REINTERPRETING THE STRAIGHT PATH.
GHANAIAN MUSLIM CONVERTS IN MISSION TO MUSLIMS

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Christian missionary interest in West Africa in the early 15th century, among other things, was stimulated by the desire to halt the spread of Islam. Early in the 20th century, the World Missionary Conference reiterated this motive when it said that the "whole strategy of Christian missions in Africa should be viewed in relation to Islam."

The early missionaries to West Africa, however, first and foremost, sought to convert the followers of the indigenous religions (traditionalists). Even though this would prevent the traditionalists from being converted to Islam and so stall the spread of Islam, in Ghana no deliberate effort were made to convert Muslims to Christianity. Thus Christianity and Islam co-existed as rivals or competitors for the souls of the 'unconverted pagans'. Muslims who came under Christian influence were mainly those who attended mission schools. However, as time has shown, the mission schools did not yield many Muslim converts to Christianity.

Thus, in spite of the missionary mandate, and the historical aspirations to missions to Muslims, the statement that "the adherents of Islam have been more neglected by missionaries of the Gospel than any other people" is applicable to the spread of the Gospel by missionaries and the churches they established in Ghana.

Since the mid 1980s, however, there has been a sudden upsurge in Christian mission to Muslims in Ghana. This evangelistic endeavour is organised by specific Christian ministries such as, Xristomus Publications, the Converted Muslims Christian Ministries, and the Markaz Al Bishara, which have been founded with the sole aim to carry the Gospel to Muslims.

In the rest of this article, against a brief background of Islam in Ghana, we examine Christian missions in retrospect and deduce the reasons for lack of missions to Muslims. We will then discuss the current phenomenon of Christian missions to Muslims, looking at the specific example of the

Converted Muslims Christian Ministries (CMCM), which is a group of converted Muslims in Mission to the Muslim community in Ghana. We will also examine the response and reactions of Muslims to the recent Christian attempts to convert them, before drawing our conclusions.

Islamic in Ghana

Historically, West Africa made its first contacts with Islam in the 8th Century. From being the religion of a small minority of expatriate business people from North Africa, Islam spread first among the ruling classes, merchants and town dwellers before being carried to the rural areas. Islam entered the Gold Coast [now Ghana] from both the north and south of the country. As early as the 14th century, Muslims began to move into the area covered by present-day Ghana. As J.A. Mbilla noted, this movement of Muslims is often referred to as 'the dispersion of Muslims rather than the spread of Islam' as mainly Muslim traders who were not missionaries were its carriers. These Muslim traders often moved with Muslim clerics called mallam, alfa or kramo. These Muslim clerics were able to attract the indigenous people especially the rulers through fortune telling and the preparation of protective charms and amulets and their general literary skill.

In Northern Ghana, Islam spread among the Gonjas, Dagombas, Mampruis and the Wala where chiefs accepted the Muslim clerics into their courts. From the North, Islam spread southwards arriving in Kumasi capital of Ashanti in the 18th century. It spread further south to the coastal areas where the Ga and Mfantisi ethnic groups have recognised Muslim communities of both indigenous and non-indigenous Muslims. Among the Mfantisi in particular an indigenous Muslim community founded by Benjamin Sam, a converted trader and a Wesleyan teacher-catechist, linked up with the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission in 1921, resulting in the established presence of the Mission in Ghana. In the south in particular, the Muslim communities

4 J.A. Mbilla, *PCG. Evangelism and the Muslim Presence (The First Evangelism Consultation of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana)* 1st-4th March 1994, p. 27.