

EVANGELIZING AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION MIGRANTS IN URBAN CONTEXTS IN WEST AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE

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In 1978 this writer experienced an unforgettable encounter with a then recent convert to Islam in Freetown, Sierra Leone, West Africa. The following conversation stirred a marked personal interest in the rural migrant's exposure to urban Islam and gave birth to a concern for methods the church could employ to bring the adherents of African Traditional Religion to faith in Christ.

As this Muslim's story unfolded, curiosity gave way to genuine interest: why had this recent migrant from up country become a convert? "Why did you leave your African Traditional belief and become a Muslim?" the writer asked. He replied, "I was attracted to a group of Muslims who came together every evening to pray at a place beside a wall paralleling the road near my home. I began to listen to their prayers. They asked me if I would like to join them and I did. Now I am a Muslim" (Interview:1978).

The Problem

The challenge facing the church in urban evangelism in Africa has not gone unnoticed. Marion Birch, a second generation Wesleyan missionary in Sierra Leone, has made this comment: "Many up country African Traditional adherents are drawn to Islam when they migrate to the urban centers" (Interview:1978). Similarly, Don McCurry, founder of Ministries to Muslims, stated that "Muslim evangelism of African Traditional believers who move into the cities is one of the hottest issues right now in West Africa. The church has not yet awakened to this opportunity" (Interview:1991).

Statistics indicate that Islam is spreading rapidly in West Africa (Clarke 1982:259). According to John Mbiti, Muslims living in Africa in

1984 were estimated to be two hundred eleven million. He has estimated the rate of increase to be about 2.5 percent every year. This rate parallels the natural increase of population in Africa (Mbiti 1991:186).¹ What are some of the reasons? Is there a link between the growth of Islam and urbanization?

Along with the growth of the population in general, urbanization in West Africa also continues to increase significantly. Africa, which was 20 percent urban in 1960, is projected to be 39 percent by 2000 A.D. and as much as 54 percent urban by 2025 (Zanotelli 1988:278). A United Nations Report states that Africa has the world's highest urbanization growth rates, averaging about 4.6 percent per year through the 1970s.² Alex Zanotelli, a Comboni missionary and former editor of *Nigrizia Magazine* predicted that

urbanization combined with high population growth rates will lead to dramatic increase of Africa's urban population and create slums, where 70-80 percent of urban population will likely be living in the future, according to some experts. These conditions present a direct challenge to the mission of the church in the world. If the church, and in particular, its pastoral agents could discover a way to the poor, the way to the slums, it would then become more dynamic and more effective (1988:280-284).

The question arises: How may the church best respond to this reality?

Methodology

This study examines the rapid urbanization in Africa and a number of its causative factors. In addition, the paper explores the

¹ Mbiti states that Islam has dominance in approximately one-third of Africa, covering the Saharan region and north of it, as well as the northeastern strip of Africa including the whole of present Somalia. He cites strong Muslim minorities in some parts of Uganda, the Durban area, Ethiopia, Nalawi, Mozambique and Tanzania, the Coast ad Sierra Leone and Chad (199:185).

² *The Global Report on Human Settlements* (1986) was released in Nairobi in 1987. The *Report* was prepared by the United Nations Center for Human Settlements (Habitat) based in Nairobi and as a whole reflects serious concerns about the trends of urbanization in the world.

socio-cultural dynamics involved in the rural, community-oriented migrant's adjustment into urban life in an effort to provide an understanding of the worldview of the recently-arrived urbanite. Also, the research led to an examination of the socio-cultural characteristics of the rural, African Traditionalist.

The thesis of this paper focuses upon the need of the church to awaken to the plight of the rural migrant and offers some suggestions for effective urban evangelism in order to win these receptive people before they become assimilated into Islam.

Characteristics of the universal religions, Islam and Christianity became a part of this research in an effort to find where these traits might parallel African Traditional Religion. Further exploration led to an appraisal of the socio-cultural-religious systems of these three groups in an effort to discover how Islam and Christianity may identify with the African Traditional migrants and minister to their needs. Finally, a comparison is made of several parallel cultural concepts that provide contextual means to meet migrant needs. A case study of the Wesleyan Church in Freetown, Sierra Leone, demonstrates how the home cell ministry utilizes cultural parallels in developing projects to meet community needs which may bring families into the body of Christ.

The writer conducted eight interviews with representatives from four West African nations: Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Gambia.

Urbanization

Before an evangelization strategy can be designed that will reach the rural migrant, several factors need consideration:

- 1) The cultural context of the ruralite who has become an urbanite,
- 2) The world view of these African neo-urbanites, and
- 3) The core culture that will direct their search for identity and fulfillment.

As a backdrop for understanding, we look at the term urbanization.

Definition of Urbanization. A definition that goes beyond a traditional demographic concept of urbanization, as reflected in the

statistics of a city, serves to clarify the term. Aylward Shorter offers this concise description: “Urbanization is a form of social consciousness” (1991:7), which echoes Kenneth Little’s definition: “By urbanization is meant the process whereby people acquire material and non-material elements of culture, behavior patterns and ideas that originate in, or are distinctive of, the city” (1974:7). Shorter (1991:26) believes that for the ruralite migrant, contact with urban life affects his/her thinking and culture. As a result of this social change, modern Africans find themselves disoriented. They feel the need to keep in contact with their traditional or root culture; yet they also see the need to redefine their traditions in the context of modernization.

For many of Africa’s urban dwellers today, their social consciousness reflects their village roots and traditional beliefs much more than does modern or educated urban thinking. However, these new urban dwellers possess an openness toward change which is significant for evangelism. Shorter reminds the reader that “the ultimate focus of the urban migrant remains rural” (1991:16). This is due largely to the more recent and rapid rise of rural migration to the urban centers as urban growth factors.

Urban Growth. Urban growth represents the physical aspect of urbanization and refers to the number of people actually living in urban areas (Shorter 1991:7).

Rate of Growth. Urbanization is a universal phenomenon today, particularly true in Africa. Little states in his book, *Some Contemporary Trends in African Urbanization*, that “one of the most significant features of modern Africa is the flight of people from their own countryside” (1966:65). As noted earlier in this text, Africa has the world’s highest urbanization growth rates, which averaged 4.6 percent per year through the 1970s. This is most significant when one considers that in 1960, Africa, the least urbanized region in the world, had only 20 percent. Urbanization jumped to 27 percent by 1980 and is expected to reach 39 percent by 2000 and 54 percent by 2025. Eastern and Western sectors of Africa have the highest annual rates of growth for urban populations on the continent and have the fastest growing cities in the world. The rural-to-urban migration factor figures significantly in the growth of these towns and cities, whereas in northern and southern Africa natural population increase primarily accounts for urban growth (Zanotelli

1988:280-81). When one considers that 70-80 percent of the overall population of Africa currently lives in the rural areas (Mbiti 1991:191), the potential for urban growth through migration is staggering.

Effect on Towns and Cities. Rapid urbanization in Africa has generally been accompanied by even more rapid growth of large towns, according to Zanotelli. Seven percent of the population lived in cities in 1985, but urban growth in cities is expected to increase 20 percent by the year 2000 and is expected to increase by 34 percent by the year 2025 (Zanotelli 1988:281).³ Shorter states that the population growth rate in Africa is among the world's highest, but that Africa's urban growth rate is generally twice as high as the world average (1991:8).

Shorter shows the effects of this as follows:

In 1970 Africa had only seven cities of more than one million people. If present trends continue, by the end of the century it will have 95 such cities, five of them with more than five million inhabitants. In 1970, in addition to the big cities just mentioned, there were 137 towns of 100,000 or more. If these present trends continue, by the end of the century there will be 692 towns. This combination of fewer cities with high urban growth rates implies a staggering growth of existing towns—towns doubling, tripling, even quadrupling their size in every decade. It also implies the mushrooming of new towns, the spread of an urban network throughout the countryside—villages and trading centers turning into towns before one's eyes (1991:8).

This projected increase in population growth indicates extensions of urban growth along the trade routes into the interior, which in turn shows the close link between the urban-rural communities. Shorter believes there is a sense in which whole African countries are becoming "peri-urbanized" (1991:19).

Cities are spread relatively evenly across Africa except for the Copperbelt, an area 70 by 30 miles in Zambia, and southwestern Nigeria (O'conner 1983:42). These two areas are heavily populated. O'Conner

³ Zanotelli bases many of his statements on the *Global Report on Human Settlements* (1986).

remarks, “the significance of the urbanization process in tropical Africa is enhanced by the fact that the cities exert all kinds of influence out of all proportion to their modest size” (1983:16).

Factors Contributing to Urbanization

Opportunity. The city provides a huge and diverse market which attracts such ventures as industry, trade, banking, education, entertainment, communications, administration and government (Shorter 1991:9-11). The rural population for many generations has been moving toward migration because of the education system. Schools were established by missions and the government throughout rural areas. The youth, who have been increasingly trained, turn to the urban centers to apply their education and seek for a higher standard of living. Gideon Sjoberg in his work recognized this trend: “The fact that ruralites continue to flock to the large cities suggests that the urban communities are providing those people with certain advantages not found in the village” (1965:223). The Wesleyan Church in Sierra Leone counts among its members over a thousand youth and families who have migrated to Freetown in the 1960s and early 1970s (Birch Interview:1978).

Hopelessness and Poverty. In addition to opportunity seekers, many people are forced to flee to the cities when drought and warfare affect the countryside (Shane 1989:39). In addition, the increasing trend today is for Africans to bring their families to town, which causes faster urbanization, as the ratio of women and children to men changes in urban contexts (Wilson 1961:103). However, in general, as O’conner points out, more children and older people still remain in the country than do those who migrate to the city. The most numerous among age groups in the cities are the young adults between the ages of 20-29, but this is changing. This trend makes single family households much more common (1983: 81, 83).

The Female Factor. As noted, women migrating to urban centers contribute to urbanization. Women naturally follow their men to urban areas, and the men follow the financial opportunities. Some women as well as men migrate because they want to break with the constraints of confinement and control placed on them by their traditional society. Also marital troubles spawn a desire for escape (Shorter 1991:17; Little 1974:25).

The Age Factor. Youth flock to cities in search of work. Shorter concludes, “the search for casual employment is the chief occupation of the young migrant to an African town” (1991:12). The opportunity factor draws ruralites like a magnet. In looking at the structure of an African town as to age, Shorter gives the following overview:

Around 85 percent are under the age of thirty with young adults between the age of twenty and twenty-nine accounting for 30 percent. Adults in their thirties and forties constitute ten percent, while the over fifties are a mere five percent (1991:12).

These are a few of the many factors that draw people to urban centers. The living conditions that await these opportunity seekers are another matter for consideration.

Living Conditions. What kind of living conditions will these rural migrants find in the urban centers? Since they have had very modest living standards and generally are without many resources, they will be forced to live simply. This probably accounts for the fact that many West African cities are still rural in orientation in contrast to modern Western cities (Little 1974:12-13). Estimates, according to this standard, place most of these masses on the poverty scale. At present, in the big cities 40-50 percent of the urban population are living in slums, in shanties, in sub-human conditions with some experts forecasting that as much as seventy-to-eighty percent of the urban population of Africa will be living in these conditions in the future (Zanotelli 1988:281).

Shorter attests that urbanization is the most important social reality in Africa today and that Christian evangelization must take full account of it (1991:1). However, as one looks at this potential for evangelism and conversion in this urban milieu, one discovers that Islam rather than Christianity has the advantage. Islam poses a strong attraction to the rural migrant; many become Muslims. Christianity has not drawn nearly as many. Why?

In an effort to understand the cultural dynamic at work in these bodies, this paper focuses on the major characteristics of the two universal religions, Islam and Christianity and how these affect rural migrants in the urban context. Similarities and differences between these religions suggest at what points the natural attractions lie. Also, the

research highlights significant characteristics of urban living which serve to draw attention to the needs of the migrant. A grasp of these factors helps prepare the church for migrant ministry.

Islam in Urban Contexts

Islam adapts to the urban context, and attracts followers in this setting. Even Islam itself in the Seventh Century impacted urbanization because its genesis in Arabia was experiencing an urbanizing movement.⁴ One explanation is that Islam's African genesis and propagation was in the trading community. Islam came into Africa via the trade routes and first took root in the trading centers and courts of the chiefs. In West Africa, the first Islamic contacts date to the eighth century (Clarke 1982:1). Levtzion states that the term "trader" and "Muslim" became almost synonymous in the Sahel and Savannah region of Ghana as traders tended to become Muslim (1979:209). However, Davidson commenting on basic causes for early conversion to Islam in West Africa describes it somewhat differently. He says,

Islam, for some of those who embraced it, was seen as a highly prestigious religion. Muslims were literate; they had wide-ranging diplomatic contacts, a formal system of education and a simple but effective legal system. They were a modernizing force with the skills essential for the efficient administration of expanding, developing states or empires (1966:98).

Clarke says that by 1600, "Islam's main strength was among the privileged classes, the rulers, the administrators, the scholars and the merchants. It was confined to the urban centers in very many parts of West Africa with the western Sahara being the exception. The mass of the people in the rural areas had remained virtually untouched (1982:71). However, Clarke points out that Islam continued to expand in the 17th and 18th centuries as literally thousands of Muslim communities, even though some were no doubt small and very temporary, were established along the trade routes and in the commercial centers (1982:108).

⁴ Shahid, *Pre-Islamic Arabia*, Cambridge History of Islam.

Shorter explains that Islam has its own historic urban tradition on the East and West African coasts and on the southern fringes of the Sahara. Shorter states that Islam feels more at home in the urban center than does Christianity (1991:2). But during the advent of Western colonization, which gave birth to new towns, new forms of government and educational systems, Islam was confronted with a rival with conflicting ideologies and the Christian religion. As a result, Christianity became the faith of the elite in the coastal urban centers and Islam became the religion of the poorer majority. Moreover, even in the interior, all towns took on a Muslim tinge, even in the midst of complete pagan village culture (Trimingham 1968:104).

The following characteristics of urban Islam in West Africa offer a concise description of Muslim practices that provide contact points for the rural migrant who comes from an African Traditional religious context.

- 1) Islam offers a strong sense of community. The tenets of Islamic faith tend to mold Islamic adherents into a very strong community. Islam uses a variety of practices such as observance of the five pillars, use of a common calendar, acceptance of the clergy as guides of conduct, and the operation of the Qur'anic village school. All of these practices contribute to unifying features of Islam (Trimingham 1968:56). A participant enters into identification with and bonding to the group.
- 2) Islam reaches out to embrace strangers and meet their needs. Muslims like to perform good works which they believe will please God. Alms-giving (Zakat) is one of the five pillars of Islam and means to purify one's position, helping one to get into heaven (Loum 1992).⁵ This coercive measure, plus the strong sense of sharing derived from communal living, provides Islam with strong incentive for compulsive benevolence.
- 3) The Islamic community will give assistance in times of need such as in death or sickness. The community helps bury the corpse.

⁵ Rev. John Loum graduated from Sierra Leone Bible College and has done advanced studies in Islam, holding a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Islamic studies. He works with the project for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa and serves as the area advisor for Sierra Leone as well as regional coordinator.

Muslim burial, carried out on the day of death, has a simple and inexpensive ritual. The body is wrapped in a sheet and placed on a mat in the ground. The community will also help the grieving family by providing food and assisting with expenses. When sickness attacks a member, the community will collect an offering to help. An Islamic group in the northern provinces of Sierra Leone called *Basaliya* comes when the family has a problem or death, bringing their cooking pots, rice, and wood, and everything to sympathize with the family. They will not let the family give a single cent (Turay 1992:Interview).⁶

- 4) Islamic community members own many apartments and dwellings. Muslims will offer their residences to migrants.
- 5) The Islamic community owns many businesses and is involved in trade. Therefore members can offer employment to migrants. Trade continues to be a primary means of spreading Islam just as it was a key factor from its genesis in Africa (Levtzion 1979:211).
- 6) Islamic dress draws attention and respect. Muslims attire in long flowing robes in a very modest, clean, proud-appearing manner. This places them before the people in a very visible and attractive way (Turay, Loum Interviews:1992).
- 7) Islam takes the fears of the people very seriously. Amulets are given to ward off evil (Forson Interview:1991).⁷ Levtzion cites

⁶ Rev. Bobson Turay was raised in the Muslim faith in Sierra Leone and converted to Christianity during his high school days. He is a graduate of the Sierra Leone Bible College, an ordained elder in the Wesleyan Church of Sierra Leone, and presently serves as the General Director of Evangelism and Church Growth. Rev. Turay pioneered the Kissy Dock Yard Church and began the home cell ministry there. This church had 19 active home cells weekly in 1992. He also serves as an officer in the Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone. He has done additional studies in the Philippines. Turay began a Christian Development program when he pastored the Kissy Dockyard Church which assists people in need with loans, clothing, food, medical care, scholarships, housing, etc. This program has been very effective in winning the poor to Christ (*Wesleyan District Conference Journal*, 1989: 38).

⁷ Mathias Forson is an ordained elder in the Methodist Church in Ghana, West Africa. He did graduate study at Emory University and completed the Doctor of Missiology degree at Asbury Theological Seminary in 1993, writing his dissertation on *Split-Level Christianity in Africa: A Study of the Persistence of Traditional Religious Beliefs and Practices Among the Akan Methodists of Ghana*.

Islamic religious power as a primary reason for its appeal, second only to trade. He concludes that this is why the African chiefs at the first contact were attracted to Islam. They were inclined to seek the Muslim amulets and their prayers (1978:210).

- 8) An underlying factor that enhances Islamic presence in a community is what Loum calls Islamic dynamism. He explains, When Islam comes to an area, it assimilates itself into the culture of the people so the people see no difference between Islam and the African culture. This makes it even easier for people to accept Islam. For example, the Imam in the mosque plays the role of both a spiritual leader and a soothsayer. When people are ill, they don't think of going to a clinic, but rather to the soothsayer who in most cases would be a Muslim Imam (1992:Seminar).

Levtzion observes this accommodating attitude of Islam which combined Islam and African Traditional Religion (which he calls symbiosis) as an explanation for the successful spread of Islam in Africa (1978:208).

This dynamism or accommodation factor allows Islam to function naturally in its environment. Since Islam uses the animistic practices of magic and divining, which parallel African Traditional religious beliefs, it has strong appeal to the rural migrant (Trimingham 1968:42).

These communal aspects of Muslim life and worship place Islam at center stage in the urban context. Islamic characteristics have the potential to meet the basic needs of the rural migrant.

Christianity in Urban Contexts

In contrast to Islam, which has had an urban orientation from its genesis, European Christianity changed its former orientation from urban to a rural-centered focus from the 14th century onward. Western missionaries often arrive in Africa having known this rural setting and subsequently have a negative bias toward urban ministry. Thus from the onset of missionary work in Africa, generally ministry has been aimed toward reaching the tribes located in the interior villages and the country

(Shorter 1991:60-62). Shorter further points out that Mainline Christianity has experienced a long-standing problem of evangelizing the towns in North America as well as Europe, which is reflected in its reluctance to identify with the town in Africa (1991:2). Several reasons account for the church's ineffectiveness in urban evangelism and ministry.

Characteristics of Urban Christianity

The following are aspects of Christianity in many places of Africa:

- 1) Church architecture and placement generally reflect a Western pattern. The church grounds provide more space around the building and are more scenic than are Islamic surroundings. Often the church building is located at some distance from the members and in a higher economic level of society. The church is normally not open for prayers except on Wednesday evening and Sunday. Usually, the pastoral staff are absent from the sanctuary (Loum, Turay Interviews:1992).
- 2) Members tend to be somewhat independent, to be isolationists, and not group oriented (Turay Interview:1992).
- 3) The pastor usually does not call on all the members regularly. Therefore, the pastor lacks a general awareness of their needs. The pastor may also hold himself aloof from the members (Sookhdeo 1991:176).
- 4) Members are spread over a wide area; thus they do not have a close community spirit among themselves (Loum, Turay Interviews:1992). Another isolating factor comes from the elitist attitude some Christian communities have of themselves which keeps them from becoming incarnational in ministry or open to outsiders (Sookhdeo 1991:176).
- 5) Institutions receive the money instead of people in need. Lamin Sanneh comments, "the church generally does not have funds readily available to reach out and meet needs of the community in times of death, sickness, emergencies, or schooling" (Interview

1992).⁸ Likewise, the Reverend Dixon, president of the Methodist Church in Ghana stated, “*The church tends to think always in terms of money and budget* [Emphasis his]. Thus the church tends to avoid becoming involved in issues for fear a program will cost them money. This is one of the problems” (Dixon Interview: 1991).

- 6) Christian funerals are expensive. There are several causes: using a coffin, keeping the body for several days, providing quantities of food for the people during a long wake. The high cost of a Christian funeral raises a barrier for many, especially the migrant and the poor.

An examination of a number of the traits of migrants may serve to highlight the interaction of the church and the migrant constituency.

Characteristics of the Rural Migrant

A number of factors characterize the rural migrant explained as follows:

Community. Community is basic in African society. Everyone belongs to a group such as a family, a secret society like the Poro or Sande,⁹ a tribe, and a village. Every person has an identity. Bobson Turay reflects on the background of this concept. He explains:

Our culture is people oriented and a person is the key in the culture. Our family is regarded as any member belonging to our extended family, even to our great grandfather, so the family means the whole range of family contacts, not just the nuclear family. So the emphasis on the importance of an individual makes everyone part of a family or a group. So beginning with the home, the family ties are kept very strong. Anything that threatens the family tie is regarded as an

⁸ Sanneh is professor of Missions and World Christianity at Yale Divinity School. He was born in Gambia West Africa. Sanneh was converted to Christianity from Islam in his youth. He authored the book, *West African Christianity*.

⁹ These are secret societies in Sierra Leone: the Poro for male and the Sande for female members. Little gives an extended description of both societies and their initiation ceremonies in *The Mende of Sierra Leone* (1967: 113-130).

enemy. This even goes to the extent that in the village, people will consult the dead ancestors who are believed to be present with power and are regarded as members of the family.¹⁰ Thus village people consider that everyone belongs to a group. Every person desires a group identity so they will feel secure and not be treated as enemies of any group. Identity gives security which is the motive behind membership in the secret societies (Interview:1992).

Needs of the rural migrant. The following list given by Lamin Sanneh (Interview:1991) highlights, in order of importance, the major concerns facing the urban newcomer:

- 1) He/she needs community identity, a sense of belonging to a group.
- 2) He/she needs housing and food.
- 3) He/she needs employment.
- 4) He/she needs help when sickness or death comes.
- 5) He/she needs schooling.

Often these pressing needs are accompanied by anxiety and fear. Sanneh states that rural migrants find these experiences very unsettling because their traditional patterns have been disturbed (Interview:1991). When faced with such trauma, one naturally reacts according to known patterns.

In summary, the first primary need of the migrant African Traditional believer concerns identity in a group, which gives the newcomer a sense of security. This sense of belonging satisfies the person's core cultural values and supplies the confidence that through the

¹⁰ Parrinder states that in Sierra Leone, "prayer is normally offered through a succession of ancestors . . . two distinct groups of ancestors are 'worshipped' . . . those ancestors whose names and feats are known . . . and those who died in the far distant past." He says that ancestral spirits plays a very large part in African thought and they are very prominent in the spiritual world. They are part of the social group. Also, they are linked closely with the beliefs in gods and the Supreme God. In some aspects, ancestors are believed to fulfill functions elsewhere ascribed to the gods, such as rain-making. For some who believe in many gods do not distinguished them all clearly from ancestors, in fact some have developed out of distant ancestors who have moved away from the nearer and more recently departed (1962: 57-58)

community his/her secondary needs, whether they be financial or personal concerns, employment, or housing, will be met. When there is need or an emergency such as sickness or death, the group will respond by sharing their resources. The second primary need concerns worship. Loum states, “the African is a religious man, he can not distance himself from religion. He wants to belong. It would be a disgrace for an African to die without belonging to any religion.¹¹ This would disgrace his family” (Interview:1992). Thus the African Traditionalist in a new urban context seeks a means to meet his religious needs.

The rural migrant's outlook. The worldview with which country migrants arrive in the city serves as a guide for survival in this new milieu. John Mbiti observes that “we should take note of the fact that African Religion is now moving into towns and cities in certain forms” (1991:192). He mentions such things as traditional medicines sold in the cities and traditional medicine men and diviners who are doing a prosperous business. Often urbanites revert to traditional methods for problem-solving and responding to crises (1991:192).

Lamin Sanneh offers this explanation: “The rural person has come from a community where belonging is expected and natural. Now in the urban center, this rural, community-minded person seeks another community in the urban context. The migrant looks for a network of support and organizations similar to those in the village and where he can use residential habits” (Interview:1991).

Rural migrants, driven by their immediate need for housing, food and employment, reach out to find a familiar avenue to meet these needs. Which group will better identify with the needs of the migrant, Islam or Christianity?

Turay states, “When the migrant comes, they will find Islam. The Muslim will say right away, ‘Welcome.’ The greatest percentage of

¹¹ African Traditional Religion has no sacred writings but it has many forms that embody faith, giving security direction for every aspect of life. Mbiti gives a concise summary of where to look for and find African Religion. He says African Religion is found in the following: rituals, ceremonies, and festivals of the people; in shrines, sacred places, and religious objects; in arts and symbols, music and dance; in proverbs, riddles, and wise sayings; in names of people and places; in myth and legends; in beliefs and customs; basically in all aspects of life (1991: 20-29).

house-owners in Freetown are Muslim. They will open their hearts to those coming in from up-country, even if the person does not rent from them” (Interview:1992).

The migrant’s subliminal desire for security and belonging makes him extremely sensitive to his new environment. Turay suggests that the presence of Islam in the community will catch the up-country traditional believer’s eye. He says:

The way the Muslim comes dressed in and out of his house is a testimony to Islam. The Muslim carries his culture with him. They dress respectfully in their long flowing robes causing people to look at them and say, “Oh, that is a Muslim.” Thus, a person tends to want to identify with this group which stands out (Interview:1992).

The religious mindset of the migrant is open to new thought. Lamin Sanneh points out,

The rural animist, in his traditional religion, comes to the urban center with a world view that maintains an openness to other religious traditions and freedom to absorb them and at the same time has an absence of an exclusive, controversial attitude to religious options (1980:2).

Also, significant is the fact that many of the migrants are young and as a result are more open to change and new ideas. An older study in 1961 in Brazzaville, Belgium Congo underscores this early age trend, revealed that the average migrant age was 18 for women and 19 for men (Little 1974:3). Consequently this group comes with openness to change, a prime factor of conversion potential.

The migrant sees Muslims in the community at worship daily. Numerous Mosques are scattered throughout the city. If the Mosque is at a distance, Muslims will establish a place of prayer in their immediate community, which may be in a vacant yard or along a fence or road. Worshippers will gather at the appointed times of prayer daily, especially at sunrise and sunset. Loum states that this daily prayer ritual has drawing power. The non-Muslim watching will be fascinated by Muslims’ procedure (1992). The rural newcomers will not only be attracted by Islamic prayer but will often be invited to join in worship to Allah. This was the experience of the man referred to in the introduction of this

paper. Thus the migrants' desire for identity and worship can easily and quickly bond them to the Islamic community (Turay Interview:1992).

Urban Characteristics

Several aspects of living conditions characterize African urban life today.

Lack of Family Coherence. The urban context tends to compact people from many different backgrounds within a confined area. The limited living area forces family members to seek homes wherever they can find them, thus breaking family coherence and the sense of community.

Lack of Housing. O'Conner observes that "housing is a big problem of rapid urban growth throughout tropical Africa, where both poverty and inequality are all too clearly reflected in housing patterns" (1983:165). O'Conner feels, however, that the lack of housing does not cause as much concern from a distinctly African perspective as it does from a Western point of view (1983:165).

Lack of Employment. According to O'Conner, unemployment is now one of the most serious problems in most African cities (1983:159). This condition is related to rising standards of education, rising expectations, and the lack of opportunity for work in the rural areas (1983:160-61).

Increased Stress. Little believes that urban living places the family and the marriage under stress and creates larger tribal groups than those in the village (1974:74). Thus, the sense of intimacy is diminished. Urban centers draw upon Western systems of organization; these systems focus attention on the personal independence and separate family structure rather than upon communal living representative of village life. The attitude of self-care prevails (Turay Interview:1992).

Alien Culture. O'Conner comments that the environment of the cities is viewed by the vast majority of the African population as being totally alien in its cultural forms (1983:87).

Indigenous Innovations—The Voluntary Associations. Rural migrants are forced to adapt to their new milieu; however, innovations contextualized from their rural culture help them to adjust to their urban

environment. Migrants have taken the communal aspects of rural life and organized a similar communal indigenous group called the Voluntary Association. Little recognizes that these associations largely substitute for the traditional institutions of kinship and local community, especially in the industrialized towns of the coast and sometimes inland (1966:8-9). Little further states that these Voluntary Associations exist for economic, social, and religious reasons and as a result they flourish (1974:74). These associations meet the needs of migrants in various ways such as by making innovations seem less strange and helping women find their place in urban society. As a result, the migrant “has begun to assimilate urban industrial values” and “many individuals who move for the first time into the city . . . are already ‘urbanized’ to an appreciable extent . . . [because] there is this degree of continuity between rural and urban social systems . . .” (Little 1966:10-13). One can readily see the important role these indigenous groups play in urban acculturation and survival for the rural migrant.

The next section will examine ways the body of Christ can contextualize its ministry to meet the needs of rural migrants and bring them to faith in the living Jesus.

Meeting Community Needs: The Churches’ Theological Resources

The church is referred to as a body by the Apostle Paul (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; and Ephesians 4:16). A body by its very nature functions through the various members interacting with each other. The body of Christ, the church, is designed for sharing and interaction between members (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Thus the nature of the church is to form a strong community which leads to bonding among its members. However, as we have pointed out previously, these aspects are often obscured in an urban context. If the church will explore ways to contextualize the presentation of itself in the urban setting and become involved with people in an incarnational ministry at the grass roots level of the community, it will have great potential to draw the rural migrant into its fold. The fact that Christianity continues to spread rapidly in the areas of Africa where African Religion has been most predominant (Mbiti 1991:198) underscores this potential.

John Mbiti points out that the church has parallels with African traditional life in which kinship and the extended family play a central role. He notes:

The Church is the Christian family, in which all are related to one another through faith and baptism in Jesus Christ. The Church also includes those who have died and those who still live. This is similar to the African view of the family of both the living and the departed (1991:190).

This parallel between the living and the departed provides a significant point of contact with the African Traditional follower and the gospel.

Another significant parallel centers in the African's concept of God, states Mbiti. He explains that Africans "give up certain ideas, beliefs and practices in their traditional life and assimilate newer understandings of God's dealings with men as proclaimed in Christianity" (1991:189). The various aspects lost in past ages have once again gained recognition through the revelation of Scripture.

Mbiti again comments:

These are the gifts of immortality, resurrection and the making of all things new again. In this, Christianity seems to fulfill a great need in the African world-view which had no hope of rediscovering those lost gifts (1991:189).

Additional parallels come in the area of morals and ethics (1991:190).

God has equipped His earthly body for identity and communication. However, for the church to be effective in African urban culture it must divest itself of the more Western individualistic characteristics and contextualize. This writer offers the following suggestions for the African situation:

- 1) The church body should extend its fellowship bonds and be structured in such a way that it can welcome the stranger and the poor in the community.
- 2) The church should be visible. Its members who are dispersed throughout the community must serve as "light" and "salt." The early church met daily in the temple and in every home to teach and preach Jesus Christ (Acts 5:42).

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- 3) The church should be compassionate and share in order to meet the needs both of its members and its community.
 - 4) The membership should be faithful in its corporate worship at the church and in its private worship in homes.

A congregation functioning with these dynamics will form a caring community with magnetic attraction.¹² Shorter offers this insight: “The Church has never found it easy to enter this world [of the poor] but it is in the measure that Christians draw close to the poor that they remain spiritually open and creative” (1991:56).

A function of the church is to recognize the needs of the up-country migrants in their new urban context and to discover ways to reach the migrants. The church must understand that the migrant is need-oriented and that needs can become points of contact. Lamin Sanneh emphasizes this situation. He poignantly states:

When the up-county migrant comes into the urban context, he begins looking for a way to meet his immediate needs. Where will he find help the easiest and quickest? When migrants move into the city, one of the first things they do is look for communities like folks back home. Failing to find this, they look for communities that are closer to these. These tend to be benevolent societies, communities that will help take care of burials (the issue of the funeral), lodging, putting one in touch with people and organizations that can help them find jobs, take care of arrangements for marriage, schooling for children. These are patterns of support, even though they are not like the village, they help to make the urban conditions less intimidating and less disruptive. This is especially true for women coming from rural areas who fall easily into prostitution (Interview:1991).

¹² Rev. Bobson Turay, former pastor of the Kissy Dockyard Wesleyan Church, reports that “The home cell ministry has established personal relationships with Christian believers from other churches in Freetown: the Limba Church, Roman Catholic, A.M.E., Nigeria Baptist, etc. Some of these have come to love our local church, which they have often expressed to us. However, we have encouraged them to remain in their local churches rather than joining us” (*Freetown District Conference Journal* 1989:38).

Thus, one can see that a community of believers functioning with vibrant body-life and demonstrating loving care for each other has the potential to attract the migrants who seek a caring community similar to what they left behind.

In addition to the body of Christ ministering to each other, the church must extend itself into the neighborhood to make contact with others and meet needs. Again, Sanneh comments:

The church must extend itself into the community to deal with rural migration.¹³ Ministry and evangelism will take place when the community can see and feel the body of Christ at work meeting needs. The church must be a community of life, not just for salvation (Interview:1991).

How Can the Church Reveal Christ's Character?

The church can manifest Christ's character in significant ways. For example, the members can:

- 1) Demonstrate genuine love and compassion for others.
- 2) Accept the migrant into the church community.

Loum reminds us,

Remember that the strength of Africa is the *community*.¹⁴ Once persons leave the village, they lose this village identity and community solidarity. Therefore the church in an urban area should pay attention to this factor and concentrate on these people by making them feel they belong and are wanted. If we pay attention to this *community cultural dynamic*,¹⁵ it will help the advancement of evangelism among them. On the other hand, if the church fails, in all likelihood, the Muslims will take hold of them because Islam is also

¹³ Some of the African Independent Churches are already reaching out to meet migrant needs. They have healing services, mid-week services with meetings and general socializing on the church premises. In Nigeria and in Cameroon the churches are responding in some degree to the rural migration opportunity (Sanneh Interview: 1991).

¹⁴ Author's emphasis.

¹⁵ Author's emphasis.

community based. They will go out to provide their needs, both spiritually and physically (Interview: 1992).

Loum suggests the following ways the church can provide this sense of community:

- 1) Provide a place for the migrant to live. Because many people arrive with nowhere to go, often the Muslim will give them a place to stay. Through this avenue, the visitor will follow the religion of the host.
- 2) Provide practical help. The eyes of the church should be open to this need.
- 3) Provide employment. The migrants want to make a living. If they do not have a means to do so, the Muslim will help them and they will follow Islam.
- 4) Provide Schooling. The migrants lead the way for their families to come to the city so the church should provide schooling because the migrants want their children to become well-educated [and thus they would likely place them in the church school] (Interview:1992).

Such services offer the community a channel into the fellowship circle of the church. The church must not neglect them. As Loum suggests, “the church can locate the recent arrival to the community through conducting a survey of the area periodically” (Interview:1992). The church then can extend an invitation to attend services as well as provide practical assistance.¹⁶

How can the Church Build Bridges to Its Community?

There are a number of innovations that could bring the church into contact with the community and help to meet felt needs.

¹⁶ The Kissy Dockyard Wesleyan Church in Freetown, Sierra Leone, provides an example of community involvement. This church operates what they call the Kissy Home Cell Christian Development Program through which they are able to reach out to poor communities (Bottom Mango, Kamanda Farm Cola Tick, and Moyiba Hill were cited) to provide help in the form of loans, clothing, medical care, scholarships, housing, etc. The pastor states, “God has used this programme together with the Home Cell Evangelistic Ministry to win many souls for Christ” (*Freetown District Conference Journal* 1989:38).

Ministry in time of death, claims Lamin Sanneh, meets a great need. Several things can be done to identify with the family and to assist them.

1) *Wake-Keeping*: Church-body participation in “wake keeping.” Bobson Turay, former pastor of the Kissy Dock Yard Church in Freetown, said his church substituted the traditional “wake keeping” form with its drinking and evilness, with Christian meaning so the church could utilize this very important event in the life of the family. This innovation communicated a Christian witness.

Rev. Turay explains the wake’s meaning:

The wake traditionally witnesses to the dead person’s background and former participation in the cultural traits of the tribe. The community visualizes it like a monument to the person. The bigger the wake, the more important the person’s role in the community. The wake says the deceased belonged to a group and a culture which is one’s greatest desire and inheritance. The church by contrast, should view the wake as a time of Christian testimony. The purpose for going is not to bear witness to the late person’s life, but to celebrate the life of Christ, his death, and resurrection power. The church members attending the wake understand clearly their goal and guidelines for their presence. They determine their songs, their message, their testimony. No liquor or wine is allowed for the Christians. They also set a time for departure (about 2:00 AM) rather than staying the whole night through (Interview:1992).

In Ghana, President Dixon, head of the Methodist Church, says that some Methodists and Presbyterians have begun holding the wake in the church to save the members’ money. He further suggests that each church should establish a funeral fund to assist the family. He believes that if the church will make changes to lower funeral costs, a powerful appeal could be given to those outside the church who do not wish to be forced into debt with expensive church funerals (Interview:1991).

2) *Means for Giving Condolences*: Provide an open book for condolences to assist family needs. The church people can contribute money, food, and other items to address the needs of the bereaved family

so that the family does not have to bear all the burden. This practical help can be a convincing testimony for the Christian community. The Muslims do this. If Christians do not help, people are often forced to go to the Muslims for help to bury their dead (Turay Interview:1992).

3) *Community Burial Casket*: Provide a community burial casket to be reused or provide wood and laborers to make the coffin. The communal burial casket has precedent with the Muslims. They call this “*Berria*” which is like a casket. No matter who dies, they use this same box to carry the body to the gravesite. Then the body is removed and buried in the African way. This communal box can be used for those who cannot afford a coffin like those used in a village setting in a province. Alfred Kamara, home cell director for the Kissy Dockyard Wesleyan Church in Freetown, Sierra Leone, stated that even the Catholic Church in the town of Lunsar uses the communal box. This cuts down costs. As noted, making the coffin is another way to help. The National Pentecostal Church in Freetown buys and stores coffin boards. The moment a member of their church body dies, their men get the wood and construct the coffin so they can bury that day or at another time. They do not take the body to the mortuary. This cuts the cost from about 50,000 to 60,000 Leons (Sierra Leone currency is equivalent proportionally to the U.S. dollar) to about 10,000 Leons. The church should establish a funeral committee of those who can immediately assist the bereaved with such skills as carpentry and serving (Turay, Kamara Interviews:1992).

4) *Same Day Burial*: This can save expenses. However, too great of haste could have a detrimental effect. Guarding the deep respect the African holds for the body is a means of showing compassion and of honoring the African position. Rev. Turay notes, the dying person is very, very important in African culture. Understanding the African culture at this point is very important. Burying the dead in a rush because of lack of funds reflects very negatively on the family and their group identity. Time for wake-keeping has great significance. (Interview:1992).

Barje Maigadi states that in the African village, the burial rite may last for days symbolizing a worthy send-off celebration for the living dead (Interview:1993). African mentality believes that a strong group will assume responsibility to bury the deceased properly. To be forced to

skip this involvement due to lack of funds suggests a weakness in the family and the community. Thus, if a church body fails to give this custom great respect, disgrace befalls the dead. Then the watching community will play down the image of the entire congregation (Turay, Kamara Interviews:1992).

Theological Bridges to the Community

1) *Baptism*: Perform this ritual in the traditional context with drums and much singing, as in the village ceremonies. Loum states that Christian Baptism is a powerful symbol and can greatly diminish pagan practices. In the African culture, immersion is very symbolic. When a convert is taken to the river and immersed three times, this event stays with the person as long as that person lives (Interview: 1992). As Lamin Sanneh has commented, “I believe this service should be accompanied with much joyous activity, drumming and singing which reminds the baptized that the church is wholly with him in support and that he has not been completely left out of his animist heritage which uses much drumming and singing” (Interview:1991).

2) *Easter celebration*: Sanneh advocates making much of the Easter event and resurrection celebration. Also, he suggests preparing the membership for this celebration well beforehand and gathering an offering for a time of fellowship following the worship. He would reach into the community and invite all contacts. Using indigenous ideas, a congregation could develop a special Lord’s Supper rite or new liturgy with Scripture could be created. Sanneh says:

I would seek to get across the idea of initiation into the community, carrying the concept “We are the community of God,—the family of God being initiated again into the wider family of the Church.” I believe this would help the outsiders to have a more Biblical perspective on this practice. Make the death and resurrection of Christ the major calendar year emphasis, even over Christmas. Christmas is very theological; Easter is theatrical. Easter is the public “out-dooring” of the Son of God in African eyes. This is the day God anointed His Son, christened Him with a costly name—Christ, a name to whom every knee shall bow, every tongue confess. The

risen Christ and the empty tomb is God's own outdooring of Christ (Interview:1991).

Nigerian pastor, Barje Maigadi, likewise affirms placing emphasis upon the resurrected Christ: “The Christian's hope of the resurrection offers a powerful attraction in contrast to the belief of the African Traditionalist who conceives only of the lingering spirit of the departed, but no resurrection of the body. Islam as well has no assurance of a resurrected body” (Interview:1993).¹⁷

President Dixon, leader of the Methodist Church in Ghana, West Africa, explains, “Christians celebrate Easter as an outstanding event. Parades are common on Good Friday afternoons. Easter Sunday people come to church dressed in white” (Interview:1991).

1) *Christmas*. “Make more of the Christmas event,” Sanneh advises. Extend the celebration over several weeks and highlight the various narratives such as the angel's announcement to Mary, Mary's story, the trip to Bethlehem and the search for an inn, the birth of Christ, the angel's announcement to the shepherds and their response, and the visit of the Wisemen. These could be portrayed through drama, choral groups, and readings. Sanneh further suggests that the church could raise funds and provide for the needs of the poor of the community in remembrance of God's gift to humankind (Interview:1991).

2) *Festivals*. Sanneh encourages the church to capitalize on group gatherings such as festivals, which provide a special time for coming together to celebrate, eat and share. As recorded in the Old Testament, God established many such occasions among the Israelites. Also, Sanneh suggests that the church should take note of Islam's festival events. Muslims follow a religious calendar which includes numerous festivals. These festivals provide wonderful opportunities for people to socialize and fraternize. A kind of distributive ethic prevails in these events, where those who were “lucky” when they came to town now share the fruits of their labors with the less fortunate. These festival events help to acculturate people into the Islamic ethos and they even serve as introductions to Islamic religious teachings (Interview:1991).

¹⁷ Barje Sulmane Maigadi, a Nigerian, was the first Ph.D. graduate in Inter Cultural Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in 1997.

3) *Drama and Bible Emphasis*. Sanneh suggests that the church community can bear a powerful witness through such tools as:

a) Drama.

b) Exaltation of the Bible. Christianity must lift up the Bible as the Word of God communicated by the Holy Spirit and hold it forth with clarity and confidence as authoritative and life-giving. Christ commanded that the gospel be proclaimed to all nations (*ethne*) or people groups (Matthew :19, 20; Mark 16:15). By exalting and following God's Word, perhaps the church can bring the Qur'an, the sacred book of the Muslims, into proper perspective. Sanneh wrote,

The church needs to bring down the Qur'an from its pedestal. Until this is done, we have a very weak position among the Muslims. Islam has the lingering idea that Arabic is a language that is not translated, that it is holier than a language that is translated. Even if a Muslim becomes a Christian, he carries an inferiority complex (Interview:1991).

c) Translate the Bible into the People's language. The Scripture should be available in the vernacular language. Gatherings, such as "the home cell" and public worship, where possible, should use the vernacular language. Sanneh suggests that the church can take advantage of the deep desire and longing for self-respect and self worth that is reflected through the use of one's own native language. Placing the gospel message in the vernacular elevates the person and his/her culture. The use of the vernacular by the church gives its ministry an advantage over Islam, which insists upon the use of Arabic for religious worship in such practices as prayer, fasting, and the reading of the Qur'an. The Islamic belief that Arabic is the language of God, since He revealed the Qur'an in it, makes Arabic a special if not almost sacred language. This places all other languages in an inferior position and suggests that the vernacular should be replaced with Arabic, especially for key religious functions. Sanneh believes this attitude permeates one's own self-concept, creating a negative self-image.¹⁸ This position places a major hurdle in front of

¹⁸ Sanneh writes, "Mother tongue speakers find themselves in the anomalous position of conceding that their languages are 'profane' or 'mundane' (*ajami*) for the decisive acts of the religious code" (1989:212).

Islam's appeal to the non-Arabic speaker (Seminar Asbury Theological Seminar: 1991).

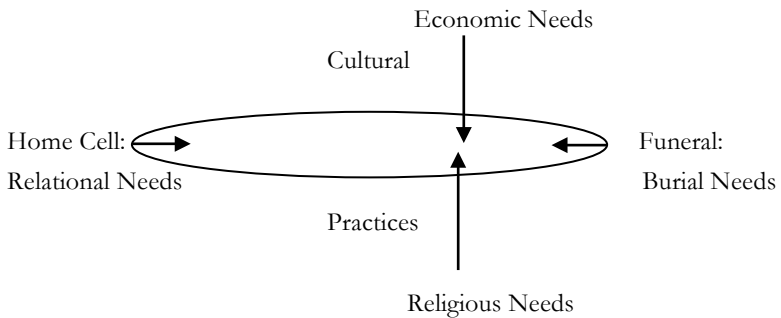
Non Theological Bridges to the Community

a) Favor a strong stand against alcoholic beverages. Islamic rules forbid people to consume alcohol, thus helping those coming from the rural areas to avoid the temptation to become addicted and eventually end in a base lifestyle (Interview:1991). The church should take no less a stance.

b) Introduction of literacy classes to reach the community. This ministry, done without charge by the Methodists in Accra, Ghana, has been a means of drawing people into the fellowship of the church (Dixon Interview:1991).

In these key ways, then, the community inherent in the church body can become a powerful witness in any given social structure.

This diagram illustrates the role of "Community" in bridging needs:¹⁹



In addition, the church can have a vital ministry through small group gatherings as demonstrated by the Wesleyan Home Cells in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

¹⁹ In Acts 15:8-9, we see a model, the role between the "Holy Spirit" and "us", the body of Christ, the Church. On the spiritual side, the Holy Spirit gave direction to the body. The church accepted the Holy Spirit's direction regarding Gentile practices. In Sierra Leone, we have identified a number of practices/rituals observed by the Church. When the church can understand their practices in relationship to direction by the Holy Spirit based in Scripture, then the church has solid ground for their practices.

The Role of the Home Fellowship

Home fellowships provide a unique setting in which the church can serve as a viable body of Christ. Home-based groups established within the communities surrounding the central church can easily be in touch with grass roots needs and feelings. As previously noted, one of the first things migrants do when moving into the city is to look for communities similar to those back home, communities that will have benevolent societies to assist with personal needs. This study has pointed out that few African townsmen are entirely lost in town because they have or eventually will establish contacts. Shorter makes this observation:

Beginning with initial family or ethnic contacts, the migrant builds up a “survival network” of workmates and patrons. Sports, leisure activities, funerals, church services and political manifestations bring people together. However, the urban migrant is not simply “given” a ready-made community, as he would be in a village. He chooses his own associates and creates his own selective neighborhood (1983:364).

The migrants’ sense of “networking” and desire to select their own new community associates prepares them to be accepting of the home cell fellowship model. Lamin Sanneh suggests these informal fellowships need to meet on a regular basis and have a certain amount of organized structure. He explains,

Moslems will respond to these fellowships because in the villages, Islam is a lay religion led for the most part by lay-people. The church that extends itself through these lay-led group fellowships knows how to deal with its own people. This concept is absolutely critical. The home fellowship is the obvious way to proceed. It places the focus on the people, which is very important for growth (Interview:1991).

Shorter, commenting on the role of community groups, concludes that “in my opinion, they are the most important initiative of the urban church in Africa today” (1991:100). As an example, the Wesleyan Church has applied the home fellowship concept in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

*Home Fellowships: A Wesleyan Church Case Study (09:1992)*²⁰

In the Wesleyan context the home fellowship parallels the function of the Voluntary Associations in a number of aspects in an attempt to meet the needs of the community, especially those of the migrant.

The Freetown District of the Wesleyan Church has 43 home fellowships known as “home cells.” Most of the 11 Freetown District churches have one or more home cells. One of the Freetown churches, the Kissy Dockyard Wesleyan Church, has 19 home cells in the communities surrounding the church. The church appointed a layman to supervise their home cell ministry. The church divided the area into three zones and appointed a director over each zone. Each week, the director visits the cells to supervise and encourage the members and leaders. All the home cell leaders, both men and women, meet together each Saturday for instruction, sharing and prayer under the direction of the home cell supervisor.

The home cells identify culturally with their community. Ten to 15 people from the immediate community compose the cell led by a lay member. Spirited singing, testimony, sharing of needs, prayer, and Bible study fill the two-hour weekly gathering. Often new people from the community who have been invited by the members attend. Weekly gatherings rotate at members’ homes, providing they have adequate room to meet. Thus, evangelism and Christian witness touch a wide area through the grass roots membership who know the people and the needs of their community.

Home Cell Ministries

Home cells minister in a variety of ways:

1) *Discovering Strangers in the Community*: Strangers are discovered almost immediately because home cell members generally know their

²⁰ The author spent a month in Freetown in September, 1992 doing research for his dissertation. He visited and interviewed over a dozen pastors and home cell leaders in Freetown and visited three home cell services in the Kissy Dockyard area one evening. I experienced first-hand their dynamic life and influence in their community. The pastor of the Kissy Dockyard, Bobson Turay served as my guide and interpreter.

neighbors. Rural migrants receive a welcome and their needs become known. Members invite them to their cell meetings. For the newcomers the opportunity to join a group appeals to and meets a basic need of identity. Their home cell provides a place for weekly fellowship and bonding in these community gatherings. Also, the home cell can provide daily places to gather and pray in the mornings and evenings such as the Islamic community does.

2) *Employment Needs Addressed:* The cells have established a capital fund from which the cell makes loans to enable people to turn the money over to make some income. Through this means the recipients can have a sense of belonging to a group and become self-supporting. Members may also be able to offer employment, at least temporarily.

3) *Special Community Needs Addressed:* Needs for food, assistance in times of sickness, and death are met through a special offering called *OSSU*, a charity gift. If trouble overtakes someone, each member contributes a small amount to assist the person. In this way, the person in need identifies with the home cell as people who love and care and show they are true brothers and sisters through their sharing (Turay Interview:1991).

4) *Housing Needs Addressed:* Home cell members may be able to offer housing which is one of the basic needs the migrant faces.

5) *Powerful Home Cell Member Influence:* Home cell ministries testify to Christ's love which causes recipients to open their homes to extend the Christian witness and Bible study. Often visitors request Bible studies in their own residences. When these new persons receive Christ, the circle of witness widens in the community or extends into a new community.

6) *Home Cell Uniting Factors:* Just as the Islamic community does on Friday at the Mosque, all the home cell members gather at the church on Sunday for worship and celebration which unites them with the larger body of Christ.

7) *Potential for Church Status:* Some of these home cells reach a point in attendance and spiritual maturity that enables them to separate from the parent body and organize new churches. Nine of the existing Wesleyan churches in Freetown began as home cell fellowships, and this

number will continue to increase as new home cells form throughout the city.

The home cells provide a sense of community and assistance in securing basic needs which remind the rural migrants of their communal village roots. Thus bonding with the home cell community can be the means of helping the African Traditional adherents bridge the gap in finding Christ and a spiritual community within the church. In conclusion, Wesleyan home cells have been instrumental in bringing many African Traditional believers to Christ and church membership.

Another interesting dimension in urban evangelism involves following the migrants to their origins in the country.

Urban Links Enhance Rural Evangelism

As the church grows in the urban centers, the opportunity for rural evangelism and church planting also increases. This circumstance is a result of the continuing relationship between the new urbanites and their village roots. Moller states that a survey of this situation shows that although townsmen maintain many links to kinsmen in their urban social relationships, they have a greater capacity for social participation which permits them to involve themselves in both urban and rural relations (1987:279). Little points out that it is in the tribal village, not the town where the most important personal ties remain (1966:7). As anticipated, the urban migrants make frequent visits to their rural homeland (Shorter 1991:15). Rural and urban dwellers are thus bound together, each affecting the other. In recognition of this interaction the reader may then more easily understand Shorter's observation that "there is a sense in which the whole of African countries are becoming urbanized" (1991:19).

Migrants finding Christ in the city have the opportunity to share their new faith with family and communal members in the village. For example, most of the 90 plus Wesleyan churches in the country of Mozambique resulted from the witness of family members who had found Christ while working in the gold mines in and around Johannesburg, South Africa. Thus, the more contacts the urban church can establish with the urban migrants, the greater the potential for evangelism in new communities in distant rural areas.

Summary and Recommendations

This study has focused on the accelerated growth of Africa's urban centers and more importantly upon the responsibility of the church to reach out to and assimilate urbanites into the Christian community. These urban magnets are drawing the poorer rural population who seek the "better" way of life through the many opportunities urban living offers such as employment, education and a higher standard of living. According to a United Nation's report, Africa led the world in urban growth rates with an average of 4.6 percent throughout the 1970s. The urban population in Africa has been projected to reach 39 percent by A.D. 2000 and as much as 54 percent by the year 2025. The majority of people migrating hold a worldview rooted in African Traditional Religion. As the reader has seen, these rural migrants come with a certain openness to change; thus they are prime prospects to convert to another system of religious belief. The various circumstances confronting migrants enhances this openness to conversion. Migrants to the cities face a new and foreign environment. They have immediate need for housing, employment, food, education and identity. And they need a community like that which they left, which had provided them with security and support.

Both an Islamic and a Christian presence exists in the city. Which one will most likely assist the migrant? With which one will the migrant identify? As we have seen, Islam, due to its early contact with the colonial trading centers, remains a strong presence in the cities and towns, often controlling a large portion of the business establishments and available housing. Islam is in a position to offer immediate help to meet the physical needs of migrants. Since Muslims worship openly throughout their communities, they attract attention. Furthermore, Islam's communal base offers a common ground the rural migrant can relate to. All these factors place Islam on center stage. Consequently, the migrant comes into contact with Islam almost immediately and reacts favorably to the overtures of Islam. The opening story of this paper illustrates that many rural migrants convert from their African Traditional Religion to identify with the familiar community spirit they see in the Islamic religion. This gives them a sense of security and the resources to meet their immediate needs. The mushrooming migrant population with

its high potential for conversion appears to be one of the major reasons Islam continues to increase in West Africa.

On the other hand, the migrants generally do not have the same exposure to Christianity as they do to Islam. The more Western orientation of the church and its isolation from the local community and daily living tend to mask the true communal nature of the body of Christ. This often prevents the church body from knowing the personal, daily needs of the local residents and especially recently arrived migrants. Therefore, migrants do not come into relationship with the church as readily.

However, this study has emphasized that the church does possess inherent qualities that can provide points of contact with the rural migrant who follows the African Traditional Religion. These parallels may serve as avenues between the two groups that may lead to conversion and ministry. As suggested, there are a number of ways the church can use these parallels for ministry and evangelism in the community, especially with the rural migrants.

In addition, this paper mentions the Voluntary Associations that are helping the rural migrants find identity and employment in their new urban environment through this indigenous communal body. The home cells of the Wesleyan Church provide an indigenous parallel to these Voluntary Associations for evangelism and church planting. This study has also highlighted various ways home cell groups have served to meet the needs of local residents as well as provide a setting to expose them to the Christian faith and community. The home cells display Christian life in action and represent the church at the grass root level of the community. Rev. Bobson Turay and Mr. Alfred Kamara have explained how the presence of the home cells in the local community brings Christians into immediate contact with visitors and new residents. As a result the home cells serve as links to Christ and the church.

In summary, this study has noted that the home cell organization serves to meet migrant needs and that the loving concern that they demonstrate serves to open the hearts of the migrants to explore the Christian faith in weekly home Bible studies which usually result in conversion to Christ. As a result, cell membership grows, cells divide, and new home cells multiply. Thus the Christian faith slowly permeates

one community after another with new churches and home cell networks. The home cell model provides the urban church an acceptable means for incarnational ministry in the community and becomes, in particular, one of the most effective channels to reach the rural migrant within a growing metropolis.

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