LCCN Fulani Work
By Mogens S. Mogensen


Shortly after the founding of Joint Christian Ministry in West Africa (JCMWA), an international networking organisation focusing on the Fulanis in West Africa, the bishop of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, Dr. Akila Todi stated that,

JCMWA is a great challenge for West African churches, in particular for my own church. I say this, while more than 400,000 Fulanis live in the area of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria. But for many years the church has not been concerned about these people. I have often said that we in the Gongola State gladly receive the milk from the Mbororo [nomadic Fulanis], but apart from this we do not want to have anything to do with them. Therefore, it is high time that we change our attitude (Durst 2004:400; my translation from German).

And indeed it was a great challenge that the Lutheran Church of Christ in West Africa faced, when it decided to initiate a ministry among the Fulanis. The first few decades of this story is what will be presented in this article.¹

The Founding of the Sudan United Mission, Danish Branch

The Lutheran Church of Christ grew out of the missionary work of the Sudan United Mission Danish Branch (SUM-D, now Mission Africa), the focus of which was on ethnic groups in the Adamawa province of Nigeria who were following traditional African religions. The Muslims, however, did play a significant role in the history of SUM-D and the mission strategy that was followed by SUM-D. When the founding father of SUM-D, rev. Anton Pedersen, travelled from Aalborg in Denmark to Edinburgh in Scotland to attend the international mission conference in June 1910, he was of the opinion that mission among Muslims in Africa was the most urgent challenge for the church. But when he listened to dr. Karl Kumm, the founder of Sudan United Mission, of which the Danish mission organisation became a member, he was suddenly changed his focus from mission among Muslims to mission among those ‘animists’, who were in imminent danger of becoming islamized. Now rev. Pedersen realised that to win Africa for Christ, a chain of mission stations had to be established across Africa in order to stop the progress of Islam and to bring the gospel to into the Sudan belt.

¹ The article is mainly based on my PhD dissertation from Fuller Theological Seminary, 2000, “Contextual Communication of the Gospel to Pastoral Fulbe in Northern Nigeria”, published in 2002 under the title “Fulbe Muslims Encounter Christ” (Jos, Nigeria: Intercultural Consultancy Services). Therefore, the story of the LCCN work among the Fulanis has only be described up to the year 2000.
When SUM-D was founded the following year, and the first missionaries were sent to the Adamawa-province in Nigeria, there was no doubt that the focus of the mission work was not on Hausas or Fulanis or any other Muslim groups but on the non-Muslim ethnic groups in the area. The first missionary, Niels Høgh Brønnum, settled in Numan, where half of the population were Hausa-speaking Muslims and the other half Bachama following their traditional religion. In his diary he wrote that he had managed to avoid settling in the Muslim quarter of the town, so that from the beginning it would be very clear that his task was to reach the non-Muslim population (M. Jensen 1992).

The missionaries and the members of the congregations that were established lived and worked in a context where Islam played an important role and they were often in close contact with Hausas, Fulanis and other Muslims, some of whom also benefitted from the medical, educational and other social services of the church, but for the first many decades there was no organised mission work among Muslims. One of the first evangelists in the work of SUM-D, however, was a Christian Fulani originally from Yola, Malam Muhammadu, whose baptism name was Markus. For many years he was a trusted co-worker of the mission, but he was never assigned to work among Fulanis (Nelson 1980:18).

The Islam in Africa Project

The absence of mission work among Muslims was not unique to SUM-D and the Lutheran church that grew out of the work of SUM-D, but common to almost all mission organisations and churches in Northern Nigeria. In 1952 the Church Missionary Society and the Methodist Missionary Society, however, asked J. S. Trimingham to do a survey of Islam in West Africa, the result of which was published in 1955 in the book *The Christian Church and Islam in West Africa*. Trimingham observed that the individualistic approach of Western mission would have to be changed to a community approach when sharing the gospel with Muslims in West Africa and that it would have to abandon its separation of religion from other aspects of life and adopt what we today would call a holistic approach. Since Christianity was perceived by Muslims to be a Western religion, the African churches would have to do the mission work.

The call of Trimingham was heeded by church and mission leaders. At a meeting in Ibadan of the All Africa Conference of Churches, the African church leaders recognized their obligation to bring the gospel to their Muslim neighbours and called on their overseas mission partners to assist them in this very demanding task. Special area committees consisting of representatives of local churches and missions were established, first in Northern and Western Nigeria and later also in other parts of Africa, and in 1959 the Islam in Africa Project – IAP (later renamed Programme for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa – PROCMURA) came into being. SUM-D and its partner the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria was involved in IAP right from the very founding of the organisation.

It was agreed that IAP should not be a new mission organisation but a joint effort for which mission organisations would send Islam experts to work together with local committee to equip church members to interact with Muslims. One of the first area committees was established in Northern Nigeria, and the first Islam expert was sent out from the Netherlands. It is noteworthy that this expert was first hosted by the Lutheran Church of Christ in Sudan at its headquarters in Numan.
The objective of IAP, which also deeply influenced the approach of the Lutheran Church towards Fulanis and other Muslims in its area, was to “keep before the Churches of Africa (South of Sahara) their responsibility for understand Islam and the Muslims of their region in view of the churches task of interpreting faithfully in the Muslim world the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Constitution of PROCMURA). In this way IAP held together dialogue and proclamation together in a fruitful tension (Mogensen 2002:158-161).

There is strong evidence that IAP was instrumental in raising the awareness about mission to Muslims in general and mission to Fulanis in particular in the Lutheran Church, as well as in many other Churches in Northern Nigeria. Many of the pastors and lay people, who later got involved in Fulanis mission, had got their training and inspiration from IAP and carried out their ministry in the spirit of IAP.

**Joint Christian Ministry in West Africa**

In the 1970s a process started that led to the creation of a networking organisation for the promotion of mission to Fulanis, and right from the beginning representatives of LCCN contributed actively to this process. The roots of this organisation, however, can be traced back into the 60s. In 1963 the Lutheran World Federation took the initiative to open Radio Voice of the Gospel (RVOG) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The program policy of RVOG was holistic. It tried to “meet the needs of the whole person, as an individual and as a member of society”, by endeavouring to “combine the proclamation of the Good News and assistance in the struggle against ignorance and poverty” (Lundgren 1983:viii-xi). One of the seventeen area studios producing Christian programs to be broadcast by RVOG was Radio Sawtu Linjiila (SL) in Ngaounderé, Cameroun. This studio produced Christian broadcasts in Fulfulde for the nomadic Fulanis.

The first Fulfulde programs were produced by SL and broadcast from RVOG in 1966. They were produced in the Adamawa Fulfulde dialect and received also in Northern Nigeria. At the time of the closing down on RVOG in 1977 the regular audience of people who listened at least five times per week to the SL broadcasts was estimated to be about 1,8 million Fulfulde speaking people, half of which were considered to be living in Nigeria.

The response from the nomadic Fulanis was very positive, but the follow-up by the local churches was lacking. The founder and first director of RVOG, Sigurd Aske, put it this way, “The station does not evangelise; the churches do” (quoted in Lundgren 1983:6). In 1974, SL began to produce and distribute cassettes in order to assist the local churches in their follow-up. But apart from using these cassettes the churches did very little to follow up on the openness towards the gospel, which had been created by the Fulfulde broadcasts. By the end of the 1970’s, only two churches had set aside people for this work, one of which was LCCN.

In the 1970’s conferences were held to discuss the impact of the radio broadcasts and the need for a local follow-up. In 1974 LCCN together with SL took the initiative to hold a conference in Jos which had 45 representatives from churches and missions in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and the Central African Republic and the American Lutheran Church, IAP,
LWF and RVOG. After the Jos conference, a continuation committee was setup to oversee the work with the LCCN bishop Akila Todi as the chairman.

During the next three years the committee conducted a “Fulani Evangelism Survey”. The author of the report of the survey, Charles Richard, tried to answer the crucial question, “Has Fulani Evangelism priority in the planning for mission in the churches of the region?” (1976:11). When visiting a number of churches in Nigeria and Cameroon, he did not see much evidence that mission to Fulanis had high priority with the leadership of the churches. He therefore proposed that people be released for mission among Fulanis and that a fellowship of such workers be built through events, visits, sharing of experience and prayer support. Based on the report the continuation committee encouraged churches to release persons for full-time work among Fulanis and to set up Fulani evangelism committees and that representatives from these committees and churches meet for occasional planning and sharing events (Richards 1976:2-26).

From 1978 and onwards LWF convened a series of meetings in Europe and Africa which led to the establishment of a networking organisation, called Joined Christians Ministry of West Africa. Representatives of LCCN (and of SUM-D) played significant roles in this process. The specific purpose of this new organisation was “to be a servant of the member churches and agencies to strengthen the witness and service of churches in West Africa among Fulani-speaking people and to initiate new Christian ministries among them in areas of obvious need”.

The missiological principles of ministry among Fulanis
LCCN and SUM-D representatives, among whom were the administrative secretary of LCCN Rev. Anthony Bumbum and the chairman of SUM-D, Rev. Aage Nielsen, who both became members of the standing committee of JCMWA, contributed – primarily together with other Lutheran church and mission leaders – to the development of the missiological principles for ministry among Fulanis, and these principles also in turn became guidelines for LCCN’s future ministry among Fulanis.

Three major missiological principles were explicitly stated. (1) Both witness and dialogue form part of the proclamation of the gospel. Therefore, there should be witness in dialogue and dialogue in witness. (2) Proclamation and development should be seen as two parts of one mission. In these two principles we see clearly the influence of the thinking of IAP. (3) The already existing communities of Fulanis should be respected in the proclamation of the gospel, and great attention should be given to the theological significance of the Fulani worldview. This is in line with the emphasis of IAP on a community approach and on “responsibility for understanding Islam and the Muslims of their region in view of the churches task of interpreting faithfully in the Muslim world the gospel of Jesus Christ”. (4) And finally the mission work should be carried out in ecumenical cooperation (Mogensen 2002:170188).

There is now doubt that one of the major achievements of JCMWA has been to help churches to focus on the felt needs of the Fulanis and to establish relevant holistic ministries, just as it happened in LCCN.
The Development of the LCCN Fulani Ministry

In Adamawa State, where most of the congregations of LCCN are located, there are several hundred thousand Fulanis, many of whom are pastoralists. During the 1970’s one of LCCN’s mission partners, The America Lutheran Church (ALC), which later became part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, had talks with the LCCN leadership about Fulani mission. Another motivating factor was the drought in the Sahel area in 1968-1973. A large number of Fulani refugees came into the LCCN area, whom the church felt obliged to help (Loven 1977; Martenson 1974:40; LWF 1979).

The Fulani mission project started as a joint venture between ALC and LCCN, with an American missionary couple, Grace and Don Flaten, and a half-time Nigerian pastor, Lenos Ahmadu. Lenos Ahmadu, who was a pastor in Mayo Belwa, had long-standing friendships with pastoral Fulanis in his area. The Flatens had served as missionaries from 1956 to 1976 in Cameroon and were fluent in Fulfülde. A house with an office was built for them at the agricultural centre in Mbamba outside of Yola (which is now Brønnum Lutheran Seminary, Mbamba), and since then the headquarters of the work has been in Mbamba.

Apart from visiting pastoral and town Fulanis, the work focused on encouraging and training church members to respect and reach out to Fulanis through courses offered locally and through Bible schools. For the first few years, however, the Fulbe mission work, had a low priority with the church leaders and the expatriate missionaries.

In 1983, the Flatens left the work due to sickness. A couple of years later an ALC missionary, Inger Hendrickson, who for many years had been in contact with Fulanis around Jos, moved to Numan, to continue her work among Fulanis there, and a Fulani evangelism committee was set up. As a result of her visits to Fulanis camps some young men were enrolled in reading classes and became interested in the gospel. Three young men became Christians, but handling these Fulani converts became very problematic. Two of them were soon sent to Bible Schools and the third was given employment in a Fulani mission project by a church in another part of the country. All three of them were baptized, but soon returned to Islam, which created a suspicion and negative attitude in many church members and leaders concerning Fulani mission (Mogensen 2002:189-192).

The LCCN Fulani Evangelism Project

In 1986, SUM-D for the first time sent a missionary couple to work among the Fulanis, Karin and Mogens Mogensen, who had been working as teachers in a secondary school and an advanced teachers college from 1982. They continued in the Fulani-ministry up to 1991. Two years later, LCCN and SUM-D agreed to set up a holistic “Fulani Evangelism Project”. Among the other Danish and Nigerian missionaries, who became involved in the project in the 1990s were Kirsten Højgaard, who is a nurse, and Ellen and Erling Hauge Jensen, who are teachers, Isuwa Haniel Dading, James Ngitama, who are both teachers, and two Christian Fulanis, Abu and Adamu.
Over the next few years a team including evangelists, pastors, teachers, nurses and a veterinarian was formed. The backbone of the work was a network of “Kungiyar Makiyayi Mai Kyau” (“Good Shepherd’s Groups”) in local congregations. These groups consisted of lay people with an interest and love for Fulanis. They prayed for Fulanis, visited them, helped them, witnessed to them and took care of converts. The team of Nigerian and expatriate missionaries trained and encouraged the groups in their work and assisted them by offering their educational, medical and veterinarian services to their Fulani contacts. In 1998, there were about thirty of such groups with ten to fifteen members in each (Mogensen 1989a, 1989b, Mogensen 2002:191).

The work of the Nigerian and expatriate missionaries and the “Good Shepherds’ Groups” can be characterized as friendship evangelism combined with social ministries. The evangelism principle was called the “foot, mouth, hand” principle. They would visit the Fulanis (the foot), and through conversations (the mouth), they would express their concern for them and share the Good News with them, and when necessary they would help them (the hand) with their needs (E. Jensen 1994). This concept had been developed by a Norwegian Lutheran missionary, Odd Hansen Matre, working among Fulanis in Mali.

I have heard it said among the Peul that there are three elements in friendship; these elements can serve as a little guide for us in maintaining relationships: Our foot allows us to go see our friend. Our tongue permits us to greet our friend and say good things about him. Our hand lets us give good things to our friend (Matre 1992:5).

**Models of follow-up**

In the late 1980s a number Fulanis converted to Christianity, and a variety of models of follow-up and incorporation were considered and tested.

1. The school model: Due to the negative experiences with this model, it was never again used with new converts. The missionaries in cooperation with the central and local church leadership, however, experimented with the four other models.

2. The employment model, where the convert was taken care of by being employed with a Christian employer or in a Christian project.

3. The adoption model, where the convert was “adopted” by a Christian family.

4. The discipleship model where the convert was attached to a mature Christian as his/her disciple.

5. The remain-in-the-Fulani-context model, where the convert was helped to stay with his/her own people while being followed up by Christians in a nearby congregation (Mogensen 1991).

In 1996, a centre for new Fulani Christians, Baba Lenos Centre, was opened close to the LCCN Brønnum Lutheran Seminary in Mbamba outside Yola. The centre was not a Bible school, but
a place where new converts who for security reasons needed to get away from their own people could come to stay and as part of a Christian fellowship be brought up in the Christian faith and learn to read and write.

The language issue
Right from the beginning it was discussed whether Hausa or Fulfulde should be the primary means of communication with the Fulanis. The first expatriate Fulani missionaries, the Flatens, “found the Fulanis in Nigeria, especially the settled Fulanis use the Hausa language more and more. They seem to prefer that to Fulani [Fulfulde] and the new generation will not even know Fulani [Fulfulde]” (Flaten 1998). When the work started the missionaries contacted both town and, pastoral Fulanis, but since 1988 the focus has increasingly been on pastoral Fulanis. This could have been an argument for giving priority to Fulfulde.

The fist secretary of JCMWA, rev. John Gorder, who was based in Jos and was a member of the Lutheran church, argued that it would ne more relevant for the expatriate LCCN missionaries to become fluent in Fulfulde first, since they were trying to understand the Fulani community. Because of the close cooperation with the congregations, the missionaries used both Hausa and Fulfulde in their work, but he first bishop of LCCN, Akila Todi, who was fluent in Fulfulde, and his administrative secretary rev. Anthony Bumbum gave preference to Hausa over Fulfulde for new expatriate missionaries among Fulfulde (Gorder 1984).

Models of incorporation of converts into local congregations
Another important issue was what kind of congregation Fulani converts should be integrated into. Up till now all Fulani converts have been integrated into Hausa speaking congregations made up of non-Fulani ethnic groups (Bukata 1998). But right from the beginning there has been a hot debate about whether this was the best way of integrating Fulani converts into the Christian community. A survey carried out in 1998 among Fulani converts from LCCN and four other protestant churches in Northern Nigeria, however, showed that the converts themselves had other aspirations. When asked the question “Do you think that it would be helpful for Fulbe [Fulanis] who have become Christians, that they have their own congregations for only Fulbe [Fulanis]?” 48 out of 60 answered “yes”, and among the LCCN converts 8 out of 9 answered “yes” (Mogensen 2002:407).

The questionnaire survey and the life story interviews showed that the non-Fulani congregations contributed to attracting the pastoral Fulanis to gospel, and the Fulani converts in general perceived the congregations to have been welcoming fellowships that were very helpful in their process of conversion and integration. The actual participation in worship services and other activities in the church buildings was very attractive to the converts, although the services were conducted in non-Fulani languages and there were elements of the fellowship and worship, which the converts did not appreciate. In the process of becoming members of traditional non-Fulani local congregations, however, the Fulani converts were extracted from their Fulani community, and the theology of the traditional non-Fulani churches did not fully reflect the concerns of pastoral people. In short, they while they did not any longer feel at home in their own community, they did not feel completely at home in the church (Mogensen 2002:322-334).
Based on these data six models of local congregations for Fulani converts were proposed, and also discussed among missionaries and church leaders in the LCCN – as well as in other churches in Northern Nigeria. Six different models were developed.

1. A traditional non-Fulani church.

2. A Fulani church. This is a relatively contextualised local congregation whose members are pastoral Fulanis. They worship publicly in their own church building.

3. A Fulani house fellowship. This is a small local congregation of pastoral Fulanis, that worships publicly, but with a much lower profile than the Fulani church.

4. A Fulani Isa Muslim mosque. This is a highly contextualised local congregation of pastoral Fulanis, that worships publicly in a mosque type building and therefore also follow a mosque model of worship. Their identity is Isa Muslim, but they do not participate in the Muslim worship in the traditional mosques.

5. A Fulani Isa Muslim house fellowship. This is a highly contextualised local congregation of pastoral Fulanis, but with a lower profile than model number four. Their identity is Isa Muslim, but they also participate in the Muslim worship in the traditional mosque.

6. An underground Fulani house fellowship. This is a local congregation whose members are pastoral Fulanis who worship secretly as a house fellowship in the home of one of the members. Their secrete identity is Christian or Isa Muslim, but their public identity is Muslim, and they also participate in the religious activities in the Muslim society.

When considering the alternatives to the traditional non-Fulani Church there is a need not only for a contextual evaluation of the congregational models, but also an ecclesiological evaluation. The contextual evaluation will need to look into issues such as the pastoral context, the Muslim context, the church context and the Fulbe converts’ context, all of which may differ from area to area and from one time to another. The ecclesiological evaluation will need to consider questions like these: Is the establishment of separate congregations for only pastoral Fulbe in accordance with the principle of the unity of the church? Can Isa Muslims be said to be truly gathering in the name of Jesus Christ and holding fast to the word of Jesus Christ when they have not made a clean break with Islam and the Islamic community? Must a Christian congregation be a confessed fellowship and a Christian faith never hidden or secret? (Mogensen 2002: 322-349).

Conclusion
Mission to Fulanis is still a fairly new ministry in the LCCN. LCCN used to carry out is Christian ministry among agriculturalists or other settled groups of people, but now it is challenged to reach out to pastoralists, who depend on their cattle for a living, and are nomadic or semi-nomadic. The religious background of the vast majority of the members (or the parents of the members) of LCCN are various traditional African religions, but now the church is faced with
the task of communicating the gospel to people with an Islamic background. All this raises a lot of theological and practical questions, which LCCN in response to its call to participate in God's mission will have to grapple with in the years to come.

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