared a vague affinity, evident in common customs and traditions. Mandingo traders had established weekly markets in the Nimba region disconnected from the coastal settlements. The Mano and Gio villages would have been at their zenith, of which Old Man Zovah stated, “Today, the towns our fathers built are empty, the people dead. Only Kola remains” (:51).

An interesting element of the trade network was the Kissi money (see 9.10). The black steel rod was probably formed and smelted by blacksmiths from iron ore in the

⁹³Ethnologue Report. [Online]. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=daf. (May 2009).

Nimba range. Kissi money was used during this time of trade extending to those who lived in the border regions of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. Kissi money was used for many decades and circulated alongside American, British, and French paper money. After being replaced by Western currencies, Kissi money became limited to ritual ceremonies. Because of integration into various ceremonies and rituals, the Kissi money still is referred to as “money with a soul.”⁹⁴ Kissi money was actively used among the Mano and Gio and had considerable homogeneity with neighboring people that used the Kissi money, trading networks, and culture.

5.5 SOCIETAL STRUCTURE

Sociologically, the life of the Mano people was governed by and revolved around the secret societies. The largest and most important were the Poro and the Sande Societies. The Poro Society was the bush society for men and boys and the Sande Society was the auxiliary for women and girls. The Poro Society originated with the Mano and the meaning of the word Poro was “tattoo” or “body marking.” The Poro Society has been the greatest barrier for Christianity to overcome in penetrating the indigenous Mano village with the good news (Wonbenyakeh, May 2009).

The barrier of the Poro Society to Christianity was not only an issue of religious belief. History demonstrated that both the governmental political relationships and the missionary enterprise struggled to transcend that divide. In the Mano tradition, the village chief had a governance role related to family, town, and community, but significant issues could only be appealed to a tribunal of the Poro secret society, thus centralizing control and power. The prominent role and secretive structure of the society, created a barrier to all outside influences (Harley 1941:6).

In the early years of evangelization and without context of how the Poro functioned, the Society would have seemed an insurmountable barrier. In early writings on the subject, Jackson described the society to his Canadian family as clubs with indigenous

⁹⁴Kissi Money or Money with a soul. [Online]. <http://www.liberiapastandpresent.org/kissi.htm>.

membership that once in were very hard to get out of. He acknowledged that because of secrecy, he did not know precisely what happened, but viewed the society as a diabolical barrier to the Gospel (Gautier 1995:17).

The Poro Society had many different functions, serving as an integral part of the society structure, much as a town or city government in the Western world. An analogy of the Poro would be that of a municipality functioning in many arenas including judicial, administrative, enforcement, and recreational. In the same way, the Poro was a body with many functions. The Poro functioned as a training institute that taught boys to become men, but also had spiritual, civic, and religious functions.

The Poro Society was set up as a village structure with a hierarchical council of secretly named officials. The Poro drew from families in the village and masks were used to identify roles. The power of those identified in leadership roles through family lineage was believed to be endowed to them through ancestral spirits. Sacred locations were utilized for activities. The inner circle ruled on issues of economic, social, and political disputes and governed outside relations (Harley 1941:8).

The spiritual component of the Poro was led by a Zo, who was a respected elder, and considered to have medicinal and spiritual powers, along with levels of authority (Dunn 2001:366). Zo was often synonymous in the English language with a witchdoctor. In the Poro, a Zo may have also functioned as a herbalist, medicinal practitioner, chief, village leader, or a host of other roles. An error of the early missionary enterprise was to view the role of a Zo as only spiritual and evil.

The Mano have always been a proud people and have appreciated speaking in parables and respectful dialogue. Overcoming barriers involves respecting the leaders and structures. According to Gbengan (June 2011), the church, when possible, should seek to be in partnership with the local leaders and communities. The Poro society was intertwined with life and village structure and a church must distinguish which areas were in conflict, but recognize other parts are a normal functioning part of life.

5.5.1 Societal Initiation

A major function of the Poro and Sande was the transition and education of young boys and girls to adulthood. The training was conducted by the societal groups and the process was long, complex, and secretive. There was a hereditary right to leadership and groupings were formed to ensure the development of future leaders.

The Society was secretive, so there were not a lot of sources for information from local agents. Harley (1941) wrote extensively on this subject as he gained knowledge from the collection of the masks. In addition, some information was obtained from nationals who had learned of the traditions through oral transmission.

A primary point of entry to the Poro was the practice of initiation which took place in the spirit forest. The Mano term for the initiation was *ge bon*. In the older oral accounts, boys in their early teens were taken to the forest for three years or more. They were to learn codes of behavior, obedience to elders, and general life lessons. During the process, they underwent circumcision, bodily markings, and secret rituals. This practice gradually changed and became a shorter rite (Adams 2009:19).

The girls were usually taken into the forest around the age of puberty while still virgins. This was a traumatic event as they were usually taken unexpectedly and blindfolded at night. The overseer was the female Zo who was only seen with a mask, creating an atmosphere of fear (Harley 1941:16-17). The fear factor contributed to the perpetuation of the devil. There was a lot of fear as the girls were forced into the process (Betty Jonah, May 2009).

One of the acts of the female initiation that caused such fear was the female genital mutilation. This was a painful and risky process. Jonah described the initiation as dangerous and shared the case of her intervention in regards to the daughter of a church deacon (name removed for privacy). His daughter was taken at night to the bush to be initiated. During the mutilation, they were unable to stop the bleeding. This and unsanitary conditions commonly caused infections. Jonah challenged the

society leaders to remove the girl and get medical treatment and advocated judicially for an end to this practice. Jonah lamented that this has been a problem for many years and young women have died because of the process.

Another example of a proactive Christian transformative role was with Pastor Anita Wonbenyakeh (May 2009) who led the church to challenge this practice as an abuse against women.⁹⁵ Anita and Moses created a safe haven for young girls at Mensonn Baptist Church to resist being taken into the initiation process. Wonbenyakeh was able to challenge the Society, in part because the influence was weakened by the war and also because of the growing impact of the church. A judicial verdict rendered that girls could not be taken by force into the initiation. Individual and family consent was mandated and ended the practice of female genital mutilation in the village.

Reflecting on behalf of the advocacy of women, Longkumer (2011:304) stated that Christian mission should insure that women are protected and nurtured both in the church and in society. The movement of indigenous evangelization of the Mano and Gio not only advocated for women, but the advocacy was often provided through the leadership of women. This study demonstrates the significant roles that women have played in Liberia in recent years, both politically and spiritually.

At the end of the six months of initiation, the boys and girls completed their rite of passage and were brought out at harvest. The families provided food for a celebration and the girls came out covered in chalk while the boys came out with distinguishing marks. The difficulty of the encounter with the society was that there were some aspects that needed to be challenged, but other aspects that were preparation for life. When the society was weakened, it eliminated the unhealthy practices, but it also ended the contextual training processes of adolescents of the village. There is a broader debate on how to view African Traditional Religions in relationship to Christianity. This research has avoided this debate as it requires more extensive discussion and is not at the core of answering this research question of evangelization.

⁹⁵Lapea #1 is the name of the village near Karnplay and has approximately 3 000 people.

5.5.2 Oracle Tree

Another element associated with the Poro Society was the presence of the Oracle Tree. Oracle was another word for god and the name might be better understood in translation as the “god tree.” This tree was traditionally planted at the establishment of the village. As you entered or passed an older Mano or Gio village, there was a large Cottonwood Tree in the center or at the approach of the town.

The older Mano traditions stated that to establish a new village, a tree would be planted and the people would worship and make sacrifices at the oracle tree. The ceremony of the planting of the tree involved a human sacrifice. According to M. Wonbeyakeh (May 2009), the village elder would have taken a niece who was a virgin, but with breasts (in or just past puberty), and she would be buried alive and the cottonwood tree planted on top of her. In later years, an animal would have been used as a substitute sacrifice. The practice of human sacrifice ended when the tribal wars ended and with the implementation of governmental control. The tree was regarded as a spiritual tree and most of the animistic practices were associated with the tree.

A similar description was presented in *The Situation of the Mano of Guinea*. In describing the barrier of evangelizing the Mano of Guinea, Moisy Mamy stated:

The Mano have trees planted in the middle of their villages. In ancient times, the Mano wanted to dedicate themselves to something. So when someone founded a village, the village would meet together and say to the founder: “We want to dedicate your village to a god; give the village a member of your family that the village can make a living sacrifice.” The person would give his niece. The village would dig a hole in the middle of the village and then would bring the person to be sacrificed. After saying everything, they would place the person in the hole alive and place a bowl on his head. They would plant the tree in the bowl and then bury the person alive in the hole. After some time had passed, the tree would sprout and grow and all in the village would come to worship it with fear. These sacrificial trees exist everywhere in Mano villages (Mamy 1997:2).

This example in another country demonstrated that this was a practice throughout the Mano and was probably applicable among other ethnic groups of the Poro Society.

In Lapea #1, Wonbenyakeh (June 2010) recounted a story of the spiritual battle between the village elders and the church regarding the disruptive influence of the Oracle Tree. Though the Poro system was not fully functioning after the war, there was the practice of witchcraft associated with the Oracle Tree. Many young people were drawn into the practice which included casting spells, manipulating the spirits, and pronouncing evil intent on people. This practice also involved exchanging of sexual favors. These practices created significant chaos and strife in the village.

After a season of prayer and fasting, the leaders of the Mensonn Baptist Church approached the village elders for permission to cut down the oracle tree to disrupt the witchcraft process. Initially, the village elders refused because of the significance of the tree and because the tree was used as a tool to manipulate for personal gain. A village leader stated that it would be impossible to cut the tree down because of the size of the tree and the spiritual power possessed in the tree. The response of the church leaders was to state that if the tree could protect itself, why were they afraid to let the church try to cut it down? The elders agreed to let the church try to cut the tree down, not feeling as though it would be possible.

After three days of prayer and fasting, the church began the process of cutting the tree down. Cutting down the tree took over 16 hours during the Easter weekend of 2010, but the tree finally fell the day before Easter. Initially, the cutting down of the tree caused consternation in the village, but ultimately, the people believed that the power of the God proved greater than the evil powers of the Oracle Tree.⁹⁶ The church doubled in attendance and many people believed and received the good news of salvation and were baptized (Wonbenyakeh, June 2010).

The practice of witchcraft was greatly diminished and the unity of the village increased as a result of this event. The story of the Oracle Tree was conveyed by Moses Wonbenyakeh in the presence of other church members. This researcher saw

⁹⁶Felling of the cottonwood tree in Lapea #1.

the tree in 2009 and then, after the tree was cut down in 2010. The church added an addition to the building to expand in order to provide space for all the new members. Refer to the footnotes for links to a You Tube video interview.⁹⁷

Christianity, culture, and witchcraft are a central conversation in *The Changing Face of Christianity*. Van den Berg (Sanneh and Carpenter 2005:45) engages the discussion of how witchcraft and evil in the African context are understood. He states (:51) that in cultures where the belief of witchcraft exists, understanding varies only slightly and witches and witchcraft are exclusively evil with intent to subvert society. These beliefs are normative to explaining bad events and may help define social values and authority. A deeper discussion would consider the role of how African Christianity engages the ways that traditional ideology is used to explain evil. Van den Berg (:58) theorizes that the African context may regard Jesus as of central importance for afterlife whereas traditional understandings hold sway for everyday experiences.

This researcher would not completely disagree with this theory, but would rather consider the idea that because Western culture does not give a high value to the spiritual realm, missionaries and Western theology have struggled to articulate an understanding of the spirit-realm and the causes of sin. A contextual understanding of the doctrine of sin would more significantly address how various context react in their worldview to sin and a blending of understanding would be helpful. This is demonstrated in Muller's (2006) view of sin and worldview. The role of the devil in society is an extension of that discussion.

5.5.3 The Devil and the Society

The role of the devil was another significant aspect of the Poro Society. According to tradition, the language of the devil was Mano and the Gio borrowed the devil from the Mano, so it was more deeply entrenched in the Mano villages (Wonbenyakeh, June

⁹⁷Love Liberia Project. Cottonwood Tree. You Tube video uploaded 29 June 2010, includes the interview of the felling of the evil tree. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRDGYvZvI-A>.

2010). The Society was a social structure, but also governed people through fear using the devil and his masks. Harley documented in *Masks as Agents of Social Control in Northeast Liberia* the different masks and roles. The thesis that God had made man in his own image⁹⁸ was reversed when man made an image and bestowed it with godlike attributes. The masks may have been made for the great devil or as a personal fetish, but were interconnected to the spiritual process (Harley 1950:3).

Harley's collection of 391 wooden face masks were from various people groups inhabiting the northeastern interior of Liberia. Harley wrote two additional essays describing the role of the mask and the secretive aspect of control. The masks functioned as a social control agent in the structure of the village (Adams 2009:17).

5.6 SCHOLARLY REVIEW

As previously mentioned, the writings about the Mano and Gio were extremely limited. There were only a few works available that were primarily about the Mano and Gio, along with reports and articles related to legal cases or economic activities. This research was valuable because of the introduction of literature that speaks specifically to the way of life of the Mano and Gio.

The most significant collection of scholarly work on the Mano and Gio was written and compiled by Harley. He contributed three significant writings that related to the Mano tribe: *Masks as agents of social control in Northeast Liberia* (1950), *Notes on the Poro in Northern Liberia* (1941), and *Native African Medicine of the Mano Tribe* (1941). All (1941) references in this dissertation refer to *Notes on the Poro*. Partor is a theologian in Liberia of Mano origin and he quotes Harley as a preeminent source on Mano customs and culture.

George Schwab authored *Tribes of the Hinterland* (1947), but drew heavily on Harley for the segments on the Mano and Gio. Harley edited much of that material and

⁹⁸ Genesis 1:27.

Schwab spoke highly of his friend, describing his colleague as having intimate knowledge of the Mano and Gio. Harley seemed to be Schwab's primary source.

It is interesting to note the impact of Harley in the field of medicine and anthropology, but marginally in theology and evangelization. In *The George Harley Collection*, Adams (2009:17) described Harley as a medical doctor, author, and pioneer in the collection and interpretation of masks in the forest region of West Africa. That Harley was a missionary was never mentioned reflected that his contributions were not in the missiological field. Winifred Harley was a trained botanist and credited with *A Third of a Century with George Way Harley in Liberia* (1973).

Zetterstrom (1976), a Swedish anthropologist, also contributed to the scholarly collection of the Mano and Gio. Zetterstrom completed a sociological study on the *Yamein clan of the Mano tribe, The Yamein Mano of Northern Liberia*. His *Occasional Papers* provided excellent insights into the structure and identity of a Mano village. The strength of Zetterstrom's work was the narrow focus on the Yamein clan. The research did not have a political or religious tone and was a sociological description of the existence of the Yamein clan. The weakness was the focus of one clan, thus, limiting the comparison of the broader Mano people group.

Zetterstrom (1976) compiled his research during trips to Liberia in 1967, 1973 and 1975. He was able to focus primarily on the northeastern Liberian border above the Yamein River and utilized trained local assistants to complete questionnaires. He affirmed the continued presence of the Poro secret circles in the region, still handling the discipline and judicial affairs. Zetterstrom utilized Liberians from Yekepa to serve as translators, observers, and conductors of surveys in the villages. This researcher was familiar with his lead interview assistant, Alfred Yeaney.

John Partor⁹⁹ is a pastor and evangelist actively involved in the evangelization of the Mano and Gio. Partor (1998) wrote *The significance of cultural naming among the Mano tribe of Liberia: A tool for personal evangelism* as a part of his Masters dissertation in Nigeria. He dedicated his work in memory of his Father, Chief Saye Quabia Partor. Being the son of a village chief, Partor would be well aware of many of the nuances described in this question related to the barriers and extent of evangelization of the Mano and Gio. Partor and Williams (missionary) served as co-pastors of Mt. Nimba Baptist Church for several years and had a long mentoring and friendship relationship. Partor's essay provided a source of intra-cultural perception.

A significant find of this research from a missionary perspective was the unpublished collection, *In the Hollow of His Hand: The Life and Letters of Tom Jackson*. After the untimely death of Tom and June Jackson, effort was taken by his children to compile newsletters, personal letters, and articles that contributed to the collection of the life of Tom Jackson. Miriam Gautier was asked to consider writing a book based on the collection. Gautier compiled those documents in chronological form. The collection describing the call on Jackson's life to leave Canada and go to Liberia as a missionary; recounting the journey, engaging of culture, and settling into the Gio town of Bahn. The collection brings clarity and understanding to the Bible translation process of the Mano and Gio Bible, as well as missiological insights.

The absence of research of the smaller groups in Liberia is true in all fields including religious studies and missiology. There is a responsibility for those in research to practice micro-missiology rather than discussing African countries, groups, and units from a macro-missiological perspective. Appiah (in Maluleke 1997:3) argues for caution in utilizing the term African in a broader sense. He states that it is important to be aware of the vastness, affinities, divisions and diversions in Africa. This researcher agrees and contends that this research contributes to that goal.

⁹⁹ A contribution of this research was to recover the only copy of Partor's dissertation that survived the civil war. The recovered copy was used to print and preserve his insightful work. Acknowledgement is made to Partor for the importance of his uncirculated work.

5.7 EVANGELIZING THE MANO AND GIO

In the previous chapter, a synopsis was given of the various denominations and the impact they had on Liberia. A broad portion of that discussion related to those denominations and the Americo-Liberians influence. This segment focuses more specifically on the denominational groups and missionary endeavors directly related to the Mano and Gio. Most of this activity took place in Nimba County and was not influenced by the Americo-Liberians. After Tubman's open door policy began around 1940, the roads began to open the way for missionaries to engage that region, coinciding with the beginning of evangelization.

Of the early missionary efforts, the Mid-Baptist Mission and the Inland Mission were the two most active in the evangelization process. Jackson (in Gautier 1995:18) was a catalyst for early missionary work among the Mano and Gio through LIM. In 1941, he described missionary efforts to 40 villages over a period of several weeks, of which, he estimated that 30 of those villages had never heard the message of the Gospel. In many of those villages, there were some who were privately open to the Gospel message, but were restricted by fear of the village leaders. Jackson stated, "It is hard for us to understand the hold these customs have on the people (:18)" After one of the preaching encounters in a new village, the missionaries were fed by the local people and the statement was made that, "Today, for the first time, someone has brought us the Word of God (:18)."

5.7.1 United Methodist Church

The Methodist Church primarily impacted the Mano and Gio through mission work in Ganta. The work at the Ganta Methodist Mission included a hospital, dispensary, schools, leprosarium, and other humanitarian efforts. By 1947, Harley was described as having built 26 buildings, using only local help. The mission was founded on behalf of the Methodist Episcopal Church Mission Board (Schwab 1947:viii).

With respect for all of the development and humanitarian work for which they were highly regarded by both Liberians and outside humanitarians, the Ganta Methodist Mission never successfully contextualized the Methodist church into Mano or Gio villages. Not until 1947 did the Mission assign a full-time evangelist to carry out the work of evangelization. There was almost no church growth associated with the Mission. History will regard the Ganta Methodist Mission as a humanitarian investment, but with little influence in the evangelization process (Partor 1998:76).

Observation regarding the absence of churches was two-fold:

- 1) The commitment to humanitarian work trumped the priority of evangelism in the traditional dichotomy of social gospel versus evangelism proclamation.
- 2) A perceived strategy of reaching the generations through schooling did not have the desired effect of the Gospel returning contextually to the villages. The mission school approach pulled people out of the culture rather than put the Gospel in context.

Harley started the work in Ganta¹⁰⁰ and wrote extensively about the mission, so his name is synonymous with that work. Many others invested their lives and made significant contributions, but were largely unknown. Mildred Kelly Dixon was honored as a distinguished alumnus of the Ohio College of Podiatry Medicine. Dixon was a graduate of the Ohio College of Chiropody in 1944. She was the only female graduate and served in the medical field. She traveled and worked extensively including serving at the Leprosarium in Ganta.¹⁰¹ In 1938, the Harleys were speaking in New Haven, Connecticut on a stateside assignment when they met Mildred Black. After hearing the Ganta Mission story, Mildred decided to join the

¹⁰⁰ As a teenager, this researcher used to hike up a mountain to the building remains of a get-away home of Harley. The home was a fascinating stone house in a remote location on top of the edge of a mountain in the Nimba Range about 30 miles from Ganta. The house was built around 1940. The house had a tin roof, an indoor kitchen, and an inside porcelain flush toilet. Cutting a path through the thick jungle and creating a path to the top of that mountain was hard to imagine. There was no mention of this refuge in his writings, but it must have been a place Harley frequented for rest, writing, or research. Dr. Harley was definitely a visionary and a builder, but he did not focus on evangelization.

¹⁰¹ Press release Ohio College. [Online]. <http://www.ocpm.edu/news/article.asp?ID=136>

work and sailed to Liberia with the Harleys. She became affectionately known as “Kau Black” and did medical work as well as setting up educational structures.¹⁰²

It is amazing to observe the Methodist presence which has had a tremendous humanitarian impact and cultural credibility, but almost no church planting impact. This absence indicates that starting churches and evangelization must be intentional. The absence might be represented by the idea that sleeping with a book under your pillow, no matter for how long, does not produce knowledge. One must engage for understanding. Evangelism requires contextual proclamation of the Gospel.

Bosch (2011:413) explored this notion about moving towards a constructive understanding of evangelism. He approached the topic from the other end of the spectrum describing conversion as turning from and a turning to. Conversion is a life characterized by sin, separation from God, submission to evil and the unfulfilled potential of God’s image, being transformed to a new life characterized by the forgiveness of sin, obedience, and renewed fellowship with God.” The study of the Mano was not about whether they have culturally related to the Christianity of Liberia, but the evangelization process of a spiritual turning from and turning to.

In a more recent presentation on the subject, Innis (2007:4) advocates a Methodism that has a “zealous proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with emphasis on personal conversion and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior as the most important task of the church.” With that said, his presentation on the subject of Mission and Evangelism is devoid of church starting emphasis or examples. Specifically related to the Ganta Methodist mission, he highlights the humanitarian contributions but makes a leap to spiritually serving the community without citing any examples of church multiplication, health, or proclamation evangelization.

¹⁰²Taryor, Nya. [Online]. *A brief history of Ganta United Methodist Mission School*. <http://daphne-edwards.com/Ganta-Mission/history.html>.

5.7.2 Liberia Inland Mission Church

The Liberia Inland Mission and Church (LIM) was one of the first groups to attempt to evangelize the Mano and Gio. LIM was a network or conference of churches that began evangelism and church planting missionary efforts around 1938. In 1995, there were listed as having 71 congregations and a total of 20 000 members. Church members came from the Bassa, Mano, Kpelle, and Gio ethnic groups.¹⁰³ The number of adherents was inflated by mission school attendees, but the 71 congregations probably numbered fairly low in attendance based on the model of house churches prevalent in the villages in accordance with polity and structure of LIM churches.

LIM began its missionary work among the Bassa, but was later able to build relations among the Gio and was invited to come to Nimba. The Gio were considered cannibalistic and groups were hesitant, but LIM took that step and started the first mission to the Gio people in the town of Garplay (Gbengan, June 2011). Initially, LIM wanted to establish the first mission in Karnplay, however this request was refused by the town leaders. The missionaries were able to convince the town of Garplay to establish a mission station and school. Today, there is a vibrant LIM church in Karnplay¹⁰⁴ under the leadership of Pastor Seigbeh Dahn.¹⁰⁵

In 1941, Janet Munn and Billie Price were missionaries in Gaple.¹⁰⁶ Price described going to a nearby village to share the Gospel in a place where they would be the first Gospel witness. After a positive experience, the people said: “We thank you plenty for coming to our town to tell us God’s Word, it is a sweet word and we love it and want to keep it in our hearts.” She identified Iva Clubine as one who had experienced a marvelous conversion at a meeting. Clubine became a catalyst to gather women for daily prayer in the village (Gautier 1995:23).

¹⁰³ <http://worldmap.org/maps/other/profiles/liberia/Liberia%20Profile.pdf> [Online].

¹⁰⁴ Observations made from the Seigbeh Dahn interview. (June 2010).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Garplay is a recognized spelling of the name, but Gaple was the spelling utilized by Munn.

The primary method of evangelism of the Inland Church was to develop centrally located preaching points. As people were led to salvation, leadership would establish lay-led house churches in villages of those converts. Thus, larger towns had churches, while villages were constituted with smaller house church and family settings. The Inland Mission emphasized education and mission schools (Gbengan, June 2011).

LIM utilized development of schools as a component of its strategy in Nimba County. The Liberian government saw missionary organizations as a viable tool for helping establish education and encouraged the practice. LIM established schools in Nimba including at Gay Peter, Flumpa, Bahn, River Cess, New Cess, Saclepea, and Garplay. All of these missionary activities contributed to the beginning of evangelization among the Mano and Gio. Until the war, the clinics, missions, and the work of LIM were being led by missionaries. Partor indicated that there were more expatriate missionaries than national missionaries. The work among the Mano and Gio was hampered by the lack of theologically trained and empowered local leaders. The LIM contributed greatly to the task of Bible translation (Partor 1998:75).

One of the currently stated goals of AIMS¹⁰⁷ is “to continue the good work begun by the expatriate missionaries by rebuilding the facilities --- medical clinics, school buildings, residential units, etc.” This indicates that medical facilities and educational institutions were a core part of the work of early missionaries. Currently, the non-profit organization that facilitates the work of schools started by LIM is the Association of Inland Mission Schools.¹⁰⁸ This researcher argues that this type of missional infrastructure is not sustainable and dependent on outside direction will result in a weakening of indigenous evangelization.

The Liberia Inland Church established some strong central preaching points, stations, and schools, but more specific research would need to be done to ascertain the effectiveness of their church starting efforts. For example, in the village of Lapea #1,

¹⁰⁷ Association of Inland Mission Schools [Online]. www.aims-liberia.org.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

it was commonly known that there was an Inland Church, but it was a house church made up of a few families and did not seem to have an impact on the village. The Inland Church in the city of Karnplay, however, was quite strong, but was the result of the presence of a central mission station and school.

One of the noted missionaries among the LIM was Tom Jackson. Jackson was involved in the translation of both the Mano and the Gio Bible. He was initially married to Billie Price who served faithfully alongside her husband for many years. Price learned the Gio language, helped in many of the translation efforts and was well respected among the people. Later in life, she experienced a lengthy illness and died in Fuquay, North Carolina (Gauthier 1995:95).

After her passing, Jackson briefly courted and then married June Hobdy. Hobdy had served in Liberia for many years and was responsible for the translation of an early copy of the Bassa Bible. As they married and moved to the Bahn mission station, Tom and June were focused on translating the Bible into Mano and Gio. They were killed during the civil war in an ambush in 1990. The Jackson family lived in Bahn and remained there after the civil war began as many fled for safety. The rebel commanders had communicated that they would be safe staying in Bahn. Early in the war, a group of government soldiers forced the Jacksons to drive them from Bahn to Ganta in their personal vehicle as a part of a vehicle convoy. Along the way, the vehicle convoy was ambushed by Charles Taylor's rebel soldiers.

Unsubstantiated accounts indicate that June was killed immediately, but Tom was able to get out of the vehicle and he spoke to and prayed for the rebel soldiers who ambushed them. Later, participants of that ambush expressed that they were not aware of the Jacksons' presence and would not have ambushed the vehicles if they had known of the missionary presence. It was also said that at least one of those participants expressed remorse in a worship service after the war. This researcher chose not to name these secondary sources for reasons of privacy, but Wonbenyakeh (June 2010) was present and able to affirm those conversations.

The Mid Baptist and Inland Church contributed greatly to the establishment of the Gospel in the early days. Jackson's life and letters give great insight into his work and highlights the origin of the Gospel proclamation among the Mano and Gio.

5.7.3 Upper Nimba Baptist Association

One of the key institutions more recently associated with the church planting efforts among the Mano and Gio people would be the Upper Nimba Baptist Association (UNBA). Today, the UNBA has merged and formed the NBU made up of three associations. The NBU was a primary consideration of this research because of the familiarity with the history and the role of the Association in the evangelization process. According to Partor, a former moderator: "This body has accomplished a great deal of church planting work among the Mano over the last ten years; more than any of the earlier mentioned organizations and denominations" (Partor 1998:78).

In 1985, the Association formed as a break-away from the Macedonia Baptist Association of the LBMEC. At that time, the LBMEC was politically networked to the TWP which was the ruling party in the Liberian government. The bureaucracy of the LBMEC and the association with politicians limited the effectiveness of the Association in evangelization. The Macedonia Association covered the counties of Bong, Lofa, and Nimba. This large area of responsibility reduced village churches to minimal representation without a voice of influence. Under the leadership of Pastors Jonah and Partor, along with missionary colleagues, Williams and Senter, the six churches in Upper Nimba decided to form an Association that would allow them to more effectively do church starting (Williams, September 2010).

Initially, the Association's formation was roundly criticized as a divisive move, but eventually was approved by unanimous vote that the Macedonia Association be divided to bring about spiritual growth and effective evangelism. Today, there are over 90 churches in the NBU. The NBU is one of the fastest growing Associations or Unions in the LBMEC. The two key factors for growth have been indigenous

leadership and a commitment to evangelism and discipleship. While other associations have spun their wheels in bureaucracy, the NBU has stayed committed to planting a church in every Mano and Gio village (Wonbeyakeh, June 2010).

The UNBA was an institutional catalyst for the growth of evangelization. The growth coincided with two significant political events; the coup in 1980 and the civil war in 1989. These two events created a climate that contributed to a growth movement. This will be discussed in more detail in regards to the diaspora effect. An example of this diaspora process would be starting of Mensonn Baptist Church in the village of Lapea #1 in 1994. Wonbenyakeh, the founding pastor, described the origins of the church as being the direct result of being relocated because of the war.

This was only one example of church starting of the NBU, but was symptomatic of what God was doing throughout the region. The NBU saw the greatest extent of growth during the civil war. Churches were the result of a movement of the Holy Spirit, the chaos of the civil war, and of trained evangelistic leadership facilitated by strategic churches like Mt. Nimba Baptist, Trumpet Baptist, and Redeemer Baptist. Today, the NBU is the largest evangelical church presence among the Mano and Gio.

5.7.4 Baptist Mid-Mission

The Baptist Mid-Mission (BMM) was a stream of traditional, independent fundamental Baptists who came to Liberia with the goal of evangelization of the indigenous Liberians. The Mid-Baptists came to Liberia in 1931 and by-passed the cultural Christianity infrastructure, choosing to go directly to the unreached. The Mid-Baptists had little interaction with other missionary groups because of strict church polity which forbade interaction. This later came to affect the churches they established who wrestled with this isolationist polity in a communal culture.

The Mid Baptists arrived under the leadership of Gordon Mellish and the Canadian Regular Baptists. The assigned task was to carry the Gospel to the indigenous people. In 1937, an evangelist went to Tappita in Lower Nimba and established two stations

among the Mano. Although the Ganta Mission had started a decade earlier, this was one of the earliest evangelistic efforts. Mid-Baptist interior focus later expanded to the Krahn and Kpelle. The Mid Baptists were connected to the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, of the US and Canada (Partor 1998:65).

There are limited records of the early Mid-Baptist missionary presence. Mellish opened the work and was later joined by Arthur Nickerson, Harlan Reilly and Robert Smith. A mission station was established in Zondo and then established stations in Suakoko, Yila and Tappita. Abe and Susie Guenter served as missionaries on the Zondo station and opened the door to the aviation ministry of the Mid-Baptist.¹⁰⁹ Others like Chick Watkins, J. T. Lyons and Lud Zerbe followed.

The statistics of Mid-Baptists are difficult to interpret as the *World Church Handbook* recorded 44 missionaries, 88 preaching points, but only 129 members in 1957. The Mid-Baptists operated five schools, a leprosarium and a clinic. The emphasis of Mid-Baptists was evangelism in rural areas (Wold 1968:66-70). The Mid-Baptists have been a presence for 50 years in the interior of Liberia, but the work was difficult to assess because of the absence of a historical record and isolationist tendencies. They had many preaching points, but this researcher was uncertain as to whether they were able to establish indigenous led reproducing churches. They produced leaders for the Mano and Gio through the establishment of the Bible Institute of Tappita and utilized aviation ministry to conduct remote evangelistic campaigns (Partor 1998:73-74).

Gbengan (June 2011) was converted through the missionary influence of Mid-Baptists. He stated that the Mid-Baptists had a strong work in the region among the Gio, but the denominational approach of isolation contributed to long-term weakness and he eventually left because of isolation and the absence of joy. “Growing up,” he said, “we looked at Baptists as liberals and Pentecostals as really liberal. Later, I became involved with Scripture Union and realized I was missing the biblical

¹⁰⁹<http://liberianmissionary.xanga.com/567731043/sheppard-update---january-2007>. [Online]. June 2011.

experience of the unity of believers” (Gbengan, June 2011). A desire for unity led Gbengan to step outside of the Mid-Baptists and become a part of the greater evangelical church body. This would be a contributing factor to his decision to establish and develop the Ganta Christian Community which focused on the collaborated effort of churches.

Mid-Baptists were doctrinally and practically conservative. The greatest barrier for growth among Mid-Baptist churches was their practice of separatism from other denominations and the strict stand against baptizing members of polygamous households. This view was a philosophical stance of missionaries (Partor 1998:74).

5.8 WORLDVIEW OF THE MANO AND GIO

Establishing a worldview is a subjective discussion and needs a point of comparison. This research question does not necessitate understanding the worldview of the Mano and Gio, except at the point that the worldview addresses the theological issues of conversion. The spiritual perspective of the people impacts how they might receive and respond to the Gospel message. This section will define an understanding of a biblical worldview based on Roland Muller’s¹¹⁰ theory and apply that theory to the framework of both evangelization and measuring the extent of evangelization.

The term worldview was coined by the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. Later, Richard Kroner wrote a book about this called *Kant’s Weeltanschauung*, published in

¹¹⁰ Roland Muller is a missiologist who writes about the transmission of the Gospel from one culture to another and how the message is understood. His more recent works have been towards an understanding of how Muslims receive the biblical message (*Understanding Islam: Through History, Theology and Daily Practice. 2nd Edition, 2012*). Muller has had 30 years of missionary experience and developed missionary apprentice programs. He states that few missionaries function in a mono-cultural environment so it is necessary to understand basic ways that the Gospel is received, but not limiting that recipient by perceptions. He states that the first two barriers involve having credibility as a valid messenger and being able to share a culturally appropriate message that considers the recipient and the community in which they live (2006:i-ii).

Germany around 1914 and translated into English in 1956. It was through this and later translations that worldview came into more common usage (Muller 2006:130).

There are many definitions of worldview. The *Webster's New World Dictionary* defined worldview as "a comprehensive philosophy ultimately founded upon four institutions." The four concepts given of identifying worldview were religion, politics, economics and science. According to Muller, a more descriptive definition of worldview would be a profile of the way a group of people live, act, think, work, and relate. Worldview becomes a method or a map to illustrate social, religious, economic, and political views and that shape the core of relationships. Anthropologists refer to the process of constructing worldviews as ethnographic interviews. Ethnography is a description of the behavior and lifestyle of the people and their community, society, and culture (Muller 2006:130).

Muller (2006:130) classified his understanding of the three critical issues for the cross-cultural church planter in *The Messenger, The Message, and The Community*. In *The Message*, he addressed the Gospel and the interaction that occurred with the perception of a particular people. Muller stated that once a hearing has been gained by the messenger, there must be the knowledge of culture that allows the message to be effectively presented across the cultural divide necessitating an understanding for whom the message is being presented.

There are many models for discerning worldviews to illustrate different perspectives. In discussing models of worldviews, there has been confusion about how a worldview is applied. There has not been a consistent set of criteria for mapping worldviews and the views of the researcher must also be taken into account. If the researcher has strong Marxist beliefs, he may include such things as classes and class struggles in society, while a person with strong religious perceptions may include belief in or perception of God, sin, and salvation in identification. Worldviews can be approached in many ways. For the purpose of this research, a presentation of Muller's biblical worldview model was utilized (Muller 2006:131).

Muller (2006:140) created a model that he classified as a biblical worldview. He began by defining biblical criteria and observed people through that lens. The worldview he espoused incorporated two chapters of Genesis, describing all people as living under the influence of sin that shaped our view. The study of sin, hamartiology, was the basis from which Muller derived his biblical worldview. His driving statement was that sin impacts perception of humanity and the responses to sin provides greater understanding of how to more clearly share the message of the Bible. The three effects of sin that Muller describes from Genesis 1-2 are guilt, shame, and fear. He then uses those responses to form the framework of a worldview. According to Muller, every culture exhibits each of these responses of sin, but cultural segments of society tend to be affected at a deeper level by one more than the other. Each manifests itself in culture and that it would be inappropriate to generalize entire cultures as being only guilt, shame, or fear based.

Honor and Shame (Muller 2001) is a book that illustrates this concept in a specific arena, but he is careful to indicate the need to resist the temptation to label people or groups. The concepts are designed to identify a more contextual understanding of a presentation of the good news within a people grouping. All cultures encounter the impact of sin and the transmission of the Gospel must overcome these manifestations.

The first biblical worldview Muller (2006:141) utilizes is referred to as a guilt-based worldview. Guilt is associated with guilt or innocence or right and wrong. Western Christianity and theology generally examines life from a perspective of man's guilt or innocence, placing a high value on how the Bible and salvation engage guilt. Theologians point out the meaning of scapegoat in Leviticus, the guilt offering, sacrifice, and atonement as pointing towards a perspective of right or wrong. Western cultures tend toward a guilt-based worldview. The movement of the boundary of right and wrong manifests itself when society convinces itself of the rightness of something that was previously viewed as wrong. If that issue becomes acceptable in

society, the right and wrong boundaries are moved. In this worldview, the ultimate determining factor is whether something is right or wrong.

The second worldview model described is one of honor and shame. The shame-based worldview processes through the lens of honor and shame. Muller (2006:136) cites Genesis 3:8 in stating that after a sinful act, Adam and Eve hid themselves because they were naked and ashamed. Matthew contrasts the holiness of walking with God with the action of sin as producing this sense of shame.

Anthropologists and sociologists have pointed out that many cultures around the world focus on the aspects of honor and shame rather than innocence and guilt as the primary guiding factor in life (Muller 2006:141-142). Middle Eastern cultures hold honor as a high value, so that someone might be put to death because they have shamed the family and the question of right or wrong is not the central tenet. Practices such as honor killings come out of this concept even though not easily understood from a Western perspective. The Middle Eastern and some Eastern cultures embrace a shame and honor based worldview. It is not uncommon for certain African cultures to reflect this worldview as well.

The third worldview model is one of peace and fear. According to Muller, fear was the third influence that went into effect with original sin. Genesis 3:9-10 (HCSB): “So the LORD God called out to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And he said, ‘I heard You in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.’” Fear entered into the human race through sin. Adam and Eve walked in the presence of God, but after the entrance of sin, fear entered and the peace of God was lost.

The biblical message of the good news of salvation is that Christ in us is our peace. 1 John 4:18 concluded that the perfect love of God casts out all fear. Many books about Christian theology written from a Western perspective completely miss this key point. Missionaries encounter the fear-based worldview among those who hold a higher awareness of spiritual realities for centuries, yet often start at the point of right and

wrong with evangelistic tools like *The Four Spiritual Laws*.¹¹¹ Missionary messages started at the point of right and wrong have often been missed by the hearer who searched for eternal peace. A more relevant approach to this worldview would be a contextual message finding peace with God (Muller 2006:141-142).

Using Muller's model, it would be understood that the Mano and Gio people live in a society structure that governs through the use of spiritual imageries and fear of spiritual reprisals are generally inclined toward a fear-based worldview. Zetterstrom (1976:83) states that the Yamein Mano have few thoughts about how God functions and there are limited concepts of life after death. The worldview of the Mano and Gio is not necessarily based on what would be commonly referred as the African Traditional Religions, as much as in the societal structure of the Mano and Gio. Zetterstrom emphasizes that witchcraft plays an important role in the overall culture of the Mano and Gio (:90), but that it is difficult to understand how it functions in the society and which parts of society it primarily relates to.¹¹²

This type of worldview may have emerged out of a religious paradigm, witchcraft, or of the societal structure. This researcher is inclined towards social structure (Poro and Sande Society) as the source of the resulting factors of fear. There were many expressions of fear, including fear of the unknown, reprisal, dissatisfaction of the spirits and of the secret society. Using Muller's model, the Mano and Gio seem to be more influenced by the sin response of fear than of shame and guilt. In theory, the evangelization of the Mano people must penetrate the controlling structure of fear, the

¹¹¹*The Four Spiritual Laws*. 1993. New Life Resources. Campus Crusade for Christ.

¹¹²(Sanneh and Carpenter 2005:45-62). Van den Berg considers culture, Christianity and witchcraft in the West African context. Van den Berg states that beliefs in witches or witchcraft is not universal, but can be found in many cultures and settings. These beliefs tend to involve accusations, suspicions, and explaining evil. This contextual view may be also used to define social values, create social cohesion, and engage personal guilt (:51-52). Though the case study is of the Longuda, his discussion of the cosmology of evil and sin (:56) in this context seems relevant to the Mano and Gio in regards to the view of the devil, witchcraft, and evil that perpetrates a view towards fear. This places the primary impetus towards this worldview with the social role of witchcraft and evil, not implying that this is the result of traditional religion or religious beliefs.

religious control of devil reprisals, and the prevailing assumption¹¹³ that real peace is unattainable. As this research examined evangelization, it considered the impact of a worldview of fear. There was also a thread of the honor and shame paradigm as honor was important in the social governance structure of the Mano and Gio.

5.9 INFLUENCE OF THE PORO

Harley was considered to be the pre-eminent voice on the Poro Society. Harley was not the most knowledgeable of the societal practices, but became the translating voice on the subject. Liberians who participated in the society have not written much or described their experiences in extensive terms. In addition, the Poro Society has moderated over time and the historical depth of the Poro was not exposed to outsiders at its zenith. Harley spent his adult life learning about this aspect of the Mano. Having lived in both worlds, he was able to translate for the reading audience some of the thoughts and practices of the societal way of life. His fairly balanced cultural perspective and anthropological studies prevented gross misinterpretation.

Although the Poro Society is still alive, it has undergone rapid changes, especially the suppression of various cruelties. The original political power of the Poro Society has disappeared, though there is some remnant of respect. Harley indicated that he preferred to speak of the Poro as in the past as many of the practices have been modified (Harley 1941:5). Even in 1941, rapid change was happening that was reshaping the influence and control of the Poro. The continued loss of influence of the society coincided with the evangelization of the Mano.

Generally speaking, cruelties, such as human sacrifice, were being abated, however, in witchcraft circles, cruelties linked to the societies persist. It was hard to document, but evidence indicated that practices such as ritualistic killings continued, especially

¹¹³This idea of a prevailing assumption that real peace is unattainable would require deeper exploration. Is this an accurate assumption and if so, what is the basis for that assumption? It may be that this assumption is inaccurate and at a deeper level of contextual understanding, the Mano and Gio people do have a sense of where lasting peace might be found.

leading up to political elections. In 1976, leaders of the Liberian government in Maryland County were arrested and hanged for ritualistic killings and witchcraft practices associated with the Poro. The hangings took place in Sanniquellie under the orders of President Tolbert. The line was blurred between the secret societies, political influence, and witchcraft that perpetrated such atrocities.

5.10 ALL INCLUSIVE NATURE OF THE PORO

The Poro Society was an all-inclusive structure. Anyone not willing to join was eventually forced to do so or became isolated from society-at-large. This forced participation included male and female (Harley 1941:5). If the conversion to Christianity was at odds with the Poro Society then the all-inclusive nature of the society prevented a movement to the acceptance of the Gospel message of salvation. If someone embraced following Jesus, they would be on the outside of the village structure, way of life, and process, or they would have to adopt a syncretic belief system. An individual would find it practically impossible to engage village life, but not participate in the Poro Society. Women, children, and marginalized parts of the culture might be reached, but the establishment would not be reached and the society would have prevented evangelical Christianity from gaining acceptance.

The Poro, according to Harley's notes, originated with the Buzi or Loma people and spread to the adjacent Gbande and Gbunde people. The Poro included the Kpelle and Mano, with lesser degree among the Gio and the Bassa. The highest degrees of the Poro were claimed by the Vai. The Mandingo and the Kru had some Poro practices, but were considered nominal. There were alleged to be 99 degrees of Poro and there was a method or contest that determined the level of a person. The Mano claimed higher levels which contributed to the difficulty of evangelization (1941:6).

Harley (1941:6) described a process of identifying the level of Poro among people who were not familiar to one another. A stranger entering a new area could go into the Poro and would be immediately received according to rank. The one in charge

would put them through certain tests, degree after degree, until one dropped out of the contest. The person out-ranked would throw his cow's tail¹¹⁴ to the other. There was a ranking process that was indisputable, based on the knowledge in the Poro.

The Poro had three classes of roles including commoners, chiefs, and priests. Priests were referred to as Zo. This researcher was unable to determine whether the Poro actually used a term like priest or if that was an interpretation of Harley (1941:11).

The Poro Society was extensively described in the *Notes on the Poro in Liberia*. Recognizing that it was written by an outsider in 1941, all of the details may not be accurately portrayed. Harley's documentation was a remarkable detailing of the process. Much of the material was gleaned through qualitative interviewing processes associated with the collection of masks. Many Liberians speak of the Poro Society based on Harley's observations creating a dilemma of determining the historically held views in contrast to what Harley believed or interpreted.

The Poro Society was essentially a structural governance of society that affects every aspect of life. The Society utilized fear as a controlling mechanism, educated through a patristic teaching process, and built strength and authority through various initiations and rites. Most of the egregious practices have been removed, but some aspects of initiation, markings, and secrecy remain. The framework of the Poro Society made village or group evangelization of the Mano almost impossible without a unique movement of the Holy Spirit and an altering of the structural dynamics.

Initially, the Gio were more receptive to the Gospel than the Mano. This was explained in Harley's (1941:24) observation that among the Gio, the Poro did not

¹¹⁴ As a teenager, this researcher remembers being in Mano villages and seeing the men with their cow tails with leather handles to ward off flies. This researcher was unaware that the cow tail was an instrument of the Poro Society and held a determining indicator of rank. This researcher's father was able to purchase a cow tail whip from a vendor, which also had a home-made knife in the handle.

impose as harsh of a control over the people. The Gio circumcised, but did not scarify the initiates, and they put less terror into ritual and held women less harshly under societal dominance. This kind of anecdotal evidence lent itself to the theory that as the Poro Society was weakened and the door was opened for evangelization. Liberians would be familiar with the Bush or Poro Society and could speak about occult practices, political influence, initiation rites and practices of the societies. With that said, the *Historical Dictionary of Liberia* (Dunn 2001) barely mentioned the Poro Society. This researcher would assume that this omission was purposely understated.

5.11 CONVERSION AND THE MANO AND GIO

Before 1960, the Mano and Gio would have been classified as an unreached or un-evangelized people group. Unreached people were described as:

“A people within which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate members and resources to evangelize themselves without outside assistance; they have not heard the Gospel in an understandable way or form, or responded to the Gospel or do not believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation and that the Bible is the word of God” (Bush 1993:vii).

The Mano and Gio were not hearing the Gospel proclaimed in an understandable form or through a clear way of acceptance. There was a language barrier, an absence of the Gospel in context, and a barrier of societal structure that limited evangelization. The missionary engagement began with the arrival of the Mid-Baptists and the LIM, but it was almost 40 years later before a broader movement of churches was being established in the Mano and Gio villages led by indigenous leaders. In rebutting Horton’s view on African conversion, Fisher (1973:23) stated that Horton had “under-estimated the willingness and ability of Africans¹¹⁵ to make even rigorous Islam and Christianity their own.” The significance of this dissertation was that the conversion and ownership of the Christian faith was demonstrated.

¹¹⁵ This researcher is uncomfortable with the broadness of the term Africans in regards to this concept. This discussion would be better articulated around a culturally identifiable group with common traits.

A comparison could be made from Acts 28:30-31(HCSB): “Then he (Paul) stayed two whole years in his own rented house. He welcomed all who visited him proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with full boldness and without hindrance.” The good news began to be proclaimed on the day of Pentecost and spread to the ends of the earth because of a great persecution. Finally, Paul finds himself in prison in Rome awaiting execution, but stated that the good news continued to be spread without hindrance. This was not referring to the absence of barriers, but the spiritual movement of God.

This could be the testimony of the movement of God among the Mano and Gio. There were many challenges, barriers, and hindrances, but the Holy Spirit, working through the lives of followers of Jesus Christ, facilitated the good news to the Mano and Gio people in a contextual manner, and the Gospel was received. The evangelization was led by local agents who were followers of Christ with a high level of personal commitment to evangelism and with a contextual sharing of the Gospel. There was a commitment to evangelization, church planting, and community ministry.

This chapter represented the historical engagement of the Mano and Gio as they were introduced to Christianity. The following chapters will describe the evangelization process among the Mano and Gio based on the historical evidence and empirical research. What were the barriers that prevented a hearing of the message and then the influencing factors that caused a movement towards evangelization? To what extent have the Mano and Gio been evangelized? How have they responded?

CHAPTER SIX

EVANGELIZATION: MEASURING EXTENT AND IDENTIFYING BARRIERS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

How does one study or measure the extent of evangelization? The context of both the person proclaiming the message and the recipient of the message matters. How does one know when the recipient has understood and received the message of salvation? What transformational impacts are evident?

This chapter begins with a brief explanation of theories surrounding the concept of measuring the extent of evangelization. Kaplan's (2004) thoughts for organizing a study of conversion are considered in regards to methodology. Evaluating extent enters into theological interpretations consistent with what Osmer (2008:131) describes as the normative task. "Theological concepts are used to interpret episodes, situations, and contexts including those in which we are actors" (:131-132). The normative task requires a hermeneutical reflectiveness of the participants.

This researcher argues that at the core of extent must be the quantifiable factor of the establishment of churches that reproduce indigenously. Once those churches are identified, the contextualization is revealed in the transformational impact of the church. The thoughts of Bediako (1993) and Sanneh (1984) are considered in their treatment of West African evangelization and the impactful role of Prophet William Harris of Liberia. The methodology of evaluating evangelization must consider churches, individual transformation, and the impact of churches on the local culture.

The primary topic of this chapter is the presentation of five identified barriers that served to prevent evangelization of the Mano and Gio of Northern Liberia. This speaks directly to the research question because it asks the missiological question of

why the Gospel was present, but not able to penetrate the Mano and Gio culture. The five barriers are each treated in a format that identifies the barriers and considers correlations or examples that further expound on the topic. This chapter concludes with observations about the barriers, but also pointing towards the transition from the barriers towards influencing factors of evangelization.

6.2 MEASURING EXTENT

Kaplan (2004:374) indicated that there were many ways to organize a study of conversion or evangelization. One pattern of study would be to organize the material by the new faith accepted and by observing the faith left behind. Observing types, patterns, rituals, and understandings of conversion enables measurement of extent. Using this approach, data was gathered around personal conversion narrative. What were the conversion narratives of the people? How did they understand and express their story of conversion? What patterns or characteristics were consistent and how did leaving one faith and embracing another express itself?

The extent of evangelization is subjective and yet, quantifiable. Measuring extent is spiritual and yet, symptomatic in nature. The model developed is intended to view the measurable activities and ascertain the depth of influence within the community.

For this study, a key measurement of evangelization was the presence and practice of indigenous churches in the villages. This central measurement of the church in the village was important. The village represented the highest political structure in the traditional Mano and Gio culture (Harley 1941:3). The political and organizational structure of the villages included dividing the village into quarters and clans with appointed leaders. Those leaders related to the village elders and the Poro Society served as a governing body on important or controversial matters. The Poro Society permeated every aspect of life. If the evangelization process did not penetrate or engage the societal structure and secure its place as a church in the village, then there

was limited measurable transformational extent. Some believers left the village and became followers of Christ, but the village remained unaffected by the process.

Establishing churches in the village demonstrated a penetration of social barrier. Although the proclamation of the Gospel was known through the cultural Christianity of the nation, the various mission stations, radio broadcasts and the like, influence did not happen until the church crossed the village boundary. This chapter examines the barriers to that establishment and the subsequent chapter examines the influencing factors towards overcoming the barriers and the resulting impact of the contextual church on the local village.

Kaplan discussed the various foreign missionary agencies in Ethiopia. Such groups were led by trained evangelists who came for the purpose of proselytizing the local population. Much of their success, however, was credited to indigenous converts who became active missionaries of their new faith (2004:379). Penetration of the village and establishment of indigenous churches demonstrated a key measurable component.

Studying the evangelization of any other group is more of an art, than a science. The rapid growth of Christianity or evangelization is not a new phenomenon among the people of Liberia. Sanneh (2008:194) documented an example of one Prophet Harris of Liberia and the tremendous example of evangelization during his ministry.

Prophet William Wade Harris of the Ivory Coast, whose call to conversion represents one of the most spectacular examples of resurgence in the history of the Christian movement. Harris was born in 1860 in Liberia and died in April 1929. Harris took part in the Glebo War in 1910, when he was again arrested and imprisoned. While in jail, he reported a spiritual experience in which the angel Gabriel appeared to him and commissioned him to be a prophet, commanding him to preach repentance, to abolish fetish worship, and to baptize converts. Harris began a preaching tour in Liberia. In eighteen months of public preaching in Liberia, Ivory Coast, and Ghana, converted some 200 000 people. Harris was arrested by the French and banished from the Ivory Coast in 1915. The question was posed: "How could an unauthorized native presume to Christianize his heathen brethren?"

Bediako (1994:91) described that same event this way: “One man preached the Gospel in West Africa for nine years and only converted 52. Another man preached the same Gospel for two years and 120 000 adult West Africans believed and were baptized into Christianity.” Bediako emphasized the nature of belief rather than assimilation through the ritual of baptism.

Sanneh (1983:89-105) only gives brief treatment to Liberia in the religious impact of *West African Christianity*. Most of his treatment reflects the role of Americo-Liberians who are often then ironically viewed as outsiders in regard to the indigenous nature of African theology. The only significant indigenous contribution that Sanneh cites is the role and evangelization of Harris (:102).

Andrew Walls two volumes, *The Cross Culture Process in Christian History* (2002) and *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (1996) have significant chapters on Africa’s place in Christianity and did not even mention Liberia. In both exhaustive works, he considers Christianity in Sierra Leone significant in relation to freed slaves returning to Africa with Christianity and then some of the indigenization effects, but did not mention Liberia. This researcher would argue that Liberia has had a much more significant role in that debate, but Walls was more versed on the history of Sierra Leone. The assumption of this researcher is that because Liberia was not in the middle of the colonization of Africa, its religious history and role is often neglected. This dissertation speaks to that gap in exploration and understanding of the transmission of the Gospel in this African context.

Before measuring extent, one must consider the barriers preventing evangelization. What were the barriers for the Mano and Gio and what was the depth of that resistance? Liberia was a nation influenced by the tenets of Christianity, and yet, in most of the indigenous groups, there was a communal resistance to evangelization. These barriers were not necessarily a resistance to the Gospel, but a functional resistance stemming from a cultural framework. Resistance can stem from historical, political, cultural, religious, or social influences, creating natural or contextual barrier.

The observations of this research revealed five key barriers to the evangelization of the Mano and Gio people. Each barrier will be discussed to demonstrate the preventative factor that served to hinder the acceptance of the Gospel within the context of the people for 150 years.

Barriers to evangelization of the Mano and Gio:

1. The societal structure of the Poro Society.
2. The cultural Christianity of the establishment of the Republic of Liberia.
3. The absence of access of the Scripture in the heart language.
4. The absence of learned or trained leaders in the village setting.
5. The confusing and isolating presence of denominational influences.

6.3 BARRIER 1: SOCIETAL STRUCTURE

The societal structure of the Poro and Sande Societies were a primary barrier to the influence and evangelization of the Mano and Gio. The Poro Society was a societal structure intertwined as an inseparable belief system and cultural governance structure of the people. “It (Poro Society) functioned as a core aspect of life for the village from leadership, to religion, judicial, educational, community, and every other facet” (Gbengan, June 2011). The central area of conflict was the missionary efforts toward evangelization that rejected perceived animistic beliefs and functions of the Poro Society, but in doing so, rejected the society structure and respect of the elders who governed. How could a church be established in a village that needed the approval of elders, but rejected the authority structure of the Society? (Gbengan, June 2011).

6.3.1 Strength of the Poro

The early Mano believers would have been strongest among the Inland Church in Saclapea and Flompa. The cultural correlation that existed was that the Society was also considered to be weakest in those areas. In the areas where the Poro was considered strong and expressive, there were few believers as they were isolated and marginalized by the structure. Christianity was able to establish a presence in areas where the Poro Society was considered weak or did not demonstrate as much sway.

The discussion of strength and weakness of the Society in a particular area was a normal conversation of the Mano. The Mano term, *Gbolo*, could be translated as sinner, but was also used to refer to a person of a weaker Poro Society or a non-member. The term was used in a derogatory manner to call a man, a woman, because he was not a member. The term *Gbolo bohn* was used of one who was of a weaker society and not accepted in stronger societies. This whole process emphasized the barrier, because the strength of the Society severely limited evangelization efforts. The early attempts of evangelism struggled to move beyond women, children and the margins of society and were never able to challenge the structural authority. The Poro was a formidable barrier (Gbengan, June 2011).

6.3.2 Correlation to the Mano of Guinea

An example of this contextual challenge was in the report on the evangelization of the Mano in Guinea. Mamy identified the mask of the Devil as a barrier of evangelization. He stated that the Mano had a mask that identified a person they called the devil. When the Devil came to town, the non-initiated groups were expected to follow certain protocol. This description correlated to Harley's description of the use of the mask as a controlling part of the Poro Society in Liberia. Mamy stated that Christians did not follow the customs and traditions as a part of the evil practices and therefore, were mistreated or persecuted (Mamy 1997:1). The stronger the Poro Society was, the greater the mistreatment, persecution, and marginalization of believers and the Church.

Mamy (1997:1-2) identified three particular barriers to the evangelization of the Mano in Guinea. All three barriers described would fall collectively into the category of the Societal Structure and the influence of the Poro Society. The stated barriers were:

1. The Mano really like fetishes.
2. The Mano have a mask that they call "the devil."
3. The Mano have oracle trees planted in the middle of their villages

6.3.3 Conflicting Values of Initiation

The early missionary efforts had a difficult challenge understanding the deeply ingrained secretive nature of the Society. To understand the evangelization challenge, one had to have knowledge of the societal structure, but that knowledge was almost impossible for an outsider to gain. The irony of this barrier was dichotomized by missionary George Harley. Harley studied the people and culture and truly recognized the depth of influence of the Poro Society over many years. Harley learned much about the society from informants who gave glimpses into the process, structure, and control of the Society. Ironically, Harley later was initiated into the Poro Society and was roundly criticized for doing so.

Gbengan (June 2011) stated that Harley's initiation was a significant mistake. "Harley did well to understand and respect the culture. The elders respected him for his cultural sensitivity. Harley took a good road to know and build trust with the village leaders and the Poro, but by being initiated, he caused great conflict among Christian Methodist." Gbengan felt that Harley made a serious error in judgment to be initiated and the respect he garnered was weakened with the initiation. The irony is that the missionary who had the deepest understanding had little or no evangelistic impact on the people and culture.

The Gospel message is at the heart of evangelization and conversion. Conversion is a transformation and a commitment that affects both salvation and Lordship. The Poro system, because it restricted and prevented the Lordship of Christ in all things, became a controlling factor of a person's life. As a believer, one must respect, understand, and relate to the system, but must not subject him or herself to its control. Once subjected to control, the hierarchy of the system becomes all powerful and the witness becomes subservient to the Society (Gbengan, June 2011).

This conundrum was described with a metaphor of an Old Mano Man who said of Harley, "*He built a straw house with a concrete kitchen*" (Gbengan, June 2011). The concrete kitchen was an analogy of the good work of his life and the Methodist

mission, but the straw house was the absence of a life transforming church and the compromise of being initiated into the Society. The very people who initiated him into the Society viewed his initiation as a compromised faith. Contextualization is not the goal, proclamation of a contextual Gospel is the goal.

The irony of the missionary enterprise to the Mano and Gio was that the missionary most knowledgeable about the Poro Society was the leader of an organization that had minimal spiritual impact. Adams suggested that though Harley gave a Sunday morning sermon, he did not have the time or the intention to pursue religious proselytizing (Adams 2009:19, 29). This was speculative, but the observation seemed to be accurate based on the literature of his ministry. Ironically, the work of the Methodist Church did help accomplish the goal of the Republic to provide education, medical care, and development to the masses of the region, but the church did not become a factor of evangelization in an indigenous and contextual manner.

6.3.4 Challenging the Devil

As the good news of Jesus Christ was proclaimed in the villages, the Poro utilized the Devil to attempt to maintain control and reject Christianity. The Devil was used to disrupt evangelization. There was an ongoing battle between the Society and the church. Williams (November 2012) described examples of the Poro exerting control through disruption and fear. Williams led evangelistic services in places like Geh, Zolowee, and Sikempa and was regularly disrupted by the appearance of the Devil.

In 1999, the churches in the Mano and Gio areas of Nimba County led a petitioned drive to limit the intentional disruptions of church activities by the Society using the Devil. The petition resulted in a governmental hearing that culminated with a law that prevented the Devil coming out except between the hours of midnight and 4 am. This was a legal compromise to manage the tension between the Society and the Church, but demonstrated a weakening influence of the Society (Wonbenyakeh, May 2009).

This action of the church demonstrated a level of growth in the extent of evangelization. The churches in the cities and the villages combined to exert a strong enough influence to affect judicial legislation. This kind of legal challenge would not have had the numerical support of the locals before, but the growth of the church, combined with local leadership, made this challenge a possibility. This was a watershed moment for the evangelization process in Nimba County.

The description and influence of the barrier of the Poro Society towards evangelization of the Mano and Gio could warrant a chapter, or even an entire project. The Poro Society and other similar structures continue to be a barrier to evangelization. This barrier has been generally overcome through the weakening of the Society caused by social, religious, and political factors. This weakening of the Poro Society will be discussed in more details in regards to the influencing factors.

6.4 BARRIER 2: CULTURAL CHRISTIANITY

One of the shaping narratives of this research was the cultural Christianity of the Americo-Liberians. Cultures have both a context and a belief system. The systems interact in a way that either strengthens or weakens one or the other. In Liberia, the religious belief system of the Americo-Liberians was weakened by cultural influences. Within the Americo-Liberian community, there were many godly leaders, but many others who opined a religion of convenience and culture. Power, wealth, and influence corrupted the church.

To state that the cultural Christianity of the Americo-Liberians was the greatest barrier to the evangelization of the Mano and Gio would probably be inaccurate, however, cultural Christianity was a significant detriment. The leaders of the Americo-Liberian churches did not maintain a missionary focus. In the early years, there were calls to evangelism, but those voices did not hold sway and eventually, the churches became an internal expression of culture. This was reflected in the priorities, presentation, and styles of participation within the Americo-Liberian

community and the churches. Many of the rally time practices, recognition of the prominent, and the influential events of the church spoke to a cultural entity rather than a mission-engaging focus. Politics were often on display at the church. Seldom were missionary activities and inter-ethnic unity on display at the church.

6.4.1 Correlation to the Bassa

In the early years of the Republic, the good news crossed the cultural chasm to several ethnic groups. The Bassa, in close geographical proximity, heard and received the good news. The influence of cultural Christianity impacted the transmission and practice of the Gospel. This sentiment was echoed by Gbengan (June 2011) when he stated: “The Bassa will profess Christ and engage in societal participation at the same time.” Over the years, there has been receptivity to the good news of salvation among the Bassa, but that reception has not demonstrated itself as a significant strength in missionary activity to reach others for Christ. This could be attributed to the presence of cultural Christianity and a weakened form of the authority of the church. One of the mini-theories associated with this research was that the greater the influence of the Americo-Liberians on a particular indigenous group of people, the weaker the impact of the Christian embrace was in terms of perceived spiritual transformation.

The barrier of cultural religion involved many facets of interaction. The underlying tenet of the unspoken barrier was that one had to cross into the culture of the Americo-Liberians to be truly considered Christian. To become Christian, one had to conform to a certain way of life that involved being able to speak English, dressing in a Western manner, and generally fitting in to the guidelines of what would have been considered civilized. This is one of the reasons why this research chose to measure extent by the presence of the church in the villages and the utilization of the heart language rather than just a numerical identification of conversion.

Sirleaf (2009) wrote of this tension in regards to her own life. She invested two chapters describing education, marriage, and going to live in a Western setting as

becoming a part of the establishment. This process was integrated within her Presbyterian roots and Christian faith. Life and the worldview of the Americo-Liberian were seen from the perspective of the African beliefs and practices over and against Judeo-Christian values of the forefathers who established the Republic.

Helena Cooper¹¹⁶ (2008), author of *House at Sugar Beach* also described this cultural divide of those who came to stay in their home and her way of life. In the forward of the book, there was a description of Cooper's early life:

Helena grew up at Sugar Beach, a twenty-two room mansion by the sea. Her childhood was filled with servants, flashy cars, a villa in Spain, and a farmhouse up-country. When Helena was eight, the Coopers took in a foster child – a common custom among the Liberian elite, Eunice a Bassa girl suddenly became known as Mrs. Cooper's daughter. For years, the Cooper's daughters, Helene, Marlene, and Eunice blissfully enjoyed the trappings of wealth and advantage. After a brutal coup in 1980, Helena, Marlene, and their mother fled Sugar Beach and Liberia, for America. They left Eunice behind.

Cooper painstakingly defined that divide that occasionally experienced a crossing over, but observed that even within a household was present. There was a world for Helena and a world for Eunice. Cooper's book grappled with and sought to find healing for that separation in a poignant way. That cultural existence for Americo-Liberians included participation or membership at a Church. For the Coopers, it was a Methodist church, not just any church, but the First United Methodist Church on Ashmun Street founded in 1822 (2008:236). Cooper's mother was portrayed as a woman of strength and faith. The presence of cultural Christianity does not diminish the validity of a person's authentic faith, but it does impact roles, expectations, and contextualization. The struggle to find peace was not only the struggle of the indigenous.

¹¹⁶Helena Cooper is a journalist for the New York Times and the author of *Life at Sugar Beach*. Cooper experienced significant trauma in her life and family as a result of the Coup. Cooper was a classmate of the researcher at the American Cooperative School in Monrovia, Liberia. This is an example of how this researcher had friendships with those in the Americo-Liberian community while also living and being invested in the Mano and Gio context in Nimba. There was always an internal tension within the life of this researcher, because the dichotomy was real and evident.

There were many examples that could be given to demonstrate this barrier. Churches were established in the heart of the hinterlands that spoke English and catered to the Americo – Liberian community. There was an unspoken understanding that when you attended an establishment church, you participated in a particular manner. The incorporation of indigenous churches into the Convention did not mean shared practices, but conforming to the worship structure of the establishment church. For a Liberian reading this research, the unspoken values were as clear as the unspoken practices of segregation between whites and blacks in other nations. The barrier of cultural Christianity was real and existed throughout the country. The depth of the barrier shaped worldview. How the Mano and Gio viewed the Americo-Liberian affected their worldview and in part, led to a country in crisis with the coup and a civil war. How the Americo-Liberian viewed the Mano and Gio, affected their ability to become one in the service and unity of Christ.

6.5 BARRIER 3: ABSENCE OF THE SCRIPTURE

Another key to the evangelization process is the heart language. The Scripture in the heart language has a two-fold dynamic in that it is both spoken and written. To truly hear and understand the good news, the Gospel must be proclaimed in a cultural and linguistic manner that touches the heart or the core of a person's contextual being.

The Gospel was often taken to new environments by missionaries. The missiological question that arose was this: Has the good news ever truly arrived until the Gospel story has arrived in a contextually understandable biblical form? In other words, the missionary process was often laying a foundation for the arrival of the Gospel in a contextual form and that form involved the heart language. The process in a contextually understandable biblical form was long and arduous.

This dynamic was much greater than simply the technical aspects of translating the Bible existing in one language into another. Sanneh (2009:191) argues that the process of translation engages a culture in a way that enables one to decode and

reward the message of one's religious instincts. The field of scriptural translation produced a deep engagement of culture, understanding, and transmission. This engagement resulted in one of the most dramatic movements of Christianity through the engagement of local agents in the process of evangelization. The adoption of the vernacular for the translation of Scripture was a "...sanctioning for hitherto or neglected tribes" (:194).

6.5.1 Correlation of the Gospel to Northern Ghana

John Agama Hall was the national chief of police in Ghana and a prominent Christian. Although the Gospel was preached in southern Ghana from which Hall came, evangelization still had not penetrated the northern parts. This concerned Hall, so Wycliffe Bible Translators were invited to concentrate translation efforts in the north.

The Bible translation process started in 1962 and impacted the northern part of Ghana with significant conversion to Christianity. There are many examples where the work of Bible translation was started through the initiative of national Christians. Missionaries have often initiated evangelism, but the vision and expansion usually developed from nationals who served to facilitate much of the translation, sometimes assisted by technical guidance of specifically trained missionaries.¹¹⁷

The heart language is vitally important to the proclamation of the Gospel. The good news can go into the heart language through the spoken word, through the printed word, and through visual imagery conveying the message of Christ. Initially, the Gospel enters a people group through the spoken word in translation. The good news is often carried through an interpreter, but later, that group of people must speak truth for themselves, receiving and presenting the Gospel in the contextual form.

Lauber stated that "Culture is a powerful force – so strong that a local culture can bend a world language like English to fits its needs, rather like gravity can bend light.

¹¹⁷Heart Language. [Online]. <http://heartlanguage.org/tag/evangelism>.

When that happens, some mistakenly say that Ghanaians are not speaking English correctly.”¹¹⁸ The Gospel moves best in contextual language. Barriers are removed because the translated message bypasses in stealth whatever barriers exist.

6.5.2 Heart Language and Spiritual Warfare

Jackson recognized the necessity of the heart language. From one of his letters written while on the ship traveling to Liberia for the first time in 1941, he wrote that “the first thing will be the language and I value your prayer very much on the subject that I have a special touch from God to get it with all speed and then out to the villages” (Gautier 1995:13). Tom and Billie and later, June, became very proficient in Mano and Gio. They spoke fluently, led the translation effort, and bridged the cultural divide through language. This fluency was an accomplishment for which they were admired and respected among the Mano and the Gio, as few outsiders have learned the language. There has been so much missionary criticism of those who came to Africa, but many truly invested in contextualization.

The work of translation often goes undetected precisely because it is engaging the unengaged. This is vitally important work towards the evangelization of all people. The Issachar Initiative described the importance of the heart language and visual presentation by citing a three decade study of the *Jesus Film Project*. “They would show the film in two different locations on the same night to the same village. One was shown using the trade language that was used for commerce and business in the city. The other was shown in the heart language, which recipients heard in their home. The results were consistent everywhere the study was done. Response to the Jesus film was four times greater when the message was delivered in the heart language. Connecting on a heart level with language

¹¹⁸Ibid.

tools produces lasting fruit. It is difficult to find lasting multiplying churches that do not minister in the heart language.”¹¹⁹

In the early years of evangelization, there is always a barrier of translation. The good news was preached in English and translated into Mano and Gio, and much was lost in translation. The next step was to take the Gospel into the language in lasting form of oral messaging, storying, visual imagery, and printed Scripture. Bible translators would say that this process is a monumental spiritual battle because of the eternal impact. Therein is the heart of the barrier; the spiritual warfare to prevent the good news from becoming contextualized.

Williams Crocker was the first missionary to Liberia to engage in Bible translation. He translated part of the Bible into Bassa, as far back as 1836. He wrote: “I hope to do something, at least, towards having their language reduced to writing, that at some future day, they may be able to read the sacred oracles in their own tongue” (Singer 2006:12-15). Though Crocker began translation, it languished for nearly 100 years. In the late 1930s, translation was resumed by June Hobdy. Thirty years later, the New Testament in Bassa was completed. After 167 long years, the completed Bassa Bible was dedicated on May 15, 2005 (ibid).

As Hobdy-Jackson worked on the translation of the Bible in Mano, her key assistant was a young local agent, Stanley Yonguoi (Gautier 1995:100). Yonguoi was a graduate of the ABC in Yekepa. As Hobdy-Jackson wrote of the challenges of translation, she described that the issues were not necessarily deep theological concepts, but ordinary questions of contextual life. “What kind of dove did the Holy Spirit look like when He came down upon Jesus at His baptism? What does the Mano word for neighbor really mean? Is it those who live around you or those who will stand with you in trouble of all kinds? What word shall we use for wine? Would the

¹¹⁹Issachar Initiative. [Online]. <http://issacharinitiative.org/impacting-eternity-through-visual-heart-language-tools/> (June 2012).

translators use the Mano word for intoxicating liquor or the transliterated word?” (Gautier 1995:101).

The Jacksons were central to the work of translation of the Mano and Gio Bible until their untimely and tragic death during the civil war. As previously stated, the villagers found the bodies of a missionary couple slain in Liberia’s Nimba County, where government troops had been battling rebel soldiers in 1990. Hundreds of Liberians civilians were killed as well during this time, so one must not simply highlight the death of missionaries, but the tragedy is of all loss of life. Their death, however, speaks to the fragile nature and the spiritual conflict of Scripture translation. The Jacksons had worked on translations for 40 years.¹²⁰

After their death and the continuation of the civil war, the translation of the Mano and Gio Bible was halted. For the next twenty years, little was done towards completion. Most recently, local leaders have been trying to revive the efforts to engage the translation process. Because of the context, twenty years can be gone in an instant and the knowledge of previous translation work can come to a halt. It is a spiritual barrier that has proven to be a significant adversary in the evangelization process.

The full Bible has not been completed in either the Mano or Gio language. The Jesus film is available in both languages and there are various audio recordings and radio broadcasts in both languages.¹²¹ Progress has been made regarding the barrier of the heart language, but will not be completed until the full Bible is available in both the Mano and the Gio language. Tribute must be given to those who have labored and continue to labor in the translation process.

6.6 BARRIER 4: ABSENCE OF EQUIPPED LOCAL LEADERS

One of the key barriers of the evangelization of the Mano and Gio has been the absence of equipped leaders of the faith in the village. This barrier was not

¹²⁰Associated Press, 29 March 1990. *U.S. Missionary and his wife are reported slain in Liberia.*

¹²¹Joshua Project. [Online]. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php> (17 August 2012).

necessarily an educational issue as much as the absence of those who have professed faith in Christ and are able to serve as leaders equipped in evangelism, pastoral ministry, and leadership skills among the people. Whether the training was through formal education, informal mentorship, or some other form, the evangelism process was often stymied by the absence of leaders.

Historically, the answer in Liberia and other places has always been to westernize and educate the indigenous people. Thus, the education has taken place at schools or mission stations established by churches, but outside of the village system and structure. Many young people become believers at mission stations while receiving an education, but their education moved them to urban areas and not back to their villages. The major impact of the mining town of Yekepa in Upper Nimba was that many young people were coming out of the villages searching for work, education, and opportunity. In the process, those young people found themselves searching for faith and a new identity. Many young people who came out of a village setting were converted at Mt. Nimba Baptist Church. The most common denominator, however, was that as they gained education and opportunity, almost all gravitated to the larger cities like Monrovia, to neighboring countries, and to the United States.

One of the early Mano churches in Upper Nimba was Repentance Baptist Church in the village of Zolowee led by “Old man Gbatu.” Gbatu was a sincere good man who was genuinely converted, evidenced by life and practice. Gbatu had minimal educational background and no training in leadership, so he was never able to lead Repentance Church to have the kind of impact on the village that an equipped leader like Wonbenyakeh had on the village of Lapea #1. The same challenge was faced in Sehyi-Geh. In the early days, to go to Geh, one had to walk three miles from the Saniquellie road down a path. The church was started by missionary Grossman and later had impact from missionaries Peggy Russell, Williams, and George and Libby Senter. Through the years, there was a reasonable core of members, but never seemed to have local leadership that could resist the pressures of the society and culture.

As previously referenced, the Methodists had a well-regarded educational and humanitarian work in Ganta, but for all of the educational opportunities the Ganta Mission provided, the mission did not result in equipped church leaders in the villages. On the contrary, the educational initiatives produced a constant flow of young people out of the village, into the educational systems, and the broader urban structure. The mission model that centered on education pulled people out of the culture rather than the Gospel in context to the culture. This is not a criticism of the educational initiatives, but rather an identification of a barrier that created resistance.

Eventually, the barrier of the lack of trained leaders was reversed because of the civil war and the diaspora. A church planting movement never took hold in a contextual indigenous manner until leaders were present to guide the process in the villages.

6.7 BARRIER 5: ISOLATING DENOMINATIONAL INFLUENCES

The final discussed barrier of the evangelization process was the conflict of denominational¹²² difference of the various missionary groups. The whole concept of churches and denominational schisms proved to be a very difficult secondary barrier to the spread of the good news in the Mano and Gio context. For villages that functioned in a communal manner and where differences were resolved rather than highlighted, denominational isolation created a major barrier for evangelization. The values in the village setting did not allow for this type of schism found commonly in the Western context.

The track record of collaboration in Christian mission is not a stellar one. During the rush of nations to colonize Africa, there was often enmity between Protestants and Catholics as they sought to gain a foothold. In later years, there were agreements

¹²²Kobia (2001:295) stated that “Jesus Christ founded one church but European and American missionary activities in Africa in the nineteenth century brought and planted a divided church.” The basis of those divisions were doctrinal, historical, and ideological as demonstrated in both the historical study of Liberia, as well as the history of Christianity in Liberia. This research would argue that a denominational church is true everywhere, but the impact varies based on culture.

signed to preserve the peace, but resulted in a high degree of territorialism.¹²³ Liberia did not have the same component, but denominational territorialism was definitely evident between some of the early missionary groups.

Dennis (1973:179) highlighted this tension of the inability of the Lutherans to evangelize the Gbandes. After years of a Lutheran presence, Dennis pointed out that there were no more than two Christian churches and that the Christian doctrine was completely incomprehensible to the Gbandes. With the variety of denominations, doctrines, and differences, it was reasoned that the denominations and the religion must be wrong. Dennis' assessment was that the Christian religion preaches love, peace, and liberty, but among the adherents of Christianity, these things were lacking. It seemed to the Gbande that Christianity was not even practiced among adherents. The Gbande who professed to be Christians seemed to do so as long as they were employed by the mission. This description spoke to denominational differences, but also spoke to syncretism, the lack of contextual reality, and economic dependency.

While this researcher does not agree with all of those generalizations, there is merit in some. It does appear that Dennis was attempting to discredit all expressions of Christianity by speaking from the eyes of the Gbandes, rather than evaluating the contextual evangelization challenges. On the other hand, the imported denominational differences of the Western culture did create a significant barrier. The Mano and Gio people were community people. To have various Christian churches in a Mano village that were in conflict would be unacceptable to the village structure which was integrated and left no room for isolationist activities or for unresolved conflict between groups.

6.7.1 Self-imposed Isolation

The Mid-Baptists were the earliest missionaries that targeted Lower Nimba in the Tappita region with the Gospel. They had what appeared to be an effective start, but

¹²³Oxbrow, Mark. 2011. *Missional Global Partnerships*. (13). Lausanne World Pulse. May.

the theology and fundamentalism of the denomination¹²⁴ created an approach of isolation which contributed to long-term weakness.

Gbengan (June 2011) was converted in a Mid-Baptist church, but eventually left because of the absence of joy and the tendency of isolation. As a community catalyst, Gbengan now focuses much of his energies on creating inter-denominational relationship and Christian community. He started various ministerial alliances and fellowships in Nimba to overcome this divide and contribute to a greater harmony.

Partor (1998:76) identified his experience with the Mid-Baptists and the Liberian Inland to be contextually out of step. From his perspective, both groups of missionaries were theologically conservative and traditionally minded, but brought in cultural obstacles with the use of imported musical instruments in worship rather than hand clapping, dancing, drums, and local instruments. These two denominational groups established more of a legalistic approach of what was Christian. They created denominational structures that were contextually out of step with a communal way of life. This was not to diminish the missionary efforts, but to point out areas of contextual shortcomings. Partor affirmed that the Inland Church and the Mid-Baptists impacted a strong foundation of personal commitment, holiness, and evangelism.

6.7.2 Community or Division

In the decades after the formation of Yekepa in 1964, the city formed into a thriving economic engine of the region. As a result, many churches were established in the city to service the population. The most numerically successful church in the city was Mt. Nimba Baptist Church which grew to a peak of averaging over 400 people in Bible study every Sunday morning. The churches in Yekepa had a healthy ministerial association and partnered together to host a community Good Friday service. To the Liberians who participated, this practice was viewed as very communal and with little emphasis on theological differences.

¹²⁴Kobia (2001:295) on doctrinal division as a root source of the denominationalism.

Grace Baptist Church of the Mid-Baptist in Yekepa, consistently refused to participate in the Easter services because of their views pertaining to denominational isolation. Pastor J. T. Lyons had a very negative view of church cooperation. He and other missionaries believed it was theologically heretical to worship with other churches that did not hold the same set of beliefs. Grace Baptist practiced closed- closed communion. Closed-closed communion was a term used to describe that one has to be both a born again believer and a member of a particular church, to participate in the communion service of that local body. If a person was a believer from another church, he or she was not allowed to participate. This led churches to be isolated rather than infused with a communal spirit under God (Williams, September 2009).

Today, the Mid-Baptist movement in Liberia has been divided between fundamentalists who remain connected to some of the strict missionary ideals and those who affiliate with the General Association of Regular Baptists. This was reflective of the schism that was the result of isolationism. Denominationalism was a barrier in Nimba County in the evangelization of the Mano and Gio primarily because of the nature of the denominational missionary groups who had a presence. Many of the other denominations that found their way to various people groups in Liberia and did not demonstrate these tendencies at the level that existed in Nimba County. It was an external barrier that impacted evangelization efforts.

The barrier of denominationalism requires contextual understanding. The barrier was the result of the held values of missionaries. A value was inserted into the context that was not missionally appropriate and reflected more of the thought process of the missionaries and where they came from, than the people to whom they came. An interesting debate could be had on the best contextual approach to reaching unreached people without inserting denominationalism. Given the intertwined nature of the village life, would it be possible to have more than one church?

Could multiple churches function in a similar manner as the presence of multiple societies did? Zetterstrom (1976:99) described the Mano as having a great many

societies. Of the ones he discovered, he included the Snake, Jifwa, and Razor societies. Would missionary enterprises have benefitted from observing how the societies interacted within a village setting to discover what a contextual relationship between the churches might be?

Schaffer (2011:13) asked a question to illustrate a doctrinal truth: “‘How many churches are there in your city?’ If your answer was anything except ‘one church,’ you had a defective understanding of the Scripture because there is only one Church with many congregations.” Evangelization must reflect many congregations and unity in the body. The New Testament epistles addressed to the Church were sent to specific regions, not just one local expression. When Paul addressed the Church in Philippi, he was addressing the collective body. Even the enemies of Christ saw the Church as one, not as separate entities. Jesus prayed for unity of the believers. Paul prayed for unity of the Church. Jesus prayed for relational unity.

In measuring the extent of evangelization, this study observed the barrier of denominationalism was the result of disunity brought to the context by missionary practices. The denominational divide resulted in practices of territorialism, feeling threatened by one another’s doctrines, and distinct divisions in the villages. The evangelization process seemed to provide evidence that the Mano and Gio were more inclined to the biblical truth of unity. This was evidenced by interdenominational work of Gbengan, criticisms of methodologies that espoused denominationalism, and the overall contextual consistency of the Mano and Gio structure of life.

In *The Church can Unite a Nation*, Loubser and Denton espoused the idea that Christian unity affects communal unity. Unity makes the church stronger. Church and denominational unity contributes to sharing and learning from one another from the word.¹²⁵ The evangelization process must recognize the necessity to pursue unity in the body, followed by communal unity.

¹²⁵Loubser, Heidi and Denton, Mario. 2010. *The Church Can Unite*. (10). Lausanne Pulse. April.

6.8 CONCLUSION

The barriers discussed effectively prevented the church from penetrating the Mano and Gio for over a hundred years with the Gospel message. The combination of barriers created a formidable foe to the evangelization process. The next chapter explores the influencing factors that brought about the evangelization of the Mano and Gio in the region. The chapter also describes how the weakening of the barriers contributed to those influencing factors and vice versa. Much like in Eastern Europe, when the walls between the East and the West fell, a new day and a new contextual reality were created. Barriers are not permanent, but they do take time to be weakened or removed, whether through intentional or unintentional occurrences. These barriers prevented the spread of the Gospel for over 100 years.

Kobia (2001:305) concludes his article on denominationalism by stating that there must be a process for churches to go through a phase of renewal in regards to the negative effects of the institutions that have been imported, otherwise the institutional forms will become like salt that has lost its savor. This researcher would argue that each of these barriers have indeed been engaged through an indigenous renewal process and have resulted in a movement towards evangelization.

The following chapter addresses the transition from barriers to receptivity and the influencing factors that led towards this receptiveness. How were the barriers removed and what influencing factors propelled the Gospel into the hearts and minds of the Mano and Gio? The interpretative task facilitates the process of using history, mission history, and interactive relationships to determine the pattern or influencing factors of movement.

CHAPTER SEVEN

INFLUENCING FACTORS OF EVANGELIZATION

7.1 CULTURE AND CONTEXT

Understanding culture and context as influencing factors are important to both the process and the measurement of evangelization. In transmitting the Gospel message, form is determined and affected by the context. A basic argument of *Transforming Mission* is that from the beginning, the message of the church incarnated itself into the life and world of those who embrace the Gospel (Bosch 2011:431). This chapter contends that the influencing factors toward evangelization could also be seen as a part of that incarnating process, necessitated by a changing world, geo-political implications, and a proclaiming of a contextualized message.

This chapter attempts to identify the primary factors that shaped evangelization of the Mano and Gio. Each of the five influencing factors have a level of subjectivity in the determination, however, this researcher attempts to identify the supporting evidence that was primarily gleaned through qualitative interviewing, assessment of the development of local churches, and historical evidence available through literary review, geo-political events, and observations. The five factors included the participation of local agent, missionary engagement, theological education, the civil war and ensuing diaspora, and the movement or work of the Holy Spirit.

Contextualization is at the heart of this chapter. How has the good news of the Gospel been transmitted to the Mano and Gio and what contextualizing factors were present? What are some of the evidences that indicate a positive transformational responsiveness to conversion? Bosch (2011:243) discusses the synthetic model of contextualization as one where he assumes the universality of the Gospel. In other words, the context is a variable, but the Gospel is a constant and transcends culture. If

that is true, than one must consider how the context impacts transmission of the Gospel and what are the creative tensions that are impacted by this engaging process?

Ukpong's inculturation and revolutionary models of contextual theology are also considered by Bosch (2011:430). The revolutionary model tends to flow towards an evolutionary process while the inculturation model is experienced through the life engagement of those who follow and embrace it. The influencing factors described in this chapter point toward a life embrace of the faith that becomes contextualized. This researcher would opt for an inculturation model process.

Another key element for consideration would hinge on the argument of inculturation as separation or as identification¹²⁶ (Scherer and Bevans 1999:166-167). A general assumed perspective is that missionary evangelization tended to gravitate towards separation from culture because it perceived culture as a hindrance to faith, while identification tends to be a process of embracing faith in context. This chapter will demonstrate that in the indigenous evangelizing movement, the church moves towards identification rather than separation from the culture. This will be demonstrated in the examples of each of the influencing factors.

In the historical African context, evangelization examples demonstrated both contextual faith and syncretism or adhesion. In Taddesse's writings on this topic about medieval Ethiopia, he stated that new converts to Christianity continued just as they were before and lost none of their loyalties to local tradition, pagan gods, or religious structure. He said that "Christian ideas and practices were added to those of their old faith, but had not replaced them" (Taddesse in Kaplan 2004:375). This description illustrated the proclamation of the Gospel resulting in adhesion.

¹²⁶(Scherer and Bevans 1999:167). Separation is often the result of searching for a pure gospel or an ontological purity and results in a model of evangelization that encourages separation from culture. A model of identification operates from the notion that the gospel is with all cultures so the contextual Gospel is revealed in culture. Culture diversity enriches the Gospel and provides new understand.

An example of contextual evangelization in Africa would be the Aksumite Kingdom. Christianity came to the Aksum through the activities of traders and merchants and evangelization was the result of the spread of Christians. The message was accepted and the Christian faith became a part of the way of life. Later, that acceptance of the faith came to define the legitimacy of the leaders, but also served a Christianization that became a condition for inclusion in the social elite (Kaplan 2004:376).

Yamamori, Tetsunao & Taber (1975:11) stated that in order to truly make the message understandable and relevant to the people, the message must be immersed in the cultural setting. Biblically speaking, God became fully man and used exactly the same media and symbols as were used in contextual everyday life. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14, NKJV). This process occurs every time the Gospel appropriately crosses a new cultural boundary. Evangelization must be measured over a period of time allowing for this enculturation process to occur, take hold, and become evident or measurable within a group of people.

7.2 INFLUENCING EXTENT

The model of measurement used to identify the extent must be focused on viewing measurable activities and then ascertain the depth of influence within the community. The research intent was to identify research markers to demonstrate an extent of evangelism. Equally important, however, were the research findings that pointed to key influencing factors. This chapter focused on identifying those factors which facilitated the movement of evangelization.

According to Kaplan (2004:377), the role of professional missionaries in the spread of Christianity in Ethiopia became more pronounced in the establishment of foreign missionary agencies. Missionary agencies were led by missionaries and evangelists who went to Ethiopia for the purpose of evangelizing the local population. The missionary presence played a key initiating role, but he also affirmed that “much of

their (missionary) success, however, can be credited to indigenous converts who became in turn active missionaries of their new faith.”

This was a significant observation about evangelization and will be demonstrated as one of the foundational influencers of the evangelization of the Mano and Gio. This research documented that missionaries served a significant and key role in bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to the Mano and Gio, but the expansion and growth of the faith was the result of local converts who became missionaries and church starters. This research would go further to observe that without the local missionary emphasis and involvement, the extent of evangelization would have remained minimal. Evangelization seldom takes place without the forming of a level of local agents.

An email from Pastor Arthur Wehyee, a local Baptist Pastor, provided a glimpse into that process. Wehyee emphasized the importance of evangelism, local participation, and effective strategy.

Thank God for what He is doing through and in us for the time we have been here in Ganta. The church is doing very well with evangelism and outreach. Our home missionaries have increased to ten men and women. Every weekend, this team of men and women are out in the villages.

By the grace of God, we will conduct a crusade this October during the week of our Missions Conference. The targeted village is Gbeyee Duoyee. This is one of the most populated villages within Saclepea-mah with no evangelical church. The teams initially visited the village and 25 individuals received Christ. On the next trip, we received 35 converts. We started a Bible Study in the village and will conduct the crusade in Duoyee and the neighboring village of Duanpa. According to the plan of the Association, we want to reach three villages planting new churches this year. We have almost reached our goal!” (Wehyee email, 6 August 2010).

Extent of evangelization cannot simply be measured by numerical gains. Extent must be seen in the perspective of contextualization, process, and purpose. In addition, there must be a clear transition in the process of leadership. Missionaries may report tremendous numerical accomplishments, but until the role of leadership and sustainability has been transferred, quantifying the extent of evangelization would be

impossible. The research demonstrated that there were five major influencing factors towards evangelization. The first most significant influencing factor of the Mano and Gio people was the development of local leadership.

7.3 INFLUENCING FACTOR 1: LOCAL LEADERSHIP

The evangelization process or the expansion of the Gospel is primarily affected by local leadership. The catalyst for significant movements can be traced back to local leaders. People on the edge of missions are often nameless and seldom perceived to be people of power, but they are God's workers in an upside down world where humility trumps pride and anonymity surpasses notoriety. As Tolkien stated: "Such is oft the deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere."¹²⁷

In the evangelization of the Mano and Gio, a host of names could be associated with leadership. Evangelization of the unreached often focuses on the initial engagement, but a deeper study would reveal development and mobilization of local leaders. To identify all or most of the leaders of a spiritual movement would be impossible, but the intent of this research was to convey through the data and empirical evidence that there has been a mobilizing presence of local leaders.

As one considers local leaders, a critical construct must be developed to establish the kind of leaders being developed. In Osmer's (2008:82) discussion of the role of discernment in the interpretative task, he refers to the idea of church members and leaders being grounded in Scripture, theology and church tradition, while also being willing to grapple with contextual challenges. For the Gospel to become contextual, leaders with leadership, discernment, and wisdom must be present. Qualitative interviewing was the methodology used to uncover the stories, episodes, and situations that reveal contextual patterns of leadership.

¹²⁷Nichols, Laurie. 2011. *Defining Cutting Edge in an Upside Down Kingdom*. Lausanne World Pulse.

7.3.1 Leadership and Movement

The movement of God among the Mano and Gio demonstrated a consistent pattern of local leaders who served as catalysts towards spiritual transformation and change. Gbengan (June 2011) stated that the Nimba region was the strongest group of churches outside of Montserrado. When asked to identify leaders of the church in Nimba, he quickly identified local leaders. Among the Baptist work in Nimba, Gbengan identified Wonbenyakeh, Kokeh Kotee, Wehyee and Partor as leaders highly respected by national leadership. Key Nimba leaders in the other denominations included Samson Yantee, Bobson Bleh, and Thompson Nyormie.

Women were also significant in the process of evangelization even in a patriarchal culture. Roberts (2006:185) states that World Christianity as a women's movement for the future of Christian practice itself. Women are often attracted to new Christian movements because they offer hope for reconciliation, healing, and improved well-being. All of these characteristics described were significant in the evangelization of the Mano and Gio, so it comes as no surprise the significant role of women like Martha Partor, Betty Jonah, Anita Wonbenyakeh, and many others.

7.3.2 Moses Wonbenyakeh

Wonbenyakeh has been a significant catalyst for evangelization among the Mano and Gio. He was from the village of Lapea #1 and married to Anita Wonbenyakeh who serves as the Pastor of Mensonn Baptist Church. Wonbenyakeh is an example of many of the different influential factors. He was saved through the influence of missionaries¹²⁸ and was ordained by the Upper Nimba Baptist Association in 1991. He received a degree from the Liberian Baptist Theological Seminary (LBTS).¹²⁹ He and Anita founded Mensonn Baptist Church.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Factor #2: Missionary influence.

¹²⁹ Factor #3: Theological Education.

¹³⁰ Factor #4: Civil War Diaspora.

As a young man, Wonbenyakeh (May 2009) had moved out of the village and was living in Yekepa seeking education, employment, and a better way of life. On 21 September 1980, Wonbenyakeh recounted that Matthew and Gargar (two Liberian young men) came for Sunday afternoon visitation from the Church and shared the good news. Wonbenyakeh confessed that “I understood that I was a sinner and needed salvation. I believed, repented, and prayed to invite Jesus to be the Lord of my life.” He was baptized by Williams at Mt Nimba Baptist Church in January.

In 1982, Wonbenyakeh met Southern Baptist missionary George Senter. Senter was assigned to Yekepa to start churches among the Mano and Gio. Wonbenyakeh asked Senter for a ride to Karnplay where Senter was in the process of trying to start a church. Through that initial point of contact, Wonbenyakeh became a translator and actively involved in church starting. Afterwards, through the encouragement from Senter, Wonbenyakeh enrolled and attended LBTS.

Senter sponsored Wonbenyakeh to go to Seminary to complete a sixty-hour diploma program. After the diploma, Moses wanted to complete the full degree, but Senter withdrew his support because he felt that Wonbenyakeh should return to Nimba and assist with the ministry as previously agreed. Wonbenyakeh decided to stay in Seminary and was able to complete his full degree. Though this was an area of disagreement, Wonbenyakeh and Senter remained friends and ministry partners.

This was an example of the dynamic tension that existed between missionaries and nationals and was common to the missionary enterprise. Missionaries often provided support for theological education, but with a view towards partnership. The national leaders have a different set of priorities and the partnership becomes strained. Many Liberians were sponsored to go to the US for Theological Education with the agreement that they return to provide national leadership, but after completing studies, some did not return. The missionaries felt betrayed by nationals who did not follow through and the nationals felt held down or controlled by the missionaries.

During Seminary, Wonbenyakeh and Omalfred Mah were assigned to Ganta as home missionaries to help Senter start Trumpet Baptist Church. At that time, the church starting efforts in Ganta had been unsuccessful. After Seminary, Wonbenyakeh returned to Ganta as the pastor of Trumpet Baptist Church. Wonbenyakeh said that “the war met me at Trumpet.”¹³¹ When the civil war erupted, many went into exile, but after the initial rebel incursions, Wonbenyakeh returned again to Ganta and Trumpet Baptist Church to serve as pastor.

This pastorate proved to be significant as Trumpet Baptist Church became the catalyst for missionary work in Nimba County, especially during and after the war. The leadership mantle of Baptist work in Northern Liberia moved from Mt Nimba Baptist Church under missionary Earl Williams and local pastor John Partor, to Trumpet Baptist Church under the leadership of Wonbenyakeh and Wehyee. This particular development was the result of the strategic location of the city of Ganta, the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, and the presence of local leadership.

Wonbenyakeh was ordained by Redeemer Baptist Church in 1991 in Camp 4 under the pastoral initiative of Anthony Jonah. In the autonomous nature of Baptist polity, ordination was not institutionally necessary, but conveyed a level of authority and respect. Williams was the co-moderator of the ordination.¹³²

Wonbenyakeh (May 2009) led Trumpet Baptist to set a goal to start churches in every clan. “We identified seven clans in the region to start churches and only one was unsuccessful. In the unsuccessful place, the people stoned the evangelist; this was motivated by previous attempts to start a church by the Liberia Inland Mission which caused problems related to the Poro Society.” There was still a high level of resentment in that clan in relation to challenges to the societal structure.

¹³¹The date was approximately 1989-90 at the beginning of the civil war.

¹³²This researcher participated in the ordination service of Moses Wonbenyakeh.

Wonbenyakeh's influence would extend over the next twenty-five years as an influential presence for the Baptist work in Nimba. His work will be discussed further in relationship to the diaspora influence. His story was included in this section because he has had a significant role in this aspect of evangelization. There are many other significant leaders, but Wonbenyakeh serves as a simple case study to understand the flow and process. It was insightful to recognize that a few leaders were the catalyst to starting most of the churches in the region, but then, empowering local individuals to provide ongoing leadership to the churches.

7.4 INFLUENCING FACTOR 2: MISSIONARY INFLUENCE

The evangelization discussion often begins with the missionary enterprise. Evangelical Christians understand the Bible and the Great Commission as a mandate to go into the world and make disciples. The missionary follows his or her calling and goes to another place to propagate the Gospel. In the process of responding to God's call, the missionary encountered cultural barriers that raised missiological questions: Was the missionary prepared for a contextual understanding? How was the missionary affected by the secular or political manifestations of the home country? What happened when those two entities collided?

A poignant example of this tension was a missionary who spent some weeks in a theological school in Kenya sharing with Methodist and Presbyterian ministers his perspectives on the theological subject of Christian Ethics. During the lectures, he noted with energy and perhaps a self-conscious awareness, that the early European missionaries to Africa carried their cultural baggage of Europe. The professor emphasized the importance of not confusing the Gospel with cultural baggage. He expounded on many of the contextual failures of the European missionaries.

At that point, some of the local colleagues who were listening to the lecture responded: "That's all very well, but we can never forget that the missionaries were the ones who brought us the news about Jesus." "Be careful, that in your repentance

for the Westernizing earthen vessel of much missionary history, you do not minimize the religious treasures therein” (Stackhouse 1988:ix). This word of caution was wise insight that all are fallible, but the Gospel transcends short-comings. (Sanneh 2009:124) noted this contradiction between religion transmission and political imposition. He went further to state that vernacular transmissions were a tacit repudiation of culture values so that some level of culture is assumed, but translation allows the Gospel to transcend that limitation.

7.4.1 New Christian Evangelist

Peggy Brock described the spread of Christianity through the British Empire as dependent only initially on foreign missionaries. The local agents and converts soon outnumbered the foreign-born missionaries (Etherington 2005:132). Conversions of large numbers only began when local agents had begun to constitute a critical mass of the mission-focused leadership (Gray 1990:132).

The term “new Christian evangelist” denotes people who, having accepted Christianity, attempt to persuade others to adopt the new faith. New Christian Evangelist lacks the negative connotations of native evangelists and the political freight of indigenous evangelists. These evangelists were not necessarily native or indigenous to the communities to whom they preached but represented those who were contextually closer (Etherington 2005:132).

The description of a New Christian Evangelist applied appropriately to Anthony Jonah. Jonah was born in Nigeria and came to Liberia in search of work. He was the first convert baptized by missionary Earl Williams. Jonah was a key leader over the next 40 years among the Mano and Gio, though he was not indigenous to the region. He was perceived as closer contextually, but was an outsider in the technical sense. It is critical to understand that missionary influence is measured by the New Christian Evangelist who assumes the mantle of spreading the good news within context.

The advance of the Gospel has always been through local agents and New Christian Evangelists. Mission statistics affirm their existence, but their voices were rarely heard. These New Christian men and women not only proclaimed Christ among their own communities, but also volunteered to take the message to peoples of neighboring cultures and languages (Etherington 2005:132).

7.4.2 Missionary Role and Contextualization

In describing the early missionary influence, Gbengan (June 2011) stated that one must “Give glory to God for the Liberia Inland Church.” The Inland Church provided significant initial work among the Gio. In the process of evangelization, they confronted the difficult cultural barriers of polygamy and the role of Poro Society in the lives of the people. The Inland Church dealt with the initial cultural challenges of reaching Gio, which then also began the process among the Mano. This would be true of the early Mid-Baptist Missionaries as well.

The missionary presence among the Mano and Gio was certainly a key influencing factor of evangelization. Contextual challenges, however, often thwarted the growth and movement of the Gospel. The key issues or barriers that arose among the Mano and Gio evangelization process including polygamy, societal intricacies, and local practices. In addition, the missionaries often imposed methods of worship, institutional polity, and denominational legalism that were foreign to the recipients and hampered the contextual growth of the work. In spite of contextual challenges, the missionaries were able to adapt and provide a framework for evangelization.

7.4.3 Irvin Earl Williams

Williams was the Father of this researcher and his life and ministry was a motivation for this research. The Williams invested 30 years among the Mano and Gio. Though many missionaries have invested their lives among the Mano and Gio, it would be hard to argue that any had a greater influence. Jonah poignantly articulated the evangelization influence in a public speaking event when she said: “God passed

through Pastor Earl and Jane Williams to us, so that we might know him and be saved. Now, God will pass through others to you, that the salvation will come to all who believe.”¹³³

Williams was born in Calhoun, Louisiana to a mostly uneducated poor family in the segregated south of the US. There was nothing in his environment that would have indicated that God was preparing a missionary. His father and mother (Perry and Irene Williams) had a racist heritage. Though his parents were not followers of Christ, a neighbor’s invitation to church led Williams to his conversion experience at New Chapel Hill Baptist Church in West Monroe, Louisiana. His recollection of that salvation experience centered on a sermon on John 1:12, “To as many as received him to them he gave the right to become sons of God.” Williams testified that “As a twelve year old boy, barefooted and crying, I publicly gave my life to Christ and confessed Jesus as Lord.” (Williams, September 2010).

Williams completed high school and college. During that process, he felt the call of God to enter vocational ministry and decided to attend Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary (GGBTS). Williams understood his calling to serve as a pastor of a local church. While at GGBTS, Williams participated in a prayer group with Augustus Marwiah of Liberia. Marwiah was saved under the ministry of Eliza George in Sinoe County and was sponsored to attend Seminary. Marwiah regularly asked participants to pray for the evangelization of the people of Liberia and to pray for the Lord of the harvest to send missionaries. In time, Williams began to sense the stirring of the Holy Spirit to respond to that prayer. Initially, he was told by the mission agency that there were no SBC missionaries in Liberia, but subsequently, they were appointed to serve as missionary evangelists to Nimba County, Liberia to evangelize the Mano and Gio.

¹³³ Jonah, Betty. Address to the children of the Randy Godfrey Elementary School. (May 2009).

In June of 1968, Williams boarded a plane in Monroe, Louisiana to begin the journey to Liberia, West Africa. The Williams had three young children; Susan, Joel, and Timothy. They were about to begin a new life as missionaries which would span 30 years. What was the impact of the thirty years of missionary service that the Williams invested in the interior of Liberia? More generally, what impact did the missionaries of the SBC have on Liberia from 1960 until 2000? Williams and other missionaries played a role in the evangelization process. This research is not intended to overstate missionary impact, but to recognize and reflect on the contributions.

A student, Brett Thornton, from the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary who travelled to Liberia on a missionary trip with Williams in 2008 stated: “The thing that surprised me most about my trip to Liberia was how Williams was able to be known all over the country and have that kind of spiritual impact. I was impressed to see what God could do with a committed life over a period of time.”¹³⁴

Mark Gonkarnue (May 2010), a local evangelist, was also influenced by the ministry of Williams and his missionary work, especially during the civil war. He said that during the civil war, “I was surprised because Williams was not afraid of the rebels. They could not move him even when they threatened him. It motivated me.”

Williams was instrumental in developing Mt Nimba Baptist Church into one of the strongest discipling and evangelistic churches in Liberia. He initiated the founding of the Upper Nimba Baptist Association, developed numerous young men and women who now serve in ministry across Liberia, and was a faithful presence through the civil war to the Mano and Gio in the region. Many who were interviewed for this research would count Earl and Jane Williams as dear friends and partners in the Gospel.

¹³⁴ Thornton, Brett. (June 2008). Statement made by Thornton reflecting on a trip to Liberia with a team that included this researcher as well as Earl Williams.

7.4.4 Tom and Billie Jackson, June Hobdy Jackson

The journal collection on the life of Tom Jackson provided insight into the life, passion, and thought process of a missionary who devoted his life to the evangelization of the Mano and Gio. Tom, June, and Billie made dynamic contributions to the evangelization efforts and equipped many local agents who continue to carry the mantle of faith they set out to inspire.

Jackson was born as Thomos Kirsopp Jackson in Carlisle, England in 1917. At a young age, his family moved from England to the northern Saskatchewan. The long cold winters of Canada were an unlikely origination for the one who felt the missionary call to be instrumental in the translation of the Mano and Gio Bible. Jackson reflected that, “There in the cold, the bitter weather, God was moving. He moved us to Canada to move us out into His plan for our lives” (Gautier1995:6).

Jackson’s call to Africa happened at Two Rivers Bible Institute, an institute where missionary activity was given a high priority. Jackson recounted that he often noticed the absence of Principal Harrison at meal time. When he inquired about his absence, Harrison told him that he was praying for God to call Jackson to Africa. Harrison had a deep burden for Africa, but was unable to go because he had contracted polio and started praying for Jackson. Over a series of months and contemplating the plight of Jonah, Jackson wrestled with God’s call on his life (Gautier 1995:8).

Jackson was struggling with the call to Africa and so he asked God for a sign. At the spring Bible conference at Two Rivers there were to be missionaries from all over the world, but none scheduled from Africa. Jackson decided that he would pray for a missionary from Africa as a sign. One the first morning, Jackson was preparing breakfast. He recounted that there was man who had just arrived. When the missionary introduced himself, he said that he had recently arrived from the Belgian Congo, in the heart of Africa. “I knew that God was calling me to Africa and I never doubted it from that moment on” (Gautier 1995:9).

In early 1941 Jackson was preparing for missionary service in Liberia. He applied for passage on a ship, but was disappointed with the news that there was “no space for a man, but accommodation for a girl.” The passenger who got the spot would be a twenty-three year old single lady from Missouri, Billie Price. At the last minute, a cabin became available on the same ship and by the providence of God, Tom and Billie’s lives would intersect in a way that only God could orchestrate. Jackson said that she “struck him as being one in a million.” Over the course of that maiden voyage, they realized that God had prepared them for one another and after a courtship, were married in Bahn, Nimba County (Gautier 1995:9,12).

This researcher was deeply moved by the faith of a young lady to commit her life to Christ and to missionary service where the conviction was so deep that she would board a ship alone, going to Liberia to bring the Gospel to the Gio. Even today, it would be a daunting experience to go to a remote and vastly different city like Bahn, but for a young lady to have done that in 1941 was remarkable. The obedience of missionaries and local agents alike, was catalytic for the movement of God, first among the Gio and then among the Mano. Jackson stated in 1941: “I ask no greater prospect than what lies before me at this very moment, the exceeding joy of making Him known in those other towns and villages where as yet the music of His Name and wonders of His love are unknown” (Gautier 1995:12).

The Jacksons began translation work with the Bassa, but later transitioned to the Mano and Gio. Jackson’s name first appeared in connection with the translation of four books of the Old Testament. In 1959, the WEC published *Ruth*, *Job*, *Daniel*, and *Jonah* in Gio. Later, they followed through with *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*, printed in 1960. After those initial forays in the Old Testament, the focus moved to the New Testament (Hallihan 2011:26).

There were many inspirational stories of the Jacksons among the Mano and Gio. It would be impossible to measure the impact that resulted from the faithfulness of missionaries among the Baptists, Mid-Baptists, Methodists, and Inland Mission. This

research recognizes the obedience and faithfulness of the missionaries while also recognizing some of the failures and contextual challenges missionaries imposed.

7.4.5 George and Libby Senter

In the evangelization process of Baptists in Upper Nimba, Williams was experiencing a significant response to the Gospel in Yekepa, but also recognized that the process would not be complete unless the Gospel was contextually taken to the Mano and Gio villages. In response to a request for a missionary to focus on the Mano and Gio, George and Libby Senter were appointed (Williams, September 2010).

The Senters began immersing themselves in the Mano and Gio culture. They spent time learning the Mano language in Geh. As they began to have a more contextual grasp on the region, church planting in the villages became a focus. Churches were started in many different places including Lugbeh, Karnplay, Kpein, and in partnership with leaders like Wonbenyakeh, Prince Peters, T. Dweh Weah, and others.

In 1986, Libby Senter, and her daughter Rachael, were brutally murdered while in missionary service in Yekepa. The murders were shocking as missionaries were held in high regard. They were murdered by Benjamin Morris who was a professed Christian and former member of Mt Nimba Baptist Church. Investigations concluded that Morris had a history of sexual molestation and that he was caught molesting Rachel, the ten year old daughter. He acknowledged that when he was caught, he murdered both the mother and daughter. He was arrested trying to flee the country.

The event was traumatic for the both the Christian and non-Christian community. The murder garnered national attention and there was increasing sentiment for vigilante justice. The community was profoundly moved and shocked when Senter was able to go to the jail cell and look Morris in the eye and say, “Just as God has forgiven me, I am praying that he will help me to forgive you.” Williams (September 2010) recounted the event as he was present along with many of the national security leaders. Williams observed that even these hardened men of national security were

profoundly touched by Senter's expression of the grace of God. The story spread and had a significant impact. The story is still recounted thirty years later and Jonah (May 2009) stated that their act of devotion to Christ will not easily be forgotten.

The premise of this research assumed that the proclamation of the Gospel to all people is a necessity and a priority. Even though there was some sentiment to do so, the barriers of isolation, cultural Christianity, and the Poro Society prevented evangelism among the Mano and Gio. The missionary presence, beginning around 1940, was a catalyst towards turning the tide. Fifty years of missionary service by the Inland Church, Mid-Baptists, Methodists, and Baptists facilitated the movement to Christ among the Mano and Gio. They were not alone in the process, but their presence played a crucial role. Though this research was not able to provide extensive documentation of the missionary history of the Mid-Baptists and the Liberia Inland Church, appropriate acknowledgement is given of faithful service.

7.5 INFLUENCING FACTOR 3: THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

"Modern missionary organizations often placed educational institutions at the forefront of their activities and many converts' first contact with foreign faiths came in the process of learning to read and write either European or Ethiopian languages" (Kaplan 2004:383). While this statement is true, the observation also provided much fodder for criticism because those institutions were out of context. The main question of this research does not seek to debate the form or delivery of theological education, but to demonstrate that theological education played an influencing evangelizing role.

As the research data was examined, it was clear that evangelization was happening among the Mano and Gio, leading up to and during the civil war. Not every people group in Liberia experienced this kind of evangelization during the civil war. Wonbenyakeh was asked a key question: "What do you consider to be the catalytic reasons for the growth of churches in Upper Nimba and in the Association which expanded to becoming the Baptist Union?" (Wonbenyakeh, May 2009).

7.5.1 Theological Education by Extension

According to Wonbenyakeh (May 2009), the most significant influencing factor of starting churches has been the presence of training leaders. He elaborated his own experience at Mt. Nimba where the believers were trained through Theological Education by Extension (TEE). TEE was an excellent training tool and effective because of the contextual training of local agents in the Bible. At Seminary, the Nimba students had an advantage because they had a broad-based Bible knowledge that was developed through TEE and church training programs. Wonbenyakeh lamented that unfortunately the war has left people without copies of the Bible, TEE, and other things to continue that training process as effectively as it was implemented.

This researcher observed at Mensonn Baptist Church that there was a used copy of the TEE book, *Following Jesus*. The students who were taking the course would copy the lessons and questions so that they all could share the one remaining copy of *Following Jesus*. Before the war, each student would have his or her own book and would be able to complete lessons. A commitment to discipleship was obviously a core characteristic of the various leaders who were interviewed for this research.

In Africa, the growth of TEE was significant. Ross Kinsler noted that a 1983 survey revealed more than 100 separate programs. By 1995 this had increased to 341 with an estimated enrollment of over 100 000 learners. TEE was originally developed¹³⁵ in Guatemala in response to a need for training outside of the formal institutions. As with many adaptations in leadership development, TEE “did not result from a carefully predesigned theoretical model with a fully developed theology of ministry, but rather in response to the needs of the church faithfully engaged in mission.”

¹³⁵ A trio of missionary educators including Ralph Winter, James Emery, and Ross Kinsler, developed and implemented a process that led to the formation of Theological Education by Extension.

TEE was launched in Guatemala and expanded to various Latin American nations.¹³⁶ After a successful expansion, TEE was moved to Africa to create a contextual set of materials for discipleship. TEE in Africa was developed and produced in Kenya. Prior to the civil war, books were printed for TEE at the Baptist Publishing House in Congo Town, Monrovia and were readily available at a reasonable cost to churches. Each of the books used in Africa were written by and for an African audience. The courses were on a ten lesson format and could be led by a teacher or a facilitator.

For approximately twenty years, Mt. Nimba Baptist Church was at the forefront of lay-training in theological education in Liberia. The church offered regular Sunday evening TEE courses and students, hungry for knowledge, participated enthusiastically. On any given Sunday night, over 150 students enrolled in TEE classes that required daily learning, homework, and commitment. The proximity to the African Bible College also allowed for faculty and students to assist with teaching courses, facilitating the process of lay-leaders, and potential ministers to be equipped with a strong biblical foundation. The course structure included preliminary studies like *Following Jesus* and *The Way of the Master* and expanded to biblical book studies, courses on leadership, and other relevant biblical topics.

Irvine Maholo, a pastor of a church in the Firestone-Harbel community, stated that the TEE classes at Mt. Nimba were the most significant shaping tool of his ministry. Maholo is a high school science teacher and serves bi-vocationally as a Pastor of Christian Education. Maholo observed that churches in other areas are weak because of the lack of biblical foundation of leaders.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ *Theological Education by Extension*. [Online]. <http://www.forthemultitude.org/2009/09/04/a-brief-history-of-theological-education-by-extension>.

¹³⁷ Conversation with Pastor Irvin Ballah Maholo in Monrovia, Liberia (June 2010). Maholo and this researcher grew up together attending Mt Nimba Baptist Church and participating in TEE classes.

7.5.2 Liberian Baptist Theological Seminary

Another example of the influencing factor of theological education would be the mission efforts through LBTS. Though it was founded by the LBMEC, in the early years, the Seminary was staffed and funded by the SBC Foreign Mission presence. Over the years, there was a gradual transition to Liberian faculty and staff. Presently, the Seminary continues to function with Liberian faculty and staff. The Seminary is no longer dependent on the IMB for funding, but does continue to solicit and receive some funding from independent sources abroad.

Beginning with the founding President, Dr. John Mark Carpenter, LBTS emphasized providing theological education with a missionary emphasis. Interviews with a former faculty member revealed that in 2000, 25 graduating students were sent out by the Seminary as Home Missionaries.¹³⁸ Records of the home missionary process were scarce, but conversations with local leaders mentioned the presence of seminary students serving in evangelism during school holidays or as church starters. Even though the Seminary was 200 miles away, a significant number of Nimba students attended and graduated from the Seminary. There are no accurate records of those who attended from Nimba, but a partial list of graduates (32) identified those who were from the Mano and Gio region. Williams partially sponsored many of the students, but his memory is now such that he was not able to recall names.

In Wan's (2003:3) study of the Chinese conversion, he stated that making disciples was the mandate of the Great Commission. To that end, discipleship of new Chinese converts was commonly a missing link of mission outreach and was one of the most critical mission challenges to the Christian church. As Chinese believers were disciplined, leadership provided unprecedented mission opportunities. In the same manner, as Liberian believers experienced a healthy and positive theological education; they participated in the missionary process of evangelization.

¹³⁸Williams. (December 2010). Williams served as a guest professor at LBTS, January 2000 and taught as an adjunct in Pastoral Ministries for many years at the African Bible College.

7.5.3 Training Local Leaders

The benefit of trained local leaders was that they were able to use a variety of evangelical strategies to convey their message by translating indigenous concepts into Christian equivalents. At the same time, the local evangelists were agents of change towards modernization among their own people and could act simultaneously as critics of the Euro-American Christian societies (Etherington 2005:154).

In Liberia, among the more unreached people groups, converts were frequently baptized without previous experience of church life. Knowledge of the Bible was limited and there was a need for a teaching process that conveyed knowledge, taught application, and appealed to contextual understanding. Literacy was an important component of this process. As the people came to read the Bible for themselves, they found much that was not prominent in the teachings of missionaries. The learning, reading, and publication of Scripture became a major catalyst of transformation (Fisher 1973:34-35). This perspective defined the importance of the role of formal and informal theological education in Liberia. The trained leaders among the Mano and Gio took on the responsibility to establish a teaching process.

At Mensonn Baptist Church the process was demonstrated in the use of the dialect Bible. Priority was given to the regular reading of Scripture in the dialect in worship services. As many did not read the Mano and Gio language, the church offered classes to teach reading of the dialect. Consequently, the village leaders who value tradition were very pleased and supportive of the church emphasis of teaching the dialect language to the citizens (Wonbenyakeh, May 2009).

Through the interview process, key leaders like Maholo, Wonbenyakeh, Partor, Jonah, Wehyee, Gbengan, and others affirmed the role of trained leaders. Within the Baptist segment of work among the Mano and Gio, discipleship through TEE became a primary factor in the development of churches in Nimba among Mano and Gio.

7.6 INFLUENCING FACTOR 4: CIVIL WAR

The civil war was a devastating blow to the people of Liberia and had a profound effect on the way of life of the Mano and Gio people. In the *Letters of Tom Jackson*, he used an African proverb: “When elephants fight, the grass gets hurt” (Gautier 1995:1)” The government soldiers, the Rebel factions, outside forces, and multi-national interests converged as the elephants in a brutal civil war. The villages consisted of people trying to make a farm and provide for their families, but instead, got caught in the crossfire of conflict. At the time of his writing (18 February 1990) and shortly before his death at the hands of warring factions, Jackson estimated that over 140 000 people had been displaced in his region. He asked the question: “How will they get back and what to?” That question would not be answered for over fifteen long years. In the midst of all that happened, this research demonstrated that God was at work in the lives were disrupted and dispersed (Gautier 1995:1-2).

7.6.1 Starting Churches in Diaspora

One of the key factors of the spread of the Gospel among the Mano and Gio was the diaspora created by the civil war. In a sense, it was a reverse diaspora in that the movement brought people back to their villages and places of origin. The civil war was horrific. However, the growth of the church during this time was significant. The movement was prompted by the dismantling of societal control, a sense of hopelessness, and the proclamation of the good news in the midst of adversity.

Wan (2003:1) studied the migration and mission among the Chinese in Diaspora. He identified “two missiological trends: the emergence of mission opportunities among them and the potentials in mission participation by them.” The trends of missions and participation were both observed in the Mano and Gio setting. As young people were coming out of villages, the customs, traditions, and societal norms were left behind, creating an openness to the good news. Williams (September 2009) stated that he was

baptizing over 150 persons a year, mostly young people coming out of the village.¹³⁹ Twenty years later, many became participants in missions, taking the Gospel to Guinea, Ivory Coast, United States, and back to the Mano and Gio villages of origin.

A combination of factors affected openness in the Chinese diaspora including the demise of communism, the disappointment with communist ideology, and the decrease of governmental control of religion as influential toward a receptivity of the Gospel (Wan 2003:2). In the same manner, there was a convergence of factors that led to the openness in diaspora which resulted in the spread of the Gospel in Nimba.

The civil war had the following observed effects:

1. Dispersing of the trained leaders back to their homes of origin
2. The weakening of the Poro Society
3. The responding to the Gospel in the midst of hopelessness
4. The strength and resolve harnessed by the trial by fire of the believers

The civil war and the diaspora directly contributed to the starting of many churches including Mensonn Baptist Church in Larpea #1.

Mensonn Baptist Church is an indigenous church planted as the result of the 15 years of civil crisis in Liberia. In 1994, the “Gbanga Fall,” drove Wonbenyakeh from Ganta to their home town. This unbearable situation became a blessed opportunity to plant a Baptist Church in Larpea # 1.

In November 1994, Wonbenyakeh and his family began to conduct a family Bible study in their new home in Larpea #1, inviting neighbors to join them. A month later, the Bible study, which had grown quite large, decided to host worship services on Sunday. The first of these services was held on the second Sunday of December under a palm thatch tent built by members. The church later constituted and became a member of the Nimba Baptist Association.¹⁴⁰

This researcher attended church services in 2009 and 2011 and observed regular attendance of over 250 persons. The church had developed fish ponds through a partnership with a non-profit agency, Samaritan’s Purse, and used the harvested fish

¹³⁹ Williams (December 2010).

¹⁴⁰ Mensonn Baptist Church. [Online]. <http://www.mensonnbaptistchurch.blogspot.com>.

and profits to feed the widows. They were involved in teaching literacy, emphasizing the reading of the Mano Bible, and many other practical community building functions. This church also impacted social justice in bringing to a halt the practice of female genital mutilation in their village (A. Wonbenyakeh, May 2009).

This was one description of a church start, but was symptomatic of what God was doing throughout the region. Many churches were started as the result of people returning to their village. The greatest extent of growth was during the civil war.

7.6.2 Hopelessness as a Catalyst

Anita Wonbenyakeh was one of the instrumental leaders of evangelization during the war. Anita recounted many of the life-threatening situations of the civil war, but always seemed to be in the context of sharing the good news. During the civil war, she remembered walking for 14 hours with a baby on her back to go with Moses to villages to preach the good news. She and Moses would be harassed by soldiers and stripped searched for money, even searching the baby's diaper at gunpoint. However, through those kinds of experiences, they became recognized for their ministry and God used them to encourage people in the hopeless situations of life. The hopelessness of the lives of people opened the door to a presentation of the Gospel message (A. Wonbenyakeh, May 2009). All of this was triggered by a response to hopelessness and finding hope in Christ. This was also a subject of discussion in Olu Menjay's (2004:1) article on Refugee Ecclesiology (see 7.7.2). Menjay states that the refugee church is born out of a hopeless situation and the church becomes a catalyst of hope both in the physical and the spiritual realm (:2).

7.7 INFLUENCING FACTOR 5: MOVEMENT OF GOD

All aspects of evangelization are not easily defined or measured. Sometimes, the movement of evangelization can only be described as the movement of God. *Acts of the Apostles* affirmed this point: "When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and

perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. They realized that these men had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13. NKJV).

As one studies the missionary movements, there must be a mindfulness of the Holy Spirit. Roland Allen argued that if missions were understood to involve the activity of the Holy Spirit, then missionaries would respect national leaders as having received the Holy Spirit in like manner, but that lack of respect was absent. In fact, there was a lack of reference to the Holy Spirit at the mission gathering of Edinburg in 1910.¹⁴¹

A previously mentioned documented example of a supernatural movement of God in Liberia would be the Prophet Harris. Harris represented a new kind of religious presence on the scene, an African Christian prophet. Today, this would not seem an unusual description, but it was highly unusual at the time. He is reported to have told a missionary, “I am a prophet, above all religion and freed from the control of men, I am under God only through the intermediary of Angel Gabriel” (Bediako 1994:92).

Harris came to prominence in a time where missionaries were struggling to reach the Glebo people. After years of slow ministry, the vicar of the Roman Catholic Church in Cote D’Ivoire wrote in his 1913 report of an explosion of response. “Space is lacking for exposing the external means which Divine Providence has used for the accomplishment of His merciful designs. I must thus limit myself to exposing the effects. These effects - it's a whole people who, having destroyed fetishes, invade our churches en masse, requesting Holy Baptism.” He attributed this movement to the preaching of one Glebo prophet, William Wade Harris from Cape Palmas, Liberia.

Initially, the Catholic Church dismissed Harris's work as that of an unscrupulous charlatan. The limited documentation of his work indicated a supernatural movement of God. It was said that over 100 000 responded to the good news of salvation during an 18 month period. Harris and his accompanying team went from village to village along the coastal communities preaching the Gospel. He encouraged people to leave

¹⁴¹ Kim, Kirsteen. 2010. *Connecting Local and Global Church*. (15). Lausanne World Pulse.

their witchcraft and turn to the one true and living God, to be baptized and forgiven by the Savior. Harris also instructed them to follow the commandments of God, to “live in peace, and he organized them for prayer and worship of God in their own languages, music, and dance, to wait for the Book.”¹⁴²

In Wan’s (2003:3) study, the diaspora had almost reached a point where it was taken for granted because of the continual unusual movement of the Holy Spirit among the Chinese people. Whether in China or among the Glebo, the supernatural movement of God was necessary for an outpouring of response. It is the opinion of this researcher that the Mano and Gio people have experienced that kind of movement of God in the evangelization process, specifically during the civil war. The movement among the Mano and Gio does not reflect the scale of the Harris commentary, but was evident in local leadership who responded boldly during a time of hardship to proclaim the Gospel and in the growth of the churches.

7.7.1 Beautiful Feet

There are many people of influence in the process of Mano and Gio evangelization. God used missionary and local agents to proclaim the good news visually depicted in Romans and Isaiah: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news” (Romans 10:15, Isaiah 52:7). Many examples could be recounted to illustrate this truth, but the following are selected narratives converging towards evangelization.

Mark Gonkarnue’s (June 2010) narrative embodied the movement of God that caused the spread of the Gospel among the Mano and Gio people during and after the civil war. Gonkarnue was born in Karnplay and is currently an evangelist and church starter. Gonkarnue received Christ through the influence of missionary Senter in 1983. Two years later, he was baptized on 11 November 1985. Gonkarnue recalled that his baptism happened about one year before Senter’s wife and daughter were

¹⁴² *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*. http://www.dacb.org/stories/liberia/legacy_harris.html.

murdered. The demonstration of Christ-likeness by Senter in his forgiving response to tragedy was a powerful and motivating presence for Gonkarnue.

Gonkarnue identified Wonbenyakeh as instrumental in shaping his life in the ministry. During the war, Wonbenyakeh started a night school and encouraged Gonkarnue to enroll with the intent of finishing high school, and during that time, Gonkarnue was mentored as an evangelist. In the equipping process, Gonkarnue began to feel the Spirit of God leading him into the ministry of starting new churches. He was influenced by Matthew 9:38, “The harvest is plentiful and the laborers are few.”

In the mentoring process, Wonbenyakeh not only taught Gonkarnue in a classroom, but also in the practical aspects of ministry. When asked about the most significant lesson, Gonkarnue said that Wonbenyakeh “taught me how to walk and taught me how to pray.” This researcher’s initial response was to interpret the comment spiritually, but he was describing the practical sacrificial aspect of evangelism. Gonkarnue stated that Moses told him that they would walk to the village of Beawo to train the leaders of the new church. He described the journey as a 10 ½ hours walk to the village to conduct training. “After we walked, we would wrap our legs in hot water cloth to make them feel better and then we would go and teach the people. At the end of the weekend, we walked home” (Gonkarnue, June 2010).¹⁴³

Other examples included walking eleven hours from Karnplay to Yekepa to lead a training session on the Bible and two days from Karnplay to the Zar Swamp for a pastoral workshop. “He taught me how to walk long distances for the sake of the Gospel.” The obstacle of church planting is that the laborers are few and the road is long. “I have so many old shoes at my house with holes in them because church planting requires a lot of walking” (Gonkarnue, June 2010).

¹⁴³ As a practical expression of participation, this researcher led his church to gather over 1 000 pair of new and slightly worn shoes and ship them to Liberia to be distributed among the churches. This act of kindness was well received and the people were encouraged. This researcher felt that it was important to not only document the shared experiences, but to give back in a tangible way.

Gonkarnue also recounted an incident while he was staying at the home of Moses and Anita, preparing for a journey. He remembered waking up to the sound of the rain on the tin roof well before dawn. As he lay there listening to the rain, he realized that he could hear Anita and Moses praying fervently in the next room. They continued praying for an hour or more until dawn. “They prayed together as husband and wife and I was deeply moved by their devotion. It inspired me in my faith.”¹⁴⁴ Gonkarnue noted that surviving in the hardship of war and in an unforgiving environment was difficult and yet, the power and practice of prayer prevailed.

The first two churches Gonkarnue (June 2010) started were in the villages of Loelay and Kailay. The churches were started during a lull in the civil war. On a follow up visit in June 2011, Gonkarnue shared that he continued to start new churches. “If we had more leaders, we would have more preaching points. We would assign them to one and I would go to the next one.”

7.7.2 Churches for the Displaced

This researcher first met Olu Menjah many years ago in Nimba during the civil war. Menjah spent some of his formative years in Sanniquellie where his father, Harrison Menjay served as pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church. The elder Menjay was ordained through Macedonia Baptist Association at Mt. Nimba Baptist Church in 1976. Although Ebenezer Baptist Church was in the county seat, the church was more of an establishment church in the county seat rather than a church evangelization the Mano and Gio. For example, the annual meeting of the LBMEC was held there during the seventies and the keynote speaker was President Tolbert. In the pre-1980s, a significant meeting like that would not have been held in an indigenous church because of the strong Americo-Liberian influence, but it was an attempt to get the meeting out of the capital city and be more inclusive.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

It was the desire of Olu Menjay to attend Truett McConnell Junior College on completion of High School. On the eve of his departure, the civil war erupted, his family was separated and hopes of leaving were dashed. Several years and much hardship later, Menjay made it to Georgia. He attended and graduated from Truett McConnell Junior College and Mercer University, where he graduated cum laude. Menjay completed a Masters of Divinity at Duke University School of Divinity and a Doctoral degree through the International Baptist Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic.

Menjay recently returned to Liberia to assume the leadership of Ricks Institute, one of the premiere schools in Liberia. Ricks was the cornerstone of early Southern Baptist missionary involvement in Liberia. Menjay was recently elected as the president of the LBMEC at the annual convention held in 2012 at Mt Nimba Baptist Church.

During the war, Menjay found his way to Danane, where he lived for an extended time as a displaced person. He wrote of his experiences in the article, *"Refugee Ecclesiology: An Example from Liberia."* In diaspora, a number of churches were started by Liberians. A refugee church is different from an immigrant church in that displaced people are in an itinerant condition, generally in designated camps, and survive mostly on humanitarian aid because of the contained situation. Menjay stated that the refugee church was born out of spiritual and human need (Menjay 2004:1-2).

1. The refugee church is born out of the need for faithful witness to Jesus Christ.
2. The refugee church is born out of the need for hope in hopeless situations.
3. The refugee church is born out of the need for community.

The premise of the article on the refugee church was how to remain faithful in unusually difficult circumstances. Habakkuk 3:17, "How do they continue to serve God when the fig tree does not blossom, there is no fruit on the vines and no herds in the stall?" These characteristics gave birth to churches in diaspora (Menjay 2004:1).

Earl and Jane Williams stayed in Liberia through most of the civil war and unrest. When Liberians evacuated to Danane, Cote D'Ivoire, the Williams moved to the displacement area to continue ministry. Williams started the refugee church, Good

News Baptist Church, along with believers who had come from Nimba. The church grew rapidly to over 500. Williams stated it was the fastest growing church he had ever experienced and many who had been previously unresponsive, were open to the Gospel, converted, and baptized. (Williams, September 2010). The church in diaspora provided evidence of God's love living as witnesses in the midst, living in-between.

In *Waiting for Daylight*, Palmer Chinchén recounted the persecution of one of the pastor's in Nimba, T. Dweh Weah. Weah was converted through Mt. Nimba Baptist Church and was an ABC graduate. During the war, he regularly travelled into Liberia from the displacement camp to lead Bible studies. On one occasion, rebels charged him with spying and he was put in jail. For three days, he was beaten with electrical cords, before he was finally released. The following Wednesday, still recovering from his beating, he walked five miles back to the same village. The soldiers immediately confronted him as to why he was there. His response, "Don't you know, today is Wednesday? You know that every Wednesday I come to lead the guards in Bible study. Call the guards together, it is time to pray." Though Weah had been beaten mercilessly, he had returned as usual with the good news. Twelve men received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior as a result of this act of grace. God does not cause our pain, but he uses our affliction for his glory (Chinchén 2007:162).

7.7.3 Anthony and Betty Jonah

The life experiences and circumstances of Anthony and Betty Jonah fit many of the influencing characteristics of the movement of God. Their narratives include both the foreign and local partnership emphasis, as Jonah was originally from Nigeria, naturalized to Liberia. His story represented how God crosses the contextual boundaries in unexpected ways. Most of all, his story speaks to the transforming power of God through conversion and how God, in His sovereignty, chooses to work in and through people to impact others with the Gospel message.

Jonah grew up in a marginally Christian home in Nigeria. As a young man, he ventured out on his own and went to Ghana in search of adventure and employment. After some time, he decided to go to Senegal in search of work. On the way to Senegal, he ended up in Liberia. While in Ganta, he was told of the opening of the new LAMCO mine and potential jobs in the town of Yekepa, Liberia.

Jonah (May 2009) went to Yekepa and began to work for LAMCO, the iron ore mining company. He started out in 1965 cutting grass at 25 cents an hour. He recalled that the boys of the Vocational Training Center used to call him “grass cutter,” because of his diligence in such a menial job. Years later, as the staff chief mechanic for the locomotives, the men were surprised by his position. Jonah stated, “It is good to work hard and to be humble.”

In Nigeria, Jonah’s parents became Christians, but Jonah acknowledged that he was unaware of what it meant to be a believer. His mother said he was baptized as a child, but he did not remember or associate conversion as a part of church, baptism, or family experience. In 1967, at the invitation of Missionary Grossman, Jonah attended Mt. Nimba Baptist Church. Grossman visited Jonah in his home and talked to him about what it meant to receive Jesus. Sensing the conviction of the Holy Spirit, Jonah said that “I knew it by myself and I prayed to invite Jesus into my life. I did not believe on deh-say,¹⁴⁵ but I accepted it for myself and believed” (Jonah, May 2009).

Jonah followed up on his conversion by participating in a new believers’ class at Mt. Nimba Baptist Church with the newly arrived missionary Earl Williams and he completed the four weeks of study on following Jesus. He was a part of the first group of nine people baptized by Williams. This was significant because of the lifetime of friendship and ministry with Williams that ensued.

Jonah (May 2009) stated that God began to bless his life and family. At that point, he was living with Betty, a Gio woman from Fehnplay. They were not married and

¹⁴⁵ A Liberian term which means the equivalent of hear-say or secondary knowledge.

Jonah felt that they needed to be married to set things right with God. He went to Fehnplay and paid \$140.00 USD as the dowry and married Betty at Mt. Nimba.

Jonah recounted that he met Ma Betty in Saniquellie. People encouraged him not to marry an uneducated woman, but they did not see that she was a good woman. They have now been married for 50 years. Betty stated she was encouraged not to marry Anthony, as he was an educated man and would leave her or “have other women.”¹⁴⁶ Betty ignored those criticisms as she felt that he was a good man.

Jonah was promoted to senior mechanic on the railroad trolleys and had a good job. They lived in area A in staff housing, and his family was provided education, medical, and public services. In the late seventies, he joined the tenth grade and graduated through the night school program at Yeke Memorial High School.

There were several key spiritual events in Jonah’s life including his ordination as a deacon, his call to Christian ministry, and a trip back to Nigeria to see his family. Having not seen his family in 30 years, missionary Peggy Russell encouraged him to go to visit his parents and he said, “with tears in my eyes, God revealed it to me that I should go home; not only to see my family, but to share with them about the transformation in my life through Jesus Christ” (Jonah May 2009).

Jonah was selected as a part of the first deacon ordination at Mt. Nimba and was ordained in 1976 with Ted York and Harrison Menjay. Jonah initially assisted as pastor with the Mano and Gio dialect worship service at Mt. Nimba, but later became the pastor of Redeemer Baptist Church in Camp 4. Jonah also helped to start the church in Zolowee and sent Pastor “Old Man (Moses) Gbatu” to Zolowee to serve as pastor. Gbatu is now deceased, but this researcher visited with his widow.

Jonah (May 2009) had a good job at Lamco that paid \$850 USD per month plus benefits. He gave up all of that and moved out of staff housing to attend Seminary

¹⁴⁶ A culture term that describes the generally accepted practice of having a mistress.

and serve as a pastor. Many people said it was an unwise decision, but the providence of God knew that only a few years later, the civil war would wipe out all jobs. Many people lost everything, but Jonah recounted that he had already given it up for the glory of God. He stated: “Where is LAMCO today? God is still here.”

Theological Training was an important part of the puzzle for Jonah. He made the decision to go to Seminary based on three things: The desire to be adequately trained for the pastorate, the desire to lead Redeemer Church, and the desire to be out of the temptations of LAMCO. At Seminary, Jonah stated: “I was the oldest at Seminary, but the youngest among them” (Jonah May 2009). While attending Seminary, Jonah planted Emmanuel Baptist Church and Star Baptist Church in Monrovia. The primary church starting method used was to witnessing from house to house to make converts. Both of the churches he started are still functioning. At the end of Seminary, several churches wanted Jonah to stay and be their pastor, but he said that he knew that God was calling him to return to Redeemer Baptist Church (Jonah, May 2009).

Jonah stated that his family was the strength for the ministry, but they have also experienced difficult times and this was reiterated in a more emotional way by Betty. She recounted that their daughter Mary died as a young lady in an unexpected health situation. Later, after the war, their other daughter Esther also died. Betty and Anthony took in Esther’s children, Sharon and Timothy to stay with them. During this research, Timothy (Grade 4) died of pneumonia. This was a very tragic situation, because it could have easily been prevented with health care. This researcher spent time praying with and grieving with Ma Betty over the loss of her grandson. While it did not deter her faith, it was definitely a dark night of the soul (B. Jonah, May 2009).

Another significant death for Anthony and Betty Jonah was the murder of missionary Libby Senter and her daughter Rachel. A. Jonah’s recollection of that event: “I was at Seminary when I receive the news of their death. At that time, Morris (the murderer) was staying at the house. Jonah stated that after the murder, Morris came back to the house and could have even murdered my wife. My only question was:

‘Why did Morris have to embarrass the one who has come to help us? It was a great shame.’ These many years later, the Jonahs speak fondly of their love for and relationship with the Senter family (Jonah, May 2009).

Thousands of people attended the funeral. Senter did what Jesus did; he said “Father, forgive them. It was amazing to me. I thank God for him. He was a good man and this was a great tragedy, but he honored God. Libby was a God fearing woman. She was learning the Mano language and culture. People respected her. God used her to reach the Mano people” (Jonah, May 2009).

The war was a very difficult time. The first year, they were in the refugee camp in Bossu, Guinea. In August of 1990, it seemed to be safe to bring the family home. Shortly after that, ECOMOG came into Liberia to halt the advances of Charles Taylor’s soldiers. The rebels came and arrested Jonah from his pulpit on Sunday, because he was a naturalized Nigerian. Anthony said that “I argued that I would not leave till I finished preaching, and after that, you can do anything to me.” Even though he had naturalized as a Liberian in 1969, the commander threw the papers on the ground and locked him up (Jonah, May 2009).

Williams went to speak on his behalf and the soldiers gave Jonah his clothes and his belt, which a soldier was wearing, and sent him home. Every morning and evening he went to the prison to check-in, but also served as a chaplain to pray and counsel the people. The soldiers never bothered him again regarding that issue. He continued with Bible training, preaching, and witnessing until they went to Cote D’Ivoire.

After living in the refugee camp for several years, the Jonahs returned home to Camp 4. One of the first things that happened upon return was an encounter with a young boy named Samuel. He was abused by a woman who was his guardian as she put his hands and feet into boiling rice to discipline him. Samuel was not her son and the woman did not care for him properly. Betty was so angry at the woman that she took Samuel to her home as a son to care for him. His hands and feet took six months to

recover. This began the process of taking in children to care for them and would become the Betty Jonah Orphanage.¹⁴⁷ Betty Jonah recounted this story in 2009. Two years later through a generous benefactor, Samuel was flown to the US to have surgery to correct damage from burns. Without Betty's actions in 2004, the boy would not have survived. Today, he is doing well and planning to College.

Initially, There was no outside support, just subsistence farming. Emmanuel (Jonah's son) eventually met Randy Godfrey through a divine appointment and formed the Liberian Christian Ministries International (LCMI) which is now the funding vehicle for the orphanage. Currently there are about 55 children who are orphans or destitute children of single parents affected by the war. The children are mostly from the Mano and Gio areas of Saclapea, Bahn, Geh, Lapea, and Karnplay (Jonah, May 2009).

When asked about his relationship with Williams, Jonah stated that "God works in mysterious ways. Earl directed us to Jesus and we are still on the road." It was he who brought the news of Mary's death and carried the body to Fehnplay for burial. In spite of skin color, we are brothers and we are part of the Williams family. "Jane taught Betty how to read and write. They learned our ways and taught us by example. It is very hard to even describe the relationship I had with your Father. We trusted him completely and he trusted us. When Esther died, Betty recalled the comfort from the Williams family" (Jonah, May 2009). These were interesting comments by Jonah in consideration of earlier comments about contextualization. Williams was never able to learn the local language and had limited understanding of the customs, and practices, of the people, but he was able to develop contextual relationships. This is an often overlooked part of the missiological discussion.

7.8 CONCLUSION

The influencing factors of the evangelization of the Mano and Gio are subjective and open to interpretation. This researcher believes based on the descriptive empirical

¹⁴⁷ Betty Jonah Orphanage. <http://www.liberiachristian.org/default.html>. (August 2012).

research, literary review, statistical data, and personal observation that these five key factors played a significant role in the evangelization of the Mano and Gio. The evidence was borne out in the fruit demonstrated in the lives of the converts and the churches they participate in and through. It remains to be seen how this process will move forward, but indications are that this movement will continue because the factors are still in place and are contextually understood.

The next and final chapter addresses thoughts and observations gleaned from the experience and research. The chapter will also introduce an Interpretive Model of Evangelization that has been developed as a result of this research effort to understand evangelization. This model enables one to conceptualize the extent of evangelization and how to understand it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE DYNAMICS OF EVANGLIZATION IN PRAXIS OF THE MANO AND GIO

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The final chapter of this dissertation is presented in three sections. First, a theoretical scaffolding matrix is suggested towards understanding how to consider the extent of evangelization. This researcher proposes an interpretative model of measuring the understanding of evangelization. Second, explanation and observation are suggested from the conversion narrative responses and how this speaks to the unfolding evangelization matrix. Finally, the chapter concludes with contributions of the research and a closing statement about the research.

8.2 SUMMARY STATEMENT

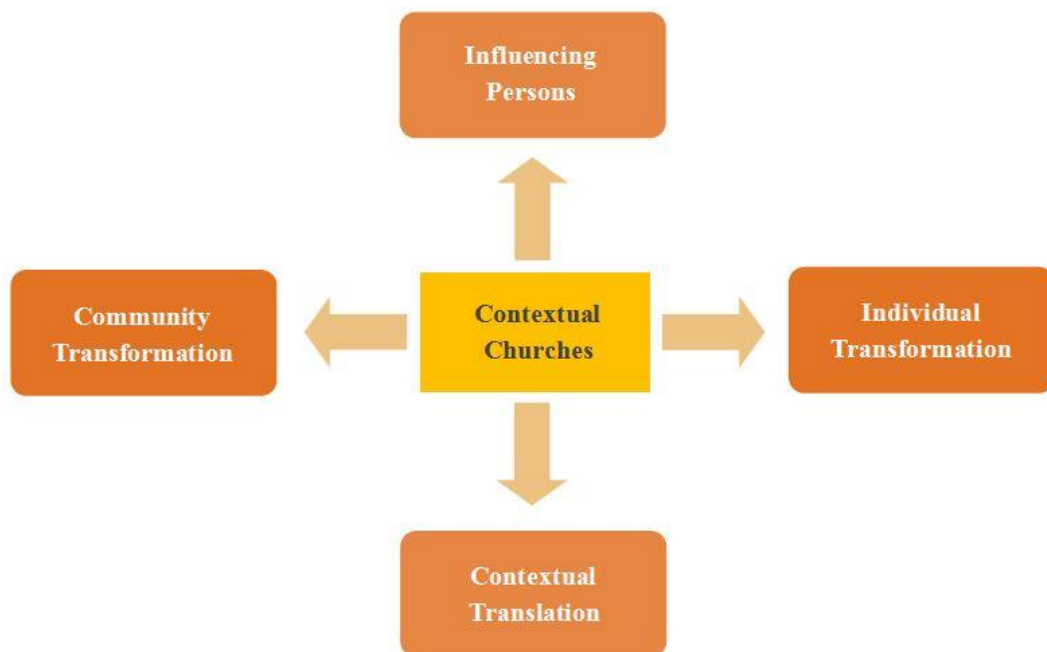
The purpose of this dissertation has been to explore the theory, process, extent, and response of evangelization within the context of the Mano and Gio of Northern Liberia. Throughout this study, the integration of history, mission history, social theory, and practical missiology have been engaged to understand the interaction of evangelization. Osmer (2008:226) concluded that case studies and critical incidents are crucial to developing a practical theological interpretation in regards to episodes, situations, and episodes. This study has been a hermeneutical reflection in the construct of answering the main question.

The main question has been to consider the movement towards evangelization of the Mano and Gio and to understand how they have responded to that process. This study demonstrated that those who have responded to the Gospel message have embraced transformation that reflect a relationship to Christ and Christ's earthly community.

The qualitative researching provided the information that was then gathered to analyze the main question. The result was a formulation to build a model for understanding the extent to which evangelization has taken place and to consider the response, individually and collectively, of those who have been evangelized. The Interpretative Model of Understanding Evangelization is proposed based on Osmer's (2008:83) interpretative task suggesting that one must use the descriptive-empirical evidence to formulate theoretical interpretations based on wise assumptions. This model presupposes a perspectival understanding and fallibility. This model considers the epistemological position of what we know and the ontological position of the impact of the process of evangelization (see diagram below)

8.3 INTERPRETIVE MODEL OF EVANGELIZATION

Figure 1. "Interpretative Model of Evangelization."



Understanding the dynamics of evangelization of a particular group of people must include the authentic nature and understanding of conversion and the realization of a contextual process that is evident in transformation. Kaplan's (2004:379) overview of conversion identified some essential practices and characteristics of conversion. He stated that baptism and the bestowal of a Christian name were essential rites for people wishing to embrace Christianity and join a local community. Since rites can be applied without contextualization, one must consider whether there has been understanding and praxis or simply a benign process of bestowing church practices on willing recipients. The interpretative model instead considers a central component of evangelization as the presence of a contextual local church.

The Church presence in a contextual setting reveals something that is not apparent by measuring conversions of individuals. The conversion of individuals is obviously important to evangelization, but when one measures extent, there must be evidence that conversion has merged into a contextual earthly community of believers. In Liberia, there were many Mano and Gio who were being converted, but were those conversions resulting in a transformative community presence? On the contrary, most converts were becoming contextualized in new settings of a mission station, Christian school, or a new city rather than being salt and light in the community of origin. This was in part because of the nationalization of the region through education, economic empowerment, and growth, but also because of the limitations and barriers created by the social structure and the missionary educational process. If evangelization has not penetrated and created a contextual center within the village, then the transformative element is absent. The missionaries established mission stations, schools, and humanitarian entities within the region which were good and helpful, but for true evangelization to become a movement, churches must be established that are indigenous led, self-sustaining, and reproducible.

The quantitative analysis of the establishment of churches (see 9.1 and 9.2) revealed a strong presence and growth of churches in the region that were indigenously started,

led, and reproducing. The contributing factors such as the political change of leadership, the diaspora, theological education, and the presence of missionaries were all valuable to this process, but ultimately, local evangelization produced contextual churches. The central identifying mark of measuring evangelization must be the presence of churches (Christ's earthly communities) that are contextual and transformative. This researcher contends that these churches must primarily be the result of local agents, not only of missionary enterprises. Furthermore, second and third generation churches flowing out of initial church starting represents a deeper level of the extent of evangelization.

The two expansive elements of the extent of evangelization in the interpretative model involve contextual translation and influencing persons towards conversion. Sanneh (1996:63-64) argues that contextual translation is absolutely necessary because it brings the Gospel into vernacular form. It is certain that Western cultures have intruded into cultures and have brought outside influences that create barriers, however, it is impossible to deny that missionaries who devoted themselves to translation did not then gain sympathetic espousal to the local culture. The mother tongue anchors the Gospel message in a context that no longer depends on outside witness. Translation is often initiated by missionary enterprises, but rapidly engages local agents who then assume a primary role in translation. Foundational to understanding evangelization is the process of translation. What are the many ways that the culture is being engaged in translation?

The second expansive element in conjunction with translation is the proclamation of the Gospel to the recipients. Who were the influencing persons towards conversion? People influence people to a hearing of the Gospel. The assumption of this research is that if missionaries, external media, or event evangelization were the primary influencing voices towards conversion, than the extent of evangelization has not travelled far regardless of the numerical values. The conversion survey considered the influencing factors of conversion (see 8.5.2 and 9.5). The results demonstrated

that friends, family, and closely related persons were the most significant bridge of evangelization among the sampling of Mano and Gio (44.4 percent). The evangelization process within the community signified a deeper level of penetration than missionary proselytizing or event evangelism. If one included the influence of a local pastor, conversion based on a local witness increased to 72.2 percent.

Forster (2011) stated that the majority of people come to an understanding of conversion through a close friend or family member. Most people experience the truth of the Gospel through relationships with others before they are convinced of the theological truths and claims of Christ.¹⁴⁸ This statement is demonstrated to be true in a culturally Christian context, but is also true among the evangelization of the Mano and Gio. This statistic demonstrated a deeper level of extent or contextualization.

The final elements of the interpretative model of evangelization involved personal and community transformation. Mugambi (1989:13) stated that evangelization was a community and an individual commitment that Christians were instructed to pursue. Based on this understanding, this research sought to blend an evaluation of the presence and transformative nature of the church in context, with equal attention being given to personal understanding of conversion and transformation.

In applying the question of identification to the Mano and Gio, one must consider how conversion is viewed and what practices, characteristics, and points of identification indicate an authentic conversion. Who has converted to Christianity and what are the points of identification? This process must consider what one has converted from to assess what one has converted to. In contrast to Kaplan's study of Ethiopia, where baptism and the bestowal of Christian names were considered important, this dissertation contends that individual and community transformation are the essential contextual measurement in tandem. The conversion survey revealed a personal and community transformative understanding among the Mano and Gio

¹⁴⁸Forster, Dion. 2011. *A Case for Relational Evangelism*. Lausanne World Pulse. December.

(see 9.6-9.8). In addition, the various examples and case studies presented throughout the dissertation affirm a contextualization resulting in transformative action. One may not always be able to surmise what transformations might occur, but a contextual evaluation through interviews, observations, and surveys will reveal whether or not the Gospel is impacting transformation. An interesting additional research might be to consider whether or not one's particular beliefs about conversion contribute to the types of transformative action that are produced.

This simple Interpretative Model of Evangelization allows one to consider various aspects of the result of evangelization to give indication to depth and contextual expression. For this research, there was a blending of quantitative and qualitative empirical research that allowed the extent of evangelization to be explored in light of this interpretative model.

8.4 CONVERSION NARRATIVES

A key interpretive element of the research was to conduct a survey of Mano and Gio self-identified Christians to better understand how the Mano believers viewed their conversion experience and the impact of their assimilation into the local faith community. The survey was designed to reveal beliefs, patterns, and indicators of faith and whether or not faith has been embraced and understood in a contextual manner. Mason (2005:24) stated that qualitative research is characteristically exploratory, is fluid and flexible, and context-sensitive. This dissertation utilized various examples and evidences to formulate conclusions in regards to the process of evangelization. This section summarizes the collection of that data and is linked to the content in the Appendix. The following sections of explanation and observations are made from the conversion narrative responses and how this speaks to the unfolding of the extent of the evangelization matrix.

Though the available research on the subject is minimal, the consensus seems to be that the Mano and the Gio have a limited perception of God or a higher power. The

Mano and Gio have generally viewed the role of God as somewhat insignificant. The Mano word for God is *wala*.¹⁴⁹ Schwab (1947:315) surmised that Wala was basically a corruption of Allah, but if so, it would mean that they had completely forgotten an original Mano perception of God, as even the oldest persons only used the word Wala and with no association of the tenets of Islam. Wala does not represent an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresence being, rather, a removed and slightly involved being.

Based on a general understanding of the view of God and his role in spirituality, Christian conversion for the Mano was not a leaving of one god or religion to pursue another, but a contextual change of who God was and is. Choosing Christ had more cultural and social implications than as a spiritual paradigm shift. If a Mano were to choose to follow Christ, the challenge would be in relating to the social structure rather than offending a religious entity or a dogmatically held set of beliefs of God.

Zetterstrom (1976:82) provided an account of the creation story (see 9.11) from the oral traditions of the older people in the village gathered in 1975. He stated that there were different versions of creation across the Mano and Gio traditions with some overlap. A future consideration would be to compile oral traditions from the various clans and compare the similarities and differences of creation narratives. In that comparison, one must also consider if time and the devastating effects of war have robbed the traditions of this knowledge.

There seem to be both traditional and modern contextual elements of the story. In some villages, there were no accounts of creation and it was not an important aspect of culture (Zetterstrom 1976:82). It appeared that thoughts about Wala were interspersed through society as explanations of aspects of life, but that reverence for or worship of Wala did not play a decisive role. The transitions of the role of Wala, the secret society, and the various practices of witchcraft were vague and not seen as

¹⁴⁹Zetterstrom (1976:82). Wala is viewed as god the creator and he lives in the town of the dead where the ancestors are (*go pa*) or he lives up in the air as relates to what is traditionally referred to as heaven (*lei seleyi*). The term is often used interchangeably with the presence of a god or the ancestral spirits.

interrelated. Conversion involves understanding the interactive relationship of God and man, the necessity of salvation, and the transformational nature of conversion. There was no indication in research of those who converted to Christianity of experiencing a backlash for changing their belief about God, but only in terms of their relationship to the societal structure.

When conversion occurs, there is generally an associated identity shift. As Bosch (2011:500) stated of conversion, it is not “the joining of a community to procure eternal salvation, but rather a change in allegiance in which Christ is accepted as Lord and center of one’s life.” Conversion processes may be hampered by relationships to existing beliefs, but in the case of the Mano and Gio, the assimilation process revealed that the participants had a healthy contextual understanding of conversion.

8.5 CONVERSION SURVEYS

The goal of the conversion survey was to complete 40 surveys. Thirty-eight survey responses were completed in a manner that allowed for consistency to be recorded and observed. Two surveys were removed because they seemed not to have been adequately documented. The conversion survey format is presented in the Appendix (see 9:3). The method of the survey was to ask each participant to briefly recount their conversion experience. The follow up questions were included to determine who were the influencing persons in the process, when and where did conversion happen, and what were transformative changes of conversion.

8.5.1 Survey Participants

The gender compilation of the survey participants¹⁵⁰ included males (24) and females (14). The scope of the research was to incorporate a span of ages, but targeting those at least 30 years of age. Almost everyone interviewed would have been born at or before the civil war indicating most would have some memory of pre-war Liberia.

¹⁵⁰The personal descriptive details of survey participants are in the Appendix (See 9.4).

The median age of those interviewed was 40-50 with a statistical average of 45.5. The gathering process asked for an age range of tens rather than a specific date of birth to respect privacy and with consideration that dates of birth were not necessary.

The research reflected that over 70 percent of those surveyed were converted after the age of 20. In a culturally predisposed Christian locale, many professing Christians identify their conversion at a young age. Southern Baptists are the largest Protestant denomination in the US. The North American Mission Board indicated that half of all respondents indicated a conversion experience occurred at age 12 or younger.¹⁵¹ This would reflect a family-influenced, culturally acceptable practice as opposed to experiencing spiritual conversion apart from a contextual family religious experience. A significant indicator of impact in this conversion survey was that almost all of those surveyed could identify a specific year of conversion and actual date (85.7 percent).

This survey assigned each person a code so that the name and privacy of individuals providing answers are protected. The ages were also coded in groups of ten so that it would be unlikely for a person reading the answers to associate a particular person with a given answer. All participants were willing to give their name and age for the purpose of the survey, this research preferred privacy for the participants.

8.5.2 Pre-Conversion: Who Were the Influencing Persons? (Appendix 9.5)

The question of pre-conversion related to how the process was initiated. Who was the person(s) who influenced or led you to faith in Christ?¹⁵² This was an important question because it demonstrated the transmission of the Gospel and was a central component of the Interpretative Model of Understanding Evangelization. Evangelization happens more significantly when the transmitters were local agents.

¹⁵¹U.S. *Congregational Life Survey: Conversion & Witnessing Among Southern Baptists*. 2002. [Online]. North American Mission Board. <http://www.namb.net/namb1cb1col.aspx?id=8590001100>.

¹⁵²Data of the influencing persons toward conversion can be found in the Appendix (See 9.5).

"The entire mission of the Church is concentrated and manifested in evangelization."¹⁵³ Patterns of transmission reveal a level of contextualization.

Root described various methodologies in a study of evangelism in the early church. He cited contact evangelism as an encounter where one was presented an invitation and responded to the Gospel message. He also cited examples of evangelism where persons led others to Christ utilizing a network of friendships (Root 2011:4). There is significant value in understanding how and through whom individuals encounter Christ. The assumption is that a variety of influencers such as missionaries, pastors, family, and friends reflect a fuller extent of evangelization, whereas, if most were the result of missionary influencing, then contextualization has not been realized.

Results were examined to evaluate transmission: Was conversion the result of missionary endeavors or the activity of local agents? The results demonstrated friends, family, and other persons¹⁵⁴ were the most significant bridge of evangelization (44.4 percent). The evangelization process was traveling within the community signifying penetration at a deeper level than missionary or event evangelism. 72.2 percent were influenced at a local level of witness.

Figure 2

Influencer ¹⁵⁵	Number	Percentage
Missionary	3	7.8%
Local Pastor	15	39.4%
Friend	11	28.9%
Family	7	18.4%
Person	6	15.7%
Event	12	31.5%

¹⁵³ Olson, Carl. 2005. Evangelization 101: A Short Guide to Sharing the Gospel. *Our Sunday Visitor*.

¹⁵⁴ "Other persons" indicated someone who was not identifiable as a local pastor, friend, or family member. This person was generally understood to be a local person, but not one of a close relationship.

¹⁵⁵ "Influencers" may include more than one category per person. Each person's answers were charted to indicate who they identified as influencing their movement towards conversion (See 9.5).

Forster (2011), on the case for relationship evangelism, stated that the majority of people come to an understanding of conversion through a close friend or family member. Most people experience the truth of the Gospel through relationships with others before they are convinced of the theological truths and claims of Christ.¹⁵⁶ This statement would be generally true in culturally Christian contexts, but was also demonstrated as true among first generation converts of the Mano and Gio.

8.5.3 Frequency and Method of Baptism

In regards to baptism, one must consider how this was observed, practiced, and understood in a particular context. This research sought to ascertain the process whereby one was approved for baptism and the consistency of the practice across the spectrum of churches within a particular tradition. In some cultures, baptism was a test to determine if converts had separated themselves from pagan practices, while others used a series of practices to ensure a thorough examination (Kaplan 2004:379). In the observations and discussion, most of the churches had a process of interview regarding a person's salvation and some had a class for new believers to complete. Wonbenyakeh (June, 2011) indicated that the church observed and questioned new believers for a season in regards to their commitment to Christ. Other factors such as polygamy, alcoholism, and personal conduct were considered before baptism.

The research data (Appendix 9.6) indicated that 86.8 percent of the 38 persons surveyed had been baptized by immersion.¹⁵⁷ This indicated a high level of significance attached to assimilation through baptism and a willingness to follow through with a conversion commitment. The consistency of baptism of the participants in the survey seemed to indicate a clear and consistent practice of baptism within the Mano and Gio Baptist Churches. Baptism was not a common theme in the

¹⁵⁶Forster, Dion. 2011. *A Case for Relational Evangelism*. Lausanne World Pulse. December.

¹⁵⁷In the Baptist tradition, baptism by immersion has historically been considered the biblical method of baptism. The survey question was asked: Have you been baptized and if so by what method? There was not an attempt to ascertain understanding, simply to consider whether or not baptism was a practice associated with conversion and if the churches maintained the practice through the war.

conversion narratives which indicated that participants did not see baptism or church membership as conversion. In adhesive examples of conversion, persons often viewed church membership or bestowal of names as assimilating into Christianity. There were no respondents who equated baptism as salvation.

8.5.4 Theology of Conversion: Personal Response

The central component to the conversion survey was the question: “What was the story of your conversion or how did you experience conversion?” The goal of this question was to provide the participant an opportunity to express their salvation experience in their own words and understanding. The answers were then analyzed to identify thematic indicators. The first consideration was in regards to a personal response. What did the participant indicate as a personal belief or action in regards to conversion? (Appendix 9.6). McRaney (2003:91) indicated that it is difficult to determine when a person actually receives Christ or experiences regeneration, but that receiving Christ seems to have three facets: surrender, repentance, and faith.

The survey responses indicated consistent understanding of conversion. Most of the participants recognized conversion to be a personal decision in which they acted on a point of understanding. Personal actions of prayer, confession, and an understanding of receiving Jesus were integral to the conversion activity. In utilizing Bosch’s (2011:11) definition of conversion, the respondents identified consistent expressions of repentance, confession, receiving and accepting Jesus Christ. CS31 stated: “I believe that my conversion means that I have believed the good news of Jesus Christ and that I repented of my sins and accepted Jesus as my Savior” (see 9:4).

Conversion was not viewed as simply being saved from hell or procuring eternal life. There was a significant understanding of personal responsibility in the process. Some participants¹⁵⁸ did indicate a “salvation or sinner’s prayer,” which taken by itself could indicate a programmatic response. Those responses must be paired with other

¹⁵⁸CS06 and CS11 (See 9.4).

responses to have an indication of whether there was a contextual or programmatic understanding. The collective response indicates a depth of contextualization.

8.5.5 Theology of Conversion: Personal Transformation

“Although it is something of a truism, people convert in order to improve their lives. The crucial question is therefore, how they understand the deceptively simple concept of ‘improving their lives.’ It must be clear that to view certain motives as valid and legitimate, and others lacking in those characteristics, tells us more about the researcher’s values, than about the converts” (Kaplan 2004:381).

The participants were asked to identify or describe personal transformation as the result of conversion. Was conversion viewed as an adding of a religion and practices, or was it viewed as following a new path of life incorporating biblical changes into one’s life? Three categories of change were identified: Perception of others, issues of sin, and life changes. The answers were organized into the three categories (See 9.7). Of the three categories, the most expressed narrative was of personal positive life changes. The survey results revealed a conversion that was not rooted in negative connotations of sin, but of proactive, profound life changes.

In the first category, the perception of others, there was a consistent expression that people were surprised at the life transformation and that most people were pleased with that change. CS19 stated: “People are surprised at my life change and listen to my witness.” CS06 stated: My conversion “was a joy to friends and family because I am no longer a drunk. I was a shame and disgrace.” CS33 stated: “My parents felt joyful. People who used to be afraid of me, now accepted me” (see 9.7).

In regards to issues of sin, there were a variety of vices and attitudes that were identified. The most common were the issues of drunkenness and immorality, both of which are viewed as a significant problem in the culture. In the life changing responses, most identified changes in attitude and action. Living a positive, helpful life was a common expressed personal change. CS11 credited the Lord for

deliverance by stating: “The Lord has helped me from a spirit of disobedience, fighting, stealing, and bad thoughts.” Another response (CS17) paired the sin issue with life change by stating: “I used to be very greedy and fussy. My conversion has helped me and my husband to become free-handed (giving) and generous (see 9.7).

In regards to life changes, almost every respondent gave examples of a personal transformation. Responses included reading the Bible in dialect, reconciling with a sister-in-law, leading family devotions, and helping to start a church. Evangelization themes of peace, reconciliation, and translation were quite evident in the responses.

8.5.6 Theology of Conversion: Belief Statements

What statements of belief were interwoven into the conversion narrative of the respondents? Four key areas were identified based on the responses: Personal belief, sin and damnation, freedom and joy, and transformation. The two most expressed categories were the belief statements of the atoning work of Christ and the expression of personal transformation (Appendix 9.8). Ten participants expounded on the belief of freedom and joy as expressions of conversion. Only five of the 38 participants indicated sin and damnation as a central part of their narrative. Two of those indicated deliverance from bondage and the powers of darkness. A general criticism of the foreign missionary enterprise was a conversion narrative of salvation from hell. The survey did not reveal this to be a central tenet or understanding of the Mano and Gio, but rather, they expressed an understanding of positive expressions of change. There were consistent expressions of change, joy, new life, and living differently. The analogy of a U-turn referenced earlier was evidenced in many of the statements.

8.5.7 Theology of Conversion: Church and Community

The evaluation of the theology of conversion also considered the local church, circumstances of conversion, and extenuating factors. The most consistent statement was the identification with a local faith community. Many of the participants identified with the local church. Responses indicated attending church, attending with

the family, and participating in the local church through membership (Appendix 9.9). CS21 indicated that “I am now pastor of this church.” This statement indicates that, not only was the Gospel message taking place, but evangelists were being raised up which is the most contextual bridge of the Gospel to future generations.

An assumption of the extent of evangelization expressed was the contextualized form of the moving Gospel being the formation of local church. By extension, conversion would involve participation in a local church. This was evident in most personal narratives. There were a few that emphasized the circumstances of conversion, but this was not a major theme revealed in the narratives. Four responses indicated that they had attended churches for many years, but did not know or had not accepted Christ. 65.7 percent of respondents indicated attending, participating, or joining a church as a continuation of their conversion experience.

8.5.8 Conversion Narrative Observations

What do you believe about your conversion? To measure the extent of evangelization, one must consider how individuals perceive their conversion and whether or not it is a transformative experience. Is conversion for church membership or life transforming? Has my conversion spiritually transformed my life evidenced in belief, attitude, and practices? Are these changes considered to be contextual changes or is the perception based on external expression such as baptism, name change, civilizing practices and the like? These characteristics distinguish the level of evangelization as external expressions or internally embraced contextual applications.

The survey consistently revealed an awareness of the changing nature of the Holy Spirit in personal transformation. CS16 stated: Christ made me a new person and now I live daily for Him” (see 9.8). The results would indicate a growing level of indigenous evangelization among the Mano and Gio. Gbengan (June 2011) was born among the Mano and has lived most of his life interacting in and around the culture. His observation of the conversion process was that “with the Mano and Gio, it is a yes

or no decision.” They must denounce an old way of life in order to embrace Christ, and in doing so, they generally have had a genuine conversion experience. This was evident in the percentage of those who described conversion as life changing.

The clash with culture raised questions about evangelization of the Mano and Gio. Since conversion necessitates a life change that will be in conflict with the cultural way of life, what are best practices in situations where missionaries or local agents are confronted with culture that goes against faith? The following case study reflected a common challenge that missionaries and local agents faced in the early years of evangelization. This illustrates the distinction of conversion from a religious expression to another version, versus conversion as a social structure adjustment.

8.6 CASE STUDY: CONVERSION AND RESPECT

Case study question posed to local leaders: “If you are a missionary in the village and the announcement is made that the Devil is coming, would you go in or not?” As a part of the traditional Poro Society, the Devil would come into the village at night. The women, children, and uninitiated men were to go inside and not look at the Devil. It was understood that to look at the Devil would result in severe punishment or bewitching. This created a dilemma for the missionaries who came to the village because they did not feel that they should respect the practices of what they perceived to be witchcraft. Often, missionaries would stay outside as a show of defiance to what they believed to be satanic practices. This resulted in great conflict in the village because the leaders in the village felt traditional practices were being disrespected.

Gbengan (June 2011) and Wonbenyakeh’s (June 2011) opinion was that the right response was to go in out of respect, and this would not be perceived as support.¹⁵⁹ Some Mano rejected Christianity because missionaries disrespected the elders and

¹⁵⁹In previous discussions about Harley, all comments about his knowledge of the Poro were received as him having great respect. In contrast, his initiation was not perceived as respect, but as support and this drew much criticism from local agents. It is not entirely clear why Harley allowed himself to be initiated, but one can construe from a Western mindset that he was trying to respect the practices and in reality, it produced the opposite. Even the most learned outsider can struggle with nuances of culture.

Poros Society in this way. Respect of elders was not perceived as support. Support was evident by the distinction between member and non-member.

A contrasting contextual example previously mentioned would be the experience of the leaders of the Nimba Baptist Union. The pastors were seeing a great response to the Gospel during the period of the civil war and were holding evangelistic crusades in the villages. Feeling threatened by the growth of Christianity among the Mano and Gio, the Poros Society would send the Devil out as a way of disrupting the evangelistic meetings. This led to a confrontation in many villages and resulted in a judicial court challenge by the churches to intervene on their behalf. The churches and The Poros Society went to the courts on this issue and the courts in Nimba County ruled that the Devil could only be out from midnight to 4 am, which limited the Society from exerting that kind of disruptive control over the village. This conflict was initiated through local agents so it did not create the kinds of disrespectful opinions that the actions of the missionaries took. This action would have only been possible taken in a local context.

8.7 CASE STUDY: CONVERSION AND INFLUENCE

To consider evangelization of the Mano and Gio to Christianity and the integrated process, one must recognize evidence of the presence of churches in local villages and an impactful role by the church on local villages in a positive manner. This reflects an indigenizing nature of the church. Was the Christianity of the Mano and Gio making a social impact on the lives of the people?

During the civil war, many Liberians spent years in displacement camps in Cote D'Ivoire, Guinea, and Ghana. The Mano and Gio crossed the border at Danane, Ivory Coast or in Tuo, Guinea. Many Liberians felt mistreated and were grateful to return to Liberia. Recently, the tables were reversed due to the conflict in Cote D'Ivoire – How did the Christian community respond to the presence of displaced Ivoirians?

This researcher attended an outreach event training at the African Bible College during the weekend of 18-19 June 2011. Approximately 40 undergraduate students participated in a training followed by an evangelistic and humanitarian ministry in Bahn City among displaced Ivoirians. A key dialogue of the training was to consider how Liberian Christians would respond in light of their displaced experience? The consensus was that the church should take a positive proactive role with the displaced. In the training, participants talked about not using the name “refugee.” One does not choose the name for oneself, but it is imposed by others. Many Liberians recounted how they cringed at being referred to as “Hey refugee!” Myers Cooper stated: “I didn’t have choice to reject their name for me of refugee, but now I have a choice at how I refer to others.” (June 2011).

The training of the students included defining word choices, considering how to minister to needs, and evangelism. Activities of the project included house to house visitation, soccer games, a meal together, and worship. Gbengan (June 2011) stated that the ministry was very successful and the students would continue to do community service projects like cleaning in the community, literacy, and outreach.

The same weekend of the student outreach in Bahn, this researcher preached at a church service two hours away in Lapea #1 at Mensonn Baptist Church. An Ivorian pastor attended with his family from the nearby Zorgowee displacement encampment. He was received, introduced, and invited for a meal afterwards. This action among the churches of the Mano and Gio demonstrated a biblical approach of unity to transcend what was often a political divisive issue.

8.8 SUMMARY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Through this dissertation, the question has been explored as to whether or not the Mano and Gio of Northern Liberia have been evangelized and to what extent that has happened. A deeper level of consideration was the contextualization of that evangelization process which led to the creation of the Interpretative Model of

Understanding Evangelization. What were the barriers that prevented evangelization and then, what were the influencing factors that contributed to evangelization and transformation?

This study has utilized an integrated approach of sociological theory, history, practical theology and missiology to analyze and evaluate evangelization. The conceptual and theoretical framework of evangelization demonstrated the necessity of contextual evangelization as a measurement of extent. This research sought to answer the epistemological question of whether indigenous churches have taken root in the community and become transformational in their impact on the surroundings.

The empirical research and data gathered supported the observation of a movement of the evangelization of the Mano and Gio people to Christianity happening. The research demonstrated that there has been a significant shift in the religious system from a traditional religious belief about God towards an acceptance of the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. This shift was not simply the establishment of foreign mission churches, but reflected a faith transition to acceptance of the Gospel message. This transition does not negate the various aspects of culture, societal structure, and traditional beliefs, but embraces salvation through Jesus Christ in context.

At the heart of this research has been capturing an understanding and interpretation of evangelism, evangelization, and the processes of evangelism unfolding in a particular region or group of people. The core foundational definition utilized was that “Evangelism is the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in Him, calling them to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sin, and inviting them to become living members of Christ’s earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit” Bosch (2011:11).

The secondary question of the research considered how to measure the extent of evangelization and the interpretation of those results. The Gospel did not come to the

Mano and Gio people until around 1938, even though Liberia was established in 1847 as a Christian nation. Over the next 50 years, evangelization was primarily dependent on the foreign missionary presence and revolved around mission stations, schools, and other institutional establishments. In the last 30 years, however, the movement has extended to facilitate the shift in acceptance of Christianity among the Mano and Gio.

Statistical data revealed that there are over 100 Baptist churches in many of the various Mano and Gio villages associated with the Nimba Baptist Union (see 9.1 and 9.2). This does not include other successful church starting denominations including the Liberia Inland Church and the Mid-Baptist Church. On a lesser scale, others like the Pentecostal, Methodist, and Non-denominational groups have also begun to make inroads in the evangelization process in the region. The total number of churches among the Mano and Gio is difficult to assess, but it would be reasonable to say that there are at least 200. Most of this growth has happened in the last 30 years, with at least half or more being after the coup in 1980.

A key observation would be the growth of the number of churches that started during the civil war. To the extent that there was no missionary presence, the growth was solely the work of the local agents and the Holy Spirit expanding the church even in times of crisis. Of the 38 individuals surveyed, 19 became believers during or immediately after the civil war and almost half of the identified churches were started during the civil war.

The churches among the Mano and Gio are generationally in their infancy. It remains to be seen how the culture will be shaped by the church and the movement towards Christianity. It has already reshaped the role and dependency on the Poro Society as the fabric of governance and secrecy among the people. As the church grows, the tension of the Society and the Church will continue and the resolve of the church will be tested. It remains to be seen whether the acceptance of Christianity as a normal part of the social structure will cause a cultural Christianity to emerge as it exists

among the Americo-Liberians or even the Bassa. Times of testing have often produced a stronger faith, than times of peace.

The most significant aspect for this researcher has been to experience the consistency and vibrancy of faith of the leaders of the churches. Men and women like Moses Wonbenyakeh, John Partor, Anthony Jonah, Arthur Wehyee, Eleazar Gbengan, Anita Wonbenyakeh, Betty Jonah, and Martha Partor have made significant life contributions that have moved the spread of the Gospel to the people of the Mano and Gio villages. There are many others, these are simply the ones that this researcher was privileged to interact with in this project.

In June 2010, this researcher sat on a make-shift three legged stool outside of the home of Ma Gbatu. One of the first local pastors of a Mano Baptist church was Old Man Gbatu who went from the Redeemer Church in Camp 4, to become the founding pastor of Repentance Baptist Church in Zolowee. There were many conflicts with culture in those early years. Through it all, Old Man Gbatu was a faithful minister of the Gospel until he passed. Sitting with Ma Gbatu demonstrated that the Gospel had taken hold in that town. The church was still an active part of the community. It had moved from being marginalized as outside of culture, to being an institution of the village and with many followers and adherents of Christ. Twenty years have passed since there was any missionary presence in that region, so the impact and strength of the church was purely the result of local commitment to Christ.

The missionary enterprise initiated a movement towards Christianity through proclamation of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. The local agents took up that Gospel mantle and applied it in a reproductive contextual way within the social structure and system to which they belonged.

The research question was: *How and what influencing factors have led to a movement towards evangelization of the Mano of Northern Liberia and to what extent have the Mano and Gio been evangelized? How have the Mano and Gio responded?*

This research identified those influencing factors and determined that the significant number of indigenous churches and the transformational examples indicate the Gospel has been established and continues to penetrate the Mano and Gio culture. Evangelization seeks to present a contextual, biblical, and theologically relevant Gospel, but unless the culture embraces and reframes it, evangelization has been limited. Among the Mano and Gio, this research demonstrates that the good news has been embraced and reframed in a contextual manner.

When embraced contextually, Christian conversion addresses issues such as social justice, poverty, and the challenges of a secret societal structure. When the missionary enterprise has sought to impose strict denomination polity, the result has been a nominal yield of converts and transformation. After breaking out of some of the denominational limitations, the indigenous churches have been much more effective and Christ-like in their Christian unity. This is not a criticism of the missionary enterprise, but a realization of the movement of process that is necessary and the importance of contextual valuation.

Due to the limited presence of research on the people and region, there was a constant awareness of the need for more sources. This research is a small contribution to a much broader need. Much research remains to be done to provide future documentation of the world and ontological view of the Mano and Gio. There would be great value in an extensive research about the historical view of God, creation, and spiritual beliefs of the Mano and Gio and other people groups of Liberia.

The war has brought many changes to Liberia. Many of the historic institutions were dismantled by the war, taking with them history, knowledge, culture, and influence. A significant sociological consideration would be to observe the new shaping influences that are filling that void for the young people and of those who did not know pre-war Liberia. In that process, considering the role of the church and how it exercises influence would be of preeminent importance.

Finally, missionally, one must consider the continued proclamation of the Gospel among and beyond the Mano and Gio. How has the work of translation continued? Who are the nearest neighbors to whom the Mano and Gio have taken the Gospel? How does the presence of displaced persons in Liberia from neighboring countries enhance the broader movement of the Gospel message? The heart of the evangelization rests with understanding the importance of the Gospel message, the contextual realities of transmission, and the ongoing necessity of translation.

The hope is that the research will contribute to greater awareness of the Mano and Gio, as well as the necessity of evangelization through contextual and translatable means. Through the recording of the transmission of the Gospel to the Mano and Gio, it is the hope that others will be inspired to research and record the movement of God among indigenous groups of Liberia, West Africa, and throughout the world. This historical and missiological discourse is a valuable tool towards that end.

Key to this type of research is the idea of reflective practitioners. One must be able to both practice the ministry of evangelism and at the same time, be able to evaluate and speak to the academic community about those reflections in ways that fit into structures and systems of learning. Osmer (2008:230) encourages the development of portfolios of performance and self-reflection and this researcher hopes that this research contributes from the world of practitioners to the academic scholarship necessary to further theories, patterns, and constructs of missiology.

This researcher is grateful for those who have invested in writing.

APPENDIX

9.1 LOWER NIMBA CHURCHES

Church	Location	Year	Founder	Members ^a	Language
Gray ZlankonwonBC ^b	Gray	1993	Alex Vama	15	Gio
St. Simon BC	Marlay	1994	Alex Vama	10	Gio
Bethel BC	Youlay	1994	Sam Gonkerwon	10	Gio
Toweh Town BF ^c	Toweh Town	2006	John Partor	10	Gio
Hope BC	Kwendein	1952	LBMEC	250	Mano
Union BC	Boyee	1965	Hope BC	100	Mano
Mt. Olive BC	Gokorpa	1957	Charles Barwon	125	Mano
St. Paul BC	Zanzain	1964	Charles Barwon	200	Mano
Good Tiding BC	Nuoepa	1967	Joseph Karzon	80	Gio
Bethlehem BC	Zuolay	2005	Joseph Karzon	10	Gio
Good Master BC	Zuotuo	1985	Joseph Karzon	50	Gio
Mt. Zion BC	Grenpea	1996	Zlankonwon Ass.	50	Gio
Goodness BC	Zeongean	1960	David Doe	250	Gio
Mt. Galilee BC	Volay	1968	Dea. Barlea	50	Gio
Good Shepherd BC	Ziah Town	1975	George Gilla	90	Gio
Gbupea BC	Gbupea Town	1989	St. Paul BC	30	Mano
King James BC	Kennpea	1982	James Nensan	20	Gio
Providence BC	Tapita City	1968	Thomas Harris	220	Gio
Grace BC	Seigbeh Town	1970	Doe Suboe	80	Gio
Evening Star BC	Ziah Old Town	1975	Peter Karyah	100	Gio
St. Luke BC	Voipa	1976	Hope BC	110	Mano
St. John BC	Gotoin	1989	Abraham Gaye	50	Mano
Danpa BC	Danpa	2000	St. Paul Baptist	10	Mano
Emmanuel BC	Gbah	1974	Joseph Korpea	100	Mano
St. Stephen BC	Zikepa	1977	Joseph Korpea	130	Mano
Yarwein BC	Sendin	1978	Joseph Korpea	130	Mano
First BC	Dinglan	1990	Abraham Gaye	50	Mano
Good Samaritan BC	Korlay	1992	Deacon Sergbeah	80	Gio
St. Mark BC	Vanplay	1984	Zlankonwon Asso	80	Gio
Forgiving BC	Gblorglay	1983	Rev. Zahnmie	20	Mano

^a The member category is an estimation of currently attending baptized members to the nearest tens.

^b BC is an abbreviation for Baptist Church.

^c BF is an abbreviation for Baptist Fellowship.

9.2 UPPER NIMBA CHURCHES

Name of Church	Location	Started	Founder	Members	Language
New Jerusalem BC	Bahn City	1990 ^d	n/a	n/a	Mano/Gio
Action BC	Baytonwee	1986	George Senter	20	Mano
Behyipea BC	Behyipea	1989	George Senter	20	Gio
Beawo BC	Beo Bongaplay	1995	Thompson Nyormie	20	Gio
Bethel BC	Burtain Town	2000 ^d	John Partor	n/a	Mano
Menniewah BC	Beo Nyoanplay	1994	Thompson Nyormie	10	Gio
Faith BC	Beo Gbailay	1993	Thompson Nyormie	10	Gio
Goodnews BC	Borten Town	1996	n/a	30	Mano
Bunadin BC	Bunadin	1989	n/a	30	Mano
Redeemer BC	Camp 4	1967	Paul Grossman	70	Mano/Gio
Goodwill BC	Cocopa	1993	Trumpet BC	30	Mano
Star BC	Gbapa	1975	Moses Gbatu	20	Mano
Mt. Duon BC	Gbleah Town	1989	n/a	n/a	Mano
Ganaglay BC	Ganaglay	1995	James Bayogar	20	Gio
Trumpet BC	Ganta	1984	George Senter	200	Mano
Karnplay BC	Karnplay	1982	George Senter	75	Gio
Unity BC	Kpain	1980	George Senter	50	Mano
Kpala BC	Kpala	2002	Goodnews BC	20	Mano
Kpaiplay BF	Kpaiplay	2002	Moses Wonbenyakeh	10	Gio
Goodnews BC	Kpiekpoa	1993	Trumpet BC	20	Mano
Menson BC	Larpea #1	1994	Moses Wonbenyakeh	90	Gio
Leagbala BC	Leagbala	1999	Moses Wonbenyakeh	n/a	Mano
Loelay BC	Loelay	1996	Mark Gonkarnue	10	Gio
Elizabeth Senter BC	Lugbehyee	1977	Earl Williams	30	Mano
Faith BC	Nyansehn	1996	Hastings Gokor	10	Mano
Repentance BC	Saclapea	1995	John Partor	20	Mano/Gio
Ebenezer BC	Sanniquellie	1960 ^d	LBMEC	120	Mano/Gio
Faith BC	Sehyi Geh	1966	Paul Grossman	30	Mano
Yar BC	Tiapa	1995	Goodwill BC	10	Mano
Mt. Nimba BC	Yekepa	1966	Bill Mueller	300	English
Zlankwaker BC	Yoolar	2000	UNBA	10	Mano

^d An estimated figure or date based on the interview or source of information.

There were missions, preaching points, and churches that were not verified information. Villages visited where these were observed included Kailay, Dinplay, Gbaweh, St. Paul Union, and Tartuo.

9.3 CONVERSION SURVEY FORMAT

CONVERSION INTERVIEW

A. Personal Details

Name: _____ Surname: _____

Person completing interview: _____

Location of interview: _____

Gender:

Male _____ Female _____

Age:

20 – 29 _____

30 – 39 _____

40 - 49 _____

50 – 59 _____

60 – 69 _____

70 – 79 _____

80 + _____

Education: (Highest level completed)

Primary (Grade 1 – 8) _____

Secondary (Grade 9 – 12) _____

University / Bible College _____

Seminary _____

Other _____

Marital Status:

Married _____ Single _____ Widowed _____ Divorced _____ Children _____

Ethnic Origin:

Mano _____ Gio _____

B. Interview Instructions

Please interview person(s) regarding their conversion experience and transcribe the information on the survey form. Key information might be, but not limited to: Place and date of conversion experience; Influencing persons or factors in conversion; Changes that resulted from the conversion experience; Circumstances such as life factors or the involvement of a local church. How did conversion impact person's role or relationship within the village? The goal is to write the narrative of the person being interviewed, recording information used to evaluate conversion patterns. Information will remain confidential and only content will be part of final research.

C. Interview Questions

Ask the participant to share about their conversion experience. (Conversion experience may not be clear and the interviewer may use other expressions of this experience such as "how did you become a Christian?")

Explanation: The goal of the survey is to seek to identify what the person understands to be the source or cause of their salvation and what they believe about how their own conversion experience. Indicate the key terms used by the individual to describe his or her conversion. As they share, ask additional questions from the list below as needed to get more clarification.

When and where did your conversion happen?

Who were influencing persons or factors towards your conversion?

What changes in your life resulted from your conversion experience?

Did you become involved with a local church?

Were you baptized? If so, by what church and what method?

How did your conversion affect your relationships in the village?

9.4 PERSONAL DETAILS

Gender Identification:		
	Male	24
	Female	14
Age Categories:		
	70+	4
	60+	3
	50+	9
	40+	10
	30+	9
	20+	3
Marital Status:		
	Married	32
	Single	6
	Divorced	0
Educational Level:		
	None	4
	Primary	6
	Secondary	21
	Post-Secondary	7
Conversion Date:		
	Pre-1970	2
	1970s	4
	1980s	13
	1990s	15
	2000s	4

9.5 PERSONS INFLUENCING CONVERSION

CODE ^e	Date	Missionary	Minister	Friend	Family	Person	Event
CS01	1995		Pastor		Husband		Visit
CS02	1994		Pastor				
CS03	1987		Evangelist				
CS04	1980			Friend			Conference
CS05	1987		Pastor				
CS06	1995			Friend			
CS07	1993						Holy Spirit
CS08	1994		Pastor				
CS09	1984		Pastor				
CS10	1992						Church
CS11	1982					Elder	
CS12	1986	Missionary					
CS13	1971				Parents	Lady / Church	
CS14	1982	Missionary	Pastor				
CS15	1978					Teacher	
CS16	1954			Friend		Deacon	
CS17	2009			Friend			
CS18	1986	Missionary	Pastor	Friend			
CS19	2004		Pastor				
CS20	1991		Pastor's wife				
CS21	1982		Evangelist				
CS22	1982				Grand-father		
CS23	1952						Church
CS24	1998			Friend			
CS25	2000					Ev. Team	Ev. Visit
CS26	1972		Pastor		Wife		
CS27	1980						Revival
CS28	1994						Dream
CS29	1999						Bible
CS30	1994			Friend			
CS31	1996		Pastor	Friend			

^e Each survey was assigned a code # (CS01). The code is consistent through the appendix as it relates to the individual surveyed. Coding protects the privacy of the survey participant.

CS32	1995				Grand-mother	Member	Dream
CS33	2003		Pastor	Friend			
CS34	1986		Pastor				
CS35	1985			Friend			Church
CS36	1976				Father		
CS37	1997				Daughter		Death
CS38	1990			Friend			

9.6 THEOLOGY OF CONVERSION: PERSONAL RESPONSE

Code	Personal	Public Expression
CS01	I was able to pray and invite Jesus into my life	Immersion. When the message was preached, I went forth to receive Christ
CS02	He taught me the salvation prayer and I was able to pray and invite Christ into my life	Immersion. I raised my hand to receive Christ. I was baptized
CS03		
CS04	I heard the Gospel preached and received Jesus for myself. I wanted to follow Him and accept salvation	Immersion; I was baptized in 1980
CS05		Immersion
CS06	I realized I was not a Christian and I decided to receive the Lord Jesus. I prayed the sinner's prayer	
CS07	I prayed and invited Christ into my life	Immersion
CS08	I confessed my sin and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior through prayer	Immersion
CS09	By receiving Jesus as my Lord and Savior. He died for my sins and that through Him, my sins are forgiven	Immersion
CS10	I admitted my sin, prayed and asked Jesus into my heart	Immersion
CS11	I prayed the sinner's prayer that I am a sinner and I asked Jesus to forgive me and come in my heart and live there, to take control of my life	Immersion
CS12	Conversion to me is giving your life to Jesus; ask him to forgive you and take away all your sins. This happened in the home of my parents	Immersion
CS13	I confessed my sins, inviting Jesus into my heart. Now, Jesus controls my life	Immersion
CS14	After I was witnessed to, I was convicted and knew that I was a sinner. My relationship with Jesus makes me to know I am a Christian	Immersion
CS15	I openly recited the sinner pray as those who want to accept Christ	I was one of those who received Jesus

CS16	I told the interpreter I wanted to receive Christ and he prayed for me and that is how I became a follower	Immersion
CS17	I was there to receive Jesus and be saved. A woman led me in saying the prayer of salvation	I told the Pastor I wanted to receive Jesus
CS18	I confessed my sin to God and asked Jesus to come into my heart. He came into my heart and made me a new person	I went through the water and was baptized
CS19		Immersion
CS20		Immersion
CS21		Immersion
CS22	One old man led me to Christ; to turn away from all wrong and to trust Jesus	Immersion
CS23	I expressed my desire to receive Christ	
CS24	I prayed and invited the Spirit of God into my life	Immersion
CS25	Repent, confess, and asking Him in prayer into my life	Immersion
CS26	I gave my life to Christ that day	Immersion
CS27	I knew I was a sinner and repeated the sinner's prayer invited Jesus into my heart to be my Lord and Savior	Immersion
CS28	I prayed and invited Christ into my life myself	Altar call, public confession
CS29	I was able to pray and invite Jesus into my life	Immersion; I openly made profession of faith
CS30	I received Jesus by inviting Him as my Lord and Savior.	Immersion
CS31	I believe that my conversion means that I have believed the good news of Jesus Christ and that I repented of my sins and accepted Jesus as Savior	Immersion
CS32	I stood and told the church that I had been going to church, but when I look inside myself, I haven't received Jesus. I prayed and invited the Lord Jesus into my life	Immersion
CS33	I was then led by Ojuku who guided me in receiving Jesus as my Lord and Savior	Immersion
CS34	I felt convicted and prayed and invited Christ into my life	Immersion
CS35	I became a Christian by leaving my old ways and old things and living for Christ	Immersion
CS36	She then prayed the sinner's prayer and I repeated the same after her and that is how I became a Christian	Immersion (At a conference in Garplay)
CS37	She told me the only way that included me was to give my life to Him - I did so the same day	Immersion
C38	I asked Jesus to forgive me of my sins and I received salvation	Immersion

9.7 THEOLOGY OF CONVERSION: PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

Code	Perception of others	Sin issues	Life changes
CS01	People count on me to settle disputes in their homes	Stopped fornicating; gossiping; making palava	Reading Bible in dialect; rearing children
CS02	My mother-in-law no longer accused me of various things	Stopped selling tobacco and liquor	
CS03		Saved me from immorality; drunkenness	Stopped being chief Zoe of Poro; sharing Christ w/ people
CS04		Changed things I was doing	Changed my attitude
CS05	Using me to make peace amongst the villagers	No more drinking; reduced desire for immorality	Married the woman I was living with
CS06	Joy to friends in family because no longer a drunk; was a shame and disgrace	Renowned drunk; used to sell alcohol, tobacco	Conduct family devotions; my children listen to me; great joy in my family
CS07		Worldly pleasures, prostitution, drunkenness	Ever since that time, the Lord is using me to do many things
CS08			Faithfulness, leadership, and contentment
CS09			Encouraging most of my friends
CS10		Stopped drinking, smoking	Since my conversion, ten other persons have been converted
CS11		The Lord has helped me from spirit of disobedience, fighting, stealing, and bad thoughts	I am no more living life I used to live and helping people know Christ
CS12		Quitting illegal relationship	Made my relationship right with my boyfriend; happily married
CS13	Through my lifestyle, others have come to know Christ		
CS14	People who knew me before, realize my life is not the same		I am able to teach, preach and counsel people
CS15	My conversion impressed my people	I used to cheat, steal, and was very selfish	My life is now a happy one with my family
CS16		I used to fight for my husband, was very jealous, and abused my children	My conversion led me to reconcile with my sister-in-law who I used to hate badly
CS17		I used to be very greedy and fussy	My conversion has helped me and my husband to become free handed (giving) and generous
CS18	I became a new person in attitude, behavior, and activities		I became a good child at home, in community, and my life has been dominated by godly things
CS19	People are surprised at my life change and listen to my witness		

CS20		I am not drinking, fornicating; Christ has saved me from anger	I have helped start a church in Tartua, a nearby village
CS21		The Lord saved me from being a drunk, abusing and insulting my neighbors, trouble making	Encouraging people to come to church; I am now the pastor of this church
CS22		Stopped drinking, smoking	My husband was able to pay the bride price and the ceremony was a message
CS23	I prayed to keep one wife and this spoke of my commitment	I was a polygamist; practiced juju or African science	I prayed to keep one wife and now I have only one
CS24		I used to be harsh and fussy	God has made me a friendly person; I helped my mother to become a Christian
CS25		I no longer make country medicine and not involved in fornication and other things	I did house evangelism and some people became convicted to follow Christ
CS26	My friends can rely on me for settling domestic disputes		
CS27		I was an alcoholic, but my life is changed	I led more than 75 persons to the Lord
CS28		I never used to forgive, but now I do; Had a hot temper, but now it is controllable	I have become the key decision maker and the one to lead my family in prayer
CS29	My conversion has brought my brothers and sisters to the Lord	I used to sell my body for money; I loved material things	
CS30		I was an alcoholic, but my life is changed	I brought people to follow Jesus in my village
CS31		My ways of life have changed	I learned how to share Christ with people in my village
CS32		I used to drink and stay out late	My conversion has led women and children to Christ
CS33	My parents felt joyful; friends afraid of me, accepted me	I was very abusive and rude until I met Jesus	
CS34	People could see how Jesus changed my life		
CS35		The Lord saved me from dinking, stealing, immorality	I have been sharing the Word of God with them
CS36	My parents are happy that I no longer steal and lie	I used to lie and steal heavily	
CS37	My conversion is still a wonder to most of my friends	I was a member of the Alladura involved in traditional worship	Two of my many friends have come to know the Lord
C38		I was afraid in the war and witchcraft, but no longer afraid	I became a leader among the people

9.8 THEOLOGY OF CONVERSION: BELIEF STATEMENTS

Code	Belief	Sin and Damnation	Freedom / Joy	Transformation
CS01		Being saved means to be saved from hell fire	I am no longer under the power of sin	
CS02		I am no longer under bondage	I see myself as a free person	I am living a new life
CS03	To believe the Word			Turn your back on old ways; love people
CS04	Jesus is the one who gives salvation			
CS05	I believe Christ died for my sins			I should not sin anymore
CS06			There is great joy in my life, family	Conducting family devotions, parenting
CS07		Be delivered from power of dark world		Helping others to become like me
CS08				
CS09	He died for my sins; forgiven through Him			
CS10				
CS11				I asked Jesus to take control of my life
CS12	Conversion is giving your life to Jesus			
CS13				Jesus controls my life
CS14	To have Jesus as center of your life			
CS15			For me to be save means freedom	My life now is happy one with my family
CS16	To be saved is God's grace, salvation			God's grace, salvation, healing, total trust
CS17	Conscious of Christ's presence		I realize salvation means total freedom	I began to experience change in my life
CS18	Christ died on the cross for my sin	I was a sinner on the way to hell		Christ made me new person; live daily for Him
CS19	Someone whose life has been transformed by God and forgiven			Transformed from wrong doing; forgiven
CS20	One who has been born again			Directed by the Holy Spirit, to serve God
CS21				Change my way and come to Christ

CS22	To be saved is to turn away from wrong and trust Jesus			
CS23	My conviction as a Christian		Total freedom	Joy of being in fellowship of believer
CS24	To be saved means to be a child of God			I don't do bad things anymore; I follow Jesus
CS25	Jesus died for my sins on the cross and was raised from dead			Repent and confess Jesus as Lord
CS26	To be saved is turning my life to Jesus			
CS27			Salvation is to be free from sin	
CS28		I had a dream that I saw hell; that started my conviction		I share my testimony with others
CS29			Salvation for me means total freedom	I feel bad about life I used to live; now freedom
CS30	Being a Christian means living for Christ			I no longer live by myself, but am living for Christ
CS31	Believe, repent and accept Jesus			
CS32	Being saved tells me of the greatness of Jesus Name			I am experiencing many things because of power of Jesus name
CS33	Salvation means eternal life		Salvation is to be free from bondage of sin	
CS34	Jesus died to show God's love to me	I am saved from punishment of sin	Salvation means I am free	I must work hard for others to become like me in Christ
CS35	To be saved means to teach others to know Christ			
CS36				To teach others to know Christ; stop doing evil
CS37	The death of Jesus on the cross for the sin included me			I can tell friends of my everlasting life in Jesus
CS38	I knew Bible was true; I am child of God			

9.9 THEOLOGY OF CONVERSION: CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

Code	Church, community of faith	Circumstances	Other
CS01	My commitment to local church	My husband invited me to church	I am learning to read the dialect Bible
CS02	I am leading the flock of God		The pastor visited my home
CS03	I go to church regularly; love people		I am learning the Mano Bible
CS04		Invited to attend conference at Inland Church	I attended the mission school
CS05			
CS06	I always come to church with my whole family	Invited to attend Mensonn Baptist Church	
CS07	I joined a church called Protestant Baptist Mission	My conversion started when Taylor ordered my arrest, but I escaped	
CS08	Joined the church		
CS09	Become Christian and in the Baptist Church		
CS10		Open air preaching service in my town	
CS11			
CS12	Baptized and serve at Mt Nimba Baptist Church	Visit from Mid-Baptist missionary	
CS13	Discipled through Bible study, church conferences		
CS14	Regular Bible teaching		
CS15	Started going to church		Saved through Sunday School lesson and teacher
CS16			Taught Bible stories and how to read dialect Bible
CS17		Visited Mensonn Baptist	
CS18	United with Mt. Nimba Baptist Church		Listed four churches he has now been member of as he moved
CS19	Try to go to church, serve God		
CS20			I started a church in nearby village, Tartua
CS21	I am now pastor of this church		
CS22			Went to church for many years without knowing Christ
CS23	I feel joy being in fellowship of believers		I was living on the Garplay Mission Compound

CS24	Participated in youth meetings, choir		During outreach service conducted by Inland Church
CS25	Discipled by one man in the church		
CS26		Salvation came as a result of broken marriage	Fluently reading and teaching dialect (Mano) Bible
CS27	Faith Baptist - Sehyi Geh		Led 75 people to Christ
CS28	Keep attending church services and Bible studies	Husband invited me to church	Saw hell fire in a dream
CS29		Made profession of faith at funeral service	Went to church for many years without knowing Christ
CS30			
CS31	Attend church regularly, also worship		
CS32			I used to go to church but never became a Christian
CS33	Attend church regularly	My brother died and one pastor visited me	My mother used to take me to church as a child
CS34			I used to go to church but I never accepted Christ
CS35			
CS36	Now I am a Sunday School teacher in my church		I was saved at a conference in Garplay and baptized
CS37	United with Mt. Nimba Baptist Church		Sunday School, Women's home Bible study, prayer meetings
CS38	Attend church and Bible study regularly		

9.10 KISSI MONEY



9.11 MANO CREATION ACCOUNT^f

Wala created man. When he had created a number of men he appointed one of them to be the big man (chief). When this man talked, nobody was supposed to oppose him. After some time, the big man went to Wala complaining that others did not listen to him. He asked Wala to give him somebody to help. Wala answered, "I hear." Then he went and collected seedlings from all the crops that were coming up and out of them he created woman. He gave the woman to the big man who immediately told her to go for water. The woman refused saying that she had just arrived and was tired. The big man again went to Wala to complain. Wala listened, but told him to go back to the woman.

When the big man was back, Wala told water to take care of the people. The people began to complain, saying that if Wala was going to rule them, they might fall into it and be drowned. Wala then told wind to rule them. Again they protested, they said that wind could cause trees to fall and hurt them. Wala then gave them to fire but the people refused maintaining that fire could destroy everything. Wala then told the big man and his wife to go to Wala's farm where dog was going to take care of them. The other were told to stay in Wala's town.

Wala told them not to eat any of the crops on the farm. However, they were not going to starve, because whenever any animals entered the farm, dog would take care of these and they were allowed to eat the animals. Whenever dog caught an animal, the man and his wife would cook the meat together with something of what was growing on the farm. Without their knowledge, dog went to Wala and reported this. Wala answered: "You just take care of them!"

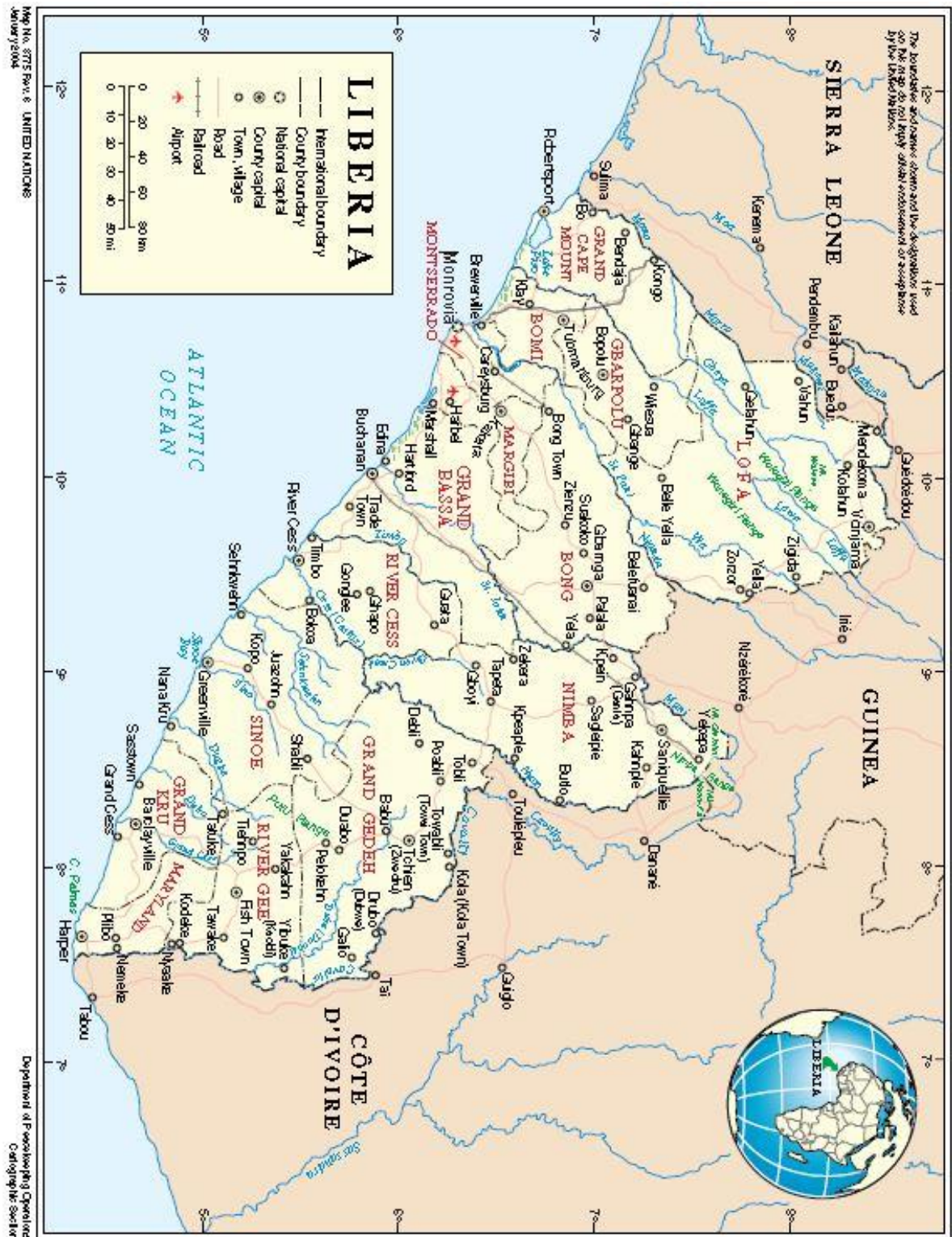
While they were staying on the farm, the woman became pregnant and delivered a child. Dog went to Wala and reported that the two now were three. "A small one is there too!" The woman gave birth to more children and eventually there were also grandchildren in the family. Then one day, Wala visited them on the farm. He told them that since they had not obeyed his rule not to eat any of the crops on his farm, they were all going to die (become mortal). The reason why he had told them not to eat any of the crops was for them to have a long life like a rock.

The people became afraid of the dog since they realized he reported them to Wala. They decided to kill the dog. When they had done so, the dog's spirit

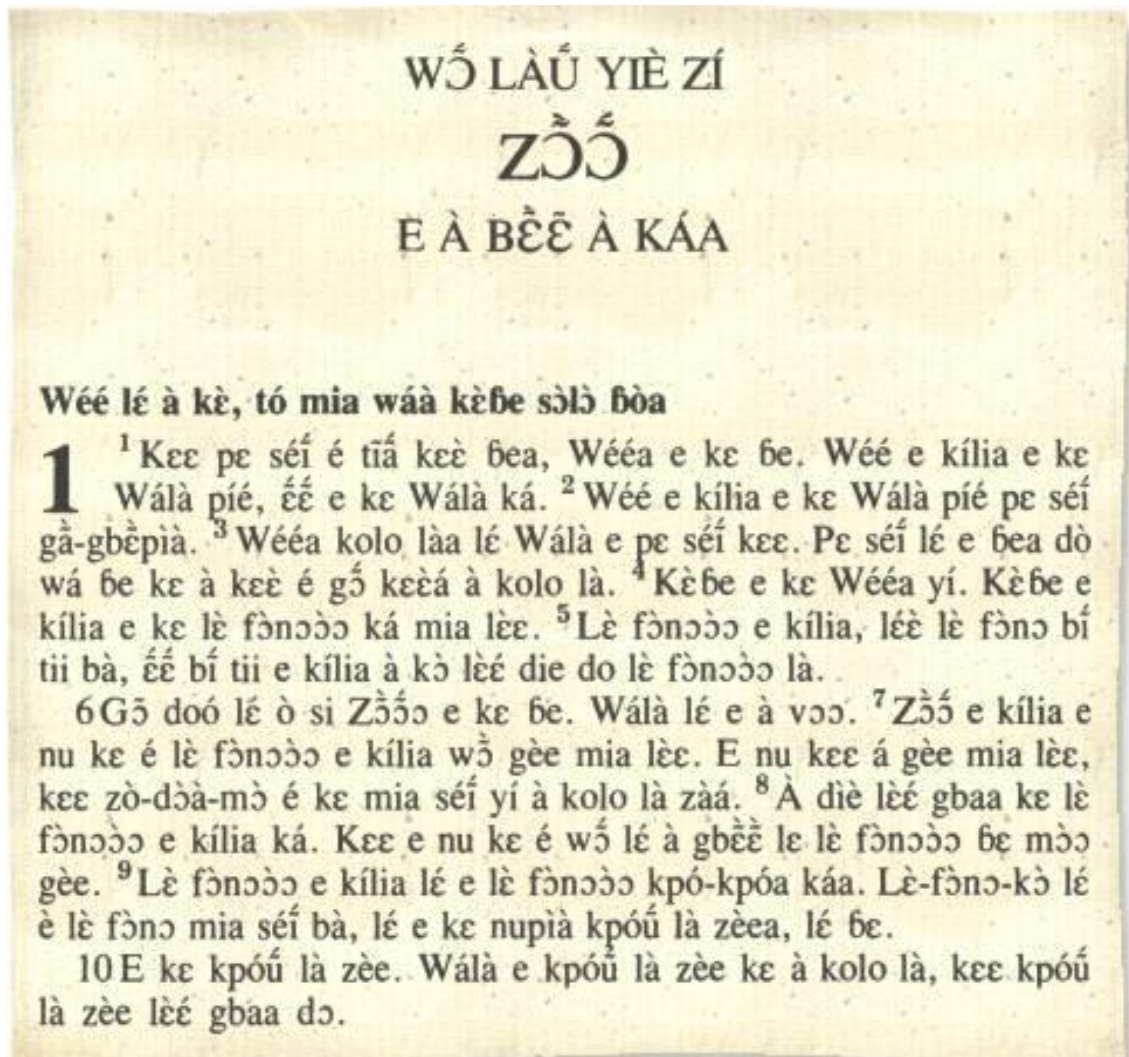
^f This account of the creation of man and original death was collected in the town of New Gbapa (Zetterstrom 1976:80-81).

went to Wala and reported what had happened. Wala again went to the farm and asked the people where the dog was. They lied saying they did not know since it had run away. Wala told them that he knew that they had killed the dog. All the time, the dog was standing behind Wala but the people could not see him. Wala told them that from now on, dog was not going to do any farm work for them and they were not be allowed to eat or to sacrifice with dog. When they had guests or wanted to make a sacrifice they should kill a chicken instead. The only thing dog was allowed to do for them was hunting and society business. All of this happened in *lei 'up'* – *i.e.* in the sky where Wala lives.”

9.12 MAP OF LIBERIA



9.13 FRAGMENT OF MANO BIBLE



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