Chapter Six

African Chaplains in Seventeenth Century West Africa

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INTRODUCTION

In many ways, the coming of Christianity to sub-Saharan Africa had much to do with events on the European continent. These events, whether political, economic, religious or otherwise, accounted, largely, for the intense contact that developed with the African continent. The threat of Moslem invasion and conquest of Europe was a constant worry, requiring much energy and commitment on the part of the European countries. Much time was therefore devoted to defending themselves and consolidating whatever gains they already had. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this threat had been effectively checked and the nations of West, central and northern Europe could now devote time to building up their economies. A fresh vitality was now available to move beyond their territories and explore new places. Africa was one of these new places and the advances in the science of navigation helped this new enterprise.

Two main periods can be distinguished. First, there was the period of the European “discovery” of the western coast of Africa, starting from about the middle of the fifteenth century, and entailing the settlement of various European nationals along the coast. This was a period of trade and evangelism, where Christianity was introduced in many forms, mostly as a “sterilized European institution, safely quarantined in hygienic enclaves along the coast whence it occasionally timidly emerged to make local
contact." During this period the church was no more than an appendage to the commercial enterprise and therefore had very little attraction for the African population. Under such conditions, Christianity was not sustainable in spite of the few converts, which even included chiefs and community leaders. The second period can be dated to starting from the middle of the eighteenth century, when some isolated attempts were made at evangelization alongside the slave trade. This again was an unfruitful period as far as mission was concerned, although, as we shall come to see, the ground was being prepared for greater success. The real beginning of success became visible only in the following century when mission organizations, from Europe (and later from the USA), with the collaboration of many Africans helped root Christianity in the African soil. Various historians with varying emphases have captured the many stories of these exciting periods and it is not our intention to provide the details here. Needless to say, the African perspective on these stories has been obscured for many years because not many Africans have been writing about them. The situation has been changing in the last 30 to 40 years and we are now hearing and reading from more and more Africans who are telling their own story. This of course does not mean that we now possess the full and accurate story of the African past, for whilst history still remains a narration of past events, the interpretation of these events will continue to vary as long as it is done by humans like us.

I. THE IBERIAN FACTOR

Africa remained a continent of mystery and intrigue for Europe for many centuries. Since North Africa used to be a strong Christian territory until the seventh and eighth centuries, many Europeans did not consider it to belong to Africa. It suited their prejudices to consider Africa as beginning at the Sahara Desert. The European imagination was fired by the impression that the vast Sahara stretch, including the area beyond, was the domain of wild human beings who were in the grips of the devil and were subject to every kind of brutish behavior. Ignorance and superstition fueled many frightful and often unfounded stories about the continent, so the very thought of penetrating it would not be entertained. There was, for example, a story of Satan standing guard, ready to destroy anyone who would venture beyond the known frontiers. This fear was, however, mitigated by

141 Some of the most useful references have been listed in the Reading list.
the story of an ancient Christian kingdom ruled by a Prester John, somewhere in the midst of the wild, which European travelers were eager to find and be acquainted with.

Following the disappearance of Christianity from North Africa, only pockets of Christians remained in places like Egypt, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. The Church, however, did not give up trying to restore its fortunes in these places. The Crusades organized by the Church in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, had as one of its primary aims the recapturing of holy places and re-establishing Christian presence in North Africa. The Roman Catholic Orders, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, were the first to make such attempts at evangelizing Moslem territory. St. Francis of Assisi (founder of the Franciscan Order) is known to have visited Egypt in 1219 during the 4th Crusade. However, after three centuries of crusading the Church had very little to show for its efforts. Hope did not die completely, as the Portuguese took up the leadership in exploration and conquest, thereby awakening a new spirit in the Church and in Europe generally. It is for this reason—for opening up this part of the world—that it is impossible to overlook the Iberian connection when writing the history of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa.

Portugal, a strongly Catholic country, eventually made the first inroads into West Africa as part of the growing navigational adventurism of the time. The Portuguese nation had been a sea faring nation for many years and in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries spearheaded the exploration of the sea routes to many parts of the world. They had previously been quite active fighting against Moslems in and around Morocco and occasionally carried off a few captives to Lisbon as slaves. These adventures formed only part of a special European desire to find a sea route to India. India was believed to be an exotic land, a worthy destination for any traveler or trader. The spirit of adventurism was also fired by the notion that as a nation, Portugal had been chosen by God to hold the Moslem forces at bay, by not only preventing their advance into Europe, but also keeping them from spreading Islam in Africa. Luis de Camoes (1524/1525-1580), a prominent Portuguese poet, wrote that Portugal had been “sent by God to strike terror into Moslem hearts and to win vast new regions of the world for the faith.” The whole enterprise was directed from the royal quarters

and was supported by all those who mattered, including no less an institution than the Vatican.

1. Henry the Navigator

One man was the moving spirit behind the explorations. Without his keen leadership and direction, the course of the history of West Africa would have been very different. Prince Henry, the son of the Portuguese king, John I, was born in 1394 and grew to become an accomplished patriot and statesman. At the age of 21, he played an important role in the fight against Moslems when he helped capture the island of Ceuta from their hands. In the ensuing years, he acquired the name Henry the Navigator, because he directed a number of expeditions down the western coast of Africa to obtain information about the area and beyond. He had heard about the trans-Sahara trade in gold and was eager to benefit from it; and also use the opportunity to advance the cause of the church. The motives of Henry were varied, ranging from commercial and scientific to military and evangelistic. According to Azurara, the respected chronicler of the time, four main motives can be distinguished.

First, as a navigator, Henry was interested in reaching further beyond Cape Bojador, which was then the southernmost limit reached by his sailors. Europeans were eagerly trying to find a sea route to India and Henry was participating actively in this search. Secondly, Henry was trying to improve the commercial interests of Portugal by discovering new trade commodities. Thirdly, he sought through his expeditions to assess the real strength of the Moslem rulers in Africa, whom he considered enemies that had to be vanquished. Fourthly, he hoped to find any of the isolated Christian kingdoms believed to exist in Africa—particularly that of Prester John—who would then become his allies against the Moslems. This way he might be able to advance the cause of the church.144

The success stories of these explorations are often recounted as if they were smooth operations without any hitches. The truth is that it took more than twenty years before any meaningful achievement could be recorded. Between 1421 and 1445 Prince Henry organized ten such expeditions.145 The crossing of Cape Bojador was delayed for almost twelve years, due to fear of the nature of the sea currents beyond, as well as the prevailing

stories that the region was the domain of Satan. In 1434, however, Prince Henry’s men ventured beyond Cape Bojador and found vast stretches of inhabited coastal land. They established trading links with the inhabitants, and proceeded further, crossing the River Senegal by 1445. By the time Prince Henry died in 1460, Portuguese traders had settled on the Cape Verde Islands, crossed the River Gambia and the Rio Grande, and were moving on down south. Within two years after his death, a further 600 miles of coastland had been explored. It was now only a matter of time before they reached the coasts of Sierra Leone and Cabo Mensurado (present day location of Monrovia) in 1465, and continued on to Elmina, Benin, Sao Tome, Principe and Fernando Po to complete the Portuguese discovery of the Guinea Coast. By the end of the century, the Congo as well as the southernmost parts of the continent had all been sighted. There is no doubt that Portugal was the first European nation to reach the west coast of Africa. Other claims to the contrary about earlier arrivals are now largely disregarded by historians as unreliable or even forgeries. 146

This notable achievement made Portugal most important on the West African coast. The king of Portugal was proud to assume the additional title of “Lord of Guinea”, and was careful to stamp his authority on every territory discovered. With Portuguese presence stretching all along the coast, the region became more or less a “mini Portugal”. This was given further credence when, in the Treaty of Tordesilas (1494), Pope Alexander VI divided the newly discovered world between Portugal and Spain, giving the former exclusive rights over all newly discovered African territory.

2. Iberian Catholic Mission

The Portuguese discovery of the Guinea coast is important for our study of Christianity in Africa, because, as we have noted, there was a strong missionary motive behind these explorations. Portugal at least professed a Christian motive, even if it were only one of many other motives and although this motive would eventually be obscured. It is, however, significant for the first contacts between West Africa and the Christian Gospel.

The originator of the expeditions, Prince Henry, was a devout Catholic, who had been honored with the title “Grand Master of the Order

146 See, for example, a claim by French sailors to have reached the coast in 1382: D. Kemp, Nine Years at the Gold Coast (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1898), 11.
of the Knights of Christ". He championed the fight against the Moslems as a means of preventing them besieging Africa before the Christians arrived. He therefore made it a policy that all Portuguese ships would have priests on board, who would use every opportunity to preach the Gospel wherever they went. The king of Portugal also stressed Portugal's Christian duty in the explorations. He was known to have said that the possibility of "getting even one soul to the faith by baptism out-weighed all inconveniences." The Catholic Church saw this as a new opportunity to re-establish Christian presence in Africa. The Pope immediately granted Letters of Indulgence to the traders along the coast, urging them to act "for the destruction and confusion of the Moors and the enemies of Christ, and the exaltation of the Catholic faith." With the experience of the Canary Islands, where Franciscan monks had labored since the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Christian mission continued alongside the commercial activities. By the following century, the Bishopric of Madeira was overseeing the mission work in Cape Verde, Sao Tome and the Azores. In 1462, Pope Pius appointed Alfonso of Bolano, a Portuguese Franciscan, as "missionary prefect" of the Guinea coast. Alfonso had already been involved in missionary work in the Canary Islands, and his appointment was an indication of the Catholic Church's desire to establish a Christian presence on the West coast.

It was no wonder therefore that the first Christian celebrations on the coast were all undertaken by the Portuguese. A Catholic priest in the Gold Coast has recorded one such celebration as a celebration of the first mass. This was in 1482, when the Portuguese sailors, after they landed in Elmina, gathered under a big tree, set up an altar and performed what they believed would be the foundation of a great church. Even if this act hardly led to the establishment of a church, it was a declaration of intent by these first sailors. In the ensuing years, the Catholic religious orders took over the mission work. These were the Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians and Capuchins. They appear to have achieved some initial success, especially in the Gold Coast, but also in other parts of the continent. Nigeria had been touched by Catholic missions, which reached the islands of Sao Tome and Principe. Through their trading activities, the Portuguese made contact with the king of Benin and eventually convinced

him to allow some of his sub-chiefs to be baptized in 1516. This was however only cosmetic, for soon after the death of the king Christianity vanished from the kingdom. Augustinian monks were also working in Warri, where the king allowed his son to be baptized and sent to Lisbon for training as a priest. When the son returned, he could not be both king and priest and had to choose. By 1650, some conversions took place in both Warri and Benin, but a breakdown in trade relations always meant a breakdown in mission, and this affected the Nigerian mission significantly. Catholic missionaries were also reported to have passed through Borno in northern Nigeria in the 1680s, but to have made no impact due to the strong presence of Islam. Another attempt, in 1710 to Katsina, also failed to produce results. In nearby Cameroon, missionary attempts were marred by Spanish-Portuguese rivalry and thus no results were produced at all. Similar stories could be told of other parts of the continent, especially of the western and southern coasts; although conversions that took place do not appear to have lasted for long. Records indicate that the work of the religious orders was hardly ever sustained after the monks had left for one reason or another. Yet, even the considerably limited success of the Catholic Church in the evangelization of the Africans, would not have been achieved without these orders. They were ready to send priests whose primary task was to convert Africans to Catholicism. They succeeded was because they were largely separated from the trading establishments based in the castles. This was in contrast to the attempts made by ship chaplains, who displayed little evangelistic zeal, and whose association with the commercial companies created a barrier between them and the African people.

In 1622, after more than a century of attempts and with very little recorded success, Pope Gregory XV established the “Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith” (Sacra congregatio de propaganda fide), known as the Propaganda Fide. This was an attempt to bring all Catholic mission work under the direction of one central authority; but it was, more importantly, another desperate attempt to maintain a Catholic mission presence in Africa. The Portuguese influence was waning fast, and so also their missionary activities.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, French Capuchin monks also championed a few missionary enterprises on the West coast with little success. The Societe des missions etrangeres, founded during 1663 in Paris, played an active role in these attempts.

Iberian Catholicism, therefore, maintained a presence in West Africa for well over two centuries, but by the end of the seventeenth century, the mission was, for all practical purposes, over. It was almost two centuries
later that a revival of mission was attempted and more enduring success stories could be recounted.

3. Impact of Iberian Catholicism

Did the Iberian Catholic mission make any impact on the African population? This is a question that must be answered with a little bit of caution since the impact could be considered from various perspectives. That the mission made an impact is a fact that cannot be denied, since a number of Catholic adherents could always be distinguished on the coast. For example, about one hundred years after the Dutch had expelled the Portuguese Catholics from the Gold Coast, Roman Catholics could still be counted among the population of Elmina. However, considering the length of time during which Iberian Catholicism held sway over West Africa, it is a sad commentary that the impact was neither greater nor more enduring. Various factors contributed to this state of affairs, chiefly the domination of trade with its corrupting influence. But of equal importance was the reaction of the African population to the Catholic Gospel. African culture and religion appear to have shown much resilience, making the transmission of the Gospel message rather difficult. The African chiefs, who were often the missionaries’ first contact, often had mixed motives for converting to Christianity. In the socially and religiously integrated African society, the conversion of the chief was bound to upset the delicate balance between the living and the dead as well as negatively influence social norms and taboos. Often the chief and his elders were unable to accept the conditions set for conversion by the missionaries. As Lamin Sanneh puts it, “the intrusion of Christianity into royal courts and palace circles threatened the position of the traditional religions whose keepers would be anxious to try to prevent their further erosion....” There is the example of Behemoi, the chief of the Wolof, who, in seeking a military alliance with the Portuguese was asked to submit to baptism. He refused, because he was aware that his people were not in favor of Christianity and his conversion would further jeopardize the loyalty of his troops. Again, the practice of mass baptism by Catholic missionaries could be cited as a reason for the low impact of Iberian Catholicism, since the supposed converts easily lapsed into their former religion without much persuasion.

151 SANNEH, West African Christianity, p. 28.
152 See GROVES, The Planting of Christianity in Africa, p. 126.
However, one of the interesting aspects of Iberian Catholicism was the influence it had on the local religion in Elmina. The Catholic heritage, whilst retaining some of its original characteristics, also lent itself to some rather unusual adaptations. There are two interesting remnants of the religion in and around Elmina existing to this day. When the Dutch attacked Elmina in 1637, the local people are said to have fought on the side of the Portuguese, and when it became clear that Elmina would fall to the Dutch, "the African Catholics of Elmina hid away missals, vestments, candlesticks, statues and sacred vessels." These articles were no doubt kept in the homes of the Catholic faithful, but with the passage of time, they must have lost their meaning and appeal to younger generations, who had no use for them. The statue of St. Anthony of Padua found its way into a local shrine in Elmina and became a central object of worship, to the extent that the name of the shrine became known as the Ntona Shrine (an obvious corruption of saint’s name).

Another group of devotees, later known as Santa Mariafo (literally, the Santa Maria people), kept the statue of the virgin Mary as an object of worship. A statue of St Francis of Assisi, which was said to have turned black on arrival in Elmina (a supposed indication of the saint identifying himself with Africans), has not survived. Many people in and around Elmina were said to have invoked the saint’s name for many years.

4. Further European Missionary Presence

It is not to be assumed that only Portugal was responsible for mission in Africa at this time. The rest of Europe was by no means inactive while these Portuguese explorations were taking place. Other European nations joined the trade on the West coast, establishing their presence in many ways. Europe, at this time, was not the industrialized and largely prosperous place that we know today. There was much poverty and hardship, and subsistence depended very much on trade. Many of the European nations were therefore waiting eagerly for favorable conditions in order to launch their own expeditions in search of “greener pastures”. Spain, for example, was already a world power and was like Portugal


154 Some historians also believe that the statue was not incorporated into an already existing shrine but that the shrine originated around the statue, which was said to have been used by the Portuguese in miraculously healing a mentally sick person many years back. See Debrunner, A History of Christianity, p. 33; R.M. Wiltgen, Gold Coast Mission History 1471-1880 (Techyn: Divine Word Publication, 1956), 43-46.
involved in new explorations, but there was much rivalry between the two
two—so much so that it often threatened to break out in open war. The
drawing of a line on the map by the Pope was not enough to deter others
from venturing into areas previously claimed by the Catholic Church.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, the English trader, William
Hawkins of Plymouth (father of the famous sailor Sir John Hawkins), had
arrived on the coast. He traded alongside the Portuguese who did not
consider him a threat. In the years following 1500, other English traders
joined him gradually, establishing a foothold on the coast and eventually
securing a trade charter from Queen Elizabeth. The formation of the
Company of Adventurers of London Trading into Africa in 1618 and their
building of two forts on the coast confirmed their desired permanent
presence.

The other European nation of significance to arrive on the Guinea
Coast was the Netherlands, which was then steadily building its maritime
expertise. The Dutch nation had always detested the hegemony of Spain
and Portugal, which had the tacit support of the Pope, and they were
therefore always seeking ways of exerting themselves. This desire was
given impetus by the outbreak of the Protestant Reformation of the
sixteenth century, so that the Dutch combined their struggle for freedom
from Spain with a struggle for freedom from the Pope. Dutch sailors began
to flout the Spanish and Papal embargo on ships sailing into their areas and
joined the growing number of interlopers. By 1581, the Dutch Republic
had been declared, and defiance of Spain had become widespread. By 1593
the first Dutch sailors had settled on the Guinea coast. Barent Ericzoon,
who was the first Dutchman to form a company to trade on the Guinea
Coast, was believed to have been one of these first arrivals. Like the
English, they soon realized the need to build a fort as both a trading post
and a defense against attacks. The first Dutch fort was therefore
constructed at Moree near Elmina and later fortified and named Fort
Nassau. In the ensuing years the Dutch presence would become more
pronounced. The Dutch eventually succeeded in capturing the Portuguese

155 The first fort was built at Cormantine in the Gold Coast and the other in the
Gambia.

156 Interlopers were merchant ships that were not flying the flag of any of the
Spanish accredited chartered companies. Such ships were often attacked and either
made to return or seized.

157 J.M. Postma, The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815 (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1990), 17.
castle at Elmina in 1637, making them the most powerful nation on the coast for many years.

The success of England and Holland in establishing a foothold on the West coast eventually opened the way for other European countries. Before long, the French were also forcing their way into the region. They initially attempted to join the trade in Elmina, but were repelled by the Portuguese. They then moved on to Accra, but were again chased out by the Portuguese. Other unsuccessful attempts were made at Assini, Komenda, Anomabu and Dahomey, so that for many years the French had no permanent base on the coast.\(^{158}\) The arrival of the Swedes was more dramatic. Debrunner narrates how a Swedish ship arrived and took away land from the English in 1652 at Cape Coast and started building a fort.\(^ {159}\) The Swedes went ahead and maintained a governor for a few years before selling the property to the Danes. They, however, continued to fight other nations and acquired much property in the process, although, in the end not much of it remained. It was the Dutch takeover of Fort Carolusburg at Takoradi in 1663 that effectively ended the period of the Swedes on the coast.

Much more enduring was the Danish presence, which started in the seventeenth century. The Danes initially had to battle the Swedes, their traditional enemies, and they could only establish themselves after the Swedes had eventually been overpowered by the Dutch. They built a small fort, Frederiksborg at Takoradi, which remained their main base until they acquired the Christiansborg Castle at Osu in 1683, and turned this into their headquarters.\(^ {160}\) From this point on, they maintained a strong presence and became one of the most formidable competitors in the coastal trade.

Most of these European nations also attempted some mission work, facing the same problems as the Portuguese and achieving sporadic success and failure. Before long, trade had assumed worrying proportions. The commodities for trade gradually shifted from gold, spices and other such commodities to slaves. The resultant impact on mission was overwhelming.

5. Iberian Christianity and the Slave Trade

One of the greatest drawbacks to mission work on the African continent was the incidence of the slave trade, which started on a small

\(^{158}\) Debrunner, A History of Christianity, pp. 28, 42.

\(^{159}\) Debrunner, A History of Christianity, pp. 42-43.

\(^{160}\) A detailed history of the forts and castles can be found in Albert Van Dantzig, Forts and Castles of Ghana (Accra: Sedco Publishing Ltd, 1980).
scale and grew to become one of the most dehumanizing and offensive practices in world history. The concept of slavery is, however, much broader than the Slave Trade of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The impact of slavery on mission in Africa is very much related to its social and historical developments; since slavery has existed and been practiced for ages in many societies.\textsuperscript{161}

In Africa, as in feudal Europe, slavery was a normal part of the social system, although the practice differed considerably. The type of slavery practiced in Africa in ancient times is often referred to as "limited slavery", which means that it was not a permanent condition. The practice of slavery in Africa, however, began to change with the growing interaction with people from other parts of the world. The first experience occurred with the arrival of Arab Moslem traders from the Mediterranean in the eleventh century, who started purchasing slaves and taking them away to their countries. This was a new phenomenon for Africa because the slaves so purchased were taken away to a far away land to become slaves for the rest of their lives. Some of these slaves were sent beyond Arab lands to Turkey, Spain and Portugal. Therefore, by the fifteenth century when the Portuguese found themselves in Africa, they were already familiar with African slaves and the use to which they could be put. It is no wonder then that it did not take long for the Catholic Portuguese to get involved in the purchase and shipment of African slaves.\textsuperscript{162} Historians refer to this trade in humans as the old World Atlantic Slave Trade, since a new form of the trade (the Atlantic slave Trade) developed later. It was the Spanish discovery of the Americas in 1492 that gave impetus for the new development in the slave trade. The Atlantic slave trade spanned a period of almost four centuries and introduced so much carnage and devastation on the continent that the effects are still present with us today.\textsuperscript{163}

Christian mission in such circumstances was most difficult, if not impossible. However, it is important to note that the Portuguese Catholics who came to West Africa were not always opposed to the practice of slavery. In spite of their presence, the first slaves were bought and sent to

\textsuperscript{161} The subject of slavery as an institution has been studied by many writers, and there is abundant literature to be consulted. So also is the subject of the Slave Trade. See Bibliography.


\textsuperscript{163} For a description of the conditions under which slaves were kept prior to shipment, refer to POSTMA, \textit{The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade}, 227-234. See also KPOBI, \textit{Mission in Chains}, 161-162; and SANNEH, \textit{West African Christianity}, pp. 25-26.
Lisbon as early as 1442, and after that contingents of slaves were dispatched every year. By the time of the death of Prince Henry (1460), an estimated 700 slaves were being exported to Portugal annually.¹⁶⁴ Also important for our study is the fact that slavery was sanctioned by the Vatican as a legitimate means of acquiring servants and labor. Moreover, the slave trade was believed to afford the Africans an opportunity to accept Christ and save their souls. As the practice degenerated, in 1525 King John III of Portugal tried to prohibit the slave trade with very limited success.

II. THE CHAPLAINCY FACTOR

In the study of the whole period of the slave trade, one question that is raised constantly and forces itself onto the stage is: Where was the church in Europe when this obnoxious practice was taking place? What happened to the spirit of evangelism that existed in the early years? The answer is not difficult to find. The church in Europe still existed, and Europe remained largely Christian, but the church was co-opted. It lost its voice and eventually its conscience and therefore did not only look on as the trade in human beings went on, but even participated, both overtly and covertly. Few church people saw any correlation between the practice of slavery and their faith. Occasionally, there were debates in some European countries on the subject of slavery and the Christian faith, in which various philosophical, theological and legal arguments were advanced, but these had little or no impact on the practice.¹⁶⁵

The chaplaincy institution, which was maintained by many of the European slave trading nations, was the only sign that Christian mission still had a little breath left. Chaplaincy was first introduced to the West African coast by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century. It was a policy of the Portuguese to place a priest on board all their ships, whose primary task was to keep spiritual oversight over the sailors. They preached, prayed for the sick and said requiem mass for the dead. It was also part of their responsibility to make contact with the local Africans and bring the Gospel to them, a task which was only rarely fulfilled. The shipping companies were obliged to bear the full cost of their upkeep for the duration of the voyages as well as the time spent on shore. There are a few recorded instances of Portuguese chaplains making converts on the West Coast, sometimes even converting whole households. These, however, were never

¹⁶⁵ KPOBI, Mission in Chains, pp. 100-103.
on any regular scale and the conversions often fizzled out after a few years.\textsuperscript{166}

This system of chaplaincy was adopted by all the other European nations that traded on the African coast. The chaplains became the principal representatives of the European churches even during the period of the slave trade, struggling against many odds and having to do their job in very unfavorable conditions. It was often difficult to find clergymen willing to take up the post because, among other things, sea voyages in those days were risky undertakings, and lasted for months at a time. Owing to the unpopularity of the position, some of the chaplains were no more than mere adventurers who made no impact at all. One Dutch writer describes the early chaplains sent to the Guinea coast as “recruited from among shoe-makers and peat-carriers, bakers and shearers ... and woefully incompetent for their job.”\textsuperscript{167} The situation appears to have improved a little bit after castles and forts were constructed and chaplains could be stationed at particular locations for a specific number of years. The latter crop of chaplains especially in the eighteenth century, were better trained and more suited to the job of evangelism. Some of them made impressive strides in evangelization, making converts from among the African population and sometimes giving Christian leadership training to some of the Africans.

In the Gold Coast, the names of a few chaplains stand out clearly, because of the impact they made on the process of mission work. The Danes maintained an almost unbroken succession of chaplains at the Christiansborg Castle well into the nineteenth century until that Castle was sold to the British. One such chaplain, the Rev. Elias Svane, took his preaching to the local people and succeeded in sending two African boys, Christian Protten and Frederick Pederson Svane (who adopted the name of his benefactor) to Copenhagen to be trained as ministers of the Gospel in 1726. They came back as missionaries and did some intermittent work in and around Christiansborg for many years.\textsuperscript{168}

The English had a similar record. Chaplaincy played an important role in their settlements all across the West and South Coast. The crown colony of Senegambia always had a chaplain attached to its administration. In addition to their functions of conducting services for the British colonists, they were also charged to “induce” the local population to embrace the Protestant faith.\textsuperscript{169} In spite of much rivalry with the French, this system was

\begin{flushleft} 
\textsuperscript{166} SANNEH, \textit{West African Christianity}, pp. 22-25. \\
\textsuperscript{167} Quoted from KPOBI, \textit{Mission in Chains}, p. 135. \\
\textsuperscript{168} DEBRUNNER, \textit{A History of Christianity}, p. 61. \\
\textsuperscript{169} GROVES, \textit{The Planting of Christianity}, pp. 153 & 186. 
\end{flushleft}
African Christianity

sustained for a number of years until mission stations were established in Bathurst and other places along the river Gambia. In the Gold Coast, the outstanding name was that of the Rev Thomas Thompson, who was sent, at his own request, to be a missionary of the SPG at Cape Coast. Thompson had some experience working with Africans when he served as missionary in the United States and spent time evangelizing the slaves in New Jersey. In Cape Coast, his primary responsibility was to evangelize the African population, but he also became chaplain to the inhabitants of the Cape Coast Castle. He worked there from 1751 to 1756, until his failing health compelled him to return to England. He, however, encouraged three African boys to go to England and be trained as missionaries. Although two of the boys died in England, the third, Philip Quaicoo, graduated in theology and was ordained a minister of the Anglican Church. Philip Quaicoo returned to Cape Coast and served as priest, chaplain and school master for many years. 170

The Charter establishing the Dutch West India Company in 1621 had an explicit clause requiring the company to make the spread of the Reformed Christian religion one of its principal objectives, and it was the chaplain (also known as ziekenrooster or “comforter of the sick”) who was charged with this responsibility. The company maintained a steady succession of chaplains for many years. Here the position of the chaplain was often the third most important position in the administrative setup after the Director-General and the Superintendent. 171 Later however, it became more and more difficult to find ministers willing to take up the position, leading to a situation of intermittent absence of chaplains. By far the most well known Dutch chaplain was the Rev. Jacobus Capitein, an ex slave who was trained and ordained in Holland by the Netherlands Reformed Church. 172

Almost all the chaplains, irrespective of which country or denomination they came from appear to have faced some general problems. Apart from the unfavorable climatic conditions that they had to endure, they were more often than not left alone to grapple with their social and economic problems. It was the period of the slave trade, and one wonders how these chaplains were expected to do any meaningful mission among people who were regarded as nothing more than commodities for sale. The

172 For a comprehensive account of the life and work of Capitein, see Kpobi, Mission in Chains.
professions of commitment to evangelism by the home churches appear to have been no more than half hearted precepts to satisfy their consciences. No wonder that particularly during the period of intense slave trading, there was not much commitment on the part of the home churches that sent them. In many instances, they were left without the necessary logistical support to accomplish their tasks. Moreover the trading companies that employed the chaplains had no real interest in mission work and therefore could not be much bothered. Added to this was the general situation of degeneracy among the Europeans on the coast. The majority of workers in the slave industry were not interested in religion or the church. Immorality, concubinage and loose living were rampant and the chaplain had a hard task ministering to persons who were not good examples of Christian living. It is, however, clear that some of the chaplains themselves had characters that created problems for the work. There are records of some of them abandoning their work and getting involved in trading or doing other things unbecoming of a minister of the Gospel.  

III. NOTABLE AFRICAN CHAPLAINS

Chaplaincy as we have noted, was devoted primarily to the spiritual care of the Europeans who worked on the coast, and eventually extended to cover the mulattoes. In spite of various statements to the contrary, the evangelization of the African population was always of secondary importance. Things, however, started to change as more and more mulattoes and Africans became educated and proved capable of handling the job of the chaplain. By the third decade of the eighteenth century, a number of Africans could be counted among the ranks of the chaplains on the West African coast. Most of them were connected in one way or another with the forts and castles on the Gold Coast and only occasionally reaching into Togo, Ivory Coast and beyond. Our information on these chaplains is gleaned from various sources including diaries, which some of them kept. The Danes particularly encouraged their chaplains to write their daily experiences down and to share with their successors. The writings of three Danish chaplains have been preserved and have become an important reference for the periods of their service. These were the Reverends Wilhem Johann Mueller, Johan Rask and H.C. Monrad. These gentlemen appear to have been interested in African affairs generally, and therefore

173 WILTGEN, Gold Coast Mission History, p. 18. See also KPOBI, Mission in Chains.
tried to describe what they understood of the African way of life regarding politics, economic activities and religion.\textsuperscript{174}

Information on the few African chaplains was also preserved in reports, diaries and other documents of the places they served. It appears that the novelty of a member of the African race rising to such a position must have generated much interest in their life and work. Owing to the varying circumstances under which these chaplains served, it is impossible to treat their stories in a uniform manner as regards detail or narration. This section therefore does not intend to give full detailed accounts of the lives and times of these chaplains. Only specific, important detail is mentioned.

1. Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein (1717-1747)

The date of birth of Capitein cannot be established with any certainty. Neither he nor his guardians knew when he was born because of the circumstances of his birth. We may, however, use the records of the Academic Senate of the University of Leiden where he studied to establish that he was born in the year 1717.\textsuperscript{175}

Capitein had been captured and sold as a slave to Captain Arnold Steenhart at the age of seven or eight years, but instead of being shipped with the others, his master decided to keep him as a slave at Shama. When Steenhart was leaving the Gold Coast, he gave the little boy to his friend Jacobus van Goch, a chief commissary stationed at Shama, who gave him the Dutch name Capitein (which means “captain”), because he had been given as a gift by a ship captain. Van Goch left the shores of Elmina on 14th April 1728, taking along the child slave Capitein, and arrived in Middleburg in the Netherlands three months later. Since slavery was then not permitted in the Netherlands, Capitein became a free person, but as a child, was still dependent on Van Goch, who became his adopted father. Van Goch took him to The Hague, his hometown, where Capitein started school at the age of 13 or 14 years. He also attended catechism classes under the Rev. Johan Philip Manger, who prepared him for baptism in July 1735. He was then 18 years old. It was at his baptism that he received his three other names, namely, Jacobus, after his adopted father Van Goch; Elisa, after Van Goch’s sister, Elizabeth and Johannes, after Van Goch’s niece, Anna Mulder.

\textsuperscript{174} See H. DEBRUNNER, \textit{Notable Danish Chaplains on the Gold Coast} (1956), 13-39.

\textsuperscript{175} The Roll Book actually states that when Capitein was admitted to the University on 22\textsuperscript{nd} June 1737, he had obtained the age of twenty years. See KPOBI, \textit{Mission in Chains}, p. 52.
Capitein’s education was financed by Van Goch as well as other persons, mostly church people in The Hague, who saw in him a great potential for mission work in Africa. He completed the first stages of his schooling in 1737, having written a treatise, *De Vocatione Ethnicorum* (The Calling of the Heathen) in which he argued in support of mission work among the African population. He was immediately admitted to the University of Leiden to follow a course in theology, enjoying full scholarship from the Hallet Foundation. The four-year course also included lectures in Philosophy, Greek, Hebrew, History and Oratory. When he graduated in 1742, he was adjudged the best student of his class. His thesis, produced in Latin, was entitled, *Dissertatio Politica-Theologica de servitute, Libertate Christianae non contraria* (Politico-Theological Dissertation on Slavery as not being Contrary to Christian Liberty). The topic of the dissertation was as controversial as it was explosive. The topic of slavery was a contentious issue in the Netherlands, with varying positions and hardly any agreement. The entry of Capitein into the debate was quite intriguing, if for nothing at all, for the fact that he, being a former slave, was arguing in favor of the continuation of slavery. He became an instant hero in the Netherlands and his dissertation was immediately published and widely distributed. A Dutch translation was completed within a matter of months and portraits of Capitein were sold alongside the book. "What many thought privately, but few dared to say publicly, had now been said, and not only in public but also in print. Moreover, it had been said by a most unlikely person—a freed slave!"

It has been said that Capitein’s defense of slavery was orchestrated by his benefactors, who used him to legitimize their support for the institution of slavery. This charge may not be completely denied because there were many interested parties in the life of Capitein. Apart from the Dutch Reformed Church, which must have considered the dissertation an appeasement of the Christian conscience in tolerating the slave trade, the West India Company (WIC) must have pulled the strings from behind the scenes. The WIC was the institution that stood to reap the single largest benefit from the defense of slavery, since it then provided a justification, and indeed a Christian one, for their slave trading activities. Yet we may not completely absolve Capitein from his responsibility for what he wrote. Even if he succumbed to pressure from his benefactors, he must have believed at least the core message of the dissertation, namely that slavery and Christian freedom were compatible.

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Capitein was ordained on 7 May 1742 by the Presbytery (Classis) of Amsterdam as a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, becoming the first African to receive Protestant ordination in a European church. He was immediately appointed school master and chaplain by the WIC and designated to Elmina in the Gold Coast. He undertook a preaching tour of the Netherlands which took him to the Pieterskerk in Leiden, the Kloosterkerk in The Hague and the Ouderkerk aan den Amstel before his departure for Elmina in the same year.

a. Work in Elmina

Capitein was 25 years old when he was ordained and had spent fifteen years in the Netherlands. His anxiety to see Elmina again was therefore great. He arrived to a warm welcome from the Dutch governor of the Castle, De Petersen on 8 October 1742 and immediately set out to organize his mission work. He tried to relate to the Europeans in the castle as well as to the Africans in Elmina town, and therefore had to relearn Fanti, his mother tongue. He experienced so much hostility from the Europeans that he was easily discouraged in his pastoral work with them. They obviously could not accept an African as their spiritual leader, and they could not tolerate his attack on their moral ineptitude. His work among the Africans, however, proved much more interesting and fruitful although that too was not sustained. He established a school for both mulatto and African children and within six to seven months, the number of children in the school had reached 45. He even went to the elders of the Elmina town to convince them to send their children to the school, and conceived the idea of sending the brilliant ones among them to Holland for further training.

Apart from his work in education, Capitein also did much in promoting the writing of the local Fanti language. Within one year of his arrival in Elmina, he was able to produce a Fanti translation, from Dutch, of three important documents: the Lord’s Prayer; the Ten Commandments; and the Twelve Articles of Faith. This was the first successful attempt by any chaplain to use the local language in teaching and learning. Capitein’s work in Elmina made such impact that the Asantehene, Nana Opoku Ware I sent twelve boys and two girls to study at the school. The original intention of the Asantehene was to have the fourteen children educated in Holland, but this plan did not realize, and they were made to stay in Capitein’s school.

177 Note that the Catholic Church had ordained Don Henrique, a prince of the Congo as early as 1518. See Neill, A History of Christian Missions, p. 118.
178 Brieven en Papieren van Guinea aan de Vergadering der Thienen (WIC inv. No.113), 140.
b. The Frustrating End

Although he made a great impact in a short time, Capitein’s successful beginning did not last long. The expected growth and progress of the work did not come easily, and although he persevered, he eventually sank under the weight of the frustration. His first frustration had to do with his intention to marry an African girl from Elmina as a means of integrating into the African society. In his view, this marriage would prove to the Africans that “although I differ from them in manner of life and in religion, they are nevertheless not despised by me....” This plan, however, failed because the church authorities in Amsterdam opposed it accusing him of impropriety in wanting to marry an unbaptized girl. They rather arranged and sent Antonia Ginderdros to Elmina to become his wife. However, the greatest hindrance and source of frustration to Capitein was the apathy of his superiors in Amsterdam, both of the WIC and the church. When his school work ran into difficulties, because of the death of two of the teachers and the lack of teaching materials, he wrote a number of letters to his superiors for the situation to be rectified, but very little response was received, causing his enthusiasm to decline gradually. He again complained many times in his letters about the appalling immoral lives of the Europeans on the coast as well as their disregard of his leadership, but no remedy appeared to be coming from Amsterdam.

Gradually, Capitein’s situation became untenable. He offered to resign but continued to stay on hoping for an improvement in his situation. When this did not happen, he involved himself in trading, but failed so miserably that he accumulated much debt, which became an embarrassment to himself and the church. By 1746, Capitein was a completely frustrated person who could not see any good prospects ahead. He died on 1 February 1747, aged about 30 years, having labored in Elmina for five years. The cause of his death has never been established, resulting in a number of speculations, including suicide or possibly murder. These speculations, however, have no basis whatsoever. His period of service was quite short but his impact on education and evangelism among the Africans was far reaching. It is a pity that the life of such a significant person of African descent has remained obscured for a long time.
2. Philip Quaicoo (1741-1816)

Philip Quaicoo was born on 13th March 1741 at Cape Coast. He was the son of Obirempong Kodwo Egyir who was a wealthy middleman in the slave trading business at Cape Coast. He was also a local magistrate employed by the governor to help settle cases between natives and was a well known person among both the Europeans and the Africans. The name of his mother is unknown.

Philip's father enrolled him in the Castle School then run by the SPG missionary and Royal Africa Company chaplain, Rev. Thomas Thompson. Owing to his strong views on the use of Africans for mission work among their own people, Rev. Thompson convinced Philip's father to send him for training in England to become a minister. The father readily agreed to the suggestion hoping that it would open up a bright future for his son. Thompson selected two further boys from the school, William Cudjo and Thomas Cobbers. The three set sail together with Rev. Thompson from Cape Coast and arrived in Islington in 1756. They were immediately admitted into the elementary school in Islington where they spent four years under the tutelage of first Mr Hickman and then Rev. John Moore. At the end of this period of study, and based on their brilliant performance, they were recommended for admission to university education, but both William Cudjo and Thomas Cobbers died before this could materialize. William is said to have had a mental breakdown and Thomas gave in to tuberculosis and small pox. Philip therefore continued alone for another four years, studying Theology, Philosophy and History.

On completion of his studies, Philip Quaicoo was ordained as a deacon of the Anglican Church on 25 March 1765 by the Bishop of Exeter at the Chapel Royal in St James. About two months later, on 1 May 1765, he was ordained as priest in the same chapel by the Bishop of London. This ordination made Philip the first African to receive holy orders in the Anglican Church. The ceremony of ordination was witnessed by the bishops of Canterbury, Winchester and Lincoln. A few days before his ordination, Philip married Miss Catherine Blunt of Holborn. The wedding

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179 The spelling of this name varies considerably in the different documents that contain information about him. It is variably spelt Quaque, Kwaikoo, and Quarcoo.

180 These agents of the castle were known as "caboeceers".

181 Thomas Thompson mentions a (another?) son of Caboeceer Kodwo, Frederick, who was also sent to England before Philip. It is not clear whether this was a brother of Philip or the child of another caboceer with the same name. It is also not known what happened to Frederick. See Thomas THOMPSON, An account of two missionary voyages (London: SPG, 1758), 35.
ceremony was officiated by his mentor the Rev Moore. He was immediately appointed a “missionary, schoolmaster and clergyman to the negroes on the Gold Coast”, as well as a chaplain to the Company of Merchants at Cape Coast.

**a. Work in Cape Coast**

After ten years away from his native home, Philip Quaicoo, together with his wife, arrived back in Cape Coast on 8 February 1766, and was accommodated in the Castle. He immediately revived the school for Africans and mulatto children where he himself had been a pupil. The school appears to have flourished for a number of years, attracting even some European children. The Royal Africa Company was so impressed with Philip’s performance that they opened other schools in the areas where they were operating along the coast, and convinced Philip Quaicoo to recruit teachers for them. Soon he was overseeing schools in Anomabo, Winneba, Komenda, Dixcove, Sekondi and Tamtumquerry. He also undertook an evangelistic tour of these coastal towns and succeeded in introducing Christianity to portions of the communities. During 1772 he even extended his tours to Accra, where he stayed for four months and started a school before leaving. He was in Axim in 1779 for a similar exercise. In 1787, together with a group of friends, Philip Quaicoo became a founding member of the Torridzonian Society, which was devoted to the advancement of the African and mulatto populations. This society became the first indigenous organization to devote special attention to physically handicapped children. The society attracted some of the most prominent citizens of Cape Coast at the time, and Governor William Fielde (1789-1791) was so impressed with their work that he attended some of their meetings and supported them financially.

**b. Hindrances and Difficulties**

Philip Quaicoo’s work at Cape Coast encountered many difficulties. As early as 1774, he was known to have said that he was tired of being there. He undertook a number of trips outside Cape Coast just to get away from the frustrations at home. One of the greatest drawbacks of Philip Quaicoo’s ministry was his inability to speak his native Fanti language. His ten year stay in England had wiped out his knowledge of Fanti completely, such, that on his return to Cape Coast, he spoke to his people through an interpreter. This was surprising since he was about 15 years old when he left the Gold Coast and could have retained much of the Fanti during his sojourn in England. F.L. Bartels suggests that his English mentors must have persuaded him to abandon Fanti in favor of English, since the English believed that “the English tongue was the heaven sent medium of religion
and civilization.”¹⁸² No doubt, this created a barrier between him and his people. The presence of his English wife did not help matters either. The local people were not sure how to relate to this black Englishman and his white wife.

He also encountered the hostility of the Europeans to whom he was supposed to be a spiritual guide. This was also the experience of his compatriot, Capitein in Elmina. One incident is recorded where some Europeans in the castle flatly refused to attend services officiated by Rev Quaicoo, because they did not want to “hear any Blackman whatever”. The moral lives of the Europeans were also so appalling that ministering to them was a difficult task. Some were even known to have demanded gifts from him before agreeing to attend church.

Philip Quaicoo’s work was also plagued by the unstable conditions on the coast. There were constant conflicts with the Dutch in Elmina and the Danes based at Christiansborg, which made the spread of the gospel and the establishment of schools difficult. He was expected to show allegiance to the English even when he thought that their actions were wrong. For example, in 1791 when the Anomabo fort was attacked, Quaicoo was ordered by the governor to take up arms in its defense. His refusal to do so cost him his salary for four months, leading to a hold up in his educational and evangelistic work. His salary was restored after he made an appeal to the Royal Africa Company. In his frustration, he tried his hand at trading to make ends meet, but he withdrew quickly after his employers complained that he was neglecting his work. They accused him of deviating “from the intentions of the Society (SPG) and his proper line of duty by paying more attention to the purposes of trade than of religion.”¹⁸³ To add to his woes, his house was burgled in 1785 while he was away on holiday in England.

The ministry of Philip Quaicoo spanned a period of fifty long years, but the impact was not commensurate with the length of time. By the time of his death in 1816, he himself felt that he had achieved very little. Some people also pointed to his inability to convert his own father to Christianity as a failure. Yet it would be wrong to write off his achievements with such ease. His initial success in education produced many educated Africans, which in turn produced the bulk of Christians who later became instrumental in the spread of the Gospel on the coast. Some of the products of his school in Cape Coast were known to have been instrumental in encouraging the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society to begin work on

the Gold Coast. Philip Quaicoo’s marriage to Catherine produced two daughters and a son.

3. Christian Jacob Protten (1715-1769)

One of the least known missionary endeavors in the Gold Coast is the work done by the Moravians. This group, founded by Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, was also known as the United Brethren (Unitas Fratrum) or the Herrnhutters. They were products of the Pietist movement, which flourished in Europe in the eighteenth century. Ignoring the systematic mission theories of the time, the Moravians emphasized personal conversion and piety and reached out beyond Europe into Africa and the Caribbean. One of the first missionaries to undertake this work was Christian Protten from the Gold Coast.

Christian Jacob Protten was the son of a Danish merchant based at the Christiansborg castle and an African mother from Christiansborg (Osu). Born in 1715, he attended the mulatto school run by the Danish chaplain, Rev. Elias Svane. The Rev. Svane found in the young boy a willingness to learn and work for the church. He therefore arranged to have him sent to Denmark for training as a teacher and theologian. Protten, together with another mulatto boy, Frederik Pedersen, accompanied the Rev. Svane to Copenhagen, where he followed a series of courses ending with a theological course at the University. He was introduced to the Danish king, Frederik IV, who agreed to pay for his education and general upkeep. King Frederik was a patron of the missionary movement and was eager to see the Christian religion preached in Africa. After eight years of study, Protten visited Herrnhut, the headquarters of the Moravians, where he spent a further two years. 184 He was then commissioned by the Moravian movement, along with Henry Huckoff, as missionary to Africa. They were to be based at the Elmina Castle and were commended to the Dutch governor there.

a. Work in the Gold Coast

Protten and Huckoff arrived in Elmina in 1737, but before they could start any meaningful work, Huckoff died. Protten appears to have had many misunderstandings with the governor at Elmina, which even resulted in his

being imprisoned on an island for a number of weeks. With his efforts at starting a school thwarted, Protten decided to move to Christiansborg, hoping to make some impact there. But he was struck down with malaria and could do very little. In 1741, Zinzendorf decided that Protten should take a holiday in Europe to recuperate. After only two years, he requested to be sent to the Island of St Thomas as missionary. There also he faced one problem after another, and returned to Europe after only a year and half. He married a mulatto, Rebecca Freundlich, the widow of a Moravian missionary, in 1746, and traveled with her back to Christiansborg. He stayed at the Castle for many years trying his hands at various mission projects until he was finally appointed “catechist and assistant schoolmaster” in 1756. He held on to this position until 1761, when an accident resulted in the death of one of his pupils. He was arrested, charged with murder and kept in the castle prison for a while. The Moravians, however, managed to secure his release and he was sent to Copenhagen to be punished. He was pardoned by the Danish king and sent back to Christiansborg in 1764, where he served as chaplain and teacher for the next five years. During this period he stayed intermittently at Ningo, where the Danes had a fort, and did some evangelistic work there. He is also known to have ventured into preaching at La and Teshie.

In spite of his topsy-turvy career as a missionary, Protten did achieve quite a bit for the Christian mission on the Gold Coast. Protten was one of the first missionaries to try and reduce the Ga language into writing, producing a translation of the Shorter Catechism and the Lord’s Prayer and some parables. He also produced a Ga Grammar book for use in his school. This was a remarkable initiative, especially since he lost the use of his mother tongue, Ga, during his stay in Denmark. It must have taken real commitment and dedication to achieve this. His attempts encouraged others like Governor Wrisberg and Governor Schoening to study the Ga language and translate other important Christian documents.

Both Groves and Bartels mention that Protten is also known to have tried his hand at the Fanti language, with Groves claiming further that he

186 Protten was said to have been cleaning his gun when it accidentally went off and killed the boy.
188 Wrisberg translated the Sermon on the Mount and parts of Luther’s Catechism whilst Schoening translated the Ten Commandments, the Apostle’s Creed and the Lord’s Prayer.
produced a Fanti grammar book. This book, however, cannot be traced anywhere. A Ga-Fante-Danish Catechism, which he claimed to have written and printed in Denmark and which he was bringing to use in the Gold Coast, was destroyed when the whole consignment fell into the sea as he disembarked at Christiansborg in 1765.

Christian Protten died in 1769. His entire mission work was fraught with much frustration arising partly from his own natural disposition and partly from circumstances beyond his control. He appears to have been a rather difficult and uncompromising character, who was angered by the apparent indifference of his countrymen to the Gospel. He is known to have insisted on a complete break with “African heathen practices”, and to have preached fiery sermons against alcohol use and polygamy. It is, however, wrong to conclude, as the Moravians did, that he “accomplished absolutely nothing for the Lord.” There was no doubt about his commitment to evangelism and education for the Africans, and as many times as he failed, he was always willing to begin again. Protten certainly deserves a place in the history of mission and evangelism on the Gold Coast.

4. Frederick Pedersen Svane

Frederick Pedersen Svane has the honor of being the first African missionary sent to the Gold Coast, and yet information on him is rather scanty and inconsistent in many parts. Although his date of birth is not recorded, he was a contemporary of Protten and was perhaps a few years older. Like Protten, his mother was a Ga from Osu and his father a Danish merchant. In 1726, he was taken, together with Protten, to Denmark by the Rev. Elias Svane where he was baptized in the Garrison Church in Copenhagen.

After years of elementary education, he was admitted to the University of Copenhagen to study Theology. Svane’s period of study in Copenhagen was a time of conflict between the Pietists and the orthodox theologians in Denmark and other parts of Europe. Svane, however, opted for the Pietists, resulting in his expulsion from the hall of residence of the university and the withdrawal of his scholarship. He found sympathy and support in Count Von Plessen, a committed Pietist, who proved to be a worthy benefactor for many years. Svane is known to have eventually also denounced what he

190 Debrunner, A History of Christianity, p. 72.
191 Wiltgen, Gold Coast Mission History.
called the “unscientific and unhealthy sentimentality” of the Pietists. He graduated in 1735 in Philosophy and Arts and was ordained for mission work. He then married a Danish woman, with whom he traveled back to Christiansborg that same year to work as chaplain and teacher.

**a. Work in Christiansborg**

Svane worked in the Castle for ten years running the school for mulatto children. His attempts to increase the number of African children in the school were discouraged by the governor, and his appeal to his benefactors in Denmark did not yield anything positive, since the Von Plessens themselves were mainly committed to supporting mission work among the Europeans and mulattoes. His work among the castle staff was full of frustration and conflict. He appears to have faced many financial difficulties and his wife was compelled to do laundry services for the castle staff to supplement her husband’s income. The wife was once nearly raped by one of the castle workers, and therefore offered to go back to Denmark in 1738. Svane had wanted to join her, but was prevented from leaving his post by the governor. He therefore stayed without his wife for about eight years before finally resigning in 1746 and returning to Denmark. It is not clear whether he lived with another woman after the departure of his wife, but he was accused by the governor of being involved with other women. During his years of loneliness, he tried his hand at the slave trade and made some money, and even built a stone house in Osu. The governor was unhappy with his involvement in private trade whilst still being employed by the Castle. His house was therefore pulled down and he was imprisoned for seven months (November 1742 to June 1743).

Svane retained most of his native Ga language and used it for teaching, but he was unable to transmit important terms of the Christian faith into Ga. He claimed that the Ga language was incapable of being developed to contain certain terms. This assertion was disproved by the Basel missionaries, who succeeded in promoting the use of Ga for all aspects of teaching and learning in the next century.

In Frederick Pedersen Svane, we have another attempt by an African to bring the Gospel to their own people. Although there is not much to recount concerning his achievement, he nevertheless was an important factor in the Protestant Mission in West Africa in the eighteenth century.

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5. Anton Wilhem Amo

Amo was not a chaplain or missionary in the same sense as the other Africans we have been considering in this section. He, however, deserves to be mentioned because he was a product of the same circumstances that produced the others. He never became ordained, but made an impact as one of the most celebrated African intellectuals of the eighteenth century.

As with many other Africans of the time, Amo’s date of birth is not known with any certainty. It is believed that he was born in 1703, in or around Axim in western Gold Coast. He was probably of Aowin or Was sa ethnic extraction. In 1707, when he was about seven years old, he was taken to Amsterdam, apparently with the knowledge of his parents. This is most likely because when he returned home almost fifty years later, he was still able to locate his father and sister. After a short stay in Amsterdam, he was taken to Brunswick, Germany, where he was adopted by the Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel and put in the care of the Duke’s son, Wilhem Augustus. He became a favorite of the royal household and many of the royals shared in his upbringing.

Amo appears to have received a Christian upbringing in the Protestant environment of the Brunswick court, which subscribed to the Augsburg Confession. He was baptized on 29 July 1708 in the chapel of the Saltzthal Castle and given the names of his benefactors (Anton Ulrich and Wilhem Augustus). His family name, Amo, was retained for a reason that is not known. The probability was that his parents were expecting him to return after his education and would expect him to still use his African name. When he was 18 years old (1721) he was confirmed.

He enrolled at the University of Halle on 9th June 1727 after probably following earlier study at the Brunswick State University (University of Helmstedt). At Halle he studied Philosophy and Jurisprudence, all his fees being paid by the Duke. His period of study coincided with the controversy between Pietism and Rationalism, represented by August Herman Francke and Christian Frederick Wolff respectively. In spite of his upbringing and environment, Amo appears to have chosen the side of the Rationalists and to have maintained that position.196

a. Academic Work

Amo became one of the greatest scholars of his time, excelling in every way. He defended his thesis entitled, “De jure maurorum in Europa”, in November 1729. He dealt with the legal aspects of slavery, investigating

“to what extent the freedom or servitude of the Moors in Europe who had been purchased by the Christians was in conformity with the usual laws.”

His conclusion was that the Roman law, on which European law was based, did not permit the purchase and enslavement of Africans by Europeans. This thesis, which unfortunately cannot be traced, earned him a degree in law. He then moved on to the University of Wittenberg, where in the following year, 1730, he was awarded the Magister of Philosophy and Liberal Arts. The award emphasized the great achievement of Amo and added that he had “acquired the respect and affection of all his university teachers, and by his extraordinary honesty, diligence and erudition, had easily excelled all his classmates.” Here he defended a dissertation entitled, “Inaugural philosophical dissertation on the apathy of the human mind or the absence of feeling and the faculty of feeling in the mind, and the presence of them in our organic living body”. This degree was converted to a Doctor of Philosophy degree a few years later.

b. Amo as Lecturer

With his achievements, Amo was appointed as lecturer at the University of Wittenberg, where he lectured in Philosophy and Logic. Between 1734 and 1737 he worked on his magnum opus, a treatise on logic, covering more than two hundred pages, and published in Halle in 1738. He then moved on to the University of Jena where he lectured from 1739 to 1740, and achieved fame as a philosopher in addition to his lectures in Psychology and Para-psychology. In 1740, he was appointed a councilor at the court of the King of Prussia in Berlin. One of his closest associates and confidants during his days of teaching was the Chancellor of the University of Halle, Prof. Johann Pieter von Ludwig (1668-1743). They were so close that the death of his friend in 1743 affected Amo’s whole outlook on life. He lost interest in his work at the University, and in 1753 he opted to return to the Gold Coast.

Amo returned to Axim after having spent about four and half decades in Europe. His father and one sister were still alive when he returned, and he reunited with them. He was revered by the local population as “a man who knew the future”, because of his knowledge in astrology and astronomy. Amo is however said to have preferred to live alone and

197 op. cit., p. 172
198 Only a summary of this thesis is produced in Gottfried Ludwig, Universal History.
199 Amo probably left Wittenberg under pressure from the Pietists who had the upper hand there and would not countenance Amo's Wolffian rationalism.
therefore moved to settle in the Dutch fort (Sebastian) at Shama, where he remained a virtual recluse till his death in 1756.

Unlike the other Africans mentioned in this section, Amo was not closely associated with the church or with mission work. We have nevertheless included him because he was also a product of European Christianity. Although he was baptized and brought up as a Christian, his inclinations appear to have been towards a more African spirituality. As Debrunner points out, the kind of Christianity he experienced in Germany could not challenge him or “fulfill his deepest African aspirations toward the wholeness of life.” The Pietism of Halle was too utopian and narrow for his liking. Amo was fundamentally interested in the spiritual values espoused by the African tradition and his aim was to achieve a synthesis of “the African personality, highest scholarship and whole-hearted Christianity.” Back in his native Axim, the environment he left behind had changed so much that it proved no better for the spiritual enlightenment that he sought. A life of meditation and asceticism was perhaps his only refuge.

CONCLUSION

Our brief survey of mission work in West Africa has revealed some worthy insights that need to be captured in our ongoing efforts to tell the African story of African Christianity. In the first place, it is clear that for the most part, Africans encountered the Gospel with seriousness and goodwill. In the whole history of mission in the period we have been dealing with, the Africans rarely showed hostility to the Gospel as long as it was presented with respect and consideration for their own beliefs and practices. Contrary to the picture of intolerance that is sometimes presented of Africans, it is clear that in most cases Africans were willing to “try” the new religion of Christianity. Again, the slave trade has been shown to be one of the greatest drawbacks to mission work. By and large, this trade reduced the seriousness with which Africans were willing to consider Christianity. Although some Africans participated in the trade, Africans were no doubt the victims, and the sheer brutality of the trade was enough to dilute the Christian message of love. Finally, this survey has revealed the enormous contribution of gallant men of African descent in the work of evangelization in West Africa. Apart from the five outstanding characters we have mentioned, there were hundreds of other unsung African heroes.

200 H. DEBRUNNER, A History of Christianity, p. 82.
who were active players in the mission field. Their stories are yet to be told. The story of African Christianity is still unfolding.
6. Early Roman Catholic Missions in West Africa