Returning African Christians in Mission to the Gold Coast

Abstract

The transatlantic slave trade created an African diaspora in the Western world. Some of these diaspora Africans encountered and embraced the religion of their Western masters. Life in the Caribbean diaspora provided an opportunity for the nestling of ideas that were to shape the establishment of the Christian faith in Africa. Following the failures of European missionaries to make an impact in Africa in the early nineteenth century, freshly emancipated Christians from the Caribbean became agents of social transformation in the Gold Coast, Cameroun and Nigeria. Using archival records from Basel in Switzerland and Ghana, this paper explores the missionary initiative of Jamaican Christians who worked under the aegis of the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society from 1843 to 1918. It provides evidence that these Jamaican Christians became principal agents for the success of the Basel Mission’s enterprise in the Gold Coast in the nineteenth century. The paper argues against a Eurocentric approach to mission historiography that has obviated the roles of Africans in the nineteenth century and demonstrates the legacy which these returning Africans have left the church in Africa.

Keywords: Basel Mission, Gold Coast, Akuapem, Caribbean, diaspora, mission history, West Africa
West African Christianity is the result mainly of almost two hundred years of Christian mission among African people. Beginning with the nineteenth-century European missionary evangelisation of Africa, through the period of emergence of the independence movement and Pentecostal groups, it has become the representative face of Christianity in the world. It is not only present on the continent, but also very visible in American, European and Asian cities.

Mission Christianity in Africa in the past was often narrated from a Eurocentric perspective, predicated on the erroneous assumption that Africans were of a lower mental capacity compared to Caucasians. Frans Verstraelen has shown that this blinded many historians from seeing the full picture of historical reality (Verstraelen 2002: 1). Andrew F. Walls, commenting on Latourette’s *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, argued that ‘since his time, much fundamental research has been conducted on the primary sources, oral and written, and new perspectives have been taken up in which Africans, Asians and Latin Americans figure as the principal agents of Christian expansion’ (Walls 2002: 8)

One major group of African agents who played a significant but unacknowledged role in the nineteenth century evangelisation of West Africa were the Caribbean Christians from Barbados, Jamaica, Antigua and other Caribbean islands. These individuals, who emphasised their Afro-Caribbean heritage as distinct from the indigenous Africans, have not been properly acknowledged in African Christian historiography. In the last two decades, however, there has been growing research on some of these Caribbean groups. These published and unpublished works demonstrate that West Indian missionaries played significant roles in the spread of the Christian faith in Sierra Leone, Cameroun and Nigeria. Employing the use of archival and oral sources, this paper explores the missionary initiative of Jamaican Christians who worked under the aegis of the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society in the Gold Coast (Ghana) from 1843 to 1918. It highlights the pivotal role they played in setting an example of a Christian lifestyle.

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BASEL MISSION IN THE GOLD COAST**

The Basel Mission (BM) was founded in the Swiss city of Basel in 1815. Its beginnings are traced to the *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft*, which was founded in the same city in 1780 as a bible study and discussion group and also to publish good Christian literature (Jenkins 1989: 4).
At the onset, they trained missionaries to serve with older, established Protestant missionary societies like the Dutch Missionary society, North German Missionary Society and Church Missionary Society. By 1821, however, the founders decided to establish religious outposts abroad in its own name (Miller 2003: 14). It started with a mission to Russia for mission among the Jews, Tartars and Armenians. Another mission was started in Liberia in 1826, but was soon given up as they failed to maintain a foothold in the country. This was followed by a mission to the Gold Coast in 1828. Three of the first batch of four missionaries died in less than a year, whilst the fourth, Henke, died in 1831. Another batch of three missionaries arrived in the same year, but two of them died within three months of their arrival, leaving Andreas Riis as the surviving missionary.

When the BM took up the task of evangelising the Gold Coast, it did not anticipate the high mortality rate which earned the Gold Coast the name, ‘the Whiteman’s grave’. Several Europeans died from tropical diseases within a short time after arriving in the Gold Coast (Hansen 2002: 204–5). When the surviving missionary, Andreas Riis, relocated the mission from Osu to Akropong in 1835 in search of a healthier climate, the deaths did not cease. Coupled with the unwillingness of the indigenes to convert and be baptised, it was a frustrating period for the mission. By the mid-nineteenth century, European missionary societies were at the point of abandoning Africa as a viable mission field (Wade and Newman 2002: 24). This is typified in the abandonment of Sierra Leone by the Baptist Missionary Society in London and the disaster of the Niger Expedition of 1841. Similarly, the Mission Committee recalled Riis in 1840, evidently with a view to end its mission in Gold Coast just as it had done earlier in Liberia.

The Mission Committee, however, launched a fresh enterprise in 1843 and asked Riis to visit the Danish and the British West Indies to recruit emancipated slaves. This was in response to a challenge thrown out by the Okuapehene Nana Ado Dankwa. According to oral tradition, before Riis’ departure to Europe in 1840, the Okuapehene said to him:

> When God created the world, He made a book (Bible) for the Whiteman and abosom (traditional gods) for the Blackman. But if you could show me some Blackman who could read the Whiteman’s book then we would surely follow you. (Kwakye 2011: 91)

In making this statement, the Okuapehene was reiterating a widely held myth of the indigenous people of the time. In Liberia, the
Basel Missionary J. F. Sessing reported a similar conversation with the Bassa King, Jove (Huppenbauer 2015: 12). H. C. Monrad, chaplain in the Danish fort of Christiansborg (1805–9), affirmed that this was also a widespread belief among the Ga, coastal neighbours of the Akuapem. Monrad wrote:

In the beginning, so they believe, God or Jongmaa, created many black and white people, the former first and the latter last. He then brought forth two covered gifts of different sizes and allowed the blacks to choose first. Greedily, they chose the largest gift, which contained only things needed to worship the fetishes and the necessities of life. The gift on the other hand which fell to the Whites contained books and the sources of everything by which the Europeans distinguished themselves from the Negroes. (Monrad 2009: 33)

Taking up the challenge, Andreas Riis returned to the Gold Coast in 1843 with another Basel missionary, Johann Georg Widmann; a Liberian born, Beuggen-trained teacher, George Peter Thompson; and twenty-five Caribbean Christians. 3 The Millers, Rochesters, Catherine Mulgrave and Alexander Worthy Clerk came from the Fairfield Congregation. The Greens came from the Nazareth Congregation, whilst the Hall family came from Irwin Hill. The Mullings and the Walkers came from Bethlehem, and David Robinson from Fulneck. The seventeen-year-old Antiguan, Jonas Hosford, from Grace Hill, was the only non-Jamaican.

The group settled in Akropong, where they immediately started their first school. Later in the same year, another school was started at Christiansborg on the coast. The fruits of the mission were borne, and soon the mission began to spread to other parts of southern Ghana. Although several factors account for this success, the Caribbean involvement was significant. 4 This is further highlighted in Der Evangelische Heidenbote (The Evangelical Message to the Heathens), a major publication of the Basel Mission, in 1854:

The arrival of these colonists in West Africa and their settlement among their fellows marks a watershed in the history of this mission. For although they still had to first go through the difficult beginnings, from now on, it advanced. The cases of death among our brothers became extremely rare [or: were very seldom seen] and the Negroes began to listen to the word of the cross. 5
The Basel Mission aimed at establishing a Christian village culture among the people of Southern Ghana and a church life and education in the vernacular languages of Twi and Ga. It was involved in a transformation of the societies in which it worked and made significant achievements in many areas. The Basel Mission stayed in the country until 1918, when the Swiss/German missionaries were expelled from the Gold Coast, because it was a British colony. When they returned after the War, the leadership had passed into the hands of the indigenous people. The impact of the Basel Mission's work is summarised by Noel Smith:

In education and in agriculture, in artisan training and in the development of commerce, in medical services and in concern for the social welfare of the people, the name ‘Basel’ by the time of the expulsion of the Mission from the country had become a treasured word in the minds of the people. (Smith 1966: 154)

Diaspora Christianity and Return Movements

The idea of a diaspora is usually associated with the Jews. In both Jewish and Christian history, it is used interchangeably with the dispersion and carries a religious as well as demographic meaning. Gerrie ter Haar has identified three main elements in the diaspora (ter Haar 1998: 80–1). First, there is the element of dispersion. Historically, the dispersion of Africans on a more or less large scale has taken place since mediaeval times, when large numbers of Africans were captured and taken to the Middle East, Asia, Europe and later the Americas for forced labour by intruders. There have been voluntary movements from the continent in recent times as well as before and during the nineteenth century.

Secondly, there is the element of identity. Whenever people live in a diaspora, identity becomes a crucial issue. The European and American slave masters attempted to distort the African personality in the diaspora by forcing a new identity on them. However, Africans in the diaspora managed to maintain strands of identity that link them to each other and ultimately to the continent.

Finally, there is the element of return, which is soteriological in nature. With respect to Africans in the diaspora, there is a desire to return to the homeland. The idea of return is not only physical, but also ideological. Elom Dovlo has identified two broad categories of Africans from the
diaspora who return to the ‘Promised Land’ to reconnect with authentic African spiritual identity:

First there are many pilgrims, tourists, scholars and students who come to seek spiritual and cultural roots in African Traditional Religions . . . the second type of Diaspora spiritual reconnection with Africa is persons and movements who have already rediscovered their authentic African spirituality in the Diaspora. They then return to Africa to live and propagate it. (Dovlo, 2002: 2)

While Dovlo maintains two categories of Africans from the diaspora in return, there is a third category of Africans in the diaspora who have reconnected to the continent that are not identified in the typology. They are Black Atlantic mission groups and individuals from North America, the Caribbean and Europe who came to Africa as employees of European mission agencies and whose lives had been transformed in the West. They were ‘returning Josephs’, because like the biblical character, their ancestors were forced into slavery in foreign lands and at this time in the nineteenth century sought a return to the homeland. These include the Basel Mission to Ghana in 1843, the Baptist Mission to Cameroun in 1844, the Wesleyan Mission to Ghana in 1845, the Presbyterian Mission to Calabar in 1846, the Anglican Mission to Rio Pongas in 1855 and the CMS Mission to Southern Nigeria.

It is this element of return that inspired the Caribbean Christians to join the Basel Mission enterprise to the Gold Coast in 1843. When Andreas Riis and his team arrived in Jamaica to recruit Christians, they discovered that many of the Jamaican Christians were already willing to go with them to West Africa. One of them, John Edward Walker, a thirty-four-year-old farmworker who came from the Moravian Congregation in Bethlehem, said that he had felt the call to go to Africa sixteen months before their departure, at a time when there was no arrangement to embark on this particular journey. As returning Josephs, they desired to make an impact in Africa with the gospel. One can glean their motives from valedictory speeches that were made in Lititz and Fairfield. At Lititz, Walker said:

My dear friends, it is now about sixteen months since I felt the call to go to Africa. I like to go, when I remember what the Saviour has done for me. There were moments when I thought: Don’t go, they will enslave you or kill you. But then, I had no peace in my heart. But when I thought I will go where my good Lord wants me to go, I felt
I therefore cannot be persuaded not to go, and do not want to be persuaded thus. My relatives have said much to prevent me from going, but even if people would give me much money to buy me from my purpose, off, I still could not give it up go to Africa. I would like to do something good for my Lord with my hands. If the Lord helps me to be an example for the poor people over there. If I leave you, I do not go to a foreign country. Africa is our country. Our fathers and grandfathers have been brought here by force and we are strangers in this land. But Africa is our proper country. I therefore ask my brethren and sisters to pray for Africa and for us, when we go there: to pray that the Lord may help us and bless us. We do not trust in ourselves, therefore we are not afraid to go to Africa since He will guard us and help us.\footnote{7}

Edward Walker’s speech gives us an indication of the prevailing thoughts of the time among the Caribbean Christians. It indicates that some emancipated Africans were still suspicious of the European, and this may have created apprehension. Secondly, it shows that the motive for responding was love, mercy and pity for the people of Africa. Finally, it demonstrates Walker’s perception of Africa as the homeland – his home – and therefore he expressed his return as the response to a divine call. Later in Akuapem, as preacher, interpreter and provider of potable water, he became the ‘example for the indigenous Africans’. His speech therefore provides insight into the reigning ideas about Africa and the abolition of slavery as well as African Diaspora Christianity of his time.

John Rochester, the thirty-one-year-old cooper from Fairfield, similarly said:

My dear brethren and sisters, I am going to leave you to go to Africa. I go with my life in my hand. If I live I live unto the Lord, if I die, I die unto the Lord. I call to mind that our Saviour came down from Heaven and left all his glory out of love for us, to do us good and to save our souls. The love of Christ constraineth me to go to Africa to tell the poor ignorant people about Him. I called to mind that if our dear minsters had hardened their hearts against us, we would never have had the light of the gospel shining about us. I called to mind how the children in Africa are growing up like beasts running about wild but your children have schools, and the gospel sounding in their ears. We are going to set the people in Africa a good example, by the help of God and to teach them how a Christian is to live and I hope by our Saviour’s blessing, we may do some good to them. I beg
my dear brethren and sisters to pray for me and my wife and my little boy.⁸

Rochester saw his journey to Africa as ‘a journey of no return’. While his forebears had hoped for the possibility of a return to Africa, it seemed to these twenty-five West Indians that a return to the homeland was imminent and final. Whether this finality would be a result of immediate death in ‘the Whiteman’s grave’ or a settlement in the homeland was not the issue. Whatever the outcome of the trip, these Caribbean Christians were more concerned about the motive for the return to the homeland. The journey to Africa was motivated by self-giving love. Rochester compared the love in his heart to the love of the Lord Jesus. Indeed Zorn indicates that they gave up houses and lands for this mission and were therefore not seeking an escape from the crisis of the post-emancipation economy of Jamaica.⁹ This pure motive of love must be compared to some impure motives that have driven world missions, for example, the cultural motive, imperialist motive and the motive of ecclesiastical colonisation (Verkuyl 1987: 163–75).

The ‘returning Josephs’ interpreted their mission to Africa this way – to show by example the way of life of a Christian. This view of the mission may have been communicated by the selecting officers including Riis. It reminds us again of the challenge by Okuapehene Nana Addo Dankwa. Assuming this comment by the Okuapehene was being discussed in Jamaica, it will have greatly assisted the Caribbean Christians in clarifying their understanding of their mission to Africa.

Before setting off, the Conference of the Jamaican Moravian Mission drew up a contract of service with the Basel Mission. It was the view of Jacob Zorn, the Moravian Superintendent of Jamaica, that a proper contract would in fact constitute something new in the history of the nineteenth-century missionary enterprise in Africa. The contract had the following five stipulations:

a. The form of public worship and the rules of the Moravian Church in regard to church discipline were to be adhered to.
b. The West Indians were to undertake to serve the Mission in all its needs in return for which the mission would support them entirely for the first two years.
c. The Mission would undertake the responsibility of providing houses for the settlers as well as land for gardens on which they could work at least one day of the week.
d. At the end of the first two years, the West Indians could choose either to follow their own employment or to work for the Mission at a reasonable wage.

e. Those who wished to be repatriated at the end of five years would have their passages paid provided they had not been guilty of a moral offence during this period.\textsuperscript{10}

This was very significant as it also enabled the Caribbean Christians to measure their expectations in the Gold Coast. It also helped clearly define their roles and place in the mission.

**BASEL MISSION WEST INDIANS IN THE GOLD COAST**

When the West Indians arrived in the Gold Coast they stayed in Christiansborg for a few weeks. The group made its way towards Akropong, which was to be the nerve centre of the Mission’s work, on 10 May 1843. They stayed on for a month at the Danish royal plantation, Frederiksgave (present-day Sesemi), which is about twenty kilometres north of Christiansborg, departing again for Akropong on 17 June. Whilst at Frederiksgave, Mary Hall gave birth to a son, Henry, who was baptised by the Revd Johann Georg Widmann. A number of the immigrants fell sick, and one of them, David Robinson, died.

They went on to settle in Akropong and built stone houses on what is known today as Hanover Street, where they lived. They quickly swung into action and together with their European colleagues set an example to the indigenous Africans that it was possible to be African and Christian.

The leadership of the first mission station was organised with Andreas Riis as the local President of the Mission. Hermann Halleur was in charge of the economic side of the mission station, and J. G. Widmann was the Pastor of the Akropong Congregation as well as School Inspector (Clerk 1943: 4). John Hall, the West Indian, was appointed elder of the Akropong Congregation, and Alexander Clerk was appointed deacon (responsible for the distribution of food and provisions to the settlers) and teacher of the colonist children, whilst John Rochester was in charge of agriculture (Smith 1966: 40).

As part of the contractual agreement, the Basel Mission provided houses for the West Indians as well as land for gardens on which they could work at least one day of the week (Koramoa and Reynolds 1978: 79)

These Caribbean Christians faced a number of challenges. Two of these were the problems of illness and death, and abuse by their
European leaders, which made them seek to renege on their own pledge to make Africa their home.

As to the former, as noted earlier, the missionary enterprise was often threatened by illnesses and death. The arrival of the West Indians, together with the discovery of quinine, helped to mitigate the rapid death of the European missionaries. The West Indians themselves had some challenges to their health. First, one can cite the early death of David Robinson at Frederiksgave, which has already been mentioned. This was only three months after their arrival and left the Basel Mission wondering if it had made the right decision with the recruitment of these West Indians.

Second, Catherine Green, one of the West Indian women, wrote to Basel that she suffered from what may have been a cancer of the breast and requested to be sent to another country where she might have better treatment. She complained that:

Since my coming to this country [Gold Coast], I am troubled with a very bad sore breast, and we tried all the means we know, but instead of it getting better, it rather getting worse and worse. And besides this the plasters which Mr. Riis gave me, it does not agree with me at all. Therefore I send to ask you whether it would not be better for me to change the country in order to see whether I could get rid of this sore breast. For I do not feel healthy on account of it.11

A record of the Inspector’s response was not found; however, there seems to have been no change in her condition. This state of affairs led Catherine Green to mistrust the Basel missionaries. Johann Friedrich Meischel, a Basel missionary, believed that Catherine Green influenced her husband also to mistrust the missionaries and to believe ‘that we do not intend to keep the promise to bring them back to the West Indies’.12 Eventually they requested repatriation to Jamaica and returned in 1849, only for Mrs Green to die at sea.

These early deaths and sickness threatened the work of the West Indians. As many more of them survived, it gave the Basel Mission hope that it had not made a wrong decision in going to the West Indies for African missionaries. Their ability to survive the tough tropical climate as well as becoming examples to the indigenous Africans enabled the Mission to expand its frontiers beyond Akuapem.

With regard to the second of the challenges noted above, the complaints of the West Indians concerning abuse were sometimes solved locally, while at other times they were compelled to turn to the
Mission Committee in Basel for help. In a report to the Basel Mission Committee in 1844, the missionary J. G. Widmann indicated that 'the relations with the West Indian brethren had improved greatly’. This did not last long because a year later, the West Indians came together to endorse a fresh petition to the Basel Mission Inspector concerning the ill treatment they received at the hands of Riis, the President of the local mission. According to them, the local people had not offended them in any way; however, they were willing to go back to Jamaica because of the manner in which they were treated by Riis. A portion of the petition was as follows:

We feel pleasure of confirming you these few line, about our present condition in which where we live. Suppose these two years end, how we can live in Africa, that we want to know and about Mr. Riis, how we live with him in Africa, it is too bad because how he goes on with his own we do not know how he will do to us and so we wish to return to Jamaica, and in the meantime all the brethren agreed together about how Mr. Riis goes in with us in Africa, sometime anything he cannot call us as Christians and speak, he always quarrel with us but we want to return back and also if Mr. Riis wrote anything against us, they need not believe too much...\(^{13}\)

Jon Miller has shown that Riis’ troublesome relations with Africans and the chorus of disapproval from both blacks and fellow missionaries caused the Committee quietly to withdraw him from the Gold Coast on grounds of impaired health and a disturbed frame of mind (Miller 2003: 132).

After some time, there was general disaffection amongst the West Indians over clothes given them and the distribution of corn by the deacon, Alexander Worthy Clerk. Although all of them grumbled that the clothing was inadequate, it seemed that Hosford grumbled the loudest. Andreas Riis in his anger had him flogged by Ashong, foreman of the labourers. When the rod used by Ashong broke, Riis completed the punishment with his feet and fists. The missionary Ernst Sebald noted that ‘the West Indians had their faults but were wrongly treated by Riis who had nevertheless good intentions. He thinks that the West Indians should live like the natives.’\(^{14}\) This situation was similar to what happened among the West Indians in southern Nigeria who maintained that they were in a different class from the indigenous agents. Any attempt to classify them as native was rejected as demeaning and oppressive (Waibinte 2007: 105–6).
The flogging of Hosford had a disastrous effect as he moved to Osu, where he stayed with another Basel missionary, Frederick Schiedt. He later returned to Akropong and had more problems with the Basel missionaries. Being a returnee African, his desire to observe African cultural events had not waned with the passage of time and life in the Diaspora. However, they had been warned in Jamaica to ‘keep entirely clear from African superstition and not countenance it even by an approving smile’. This seemed difficult for the young Hosford, who could not keep away from watching funerals and what the missionaries called pagan performances. He was offended when another missionary, Johannes Christian Dieterle, opposed his behaviour, and he left for British Accra. After some troubles in Accra he ran away to Cape Coast. He later requested repatriation to the West Indies and died at sea on his way back to Antigua. The abuse by the European missionaries therefore endangered the mission.

AREAS OF INFLUENCE

The Caribbean missionary enterprise in the Gold Coast produced an enduring influence in the areas of marital life, social action and ecclesiastical leadership. Their example promoted the work of the mission and led to the successful planting and growth of the Christian faith in the Gold Coast.

Marital Life

In the course of their work, the Caribbean Christians had to deal with a number of social issues including polygamy. Their lifestyle was meant to represent to the indigenous people what the ideal Western Christian life was. This is noted by Max Assimeng, who writes, ‘A most critical area of debate, still being grappled with in the territories of West Africa where missionaries have worked has been the institution of marriage. Christian missionaries preached against plural marriage (that is to say, the marriage of one man to more than one woman), child betrothal and imposed marriages as a whole’ (Assimeng 2010: 95). From its earliest stage, the Basel Mission was not spared the challenge posed by the African practice of polygamy. Noel Smith wrote that:

The problem of polygamy came early to the forefront. Among the Akan, although polygamy is the exception rather than the rule, it is the sign of the well to do man and the chief. Many men therefore preferred to retain the option, so to speak, of taking additional wives
and for this reason did not wish to commit themselves to a Christian monogamous marriage. Others, who were attracted by the Gospel, possessed more than one wife ... Polygamy within the Christian congregation was expressly forbidden; plural marriages which had been entered into were to be resolved before a man could be received into the Church. (Smith 1966: 93–4)

The Basel Mission practice – maintained by the successor Presbyterian Church of Ghana – that condemned polygamy seems to be problematic when applied in a typical West African society. For the first twelve years of the missionary enterprise in the Gold Coast, there was no tangible result in terms of conversions, and these problematic issues may have been especially responsible. In Nana Addo Dankwa’s request for Africans who could read the book, he was proverbially pointing out the cultural differences between Africans and Europeans, a difference which Riis had failed to observe. The arrival of the West Indians was therefore a demonstration that, amongst other things, African people could live a monogamous life like the Europeans.

The West Indian colonists who arrived in 1843 included some married couples. They were John and Mary Hall; Joseph and Mary Miller; John and Mary Rochester; James Gabriel and Margarethe Mullings; John Edward and Sarah Walker; and James and Catherine Green. Catherine Gewe Mulgrave was also married to George Thompson, the schoolteacher. At Akropong all of the West Indians stayed at Hanover Street. They showed the people of Akropong how Africans could live as Christians. Peter Hall describes early family life of the West Indians in his Autobiography:

> When I was young, I remember that a bond of unity bound all the West Indians together. Instead of ‘Mr’ they used ‘brother’ when referring to one another. It was Bro. Clerk or Bro. Miller and so on, and we the children always addressed them as ‘Uncle so and so’ or ‘Aunt so and so’. Among ourselves we referred to one another as ‘sister’ or ‘brother’. (Hall 1965: 9)

Sill has shown that this understanding of the faith community can be traced to the ‘community of the brethren (which included the sisters), as the Moravians were also named’ (Sill 2010: 122). The new, successful monogamous family lives of these West Indians in Akropong affirmed the Basel Mission teaching that Africans could live in monogamous relationships. The example was followed by the new converts and
revolutionised the social sphere of Akuapem so that among Akuapem and most of modern-day Ghana, monogamy has become the rule among Christians. Polygamists are conceived of as not 'full Christians' and in many cases are excluded from attending the Communion (Middleton 1983: 13)

Education

Jon Miller has shown that education (especially bible education) was one of the strategies employed by the Basel Mission in its aim of moral and social reconstruction of African societies (Miller 2003: 15). In introducing Western education, the Mission sought to 'liberate' her converts from the vestiges of darkness and superstition and also targeted the meeting of the manpower needs of the growing Mission. It accounts for the emphasis on seminary education which produced teacher-catechists who were to play a subaltern role to the missionary in the spread of the gospel. As Paul Jenkins has pointed out, ‘the educational system the Basel Mission had pioneered on the Gold Coast was widely admired as an unusually effective instrument of social and economic development in West Africa’ (Jenkins 2003: 198).

This objective of the Mission in education was achieved mainly because of the role of the first-generation West Indians. The two most outstanding were Catherine Mulgrave and Alexander Worthy Clerk, who were both trained in Jamaica before their arrival in the Gold Coast in 1843. A third first-generation West Indian who became an experienced educationist was Rose Anne Miller, who was only seven years old at the time of the arrival.

As cited earlier, Alexander Worthy Clerk’s task as teacher started with the school for the children of the colonists at Akropong. He was a very hard-working teacher, whose service was in great demand. His hard work earned him the name Suku Mansere, an Akan corruption of schoolmaster. He later expanded his school to take care of the indigenous youths who enrolled. When the new Teachers College was started in Akropong in 1848, he was one of the small group of lecturers. This Teachers College was deemed by the missionaries to be very significant to the success of their enterprise. It aimed at producing teacher-catechists who were to play a significant role in the evangelisation process. The products of the school were to be teachers in the sense of general education, but also catechists with seminary education for evangelism.

In 1845, there already seem to have been plans for the training of teachers from Barbados. The proposal was, however, rejected by the local
missionaries in Akropong, who described it as ‘being of little use, for a person instructed only in English finds great difficulty in the acquirement of the pronunciation of the Aquapim (Akuapem) negroes and the Ashantees’ and preferred the ‘establishment of such an institution in Africa and the scholars of our schools to those of the West Indies’.\textsuperscript{16} The effect of this was the establishment of a Theological Seminary in Osu in 1847 and later a teachers college and seminary at Akropong on 3 July 1848. The West African nationalist James Africanus Beale Horton, impressed by the Seminary, wrote that ‘it is indeed an academic achievement which can very well hold its own in comparison with European Training Colleges of the period’ (Reynolds 1985: 42).

In the Seminary, Alexander Clerk was in charge of Bible Lessons, a very essential aspect of the studies.\textsuperscript{17} Considering the fact that the training offered at the College was meant to prepare the students for the work of mission, the teaching of bible lessons was important. Clerk was therefore entrusted with a very great responsibility, and some of his students were John Powell Rochester, David Asante, Paul Staudt Keteku, William Yirenkyi and Jonathan Bekoe Palmer, who became pioneer agents of the Basel Mission. Clerk, together with other Basel missionaries, equipped the indigenous Africans, who were to be crucial to the growth and development of the church, with knowledge.

The second was Catherine Mulgrave, a trained teacher and wife of the missionary teacher George Thompson. She was the pioneer of the Basel Mission education programme for girls. A Eurocentric approach to history has rather emphasised the role of Rosina Widmann, who arrived long after Catherine had started her school in Christiansborg. Many of her students became wives of leading indigenous agents of the mission. These included Pauline Hesse, who married Alexander Clerk, and her sister, Regina Hesse, who was married to Hermann Ludwig Rottmann, the first Basel missionary trader in Christiansborg. Catherine was held in high honour and established girls schools in all of the three stations Osu, Abokobi and Odumase, where she lived between 1843 and 1891. The schools taught reading, writing, needlework, gardening and household chores.

The third teacher was Rose Ann Miller, eldest child of Joseph and Mary Miller. As early as 1848, when she was only twelve years old, she began to assist Rosina Widmann in the Girls School at Akropong.\textsuperscript{18} In her teaching work, she had to deal with young female converts who grappled with the encounter between tradition and their new faith. In 1857, she was appointed head of the infant school in Akropong (Sill 2010: 135). She
was later posted to Aburi, where she started the Girls Boarding School in 1859 and served until 1874. However, because the Basel Mission policy did not allow Europeans to serve under Africans, she was officially subordinate to Julie Mohr, wife of the missionary Joseph Mohr, with whom she had formed a collegial relationship. Even in this time, it was Miller who was in charge of the pupils because Mohr’s work as midwife often took her out of the station (Sill 2010: 143). In 1874 Rose Ann left Basel Mission service to work for the Colonial Government in the Government Girls School at Accra. She died in Accra at the age of 94.

Many second-generation Caribbean Christians were also involved in the strengthening of the educational foundation-laying process for the future nation. Notable among these were Timothy Mullings, Peter Hall, Henry Hall, James Hall, Patrick Clerk, Nicholas Timothy Clerk, Charles Clerk and Emil Miller. Wherever these trained teacher-catechists or pastors went, they worked hard to give the people of the community formal education.

One could say much more to show how the West Indians were deeply involved in the provision of education under the aegis of the Basel Mission. They played their roles together with other indigenous Africans and Europeans in laying the foundation for formal education in the country.

**Ecclesiastical Leadership**

This section will examine the role of the Caribbean Christians in ecclesiastical leadership, that is, the leadership exercised within the limits of the church. At the time of their arrival, some of these West Indians already had some experience as local church leaders. John Hall was a Presbyter/Elder in the Irwin Hill Moravian Church, Montego Bay, in Jamaica (Hall 1965: 5) and was appointed the first Presbyter/Elder of the congregation in Akropong. He helped the Basel Mission to run the small Christian community there, performing a pioneering role in Ghana, but one which he was familiar with from his time in Jamaica.

Alexander Clerk came to Ghana as a trained teacher and, as we have seen, was also appointed the first deacon of the church in Akropong. He served in many important positions, finally as an ordained minister to the end of his life. Together with two indigenous African agents, Theophil Opoku and Carl Christian Reindorf, he was ordained in 1872, initiating a process of local ordination of pastors for the Basel Mission. Clerk’s main stations as a Minister were Aburi and Tutu. Although he finally settled in Aburi, it can be argued that it was in Tutu that he left the
greater legacy, where he built the first Basel Mission chapel with funds raised locally.

Perhaps even more impressive was the pivotal role which Catherine Mulgrave played in an organisation which believed in and practised a strong patriarchy. In addition to her role as a pioneer of effective schooling for girls, she pioneered a women’s movement within the Basel Mission which has grown into a formidable Christian education organ, the Presbyterian Women’s Fellowship. It was her Moravian background that moved her in 1848 to organise the first women’s class, as the Moravians practised an organisation of choirs or units in which Christian education was offered. Having become the matriarch of the Osu Mission, she assumed the role of mentoring the unmarried women under her care. In this enterprise, Mulgrave’s success is seen in the moulding and provision of Christian wives for the new African Christians. She is also recognised for her welfare and evangelistic roles in the church. Reindorf describes her as ‘our spiritual mother who paid house visits going after the heathen’.19

Several second-generation Caribbean Christians, such as Henry Hall, Peter Hall, Timothy Mullings, Charles Clerk and John Powell Rochester, served the Mission as teacher-catechists and pastors. The position of teacher-catechists in the Basel Mission Church was created as a subaltern role to facilitate the spread of the gospel. As Andrew Walls has shown, the position of catechist was created by the CMS – following the proposal made by Henry Venn – as a sort of lower, unordained missionary (Walls 2004: 165). Venn had argued that there were catechists in the primitive church and the office of the catechist was to be regarded as probationary for higher orders, just as it was in the primitive church. The situation in the Basel Mission was not different from that in the CMS, and these teacher-catechists became the fulcrum around which the Mission expanded its work. They served in the small stations under a missionary or pastor and became the representative face of the Mission.

Later on, some of the catechists were ordained as pastors. These include Peter Hall, Timothy Mullings and Nicholas Clerk. While Clerk was in Anum, the missionary J. L. Mueller reported to Basel in 1890 ‘that the people of Anum mostly go to Nicholas Timothy Clerk with their problems. They look on the missionaries as strangers.’20 One could infer that the people of Anum related better to Clerk, the second-generation West Indian, whom they regarded as one of their own. This goes to show that the Clerk family had really integrated into the local community, in spite of their foreign origins.
CONCLUSION

Contrary to the perception that Christianity came to West Africa as a European religion, this paper has provided an example of a strong ‘non-European’ agency that helped plant Christianity in the subregion. These Caribbean Christians were products of the abolitionist movement and the emancipation era. They were also products of a century of Moravian Christianity in Jamaica. They proved to be the key to meaningful mission for the Basel Mission’s work in the Gold Coast and were involved in various sectors of the life of the church.

Some of them eventually abandoned the mission and returned to the Caribbean. Those who stayed served with distinction as God’s servants at the forefront of the evangelisation of southern Ghana. They were Africans who returned to Africa as missionaries, looking for opportunity to set an example of a Christian lifestyle for the people of the Gold Coast. Whether as missionary-teachers, missionary-craftsmen, missionary-agriculturists or missionary-preachers and eventually national church leaders, they demonstrated a clear sense of mission right from the beginning. They played a significant role in the development of the Gold Coast. However, unlike the indigenous Africans, they were really outsiders without family links to the social setup in the communities where they lived. They did not belong to any clan or family or ethnic group. They cannot, therefore, be seen as part of the West African agents, but must rather be recognised as a separate category of Africans – as Caribbean missionaries. Together with their fellows who laboured in Cameroun and Nigeria, they laid the foundations for modern-day West African Christianity, a historical fact that was ignored for several decades by some African church historians.

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NOTES


2 Okuapehene is the Paramount King and Overlord of the Akuapem people in Southern Ghana.
3 There were six families: the Halls, Rochesters, Millers, Mullings, Walkers and Greens. The single persons were David Robinson, Alexander Worthy Clerk, Jonas Hosford and Catherine Gewe Mulgrave, who married George Thompson.

4 After 1843, a much more homogenous group with a village background, who might have been healthier and stronger than the earlier missionaries, arrived. Later missionaries also took over Riis’s positive attitude to local medicine in the treatment of tropical ailments. See Sill 2010: 125.

5 Basel Mission Archives (BMA), Der Evangelische Heidenbote, No. 10 (October 1854), 80–1.

6 The biblical patriarch Joseph did not return alive to the land of his fathers, although his remains were brought back by the Israelites, led by Moses: see Genesis 37, 50, and Exodus 13: 19.


8 BMA – D-1,2, Africa Vol. III, 1842, No. 9b, Rev. Jacob Zorn to Rev. P. LaTrobe, 5 January 1843. Although Zorn does not name the speaker, one can infer from the list that Rochester was the only one from Fairfield with a little boy.

9 Ibid.


11 BMA – D-1,2, Africa Vol. II, Osu and Akropong, 1844, No. 17(a), Catherine Green to Inspector, 12 December 1844.

12 PRAAD—A, Debrunner, Digest, 114,

13 BMA – D-1,2, Africa Vol. III, 1845, Ussu and Akropong, No. 2, Complaint of West Indians, 13 January 1845.


16 BMA – D-1,2, No. 10, Osu and Akropong, Akropong 1845, Memorandum about Plan to Train Teachers for Africa in Barbados.

17 BMA – D-1,3, Akropong College Time Table.


20 BMA – No. II. 99 – Mueller’s Report for the year 1890, 29 Jan 1890 (Jenkins, Abstracts).

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