

2-5-1972

Interview of P. T. Menefee

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Recommended Citation

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This is P. T. Menefee speaking to you from the Church of Christ residence in Fajara, Gambia. Today is the 5th of February. This is a very beautiful day. We have received a lot of correspondence during the month of December and January from the various places. I received a letter from brother Roger Church, written in December. I received one from brother John Beckloff, and a couple letters from brother Willy Cato. We want to take this opportunity this morning to talk with you at the African Christian School Foundation and also to any of our other Christian friends in and around Nashville who are interested in the work in the Gambia. We feel like the Lord's work really prospered here during the year 1971. Only God knows how many souls will eventually be saved as a result of the work during the past year.

We wish to thank each of you for the encouraging and kind letters that you have written to us during the past year and to thank brother Willy Cato especially, for his recent letters. We want to greet the chairman of the Board, Houston Ezell, and all the other members of the Board of Directors of the African Christian School Foundation.

Evelyn and I and Patricia arrived in the Gambia in the early part of December of 1970. During our early days here, it was quite a struggle. We worked under very trying and hard circumstances. For example, when we arrived, it was just the beginning of the tourist season and previous to our visits, Stokley Carmichael had been here and caused quite a bit of trouble, and we were being harassed on the streets of Bathurst. I have never told anyone of you back home about this because I didn't know how Roseville, our sponsoring congregation, would feel about this. They had decided that we were to come to the Gambia because it was an English speaking country rather than go to Dakar where they speak French. So, I think that they were right in their decision. I think this was the place to

begin to work to preach the gospel in the Gambia and the Senegal. When we arrived, there were no other American families here except just the people with the Embassy and the Peace Corp teachers that were here. Even though Carmichael had only been here just a few days and they didn't let him stay, he caused plenty of trouble. For example, when we would park our car somewhere on the streets in Bathurst, there would be two or three walk up to me and tell me to move my car. I would ask them why and they would say to just move my car. I would ask them where to move it and they would say to move it over here and, of course, there was no reason for it, they were just trying to show authority. I would go to the post office and there would be two or three of them there and they would get around to where I was standing and talk about the white man. This went on for quite some time, matter of fact, for about six months, and finally the Gambia government got fed up with it and so they began to jail them and this sort of thing. They finally got them all cleared out and we haven't had any trouble during the last six months. The work has really gone along fine. However, I didn't pay any attention to this. We just did the best that we could do under the circumstances. When I was setting up the office on Picton Street, there was a couple that came there and wanted to know what I was doing there and I was a little vague about my explanation to them in reference to it because I know that the Black Panther or Black Power group is there; so, I told them to go to the police, that they knew what I was doing and they just said they knew I was in cahoots with the police. Well, later on, just about a month or two ago, I was in Mr. Evans' office, the principle Emigration officer and chief of Police, and we were talking about the situation, and he said it was because of Americans that the situation in Gambia developed the way it was and they were having this difficulty about six months ago. Of course, I explained to him that this was not our group that was causing

all this kind of trouble and we didn't have anything to do with that. One Saturday morning, about six months ago, they had a riot in the streets of Bathurst by this same group of people. They mostly were young people and we were just fortunate that we were able to make it inside the building in time. I had my car parked around close to the Senegol Embassy and the riot was over something between the Senegol and the Gambia. Some border problem that they had. While they were rioting and demonstrating against the Senegolese and robbing the "traitors" so to speak and tearing up their shops and this sort of thing, they were also, at the same time, if they ran onto a white person, abusing them; so, we just did manage to get inside the store at Kingsway and there was one white girl, she was Swedish I think or someone with the Catholic mission, I'm not sure, but anyway, she didn't quite make it in and they literally shoved her in and tried to get a hold of her and she just barely made it in the door. Of course, there is lots of dope in the country, and when they start this sort of thing, most of them are all doped up and you really don't know what they are going to do. Anyway, they climbed up on the Senegol Embassy building and went all the way to the top and tore the flag down, and my car was parked close by and fortunately there was no trouble or damage done to the car. Of course, at the first opportunity, we got to it and got in it and got out of there.

Our office is close to the downtown business section, and I usually know if anything was going to happen in town, if there is going to be any kind of demonstration. The reason that I knew about this was because I hadn't been here, I still was, matter of fact, in the hotel in Bathurst when I got acquainted with a young man. Later he began to a friend to us, and eventually he started coming to the office; so, he began to study with us and was converted. He was one of the men that was on the committee that knew all about these parades before they were ever going to happen. These

groups of young people would get together and have a demonstration or do something, and he was one of the young men to sit in on the committee for it. So, he would always tell us, and we are happy today that this young man has withdrawn completely from any kind of this activity and is a member of the Lord's church and is doing a very fine job with the church. We have never told any of our people at Roseville about our problem that we had here during these early days. We did not want to discourage them. They may have felt that we should leave Bathurst and go to Senegal and begin the work there. We knew that the people in Gambia needed the Lord.

Aside from the fact that the people of Gambia need Christ, we feel that we are filling a very definite place in the lives of the young people in the Gambia. From the very beginning, we had opposition from the Moslems as a whole. Then opposition began to show up from the Catholic church and also the other denominations, and at one time it was so great that it looked as if it was going to be almost impossible for us to be able to stay, and if we were going to be able to stay that nobody else was going to be able to come in following us. The education department sent a letter to the department of Immigration letting them know that we had been working with them and that I had been acting as a go-between for the African Christian School Foundation and the Gambia government in reference to some kind of a school here. Because of this, they have decided to take another look and then, too, there have been some telegrams come in, one from Senator Byrd, and previous to that there was a letter from Wilbur Mills of Arkansas. The last time I talked with the chief of the Immigration office, he told me that they were reconsidering and they were sending all my papers now to the president's office. Since someone called the other day for our passports and pictures, we feel like they are really going to let us stay here now.

When I first got here, I wanted to buy a car but again, the government wouldn't let me buy a car. So, to start off with, I had to use a taxi, and it took me a month or more to get it worked out where I could purchase an automobile.

Mr. Jarr, the Chief Immigration officer sure has worked with us on our recent problem. He would renew our visa, sometimes thirty days, sometimes sixty, and one time he renewed it for 5½ months, another time it was for 77 days and then he went to London and during that time it was renewed for thirty days each time. So our present visa was renewed the last time for thirty days, up to February the 29th.

Plans were to preach the gospel to all the people of Gambia, and we knew we had to go about this and work hard at it and work fast because we didn't know what time we really might have to leave. Maybe you will be interested to know what some of the methods were that we used to preach the gospel in Gambia. Even when we were still in the hotel, we started preaching to the business people in town and distributing tracts. Then after we left the hotel, we went to Fajara where we began to have individual teaching in our home, inviting people in and then teaching them in the evening. This was during the time when really it was a little bit more difficult because we weren't supposed to be doing anything at all, having any kind of activity. Afterwards, we were able to establish the Bible Correspondence Course and began to use this method. Also, we set up a reading room in Bathurst, and there we began to show films and also in our home and we began to show the Jule Miller filmstrips privately to Moslems in our home that would not want to be seen in the church building. We had some good results from this. We distributed tracts that we received from the States and also, in time, we were able to buy a mimeograph machine and run off some tracts on that.

Evelyn and Patricia would teach Bible classes in some of the surrounding villages in the afternoon, I would do village preaching which we hope to have time to do more of than we did this year. We visit the hospital and give tracts out to different ones on the staff and to those who were in the hospital who could read. We also visited the prison and tried to teach them and to distribute tracts and leave things there for the prison library. By this time we already had some converts and I had some of the young men setting up night appointments in the better homes of Bathurst and so we were showing Jule Miller filmstrips in the homes. To the new converts, we were showing "Now that I'm a Christian". We were visiting all the schools in the Gambia, meeting the teachers with an officer of the department of Education. On my second visit to the school, I gave a Bible for the School Library, that is if the head teacher would accept it and we had some real fine discussions together. Some of the schools would say, well this is a Moslem community and we have an obligation to the parents of the children to only teach them Islam. Of course, all schools have a Moslem teacher and they teach it in all the schools. I explain to the teachers that even though this was the situation, that they had the responsibility for a well-rounded education and just because the parents were ignorant of some things, that is no excuse for them not to try to broaden the children's education. During the summer months, we conducted two Bible Seminars for teachers only. This was during the school holidays. There was in all a total of 65 teachers and in the meantime, some of these teachers have now obeyed the gospel.

Each morning when we arrive in Bathurst, we have a devotional service with the different ones that will come from time to time. We sing songs, we have scripture readings and a brief explanation, and then we have prayer.

Sometimes we use Power For Today and various ones will participate. We distributed tracts, some from the States and some were what we had run off on the Mimeograph machine. We distribute Power For Today, which were out-of-date copies and also back issues of Twentieth Century Christian. We do this on a regular basis to the government offices and other places where we think we can get the most results.

There is one thing that the people in the Gambia are coming to believe and that is that the church of Christ teaching is different from the denominations in the Gambia. The local churches here haven't taught them what the Bible says. We are teaching true Christianity.

Evelyn and Barbara went into Bathurst this morning about nine-thirty to clean up the building and get all the classrooms cleaned up for the worship service tomorrow. I had to go to the doctor early this morning for a checkup. I have been sick all day yesterday and part of the night before and I don't know what it was but anyhow, I'm alright now. It was just tremendous cramps in the stomach and nausea and just got so bad that I couldn't stand it; so, I went to the German Mission, which is not far from us here, and the doctor gave me a shot so I was able to rest last night very well. I'm alright today. I have an appointment to preach at 4 o'clock today in the village of Tugari. Since I have been sick, I won't be going so Evelyn will drive Pat there to preach since he doesn't have a car and doesn't have a license to drive.

You may be interested in knowing what the cost to preach the gospel in the Gambia has been during the year 1971. According to my figures, we spent \$29,292.13. We paid the rent for 1972 included in that which is \$15,000. So, our total cost for preaching the gospel here is \$27,700.00. Whenever you stop to think about it, and you dividè this by the number of converts

we've had, the cost is about \$271 for each person that has been converted. However, when you stop to analyze it, you do not know how far-reaching the work may have been; this may be pretty cheap. This includes all expenses, all buildings, all money that is paid out for everything including automobile, furniture and everything that was purchased in Gambia this year. Any money that was paid to any African for services that they have rendered to us at this time or to the church is also included. When I was a student at Harding College in the Mission program there, I prepared a program of work and the budget was \$26,000. This is what I presented to the Roseville church of Christ for the work in the Gambia and the Senegal. They approved the program and the budget for this amount. Now we exceeded our budget for this amount. We exceeded our budget by \$1,700 and some few dollars and I don't want to say that this is exact, but this is approximately what it is. We received, direct, from other churches and contributors to us in the Gambia, \$1,989.83 during the year 1971; so, we did stay within the money that Roseville had put in their budget for us and the amount that we received direct from the States. I believe that you know that Evelyn and I traveled and raised some before we left and came to the Gambia.

We do have four members of the Lord's church now in Dakar, Senegal. We have not spent any money in Senegal this year. There was a young man came here from Ghana and spent about 3-4 months with us and during that time he was converted. He studied with us, has done some preaching while he was here, went to Dakar and he is responsible for those converts there except for one which left here and is working there. This would have been a total of five if they were all there now. Brother _____, the young man from Ghana, has now left Dakar and gone on to Italy so I'm not fully aware of what is taking place right now in Dakar. We do plan to do some work there this year.

When we came to the Gambiz, we put into effect immediately and began working on our short range plans. At the same time, we were getting acquainted with the country and the people so that we could develop a long range program of preaching and of establishing the church in every village.

We realized that it may be possible that we would have to leave. We also kept in mind the fact, and had the hope that someone would follow us if that were to happen. Everything that we did in the spending of money, we tried to spend in such a way that we would get the most out of the dollar in the work for the Lord.

We have some very fine equipment in the church office. We have a mimeograph machine--a good one. We have a good typewriter, we have two good filing cabinets along with tables and chairs and this sort of thing that makes up the equipment that we have in the building.

In the upstairs of the church building, we kept two rooms aside where we have a refrigerator, a stove, and kitchen cabinet. We have a large table in the dining room. We use this to fix us a place to eat and, of course, we have a little cot down there where Evelyn can lay down and take a little nap. When we go into Bathurst in the morning, we stay there all day and Evelyn prepares a little lunch for us and we rest a little bit in the afternoon. On the days when we stay in Bathurst, this is where Patricia does her studying--in the two back rooms. I have my office in one of the front rooms. We have the church library in one of these rooms and the reading room. We have supplies in one room and also use this room to work in as well. All the rooms are used on the Lord's Day for Bible classes. The downstairs part of the building that we rent is used for the Bible Correspondence. Brother Lawrence Umeda is responsible for the Bible Correspondence in Bathurst. He does the grading of the papers and he also does teaching there. We use this large

room downstairs for the worship service on Sunday. We use it to show films and this sort of thing. Brother Lawrence Umeda is a native Nigerian. He was a soldier in the Biafran war. He came here, and we accidentally got acquainted. He was formerly a Catholic and is now a dedicated member of the Lord's church, a very intelligent young man. He preaches nearly every Lord's day and he has certainly made a lot of improvement since he has been with us and really, he is one of the outstanding members of the Lord's church in the Gambia.

One of the members of the church of Christ in Roseville makes a contribution each month to pay brother Lawrence Umeda's allowance for the work that he is doing with us here.

There are eight members of the church in Bassi. Brother is in Bassi and is working with the church there and is doing a very fine job. There are eight members in and about twenty in Decal. We have been having worship service each Sunday in each one of these villages.

We have another young man that is now working with us, brother . He was formerly a qualified teacher in the Elementary school. He was converted after the Seminar and he decided that he was going to preach the gospel. The church residence in Fajara was rented furnished. The owner added one room to it before we moved in and in the meantime, we mosquito-proofed some of it and he has mosquito-proofed the other part of the house. The house already had one air-conditioner in it for \$15,000 a year. We have added one air-conditioner to one of the other bedrooms. This is a real fine compound out close to the ocean and has a nice breeze here most of the time. It is a fine place to live. Evelyn has a very nice garden. We get a lot of things out of the garden. As a matter of fact, yesterday evening, everything on the table was from the garden except bread or something like that.

I made a mistake on the first part of this tape when I said that we moved to Fajara. After we left the hotel, we moved to Saracunda and there we stayed in the Commissioner of Income Tax's house for two months. This is really where we began to do our work. We moved from Saracunda to Fajara. The owner here also built us a garage but I don't use it for my car because we needed someplace for the night watchman and for the cook to stay. So, they live with us here on the compound. This is about 80 miles from Bathurst and so for this reason we had to keep them on the place.

The refrigerator in Fajara was a small one and an old one as well and didn't keep food very good so we told Mr. Taylor, the owner, that he could have that one and we bought a new refrigerator and we put rugs down in the new room that he built on and the dining room table with chairs. That is about everything that we have bought for the residence of Fajara. There is one other item we bought--a freezer and it is full of things right now that Evelyn has put up out of the garden. So, we do live real well in the Gambia.

I might add here that the Gambia has one of the best climates of all of W. Africa and as far as a place to live, I don't believe that you could find, climatewise, a better place to live than what it is here. We have certainly enjoyed living here the past year, even with all the difficulties and the trying circumstances which we have been working under. One thing, you don't have all the humidity here that we had in Nigeria and in Sierra Leone. Things like your shoes and your clothes and things like this don't mold like they did there in just a few days. The rainy season here is very short and even then it doesn't rain too much during the day; most of the time it rains at night and for this reason you have sunshine every day. A couple of weeks ago, the harmotone was real heavy here. It was so heavy that the ferry at five o'clock started to come across the Gambia river and

it got lost and was out all night long and they did not find it until the next day. The ferry did return and nobody was lost.

We bought the very best automobile for the Gambia, Peugeot 404. It cost \$3,585 American money. We have driven it now for just about a year. We've put 20,000 miles on it and haven't had any trouble. People tell us that you can drive this car for six years and that you can drive it for over two years before you have to have any kind of repairs on it. These roads over here are pretty rough; so, we think that all the money that we have spent in the Gambia in mission work has been wisely spent.

Everything said and done, the Gambia is a good place to live and to work for the Lord. So much for the work in 1971, now we want to consider 1972.

The Allison family arrived on December 21, and we enjoyed the holidays together. I've been trying to break Pat in the right way. Pat has been going with me nearly every place that I go. He has been observing by preaching and personal teaching. Usually he, or one of the African boys, has been doing the baptising so he is getting accustomed to the way that we work in the Gambia. For example, on January 19th, the most important event of the day was the conversion of brother Robert Coker. During the day of the 19th, we had been visiting some of the villages around close and so we went to the village of _____ and looked up a man there by the name of Robert Coker, a fisherman whom I had been teaching for quite some time. He had read a lot of our tracts. I had just about given up on him but I thought that I would try one more time; so, after meeting him in his home, we invited him to the house that night to see the Jule Miller filmstrips. I didn't really think that he would come, but to our surprise, he showed up around 8 o'clock. We showed him three of the Jule Miller filmstrips--one, two and the third. After each one, we would discuss it with him and ask him

if he had any questions. After we had showed him the third one and discussed it with him, I asked him if he would like to be baptized tonight, and to my surprise, he said yes. I asked Pat if he would do the baptizing. Under normal conditions, it would not have been so difficult but it just so happened that by this time it was about 11:30 at night. The tide was coming in and when we got down to the seaside, the waves were just about as big as the house. I asked Pat again if he would like for me to do it and he said no, that's ok, I'll do it. I could tell that he was kind of scared of those big waves. Anyway, he started out and, of course, Mr. Coker, being a fisherman, wasn't afraid at all, but I had to encourage Pat to go on out a little further and so finally when he did baptize him, one of his arms was sticking out and he was still hanging on to Pat and I was shining a flashlight out that way. I told Pat that he was hanging on with one of his arms so he would have to go back and do it over. This time when he went out, he went way on out further so about the time that he got ready to baptize him, a big wave hit them and covered both of them up and Mr. Coker went one way and he went the other. They came out alright, though, but when they were coming out, another big wave came in. I was standing way up on the bank, and I noticed it coming and I tried to get some of the things that he had and get out of the way but I didn't make it in time so Pat's clothes got wet and one of his shoes was floating back in the water. I shined a flashlight on it and they took after it. About the time Mr. Coker reached down to pick it up, a big wave hit him and he went right on after the shoe anyway so he finally got it. We are thankful that Pat didn't lose his shoes. I told Pat that this reminded me of an account in the Bible when Paul and Silas baptized the jailer and his household at midnight. Of course, it was after midnight before we got back to the house. This was something that Pat will never forget. You see, he is getting some real good experience. This will

probably remind brother John Beckloff of the time that we were in Liberia and we were at this man's house teaching these five fellows, four of them who were denominational preachers of the Pentecostal church. It was about 10:30 when they decided that they wanted to be baptized. We took them to a pond in the rain, and it was quite a job to get my pants on and off with one foot in the mud and them trying to hold an umbrella over me to keep my clothes from getting wet. By the way, John, the young man that we baptized that night was working with the government. I met him in church in Liberia when I was there in November of 1969. He was still faithful and working with the church. We can thank God for that night.

We started a Seminar on January, the 24th, with twelve young men, and it is to last for one full month. We had 30 enrolled in this Seminar but on Monday the 24th, there were only twelve who showed up. Out of these twelve, all of them are Moslem except one young man who was a Catholic boy. Due to the fact that the 26th, 27th, and 28th were Moslem holidays, we only had two days of the Seminar. We began the Seminar at 8:30 each day and closed at 12 o'clock. During these holidays, Pat and I took a trip up country. We went up to Bassi; we stayed there Wednesday night, Thursday night and Friday night. We visited all the villages in the area and took brother with us. He said that the people seeing him with us in the village would be a great help to him in teaching them when he would go back. The Roman Catholic church has an elementary school there and also a secondary school. The government of Gambia has an elementary school there also. The people are predominantly Moslem except for those who have been converted to Catholicism. In our visit to these villages, we found places where not a single child was going to school. I asked them why they didn't have any children in school and they said that a long time ago when the Europeans came, they noticed that

they were teaching things in the school that they didn't want their children to be involved in. I explained to them that the schools were owned by the government and that they should send their children to the government school. Some of these are large villages with hundreds of children in them and not a single school. Not a single person in the village has ever been to school so I tried to encourage them the best that I could to send them to school. Sometimes we'd have crowds of two or three hundred people or more and I would make an introductory talk. The people in the rural area of the Gambia are 99% Moslem and very suspicious of the white man or any foreigner as far as that goes. One thing that one must do is to get them to like you and then, if you can get them to like you, you can enter into a program of teaching that will lead them to Christ.

Another week of the Seminar has gone by. Some of the students that had attended the first two weeks did not come back but we had others so we still have about 12 average in the class. I asked some of the boys why some of the ones that had enrolled had not come and they said that their parents had not let them come because we were teaching about the Bible. Others said that they didn't want to learn anything about the Bible, that they were Moslems. In the school, brother _____, one of the teachers is involved in the work. Brother _____ and then brother Pat has a class along with myself. We always begin the seminar off each morning by singing a few songs and having a prayer before we enter into the class periods. Already, we have one young man who has expressed the desire to become a Christian. We believe that we have hit on one of the best ways to teach the people of the Gambia, particularly the young people. We have geared this Seminar that we are having now especially for young men who have finished secondary school, who do not have a job. If they are in school or if they are working, they

are not permitted to attend this seminar. So, we feel like this will be a big help to them. Not only as far as becoming a Christian is concerned but we plan to help them to know how to conduct and to behave themselves and how to get a job and to keep it afterwards. We are really trying to teach them how to be good citizens and be honest. The elementary teachers have expressed themselves in having another Seminar during school holidays this year. We are already making some plans for that. The biggest problem is the money situation. It will cost us about five pounds or \$12 for each teacher to bring into Bathurst for the Seminar.

Since we mailed brother John Beckloff the information that he wanted to know from the Gambia government about the school, I haven't heard anything. We're anxious to know more about this and to know just when we are going to begin. Personally, I think that we ought to go ahead in the fall of '72, build a building, and I believe that this would be the one thing that would give the church a good reason to be in the Gambia. I think definitely that the African Christian School Foundation ought to have it here just as soon as we possibly can.

The other day when I was talking to the principle Emigration officer about our visa, one of the things he asked me was what I was doing about the school and I told him I wasn't doing anything about it, in fact, there wasn't anything I could do about it till I got my visa. I couldn't even tell my people back home anything or give any encouragement until I did get it. I think that he got the point on it. He wanted me to promise that I would establish a school in the Gambia. He went so far as to tell me that the Amadias had been here for a year or two and hadn't done anything and he finally put the screw down on them so that they had to get some land and get something started. Well, they did start this year, a secondary school.