



NORWEGIAN
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Impact of Translating/Reading the Bible in the Vernacular in Africa

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This Master's Thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MA degree at

MF Norwegian School of Theology, [Autumn Semester 2013]

AVH5010:Thesis for Master of Theology (60 ECTS)

Study program : Master of Theology. 44.917 words]

Dedicated to those who give witness to the truth of the words of Scriptures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

Writing a thesis is like building a house, and this cannot be done by one single person. You need an architect (or designer), builders, painters, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, and above all, a good, competent supervisor, to give the house the structure, form, shape, solidity, firmness, and the beauty it deserves. This thesis could not have come to its conclusion without the invaluable and indispensable assistance of some people. In the first place, it would like to thank immensely my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Tormod Engelsviken, for his moral support and great encouragement especially when the going was tough and rough, for his intellectual guidance, deep sense and great ability to evaluate, for the precious time he sacrificed and the pains he took to read and correct my thesis.

Secondly, I am grateful to MF Norwegian School of Theology for giving me the golden opportunity to study here and for the financial assistance during my research. I equally thank the librarians for their moral support and guidance.

I would also like to thank immensely all my informants for answering my questionnaires and providing me with the relevant data. I would like to mention in particular Mr. Vensu Alfred, the president of the Nso Bible Translation Group, and the members; Lea Kingha, Paul Tar, Therese Tche, and others who prefer to be anonymous.

Lastly, but not the least, I am indebted to my parents, Shufaay John Nkwawir, and Anastasia Nkinin, who were the very first people to introduce me to the Bible.

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

One common and major characteristic of the Religions of the Book is the existence of a sacred hand book which lies at the heart of the profession and practice of the faith of each religion. Christianity falls within this category, and her sacred book is the Bible, which contains the message of salvation. In fact, it is the Word of God, spoken in different and varied ways /epochs in the past, and in the appointed time it was spoken in a final, definitive way in the Person of Jesus Christ. (cf. Heb.1:1). He is the word of God spoken to humanity, the word through whom the world was made, and that became a human being (Jn.1:1-2, 14). St Jerome underscores the intimate and inseparable link between the Bible and Jesus Christ in these words: *'Ignorance of scriptures is ignorance of Christ'*. In a similar fashion, and as a logical consequence, I would like to say that poor translation of scriptures is poor translation of Christ. If the Bible is God's word to mankind, then it means God is communicating with us. The biblical message therefore should no longer be a mystery concealed, but rather a mystery revealed in the written word of God (Duthie, 1985:10). The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. Few of us can read these languages, hence we depend on the work of translators to read, understand, and respond to the word of God.

Despite the central role of the Bible in the lives of Christian believers, it is paradoxical as well as ironical that its translation and reading has been problematic in the history of Christianity. Some argue that the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages led to different interpretations which eventually brought about the split in Christendom; hence it has done more harm than good. To pre-empt such a dangerous situation, the Catholic Church had earlier forbidden, or rather delayed, the possession and reading of the Bible by the laity. This has orchestrated questions such as: for whom is the Bible? Who should read and who should not read it? Must it be translated into vernacular languages? What impact does this have on

missionary work in Africa, and on African theology, etc. ? In this study, I shall try to resolve some of these issues, but before then, first I would like to clear the grounds and set the ball rolling by defining Bible translation.

1.2. WHAT IS BIBLE TRANSLATION?

Bible translation refers to “the art and practice of rendering the Bible into languages other than those in which it was originally written” (visit <http://www.britannica.com>). Since translation has to do with communication, its theory shares some concerns with communication theory, for example, the recognition that every act of communication has three dimensions: the speaker (or author), the message, and the audience. This implies that the more a translator can know about the original author, the actual message the author produced, and the original audience, the better acquainted the translator will be with the act of communication . Communication is efficient when the three dimensions converge.

Some of the questions faced by Bible translators include the following: “What type of translation do we want to produce, and what translation philosophy, theory, method, or approach must we follow in order to achieve the desired results?” In effect, these questions raise another question, namely, “What types of Bible translations are there?” (Scorgie and Strauss , 2003: 51).

According to Kevin Gary Smith (2000: 24) , “ The goal of every Bible translator, in the broadest sense, is to convey the meaning of the source text in the receptor language”. However, while Bible translators agree that this is their principal objective, they disagree about how to achieve it. Basically there are two competing theories of translation and/or methodologies of Bible translation: *formal equivalence* and *dynamic equivalence*.

Formal equivalence theory, also referred to variously as complete or word-for-word or literal or gloss translation (cf. Scorgie and Strauss, 2003:51) , derives its name from the fact that its primary interest is on the *form* of the original language in the translation. It is concerned with creating a translated text which is true to the original’s form, hence it focuses on the source or

the original language. The reason behind this is that “the meaning of the original is best communicated by translating it into a linguistic form which closely parallels that of the original language” (Beekman and Callow 1974:20).

The second type of translation is referred to as dynamic or functional or idiomatic equivalence, or thought-for-thought translation. It is meaning-focused (Scorgie and Strauss, 2003: 53). The concept was developed by Eugene A. Nida. According to him, the ideal of translation is “the reproduction in a receptor language [i.e., English] of the closest natural equivalent of the source language [i.e., Hebrew or Greek] message, first in terms of meaning, and second in terms of style.”¹ The philosophy of dynamic equivalence is that the translator attempts to convey the thoughts and ideas expressed in the source language (or in the Bible), rather than translating each phrase word-for-word. In this respect, a translation should therefore have the same dynamic impact on modern readers as the original had on its readers and listeners; it should evoke the same feelings and reactions in the reader (Smalley, 1991:111f.) However, this principle needs some qualification and adaptation. In this connection, Carson says “When Jesus’ or Paul’s words made opponents angry, the translation should not therefore make modern readers angry. Rather, they should be able to sense the reason for the anger in the language of the translation” (Carson, quoted by Smalley,1991:111)

Another view about Bible translation is that it is essentially an interreligious dialogue because it has exported the Scripture into many local languages and has in turn made it possible for interreligious dialogue to take place in many countries , especially in Africa (Edward Kajivora, 2012:169). Here, interreligious dialogue is understood as “a conversation between parties who are not saying the same thing and who recognize and respect contradictions and mutual exclusions between their various ways of thinking” (Taylor, quoted by Kajivora, 2012:170). This means that true dialogue intends to listen and learn; it is a means through which areas of agreement and disagreement are clarified leading to change of attitudes towards each other (Kajivora, 2012: 170).

¹ . Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *Theory and Practice of Translation, With Special Reference to Bible Translating*, Leiden: Brill, 1969: 210.

1.3. MOTIVATION (STATEMENT OF PURPOSE)

The advent of globalization and information technology has brought about a sharp increase in the level of literacy among many cultures around the world, especially in the Third World and developing countries. This has affected the various aspects of human life including the political, social, cultural, religious, and moral. With regard to the religious and moral aspects, many people now possess and read the Bible, thanks to the many translated versions that exist in their vernacular languages. To a great extent, the work of evangelism has increased, the gospel message is spreading far and wide, faith is nurtured and practiced, etc.

My motivation to work on this subject stems from the way some African Christians read and interpret the Bible, especially the Old Testament. Because it has some similarities with traditional religion, they quote it to justify certain cultural practices which are incompatible with Christian faith. Secondly, two followers of the Jehovah Witnesses confronted me with a Christological problem, that is, the issue of Christ's divinity, and said that it is an invention by the Catholic Church whereas it is not found in the Bible. I quoted the gospel of John 1:1,14, which says that before the creation of the world, the Word existed already. He was with God and he was God, and "the word became flesh, and dwelt among us." This made no sense to them, for they continued to insist that Jesus was only and totally a human being. It was then that I realized that the Arian controversy of the Fourth century had not been finally laid to rest. It is still a current, topical and relevant issue in our society. Even though the Bible had been translated in order to facilitate people's understanding of it, that has not always been the case. Some people read and understand it differently.

Suffice to mention that this thesis does not intend to discuss all the controversies and misunderstandings over the Bible, the problem of biblical hermeneutics, the dynamics of biblical translation, etc. Our main focus will be to discuss the impact of translating and reading the Bible in the vernacular languages (especially in Africa).

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTION (SUBJECT OF THE THESIS)

The phenomenon of translating the bible from the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, into other languages is not new. It has been examined many times before but mainly from different perspectives such as the socio-cultural, linguistic and literary contexts, exegetical (as the basis for commentary), religious, missionary, historical, and even political. Previous endeavors have tended to overlook or marginalize the impact of translating the bible into vernacular languages. As a consequence, the underlying effects and dangers of translation have not been directly and fully exposed, mainly due to the polarization of religious views in succeeding centuries. In order to bring a different dimension to the subject therefore, in this thesis, I intend to investigate the impact of translating the Bible into the vernacular languages. This translation has a long history in Christendom. Formerly, it was solely the prerogative of the clergy to possess the Bible. The laity was once forbidden by the Catholic church to possess, read or even touch the bible considered as a holy book. This was to combat heresies , and to preserve the unity of the Church. After sometimes she changed this position thus allowing the laity to possess and read the bible. However, before this ban was lifted, some individual clergies had translated the bible to some vernacular languages and this had a great impact on the lives of the laity and on the society(e.g., Martin Luther's translation of the bible to the German language played a major role on the birth of the Reformation and on Protestant theology). With this in mind, I shall endeavor to explore the following concerns: 1) Should the Bible be translated into local vernacular languages? 2) In case it should, what are the impact, the effects, implications and dangers of such an enterprise on the individual, the evangelizing mission of the Church, on culture, and traditional religious beliefs in Africa?

1.5. SCOPE OF THE STUDY.

This study makes a general survey of the history of Bible translation into the vernacular as Christianity spread from the immediate environment of its birth to other continents and countries where it encountered other different languages and cultures including Africa. However, concerning the impact of translating the Bible into the vernacular, attention is

focused on the continent of Africa, specifically south of the Sahara. This does not mean that research was carried out in all the African countries south of the Sahara. Rather, I have presented a general picture of the effects of Bible translation into the vernacular in Africa drawing examples from some specific countries south of the Sahara, and then I have limited most of my research to Cameroon. The case studies and the presentation on the use of the Bible in Small Christian Communities are based in the Catholic diocese of Kumbo in the North West Region of Cameroon, where I hail from. Questionnaire were administered in this diocese, and in the Archdiocese of Douala where I served the Catholic Church for eleven years and for five years respectively.

My discussion and analysis are from the perspective of missiology, systematic and contextual theology. The translation of Scriptures into the vernacular, especially in mission territories like Africa, is a strategy which missionaries employed for the spread of Christianity, and to enable the local people better understand the Word of God and the Christian faith. It is pertinent to investigate how effective and successful evangelization through Bible translation has been in Africa. What is the impact on the growth of the Christian faith? The thesis does not pretend or claim to have said everything that can be said on the subject due to the limitation of space and time, hence there is room for further developments and discussions.

1.6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN.

In this study I have employed a mixed methodology consisting of literary studies (literature review) and empirical studies. They are explained in the following section:

1.6.1. Literature Research and Book Review. Epistemology remains an on-going process, meaning that the acquisition of knowledge is never a closed topic. The same reality can be examined and explored from various, different perspectives, and one idea can generate many other ideas which can be compared and contrasted. Bearing this in mind, I reviewed works of scholars who have written articles or books in connection to Bible translation. I did this with specific reference to the themes, theories, methodology, context, history, and controversies. To facilitate my literature research therefore, I made an extensive use of library database in the library of the Norwegian School of Theology where I consulted encyclopedias, books, journals,

articles, and dissertations. I also used electronic sources like the internet as a method of data collection.

Included in the list of books that I am going to use are the following which have said something in relation to my topic, that is, they have treated some themes that are relevant to my topic. I will use some of the books extensively. In a chronological order, they are:

- Schism And Renewal in Africa, by David B. Barrett, published by the Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1968. In this book, Barrett traces the origin of, and the conditions that gave rise to African independent Churches and schisms. He observes a connection between the translation of the Bible in a local language and an independent Church movement. In addition to this, I shall bring out other consequences of translating the Scriptures into the vernacular in Africa.
- Bible And Theology in African Christianity, by John S. Mbiti, published by Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1986. Chapter Two of Mbiti's book is of interest to me because it talks about the translation and the use of the Bible in the Church in Africa. It treats specific themes such as the translations of the Bible in Africa, what happens when Africans read the Bible in their own mother tongues, the role of the Bible in the formation and inspiration of the African independent church movement. This illustrates the impact of Bible translation on the life of the Church in Africa. I will expand on some of these themes , and update them with new material and examples.
- Bible Translation And The Spread of the Church : The Last 200 Years , edited by Philip C. Stine, 1990. The book is a collection of essays by prominent missiologists who met at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey, in October 1988. Their deliberations were centered on these questions among others: What has Bible translation had to do with the growth of the Church over the last 200 years? How has it affected the theology of the new churches? Has it had any impact on the languages and

cultures? Sanneh's paper on *Gospel and Culture: Ramifying Effects of Scriptural Translation* will provide a valuable material to my thesis.

- Bridging the Gap : African Traditional Religion and Bible Translation, by Philip C. Stine and Ernst R. Wendland, eds., published by United Bible Societies, New York, 1990. The book is relevant to my thesis because of its treatment of topics such as traditional African religion, some key aspects of African world-view (e.g., Chewa and Tonga of South Africa) and some problems in translating the Bible into an African language. The aim of translating the Bible into the vernacular is to make it possible for the common reader to understand it and to accept its authority. From this perspective, therefore, I shall discuss the compatibility of traditional African religion and world-view to the Christian faith.
- Biblical Christianity in African Perspective, by Wilbur O'Donovan, published by Paternoster Press, UK, 1996. He treats some themes such as learning about God from African traditional religion (in chapter 4), what the Bible says about ancestor veneration and about divination (chapter 13), and the problem of syncretism (in chapter 14). This will form the framework of my discussion on whether or not Bible translation has an impact on African traditional beliefs and practices.
- African Traditional Religion in the Modern World , by Douglas E. Thomas, 2005. This book tackles the issues of divination as revelation in African traditional religion, African world-views and some reasons why many African Christians cannot part with their traditional beliefs and practices (Introduction and chapter 1). I shall expatiate on this material in my discussion of whether Bible translation into the vernacular is compatible with African traditional religion.
- Lamin Sanneh, Translating the Message: The Missionary impact on Culture, published by Maryknoll Orbis, New York, 2009. In this book, Sanneh examines the historical origin of Christianity, and points out that it translated itself from the Aramaic and Hebrew (Jewish culture), which together represented the geographical setting and language of its origin, into the Gentile culture (Greek) . In this way Christianity “established a pattern of translation,

appropriation, and assimilation of languages and cultures which has theological and cultural ramifications” (Shane’s review of Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture , available in www.goodreads.com). Sanneh presents Christianity as a religious movement, or as a vernacular translation movement with implication for vernacular language and literature (Sanneh, 2009:7). Christianity adapted a multiplicity of geographical centers as its home. The consequence of this pattern of crossing cultural-linguistic boundaries is twofold: that is, the newly translated language is de-stigmatized and appropriated for sacred use, and the relativization of all cultural arrangements (Sanneh, “ Gospel and Culture: Ramifying Effects of Scriptural Translation” in Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church, Stine, ed., 1990:13).

On my part I will examine and analyze the impact of Bible translation into the vernacular with particular focus on Africa. This will be examined from a general perspective, that is , not only limited to culture as such, but looking at the impact on the Christian Church in Africa, on African Traditional Religion (ATR), on the individual and society, etc.

The above books will therefore help me in my literature research, but considering the fact that most of them are old I need to update the relevant information they contain, and supplement it with personal experience and with what is currently and concretely happening in the society.

1.6.2. Qualitative Research Method. There are no literary sources on the impact of Bible translation into the vernacular in my specific area of studies. In order to answer my research question, therefore, I need to conduct a social research studies. Generally, there are two methods of carrying out social research, namely, the qualitative and the quantitative. Alan Bryman has made a very good distinction between these two approaches. According to him qualitative method is a “ research strategy that emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data”, while quantitative research “emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman, 2008:366, 697). By its nature , qualitative research is inductivist, constructionist (ontological), and interpretivist (epistemological) as opposed to

quantitative which is deductivist and objectivist, that is, using the methods of the natural sciences in studying social realities (Bryman, 2008: 366, 697).

In this study, I shall use the qualitative research strategy which will consist in observing, describing, interpreting and analyzing the impact of Bible translation and reading in the vernacular. In my data collection, I shall use some of the essential tools in qualitative research such as ethnography and participant observation, and interviewing .

1.6.3. Research Tools.

1.6.3.1. Ethnography and Participant Observation. This is a method of collecting data in which the researcher immerses himself or herself in a group or social setting for a fairly prolonged period of time, observing the behavior of members of that setting, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the researcher, and asking questions (Bryman, 2008:402). Most often writers on research methods prefer to use the term ethnography because it has a more inclusive sense than participant observation which seems to imply just observation, though in practice it involves much more than simply observe. For example, both participant observers and ethnographers usually gather further data through interviews and the collection of documents. Furthermore, the term ethnography is sometimes used to denote both a research process and the written outcome of ethnographic research (Bryman, 2008: 402, 693).

I adopted ethnographic research in my data collection in the sense that I lived with Christians in parishes, small Christian communities, and faith sharing groups for a long time. I took an active part in most of their pastoral activities, including the reading of the bible in the vernacular. I listened to and was engaged in their conversations (both public and private) in which they talked about the impact of Scriptures in their lives. I observed their attitude towards certain realities such as sickness , accident, and death ; I equally observed their behaviours in their day to day activities, in the family milieu, in the neighborhood, villages, markets, work places, etc., and during events like conflicts and wars (village, or intertribal). Furthermore, I observed the deep attachment of many Christians to African traditional religion. They wear or

carrying around amulets for protection, and consult the medicine man as the need arises. In most cases, I asked a battery of questions to understand certain cultural practices. And in many instances, I adopted a mixture of the role of complete participant, participant-as-observer, and complete observer in both an open and closed setting. This method of collecting data gave me a wealth of knowledge about the impact of translating and reading the Scriptures in the vernacular in Africa.

1.6.3.2. Sampling. If you want fish you go to the fish pond and not the forest. And if you want a very big fish, you go to the deep sea or the ocean and not to small and shallow waters. The same holds good for sampling which has to do with collecting what information from whom or from where. Not just any person can supply the researcher with the piece of information he or she requires. Hence, it is often necessary to select informants in a qualitative research project depending on the type of information the researcher wants. That means, he or she has to decide what kind of persons or “population are suited to the investigation of the topic” (Bryman, 2008: 165).

In order to investigate more the impact of translating the Bible into the vernacular I used the purposive sampling technique which does not sample research participants on a random basis, but aims at sampling them in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to my research question. Snowball sampling and theoretical sampling are examples of purposive sampling. (Bryman, 2008:415) In the first approach to sampling (i.e., snowball) which is non-probability sample, I contacted a small group of people (Bible translators) who are relevant to my research topic, and through them I established contact with others. (Bryman, 2008: 184,699). To be more precise, I met some known members (priests) of the Bible translation group representing the Catholic Church who then introduced me to other members of the ecumenical Bible translation group through Mr. Vensu Alfred, the administrator of the Nso Bible translation group. I did not know these other members before. This group includes catholic priests and catechists, Protestant and Pentecostal pastors, Christian traditional rulers, as well as lay faithful from different denominations. I chose them because of their involvement

in Bible translation into the vernacular, and their knowledge and experience on the impact of translating and reading the Scriptures in the mother tongue.

I also employed the quota sampling technique in which “a researcher first identifies relevant categories of people (e.g., male and female; or under age 30, ages 30 to 60, over age 60, etc.), then decides how many to get in each category.” (Neuman, 2007: 142) In this regard, I sampled a cross-section of the faithful of different groups, ages and roles ranging from the children, the youth, women and men groups, teachers, church leaders, to old Christians. Only a few were selected from each category.

1.6.3.3. Interviews. The interview is a method that is most widely used in qualitative research. (Bryman, 2008:436) It is generally understood that interviewing in qualitative research is conducted in a form of a face-to-face conversation, or question- and – answer session between the interviewer and the interviewee. However, it is possible to contact interviewees who are very far away from you, perhaps even abroad. Bryman suggests two possibilities by which this can be done : telephone interviewing and online interview, in which the interview is conducted by email. (Bryman, 2008:445)

Because of long distances and places that I could not reach, I used telephone interviewing and online interview as tools to collect data. This was cheap and effective as it spared me a great deal of time and the cost of travelling. I interviewed some bible translators, lay faithful, and clergy. I used both the formal and informal interview with a mixture of semi-structured and self-completion questionnaire, in which the respondent answered without the aid of an interviewer. (Bryman, 2008:698) I sent a self-completion questionnaire through email, and respondents answered the questions by completing the questionnaire themselves and sent them back to me through email. Bryman has pointed out some advantages of self-completion questionnaire: cheaper and quicker to administer; since the interviewer is not physically present, it is not possible for him or her to influence the answers of the respondent; it is convenient for the interviewees. (Bryman, 2008:217-218)

1.6.3.4. Personal Experiences and Case Studies. Finally, I shall use knowledge from my own personal experience as a preacher and servant of God's people. As a clergy I have been deeply involved in the work of evangelization, which entails a whole range of activities including preaching the word of God, teaching Christian doctrine, administering sacraments, spiritual direction and counseling, celebration of the liturgy, pastoral/home visitation, Bible reading and Gospel sharing in small Christian communities, etc. I have listened to people's problems, and I know and understand their difficulties. Suffice to mention that I was the diocesan coordinator of the Bible Year (1996-97) in the diocese of Kumbo in Cameroon. All this put me in a vantage position to observe and to know more about the impact of translating and reading the Bible in the vernacular.

1.6.3.5. Limitations

Despite the fact that snowball sampling is used as a tool in social research, it has its own limitations, for example, it is highly probable that it may not represent the whole population (Bryman, 2008: 185) Though telephone interviewing is cheaper and easy to administer, as well as easier to supervise than the face-to-face interview, it has certain limitations. According to Bryman, these include the following: first, the fact that there is a potential for sampling bias. That means those who cannot afford a telephone, maybe due to poverty, are technically left out, and therefore cannot be interviewed by phone. Secondly, those who are hard of hearing will find it difficult to be interviewed by telephone. Thirdly, telephone interviewing cannot last as long as personal interview; in telephone interviews it is not possible to observe the reactions of the interviewee: he or she may express signs of embarrassment, puzzlement or unease on the face when asked a question. In a face-to-face interview may notice this form of communication and respond by restating the question or clarifying its meaning (Bryman, p. 198).

However, I tried to avoid these pitfalls in social research by selecting those who have telephones either fixed or mobile. When interviewing people through telephone, I was very attentive and sensitive to their reactions which were a signal to puzzlement or unease. For

example, when a person hesitates, tries to clear his or her throat, is silent for a moment, or even sighs, or does not respond to a joke, or changes the tone of the voice, I will know that there is a problem somewhere, and I will try to rephrase the question or to explain its meaning.

Another difficulty encountered in this research which is worth mentioning concerns self-completion questionnaire. They have their own disadvantages in the sense that, as Bryman has rightly stated, it is not possible for the interviewer to prompt the interviewees if they find it difficult to answer a question; the interviewer does not have the opportunity to probe interviewees to elaborate an answer, nor the possibility of asking other kinds of question, and collecting additional data. In addition, he or she may not be sure whether the right person answered the questionnaire (Bryman, 2008: 218).

1.6.3.6. Informant Bias. As someone who has been brought up and well groomed in the Catholic faith and tradition, I tried to be as objective as possible, knowing what is general Christian doctrine, and what is specifically Protestant and what is specifically Catholic in order to avoid the tendency of imposing one upon the other. My sampling was carefully chosen to include Protestants, Pentecostals, and Catholics, that is why I decided to interview the ecumenical Bible translation group of Nso, and through them I could reach other Christians from different denominations. This therefore gives our data the diversity that it deserves.

1.6.3.7. Ethical Considerations. In investigating any social reality, certain things must be taken into consideration. For example, some informants may want to remain anonymous, and certain issues are sensitive and may bring shame or even hurt feelings. I was conscious of that, and respected the rights of those who prefer to remain anonymous.

1.6.4. Thesis Layout and Chapter Summary. As it can be seen already, chapter 1 is the general introduction of the thesis. This features the definition of bible translation, the motivation, the research question (subject of the thesis), scope of the study, the research methodology (book review, and qualitative research), and the layout of the thesis. Chapter 2 presents an overview on early, modern, and contemporary Bible translations. It will highlight very important epochs and stages in the history of Bible translation such as the time of the Septuagint, the Targums,

the Vulgate, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the modern period of the missionary movements. The Reformation period was followed by the modern Missionary Era of Bible translation of the 19th and 20th centuries. With the modern missionary era, “Christianity’s center of gravity shifted from the Northern continents to the South, with Africa playing a significant role in the resurgence of faith.” (Bediako, 1995:3) Protestant missionaries spreading around the world, especially in the African continent, encountered many languages into which the Bible could be translated. Chapter 3 therefore focuses on Bible translations in Africa.

I shall then proceed to chapter 4 whose aim is to demonstrate some of the various usages of the vernacular Bible in Africa with particular focus on Bible sharing in the Small Christian Communities, or the Church in the neighborhood or at the grassroots, based on the Second Vatican Council’s ecclesiology of Church as a family, or a communion of communities. My attention will also be turned to the use of the Bible in African Indigenous Churches, with particular reference to the use of Psalms.

Chapters ,5, 6, and 7 will constitute the climax of this study, focusing on the impact of translating, reading and interpreting the Bible in the vernacular in Africa. Chapter five will critically examine and evaluate the general impact, both the positive and negative, on the Christian Church in Africa. Then in chapter six, the spotlight of my discussion will turn to the impact on the African culture. This is very important because language forms an essential element of culture, and because the process of translation involves the movement from one language or culture into another: an encounter between two different cultures. Thus, it is necessary to discuss the impact of such an encounter within the framework of Bible translation into the vernacular. In so doing, I agree with Lamin Sanneh that Christianity is a vernacular movement. He treats language and culture as essential aspects of Christian transmission (Sanneh, 2009:1). He points out the remarkable nature of Christianity which lies in the fact that it encounters living cultures with ease : “ it renders itself as a translatable religion, compatible with all cultures” (Sanneh, 2009:56). Here, the question I ask is : “Is Christianity compatible with African culture?” Against this backdrop, therefore, I shall bring out the tension that exists between faith and culture, as well as the limits and corruption of culture: all cultures have both

constructive and destructive elements. Though Jesus was born in a particular cultural setting, Christianity is not limited to one particular culture. Rather, because of its divine character, it transcends all cultures. Faith expresses truths that transcend the limits of time and space.

Though Christianity has existed in the African continent for long, many African Christians still hold the Christian faith in one hand and their African traditional religion in the other. This poses the problem of syncretism which remains a major challenge to the growth, spread, and consolidation of Christianity in Africa. It also puts to question the relevance of the Christian faith to the African context. The task of chapter 7, therefore, will be to discuss some practices and beliefs in traditional religion, such as divination and veneration of ancestors. According to Sanneh (2009:1), "through translatability Christianity achieved an impressive synthesis with the world of Greek learning and culture, and that synthesis of religion and Hellenic culture, particularly the Greek metaphysical outlook, hardened into a dogmatic cultural attitude." With this in mind, this chapter shall try to answer the question: Is there a synthesis of religion between Christianity and African traditional religion? Other relevant questions related to the same issue are : How has the translation of the Bible molded and affected the African cosmic view with regard to divination and the veneration of ancestors? Why do most African Christians still cling to their traditional religion despite the fact that they now possess part or the entire Scriptures in their mother tongue? Why do they mix religio-cultural practices with Christian belief? As we shall see in my explanation, there is a synthesis in the sense that some cultural elements are compatible with Christian faith and prepare the way for its effective transmission through Bible translation. This brings to focus the issue of enculturation.

Concerning divination and ancestor veneration, they are like mount Zion that cannot be shaken, but stands firm forever. Instead, Bible translation has strengthened them because divination to most people is seen as divine revelation, and veneration of ancestors is compatible with the veneration of saints. However, the fundamental question is : Can the Bible replace divination? The reason why some African Christians mix religio-cultural practices with Christian belief is partly due to the African yearning for integral healing and salvation, the conception about God, spirits, ancestors, life, and the family. It is equally partly due to lack of conviction on

the part of some African Christians who were converted to Christianity because of economic reasons. Furthermore, it is also due to the fact that Christianity does not answer their deep existential problems, as well as to the way the Christian faith was introduced.

Then in chapter 8, I try to answer the question whether or not the Bible should be translated. Here, I have given the reasons why it is necessary to translate the Bible into the vernacular despite the many negative consequences discussed in chapter 5. To preempt some of these consequences, I have included a section on some guidelines/instructions on translating Biblical and liturgical texts. This will be followed by the general conclusion of the entire thesis, and then the bibliography.

CHAPTER 2

BRIEF HISTORY OF BIBLE TRANSLATION INTO THE VERNACULAR

The translation of the Bible from its original language into other languages has a long history that dates as far back as the third century BC. This section gives us an insight and overview on early, modern, and contemporary Bible translations. It therefore presents specifically an overview of the Bible translations from the time of the Septuagint, the Targums, and the Latin Vulgate through the Reformation and Counter Reformation, and into the present day when the missionary translators of the colonial era have been replaced by mother-tongue speakers (Noss, ed., *History of Bible Translation*, 2009, available in <http://www.bookreviews.org>). No other book has been translated over such a long period of time as the Bible, and no other literary work has been rendered into so many languages as the Bible.

2.1. THE SEPTUAGINT.

This was the first major translation in western culture, and consisted of translating the Hebrew Bible into Greek. The translation effort was ascribed to Ptolemy II Philadelphus (c. 285 – 246 BC), king of Egypt, who is said to have commissioned seventy-two Jewish scholars (translators) from Jerusalem to translate the Torah, or the Pentateuch into Greek in Alexandria around the third century BC, that is, 250 BC.² The translation was meant for the great new royal library of the king (Ptolemy II Philadelphus) in Alexandria which had become the centre of Hellenistic Judaism. This translation is commonly known as the “Septuagint”, which later became the accepted text of the Old Testament (OT), and the basis of the canon of the Church (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_translations). It was this translation – the Septuagint – that became the first Bible of the Christian church (Noss, 2009:1).³

Augustine of Hippo referred to the Alexandrian translation as the Septuagint, a term which became prevalent at his time (*City of God* 18.42). By this he indicated that this name for the Greek translation of the Bible was a recent development. The translation was promoted by way of legend (cf. *eLtter of Aristeas*) which claims that seventy (or in some sources, seventy-

² . cf. Tessa Rajak, *Translation and Survival*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009: 15.

³ . cf. Phil Noss, “ Bible Translation in History and into the Future” 2009, *Lausanne World Pulse*, available in <http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com>

two) different translators all produced identical texts ; supposedly proving its accuracy.⁴ The Septuagint includes additions to some canonical books, the rest of the Apocrypha and some further works. Under the name “Septuagint”, the early church included various apocryphal or Deuterocanonical books (in the Catholic Church’s conception).⁵ Thus, technically the term “septuagint” should only be applied to the Greek text of the Torah rather than to other books of the Hebrew text.⁶

2.2. THE TARGUM

The word “Targum” is the distinctive designation of the Aramaic translations or paraphrases of the Old Testament. (cf. *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*, available in www.newadvent.org) Some of the first translations of the Torah began during the first exile in Babylonia, when Aramaic became the lingua franca of the Jews. After the return from exile, it began to be widely spoken in the Jewish community, and eventually it replaced Hebrew which had slowly decayed and was hardly more than the language of the schools and of worship. With most people speaking only Aramaic and not understanding Hebrew, it became necessary for the Bible to be translated into the more widely familiar vernacular language – Aramaic (Criag E. Morrison, ‘Bible, Early Translations/Versions’, in Patte, ed., 2010:126). Thus the Targums were born to allow the common person to understand the Torah as it was read in the synagogues.⁷

2.3. THE VULGATE (The Bible in Latin: 2nd – 4th century AD)

In the early period church believers copied and circulated Scriptures in Greek that everyone could read (see “History of Bible Translation” available in <http://wycliffe.org.uk/wycliffe/about/history>). Thus, during the 1st century Greek was the language of the small Christian community, but as the faith spread through the Roman Empire a Latin version of the Bible was needed in the West especially around the Mediterranean region. By the second century one such version was in use in north Africa and another in Italy, but unfortunately these versions became corrupted and several others were added until by the 4th

⁴ . www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible

⁵ . cf. Tessa Rajak, Ibid.,p.16.

⁶ . cf. David Burke in *Journal of Translation*, Vol. 5, NO.1, 2009:86.

⁷ . www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_translations. p.2

century, according to St. Jerome, there were “almost as many texts as manuscripts”. During the 4th century, Latin began to replace Greek as the common language, and since there were several Latin translations, often inaccurate, in circulation, the Church needed an official translation. So, in 382 AD, Pope Damasus assigned Jerome, his theological advisor and perhaps the leading biblical scholar and most learned man of the time, to provide an official and definitive Latin version/translation for the church. (For all these pieces of information, see “History of Bible Translation” available in <http://wycliffe.org.uk/wycliffe/about/history>)

Jerome began his assignment by revising the earlier Latin translations based on Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, but due to their inaccuracies, he ended by going back to the original Greek, and to the original Hebrew wherever he could instead of the Septuagint. In about 405 AD, after 18 years of hard work in Bethlehem, Jerome completed the new translation (Smalley, 1991: 24). His translation was called the Latin Vulgate, meaning vulgate or common Latin, and became the accepted Bible and the most widely used translation of the Western church. It came to be the official version for the Roman Catholic Church for over a thousand years, and in fact it became the Bible of the Middle Ages.⁸ In 1546 it was recognized as authoritative by the Council of Trent (Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole in Patte ed., 2010:125). David G. Burke (*Journal of Translation, Volume 5, Number 1, 2009:86*) observes that the Latin translation deeply influenced various Reformation-era vernacular translations in Europe. The Vulgate was the first translation since the Septuagint to be entirely based on the original Hebrew text. It was also the first translation done by someone who argued for principles of translation (Smalley,1991:24). By the time the Vulgate was completed, the Barbarian Goths also had their own version of parts of the Bible, thanks to the missionary effort of Ulfilas (“History of Bible Translations” available in <http://www.historyworld.net>).

2.4. THE GOTHIC BIBLE (Ulfilas).

In the mid- 4th century, Ulfilas or Gothic Wulfila (ca. 310 – 382), meaning little wolf or belonging to the Wolf, translated at least part of the Bible into the Gothic of the Danube area (

⁸ . Gleaned from George H. Guthrie’s *History of Bible Translations*, Life Way Press, 2010, available in <http://www.mystudybible.com>.

in today's Bulgaria), a language of the barbarian tribes (Smalley, 1991: 23, 199). This was the earliest translation of the Bible into a Germanic language. He was an Arian bishop of the Visigoths, or West Goths, a missionary, Bible translator, and the first person known to have undertaken an extraordinarily difficult intellectual task, writing down, from scratch, a language which was purely oral. He had to develop a writing system for Gothic before he could translate. Thus, he devised a new alphabet to capture accurately the sounds of spoken Gothic, and used twenty-seven letters adapted from Greek and Roman alphabets. He needed the alphabet to translate the Bible from Greek into the language of the Goths. It is difficult to determine how much of the Bible Ulfilas translated. The church historian Philostorgios claims Ulfilas translated the whole Bible except the two books of Kings, but others deny this. What is preserved in his version of the Bible includes much of the Gospels, the Epistles of Paul, as well as fragments from Nehemiah, Ezra, Genesis, and one Psalm.⁹

Suffice to mention that before 400 AD the Bible had also been made available in other languages, most important of which were in the Syriac dialect of Aramaic (2nd century), a major language of the eastern Mediterranean, extending over to the Mesopotamian valley; the Coptic language in Egypt (3rd century); the Ethiopic Amharic and Ge'ez; the Armenian, and the Georgian (fifth century).¹⁰ In 331 AD Eusebius was assigned by the emperor Constantine to deliver 50 Bibles for the Church of Constantinople.¹¹ There were also several ancient translations after AD 400. In AD 640 Nestorian Christians (missionaries) translated the Gospels into Chinese for the emperor of China.

2.5. THE SLAVONIC BIBLE (Cyril and Methodius).

In A.D. 863, Rostislav, Prince of Moravia (in the area of former Czechoslovakia), requested the Emperor of Byzantium to send him some teachers of the Christian faith. The latter responded by sending two brothers – Cyril and Methodius. Their goal was to plant an independent church which could have its own liturgy. In order to have worship services in the

⁹ . Gale Encyclopedia of Biography: Ulfilas, available from www.answers.com

¹⁰ Loba-Mkole, 'Bible Translation, History of' in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, Daniel Patte, ed., 2010:125.

¹¹ . *History of Bible Translations*, available in <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible> .

Slavonic language, they first had to create a Slavonic alphabet. They started by translating the book of Psalms, and then the books of the New Testament . After Cyril's death, Methodius and his companions continued the work, and after serious work they completed the New Testament and almost the whole Old Testament by AD 880. Their translations soon spread widely among the Slavonic tribes ¹² . It is interesting to note that the Slavonic translation under Cyril and Methodius coincided closely with the beginning of the church in that area. It was a missionary translation, but unusual because it was not a translation into a dialect spoken where the missionaries were working. The two brothers were Greeks brought up in Macedonia, a bilingual border town between the Greeks and the Slavs. Hence, they spoke Greek and the Macedonian form(dialect) of Slavic from childhood. Nonetheless, at the time when they translated the Bible and the liturgy into Slavic, they were missionaries in Moravia , where a different Slavic dialect was spoken. However, they translated mainly into Macedonian Slavic understood by the Moravians. Consequently, the Slavic people became literate in their own language through the written Macedonian Slavic which rose to the level of a literary language (now called Old Church Slavonic) ¹³ .

2.6. BIBLE TRANSLATIONS IN THE MIDDLE AGES.

When Jerome translated into Latin the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament, his intention was to make it possible for ordinary Christians of the Roman empire to read the word of God. One of his famous dictums was "Ignorance of scriptures is ignorance of Christ". However, as time went on, this perception was altered. The collapse of the empire saw the emergence of modern European languages among the Christians of Europe who were now speaking German, French, Italian, Spanish, or Anglo-Saxon . The Latin Vulgate had outlived its purpose: Latin became the language only of the highly educated and learned, most of whom were priests. Common people could no longer understand the church's liturgy or scripture readings all written in Latin. Instead of promoting new translations, the clergy clung to the Vulgate because it forced people to rely on their teaching. The clergy considered themselves to be the custodians of the source of Christian truth, and kept for themselves the privilege of

¹² . See "The History of Bible Translation into Slavonic and Russian", available in www.wycliffe.ru

¹³ .Willaim A Smalley, Translation as Mission, 1991: 25.

interpreting it for the people. Henry Knighton, a contemporary of Wycliffe, is a measure of how far the church of Rome had turned away from Jerome's campaign against "ignorance of scripture". Knighton rejected the translation of the Bible on the grounds that through it "the jewel of the church is turned into the common spot of the people". During the Middle Ages, therefore, translation, particularly of the Old Testament, into common tongues was discouraged¹⁴.

Nevertheless, some significant efforts to render the Bible into vernacular forms were made: the translation of the Gospel of John into Old English by the Venerable Bede; translation of the Gospel of Matthew into Old High German (ca. 748 A.D.); Charlemagne in ca. 800 commission Alcuin with a revision of the Vulgate and the translation of parts of the Bible for the use of his missionaries in a bid to convert pagan Germans; in around 900 Alfred the Great had a number of passages of the Bible, notably from the Ten Commandments and the Pentateuch, in circulation in the vernacular. He prefixed them to a code of laws which he promulgated around this time. Then, ca. 990, a full version of the four Gospels in idiomatic Old English appeared in the West Saxon dialect. They are called the *Wessex Gospels*.¹⁵

In spite of the fact that the translation of the Bible into vernacular was discouraged, there were some radical demands for vernacular texts on behalf of ordinary Christians against the church hierarchy. The strongest of such medieval demands was in France from a heretical sect called *the Cathars* (Glazier and Hellwig, eds., 1994:17).

In 1199 A.D., Pope Innocent III banned unauthorized versions of the Bible as a reaction to the Cathar and Waldensian heresies.¹⁶ The synods of Toulouse and Tarragona (1234) outlawed possession of such versions. By mid-13th century, the Cathars were completely suppressed, but in the following century the same demand for vernacular Bibles surfaced within

¹⁴ . History of Bible Translations, available in www.historyworld.net

¹⁵ .Bible Translations, from Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia, available in <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible>

¹⁶ The Cathars ('the pure ones') was a movement based on Gnostic and Manichaeian teachings. They believed in a dualist principle of good and evil, condemned the material world (goodness of creation), rejected Christ's incarnation/humanity, the resurrection of the flesh, sacraments, and condemned marriage. Hence they were considered heretics (Glazier and Hellwig, eds., 1994:377; see also *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Second Edition, Erin Beaknear et al. eds., Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 2003:260). The Waldensians shared some of their views.

mainstream western Christianity. It is clear that some vernacular translations were being permitted while others were being scrutinized. In the late 13th century the complete Bible was translated into Old French, yet there is no evidence that it was being suppressed by the church. Around 1360 the entire Bible was translated into Czech.

2.7. THE WYCLIFFE BIBLE .

Efforts to translate the Bible into English began with Caedmon's paraphrases into Anglo-Saxon (670 A.D.) Bede translated the Gospel of John in A.D. 735, completing it on the last day of his life. However, John Wycliffe and his collaborators John Purvey and Nicholas of Hereford are credited with having first produced a complete translation of the Bible into the English language¹⁷. It is commonly referred to as the Wycliffe Bible, and had two editions based on the Vulgate. The first was a literal translation from Latin into English, and the second, completed in 1396, focused on the meaning of sentences, not mere words. The latter circulated more widely. Wycliffe recruited travelling preachers, called the Lollards, to spread the word of God in English. As a result of this, he and his followers suffered persecution as heretics. Purvey and Nicholas were forced to recant their work. The Constitutions of Oxford (1408) included a prohibition against Bible translation without the approval of church authorities¹⁸. Wycliffe is often referred to as the Morning Star of the Reformation. Defying the clergy, he and his followers translated the first English Bible in the late 14th century. Wycliffe's Bible, banned by the Synod of Oxford in 1408, was the most notable Middle English (ca. 1100 – 1550) Bible Translation. In spite of this, his Bibles, and later his bones, were all burned, but he had sparked a Reformation, for these translations were part of a radical impulse for reform within the church. In fact, the issue of vernacular Bibles became one of the contentious themes of the Reformation ("History of Bible Translation", in <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis>, accessed on 29/10/12).

By the 16th century, some events deeply affected later Bible translation. The Renaissance brought about a recovery of classical learning. Greek scholars moved westward as Constantinople fell to the Turks (1453). The invention of the printing press around 1443 (in some texts 1450) profoundly influenced Bible translation. Printed translations of most of the

¹⁷. A History of Bible Translations, available in <http://www.mystudybible.com>

¹⁸. History of Bible Translation, available in www.allabouttruth.org.

modern languages of Europe were made at that time. For example, German in 1466, Italian in 1471, Spanish in 1478, and French in 1487. By 1488, there were printed editions of the Hebrew Bible. The Protestant Reformation in 1517 emphasized the need for vernacular versions of the Bible. All these events stimulated great interest in Bible translation. In respect to this, William A. Smalley says:

The invention of printing in the West was followed shortly by increased Bible translation stimulated first by the Renaissance, with its new humanism, its new interest in scholarship, and its new concern for local languages and cultures, and by the Reformation. ... The Reformation emphasis on the vernacular and Luther's own translation of the Bible gave impetus to a chain of new translations. With Luther, also, Protestant translators now usually returned to translating from the original Hebrew and Greek, rather than from the Latin Vulgate which had become the usual practice.¹⁹

That notwithstanding, the change did not come without cost. Some Bible translators suffered persecutions and even martyrdom. While doing his translation, Luther stayed carefully out of the Pope's reach, but Tyndale was strangled and his body burned in 1536.²⁰ His English translation was a forerunner of the King James or the Authorized version.

2.8. THE REFORMATION AND EARLY MODERN PERIOD.

By the 16th century the view that a personal knowledge of scripture is precisely what ordinary people most need for their own spiritual good was becoming prevalent. Erasmus (1516) expressed the wish that the Bible should be in every language, so that even Scots and Irishmen might read it. Ten years later, this wish became a central demand of the Reformation. Luther and Tyndale undertook the task.

2.8.1. Martin Luther . In 1521, Luther was forced to spend a year in hiding at Wartburg Castle after having been placed under the ban of the Empire. This was providential, for during that time he translated the New Testament from Greek into German. His interest was stimulated in 1518 by Philip Melanchthon, whose lectures on Homer inspired Luther to

¹⁹ . William A. Smalley, *Translation as Mission*, 1991: 26 -27.

²⁰ .Smalley, 1991: 27

study Greek. He later became Luther's lieutenant in the Reformation, and gave advice on Luther's first efforts at translation. Luther's New Testament was published in September 1522, thus it became known as the *September Bible* ²¹. Later, he translated the Old Testament as well, from the Hebrew. Luther's complete Bible was published in 1534. According to the historian D'Aubigne, Luther exclaimed in these words: "would that this one book were in every language, in every hand, before the eyes, and in the ears and hearts of all men" (*D'Aubigne's History of the Reformation*, p. 320). This German Bible could now be read by all German people, thus making the "priesthood of all believers" more of a reality. Now the German merchant, the builder, and the farmer could study the scripture and apply it to their lives. They could even take the priest to task if he failed to read and present what is in the Bible.

2.8.2. Tyndale. Following the publication of Luther's New Testament, an English scholar, William Tyndale, who was a student in Wittenberg, began a translation of the New Testament from Greek into English. He also translated the Pentateuch (1530) and the Book of Jonah. These translations were met with heavy sanctions due to the widespread belief that Tyndale changed the Bible as he translated it. His version was published at Worms in 1526 in 3000 copies most of which were smuggled to England. When these began circulating in England, the bishop of London and his agents seized all the copies that they could lay their hands on. The confiscated texts were burnt at St Paul's Cross, a gathering place in the precincts of the cathedral. Today only two copies of the original 3000 survived ("History of Bible Translation", in <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis>).

Tyndale continued with his dangerous work, and by 1535 he had translated the first half of the Old Testament. In that same year, while living under cover among English merchants in Antwerp, his identity was betrayed to the authorities. In 1536 he was executed at the stake as a heretic. ²² In spite of this, his texts became the source to which subsequent translators returned after Henry VIII in 1534 decided that there shall be an official English Bible.

2.8.3. The King James Bible. In January 1604 King James I of England authorized that a new translation of the bible into English be started. His intention was to guarantee that the

²¹. "History of Bible Translations", in <http://www.historyworld.net>

²². See "Jesuits Counterattack Bible", in www.keithhunt.com

new version would conform to the ecclesiology of the Church of England, and reflect its Episcopal structure and belief in ordained clergy (cf. Long, 2001:191-92). The outcome was the King James Version (KJV) or the Authorized Version, which was a revision of the Bishops' Bible, and which had Tyndale as major source. It was the third translation of the Bible into English to be approved by the English Church authorities. The first was the *Great Bible* dedicated to King Henry VIII, and the second was the *Bishop's Bible* (1568). The new translation that lasted for seven years (1604-1611) and edited by forty-seven scholars (cf. Long, 2001:194) became central to English culture, as well as the standard for English-speaking Protestants. Its flowing language and prose rhythm has had a profound influence on the literature of the past 400 years.²³ In fact, it became known as the miracle of English Prose.

2.8.4. Lefevre in France. In France, a doctor named Jacques Lefevre D'Etapes was also translating the Bible into French: the New Testament and the Psalms . The first complete French Bible was published in 1530. As a consequent, the common people possessed the Bible, read it in their families and in private; conversations on the Bible became frequent; to them Christ was the centre and sun of all revelation; now they knew that Scripture was from God, for by it they had been transported from darkness to light (*History of the Reformation*, D'Aubigne, p. 453).

The most important factor of the Reformation's success was the improvement of communication of God's word to the common people. With the printing press, it was possible for every person to know God's saving power through the Gospel. It also "unleashed the Sword of the Spirit against the lies of the Roman Catholic Church". The many vernacular bible translations at this time made it possible for the laity in Germany, England, France, and Switzerland to read or have the Bible read to them in their own language. As such, Grey says:

No longer would the elitist class of priests be the only ones in possession of the truth of the Word of God. No longer were fathers kept from reading to their own children the words of the Scriptures. No longer would God's everlasting and piercing Word be twisted and maimed by church leaders using their influence for their own gain.²⁴

²³ . King James Version, available in <http://www.biblegateway.com>

²⁴ .Jane Grey, *The Importance of Vernacular Bible Translations by Luther, Wycliffe, and Erasmus in the Reformation*, <http://www.janegrey.hubpages.com/hub/The-Role-of-Bible-Translations-in-the-Reformation>, ca. 2009.

2.8.5. The Jesuits Bible (1582). After the Council of Trent in 1563 England began changing from a Catholic nation to a Bible-loving people. Since the appearance of Tyndale's Bible (1525) the Bible had obtained a wide circulation. In an effort to turn the English people from the Bible back to the Roman Catholic Church, the Jesuits devised a means: to bring forth their own English version of the Bible capable of superseding the Bible of Tyndale. This was a strategic and decisive step given that if England could be retained in the Catholic column, then together with Spain they would make sure that all America both north and south would become Catholic. The first Jesuit Bible was thus published in 1582.

As the church grew and expanded other additional translations into new languages followed, for example, Arabic in the 8th century, Slavonic (ninth century), German (eleventh century), Dutch (12th century), Spanish (13th century), Norwegian (14th century), Persian in the 14th century, and Hungarian (15th century), to mention only some examples. (Smalley, 1991:22-24)

2.9. BIBLE TRANSLATIONS IN THE MODERN PERIOD (19th – 20th Century AD). The Reformation Period was followed by the Missionary Era of Bible translation during the colonial period of the 19th and 20th centuries. Protestant missionaries, spreading around the world, along with the traders and administrators of the expanding European empires, encountered more and more languages into which the Scriptures could be translated. The Bible in vernacular languages, therefore, became the main weapon of Protestant missionaries. Bible translation began to accelerate with the beginning of the Bible society movement. The translation, publishing, and distribution expertise of the Bible Society facilitated missionary efforts in Bible translation. The first Bible society to set the tone and pace for the Bible society era was the British and Foreign Bible Society founded in 1804. Its first publication, that same year, was the Gospel of John in Mohawk, an American Indian language²⁵. The Bible society movement and the missionary movement became tightly intertwined in translating the holy text into vernacular languages. A number of professional Bible translation agencies were founded in the mid-twentieth century, for example, the Wycliffe Bible Translators which was the foremost.

The first Wycliffe Bible Translators was founded in 1942 by William Cameron Townsend

²⁵. William A Smalley, Translation as Mission, pp. 27-28.

to promote professionalized translation. It recruited and trained people to specialize directly in translating the Bible ²⁶, a missionary to the Cakchiquel Indians of Guatemala. His inspiration for translation came about as a result of a challenge from a Cakchiquel man: “If your God is so great, why doesn’t He speak in my language?” Thereafter, he resolved that every man, woman and child should be able to read the Word of God in their own language. Thus, in 1934 Townsend founded a linguistics training school called “Camp Wycliffe” named after John Wycliffe who first translated the Bible into English. By 1942, Camp Wycliffe had developed into two sister organizations, Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). The former completed its first translation in 1951 in the San Miguel Mixtec language of Mexico, and the 100th in 1978, in the Amuesha language of Peru. And then in 1985, the 200th translation was completed in the Hanga language of Ghana, Africa, while the 300th was completed in 1989 in the Mta Manobo language of the Philippines ²⁷

In 1943, Eugene A Nida, a linguist, anthropologist as well as a student of ancient Greek literature, joined the American Bible Society staff. This marked the beginning of the promotion of professional expertise, the development of translation theory and of translation procedures based on such theory. Hitherto, the Bible societies did not have a developed and articulated theoretical base for guiding, directing and advising translators. Nida, therefore , quickly set forth to provide the necessary data and developed ways of conceptualizing and teaching the process of translation. He later recruited a professional team of linguists and biblical scholars to serve with him as consultants to translators all over the world. Later on they became and worked under the auspices of the United Bible Societies. ²⁸

The epochs which I have described above highlight major forces which strongly influenced the translation of the Bible. The epochs which I have described above highlight major forces which strongly influenced the translation of the Bible. They show the amount of effort that has been put into translating the Bible through the centuries. From what I have presented, it is good to note three categories of early Bible translations, namely, the primary translations (from the original languages), the secondary translations (mainly from the

²⁶ . Ibid., pp. 28-29.

²⁷ .Wycliffe Bible Translators, available in <http://wycliffe.org.uk/wycliffe/>

²⁸ . William A Smalley, p. 28.

Septuagint, e.g., the Armenian, Coptic, and Arabic), and tertiary translations (from the secondary translation, e.g., the Georgian) (Jinbachian, “History from the Septuagint to the Vernaculars”, in *Journal of Translation*, Vol.5, No. 1, 2009:85).

CHAPTER 3

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS IN AFRICA

The Middle East is the cradle of Christianity. From there it spread to Europe and North Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Sub Saharan Africa. The spread of Christianity, in many cases, has been concomitant with the translation of the Bible into the different vernacular languages that the Word came into contact with. Bible translation in Africa, therefore, is intertwined with missionary work in the continent. This was spearheaded by the creation of Bible societies as we saw in the preceding chapter. Like elsewhere in the world, the growth of the church in Africa was accompanied by the translation of the Word of God into the mother tongues of the new converts. In this regard, Kenmogne tells us that ‘Bible translation was part of the Church-planting agenda. The mission strategy was to study and develop the language in order to translate the Bible. . .’ (Kenmogne, 2012:34). According to Aloo Osotsi Mojola (2007) the work of Bible translation in Africa took place within the context of the “Three C’s” - Christianization, Civilization and Commerce. He observes that “a mastery of the local languages and cultures was needed to facilitate effective communication and implementation of these goals [reflected in the Three C’s].”²⁹ This highlights the *raison-d’être* of Bible translation in Africa which was useful for achieving this facilitation and implementation.

Africa is a linguistically complex region having thousands of distinct languages. Some of these are regional with a large number of speakers (in fact, millions of speakers), for example, Hausa in West Africa and Swahili in East Africa. This language diversity poses a challenge to Bible translation, and makes it even more urgent. Due to this factor of language diversity in Africa, therefore, this chapter will only feature Bible translations into some of the languages. Bible translation in Africa can be traced as far back as to the time of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Ethiopia, and the Nubian Church in Sudan³⁰ (which existed until the 16th century). The entire Bible, or some portions

²⁹. A.O. Mojola, as quoted in *Journal of Translation, Volume 5, Number 1, 2009:88*. This Journal contains a Review of Philip A. Noss’s (ed) *A History of Bible Translation*, 2007.

³⁰. cf. Sundkler and Steed, 2000:29ff.

of it, have been translated into many different languages of Africa. We shall now consider some of them.

3.1. BIBLE TRANSLATIONS IN ETHIOPIA.

3.1.1. Ge'ez : As early as the 4th century, parts of the Old Testament were translated from Greek sources into the Ge'ez language in Ethiopia. These included the Psalms and the Song of Songs which were used by the Ethiopic Orthodox Church of East Africa³¹. The Ethiopian orthodox church translated the Bible from the Ge'ez into Amharic (Mojola, 2012:5).

3.1.2. The Amarinya Bible. By 1818, after ten years of serious work, an Ethiopian monk called Abba Abraham completed the translation of the entire Bible into Amarinya, assisted by Asselin who explained difficult words and phrases using the original Hebrew, the Syriac version, or the Septuagint. (Aren,1978:42-43) This was a Bible that could be understood by the common speakers of Amarinya.

3.1.3. The Bible in Oromo. The New Testament was published in 1893 in Oromo, a language spoken in Ethiopia and Kenya. Then, in 1899, the complete Bible was published by Aster Ganno and Onesimus Nesib. In 1992, the Ethiopian Bible Society published a new translation of the whole Bible.

3.2. SWAHILI (Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania) The first translation of parts of the Bible into Swahili began with Johannes Krapf, a German Lutheran pastor of the British Church Missionary Society. Immediately after his arrival in East Africa, he began to learn some local languages developing their writing systems. By 1846, he produced a draft of the New Testament in Swahili, and by 1850 he translated the Gospel of Mark into Kikamba (Mojola, "Bible Translation in Africa- A Brief Historical Overview", in *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 15, No.2, 2012:6). was published in 1868, followed by a complete translation of the New Testament in 1879, and the translation of the entire Bible in 1890. Since then, many efforts have been made to translate the Bible into different dialects of Swahili as spoken in

³¹. See Mikre Sellassie, quoted by Aloo Osotsi Mojola, "Bible Translation in Africa- A Brief Historical Overview", in *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 15, No 2, 2012:5; see also Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Online.

different regions of East Africa; for example, the *Union Translation* published by the Bible Society of Tanzania in 1950, and the version of the *Swahili Common League*.

3.3. IGBO (Nigeria). By 1913, Thomas John Dennis (a British Anglican) translated the Bible into “Standard” “Union Igbo”. Though very influential, this version was criticized by some critics like Chinua Achebe. Consequently, the Igbo Living Bible was published in 1988.³²

3.4. GREBO (Liberia). John Payne (1815 – 1874), an American missionary of the Protestant Episcopal Church, translated a summary of the Old Testament into the Grebo language spoken in Liberia (New York: American Tract Society [1841]).The Pentateuch and the book of Joshua were translated for the use of the Protestant Episcopal Mission in Western Africa (www.smu.edu/Bridwell).

3.5. BIBLE TRANSLATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA (Tsonga, Tswana, and Zulu) . Tsonga is a South African language with approximately two million speakers living mostly in Limpopo and Gauteng. The first translation of the Bible into this language was initiated by Paul Berthoud, his brother Henri Berthoud and Ernest Creux, all missionaries of the Swiss-French Mission who came to South Africa in 1875³³. The Gospel of Luke and the Book of the Acts of the Apostles were the first Biblical texts to be translated in 1892.The were published by the British and Foreign Bible Society. The first New Testament was translated in 1894, and by 1907 the first entire Bible was published. Twenty-two years later, this edition was revised. The latest translation came up in 1989 under the coordination of Theo Schneider, and published by the Bible Society of South Africa.

Tswana and Zulu are among the many indigenous languages spoken in South Africa. The first complete Bible was published in Tswana . The Bible Society of South Africa has been involved in translating the Bible into indigenous languages of South Africa with the aim of making the Word of God accessible and understood. The Gospel of Matthew was the first book of the Bible to be translated into the Zulu language by George Champion (missionary) and revised by Newton Adams. This translation was published in 1848 by the

³² . Bible Translations into the Languages of Africa, from Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia: www.en.wikipedia.org

³³ . www.biblesociety.co.za/translation-projects/p.2.

American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) . Some members of this group translated the entire New Testament which was published in 1865. And the complete Bible, translated also by several members of ABCFM, was published in 1883³⁴. In 1959 it was revised and published by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Then in 1986, the Bible Society of South Africa published the translation of a Modern Zulu New Testament and the Psalms , while the translation of the Old Testament began in 2009.

3.6. BIBLE TRANSLATIONS IN CAMEROON. Cameroon is situated between the coast of west and central Africa, with a total population of about 19.5 million people and a life expectancy of only 53 years, due to HIV/AIDS and other diseases. French and English are the official languages, though not spoken by all Cameroonians. According to Dr. Suh Joseph Che (2011), Associate Professor of Translation Studies, Terminology and Comparative Stylistics at the university of Buea in Cameroon , there are “ over 280 different Cameroonian ethno-linguistic and cultural groups”. Cameroon is ranked 153 of 182 UN Human Development Index (2009), with a literacy rate of 75% males, and 52% females. Forty percent of Cameroonians are Christians , yet most do not have Bibles in their mother tongues, even though an increasing number of local people are now taking part in translating the Bible into their own language. About 40 per cent of the people practice African Traditional Religion, while 20 per cent are Muslim. Out of the 280 indigenous languages , Michel Kenmogne³⁵ says 104 still need translation.

The Bible has been translated into many local languages in Cameroon, such as the Bulu, Ewondo, Bassa, Kom, Bafut, Limbum, etc, but due to space and time, I shall focus only on the following : Douala, Mungaka, and Lamnso.

3.6.1. Bible Translation into Douala. The history of Bible translation in Cameroon dates as far back as the early 19th century with the arrival of the first missionaries in the country who stimulated the development of local languages. Rev. Joseph Merrick (1808-1849), a Jamaican of African ancestry, and an outstanding linguist, was part of an expedition

³⁴ . Gertrude Rachel Hance, *The Zulu Yesterday and Today: Twenty-nine Years in South Africa*, Negro Universities Press, New York, 1969: 45.

³⁵ . Michel Kenmogne is the General Director of the *Cameroon Association of Bible Translation and Literacy*.

to Cameroon led by the Baptist Missionary Society of London.³⁶ Around 1845, he founded the Jubilee Mission on the Cameroon coast, and translated the New Testament into the Isubu and Douala languages. He also began work on Douala-English glossary. Though his service in Cameroon lasted only for about four years, he made such a great impression that he has been referred to as ‘the founder of Christianity in Cameroon’ (Jaap Van Slageren in Sundkler and Steed, 2000:261).

Another Baptist missionary, Alfred Seka (1814 – 1880), an English engineer-missionary, arrived shortly after Joseph Merrick. Seka founded the Cameroon town of Victoria (Sundkler and Steed, 2000:260), after Queen Victoria of Britain. Now it is called Limbe. He studied the Douala language, formulated its alphabet, and translated the New and the Old Testaments published in 1862 and 1872 respectively. Although Seka’s translations were literal, and therefore subsequently criticized, they however gave an impetus to literary work in African languages³⁷.

3.6.2. The Bible in Mungaka. The Bible was also translated into Mungaka, another Cameroonian language, by a German missionary, Dr. Adolf Vielhauer (1880 -1959). This was in collaboration with Elisa Ndifon (1888-1971), an indigenous teacher and preacher, with the assistance of Anna Hummel, Elizabeth Buhler, and some native Mungaka speakers. The translation project took about thirty years to complete; 1961 saw the publication of the translation of the entire Bible into Mungaka language, 2 years after the death of Vielhauer. He made some observations on translation which are similar to those of some translation scholars like Eugene Nida. For example, Vielhauer felt that in order to make biblical truths acceptable “to readers in the grassfields of Cameroon”, it was important to make certain environmental adjustments: using “leopard” for “wolf” and “bear”, and substituting “wine tree” for “vine”³⁸. Through the translation of biblical texts, Vielhauer enriched the repertoire of Mungaka literature, and helped enhanced and promote the native tradition by collecting and publishing oral literature.

³⁶ . *Translators Through History*, - Jean Delisle, p. 86, available in <http://www.books.google.no>.

³⁷ . Ibid.

³⁸ . Ibid.

3.6.3. God Speaks Lamnso'. The Lamnso' Bible Translation Group, under the leadership of Vensu Alfred, gives us a summary of the historical landmarks of Bible translation into Lamnso'. It started in the late 1970s with the arrival of a consultant, Karl Grebe who helped developed the Lamnso' orthography. By 1974, the translation of the New Testament started ad experimentum : translated sections were tested and used in Churches. Some people were designated as reviewers and testers in the churches. Grebe was working in collaboration with a few local translators like Pa Siiyatan as the main translator. In 1990, the New Testament (NT) was published and launched in the presence of all the leaders of the Protestant and Catholic Churches together with their flocks. The impact was so encouraging that there was need for a translation of the entire Bible.

In 2000, ten years after the launching of the New Testament, Karl and church leaders met to discuss how they would start the translation of the Old Testament (OT). Several other meetings were held afterwards and, in 2001, four Churches (the Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic , and Church of Christ) appointed prospective men to be trained as translators and testers. In 2002, the translation of the OT commenced fully, and the different Churches appointed more men and women to serve as reviewers. An inter-church committee was set up made up of leaders of the four churches. The Catholic Church requested the translation of the Deutero-Canonical (Apocryphal) Books. A Catholic team was thus set up for this purpose.

The translation work progressed slowly but surely and painfully because Karl did quite a good chunk of translation through the email as his wife had developed cancer and had to be evacuated to Canada. For over three years consulting was done through correspondence , but intercepted by a period of about 6 weeks to two months every year when Karl would come to Cameroon for face-to-face consulting. Later on he returned to Cameroon after the wife passed away and continued with the translation. He finished consulting and had barely five days left to finish some minor checks, but the cold hands of death suddenly snatched him away. Presently, the typesetting of the translation is at the final stage and after that it will be sent for printing.

Bible translation, both in Cameroon and in Africa as a whole is an on-going process which still has a long way to go. Now the work and the project of Bible translation in Cameroon is being coordinated, sponsored and promoted by Bible translation groups and institutions such as Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL Cameroon Branch, *Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy (CABTAL)*, Lutheran Bible Translators of Canada, etc, in collaboration with Christian churches. As of now, 16 languages have the entire Bible, 34 have the New Testament, some languages only have portions of the Bible, while 195 have no Scripture portions (“Accelerating Literacy and Bible Translation through Nationals” in <http://www.onebook.ca/programs-projects> , accessed on 28/01/13).

CABTAL began work in 1989 and since then it has been pioneering new techniques in language projects. At present, it is engaged in 23 language programs with around 200 people involved. It has produced the Jesus Film project in Mundani (“CABTAL: Bible Translation in Cameroon”, in <http://wycliffe.org.uk/blog/tag/cameroon>, accessed on 28/01/13). CABTAL is also engaged in translating the NT and portions of the OT in the Bum and the Babanki languages, and recently completed the translation of the NT in the Kom language, all of the NW region of Cameroon (“Just in Time for Easter”, in <http://www.wycliffe.org/Give> , 28/01/13).

Among the projects carried out by the Wycliffe Bible Translators UK Blog are the following in the North West Region of Cameroon: promoting literacy and Bible translation in the 10 languages of the Ndop plain, for example, Bafanji, Bamessing, Bamali, and Bamukumbit. Under the leadership of Dan Grove, and with the collaboration of local Christians, they organizes courses on translation principles. The gospel of Luke is already printed in the Bamunka and Bambalang languages, and they are making great progress with the translation of the entire New Testament (“God Speaks Bamunka”, in <http://wycliffe.org.uk/blog/tag/cameroon>, accessed on 28/01/13) .

The Oku team is typesetting their NT, and their alphabet chart, bilingual diaries, and the Jesus Film , the Oku Dictionary, 2 traditional stories booklets , etc, have been published (

“CABTAL: Bible Translation in Cameroon”, in <http://wycliffe.org.uk/blog/tag/cameroon>, accessed on 28/01/13) .

The Wycliffe Bible Translators USA carried out translation projects in Ombessa just north of the capital, Yaounde in Cameroon. The languages involved are Nugunu, Yambetta and Tunen. The project, support by SIL Cameroon, consists of using technology installed by Wycliffe Associates USA “to transfer data that includes translated Scriptures that are checked remotely for accuracy and returned to them for updating on their computers.” They also use a computer program, “ Our Word, to make adaption from a neighboring language . . . that already has the New Testament. Using a source text, this program enables translation teams to produce very accurate first-draft-translations from already existing New Testaments “ (Accelerated Bible Translation in Cameroon”, in <http://wycliffeusa.wordpress.com/2012/01/26/>, accessed on 23/01/13).

CHAPTER 4

HOW IS THE VERNACULAR BIBLE USED IN AFRICA?

4.1. VARIOUS USAGES OF VERNACULAR BIBLE.

The aim of this chapter is to show the various different ways in which the vernacular Bible is used by the laity and even non-Christians. Chitando maintains that a significant aspect of the Christian heritage in Africa is the central role the Bible plays in the lives of believers. For example, It is read in homes, churches and schools, as well as on a variety of occasions. In Sunday Schools children recite Bible verses. Members of different denominations appeal to the Bible for support during theological disputes. Preachers begin their sermons with biblical quotations, and use biblical stories in their preaching. Furthermore, the Bible is used to comfort mourners, to encourage students writing their examination, and to congratulate the successful and graduating ones (Chitando, 2007: 6-7). In addition, Sacred Scriptures are used in Bible sharing groups, in liturgical celebrations like the Mass, during devotional meetings, and other Christian assemblies.

People study the Bible and use it for meaningful conversation for the transformation of their lives. In this connection, Alfred Vensu, one of my informants, says

As people have access to the Word of God in a language they understand better, they engage with it in meaningful ways for transformation to take place in their lives. Formerly, most of the people heard the Word of God only on Sundays ... and some special church occasions. But now the laity is reading and interpreting Scripture. This has sparked the decision to study more because you constantly see people asking the others questions arising from their interpretation of the Bible. The Catholics through the Small Christian Communities are studying the Bible in Lamnso. The Lamnso Choirs of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon are using the Lamnso Scriptures, the Cameroon Baptist Convention in Nso' use it in Sunday schools, and the Church of Christ help the people to study the Lamnso Bible through correspondence courses.

Biblical inscriptions are found on the doors and walls of many homes; they are pasted on vehicles both private and public; some people read and pray with the Bible when travelling in a bus, train, ship/boat, or aero plane; Still others fasten some Scriptural inscriptions somewhere around their

bodies (like the Jewish Turim/Talmud). The Bible is also used for drama/sketches, and to compose religious songs and gospel music. In some instances, it is used for swearing, taking an oath, and assuming power, or for taking up an office.

I am going to focus on Small Christian Communities because Bible sharing constitutes its life wire, the core or the heart of its activities, and because it is directly linked to the topic of this theses. It is also a novelty in the Catholic Church, that is, a new way of encouraging and getting the laity read and practice the Bible, in other words, of enthroning the Word of God in the lives of the Christians thus making it a normative source of authority for them. I shall also focus on African indigenous Churches because the translation of the Bible into the vernacular played a key role in their creation, and because their use of the Bible has a great impact on the African continent .

4.2. USE OF THE BIBLE IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES.

4.2.1. Meaning of Small Christian Communities.

Small Christian Communities (SCC) is a new phrase that looms large on the lips of many African Catholic Christians, for example, in Cameroon, Ghana, South Africa, and East Africa ,notably in kenya. Other terminologies commonly employed to refer to Small Christian Communities include the following: Basic Christian Communities (BCC), Living Base Ecclesial Communities – in French *Communauté Ecclésiales Vivantes de Base (CEVB)*, Small Church Communities (SCCs), Living Christian Communities (LCCs), Small Faith Communities (SFCs) (Healey,2013:1-2). The term ‘base’ indicates from the grassroots, that is , the base of society, the poor and marginalized, the foundations where people can exercise some influence on the structures and established order, or where change can be initiated from below. ‘Ecclesial’ expresses the idea that these communities are ‘church’ at the local level (cf. Healey, 2013:1-2). This echoes the Second Vatican Council’s understanding of the Church as the people of God, the Body of Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, ‘The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church’ No. 17). No. 26 of the same Constitution states that

This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the New Testament. . . In these communities though frequently small and poor, . . . Christ is present.

Small Christian Communities are a new way of being church which originated from the new model of Church (as the people of God) and the communion ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. Before Vatican II, the Catholic Church had a pyramidal structure, in a descending order, with the pope at the top, followed by bishops, priests and religious, and then the laity right at the lowest rung of the ladder. It was more or less the church of the clergy, while the laity were at best passive observers and carriers of orders from above. Vatican II injected a new ecclesiological awakening or renaissance into the church according to which the parish is seen as a communion of communities. Each individual christian belongs to a christian family, a number of families together form a small Christian community or the Church in the neighbourhood with a Bible sharing group, and then the different small Christian communities constitute a parish which becomes a communion of communities.

When we read the Acts of the Apostles, we see that the early Church lived as a community. However, this awareness of being a community began to fade drastically as time went on. Azevedo has observed that ‘the Church became more highly structured as a religion of the Roman Empire. It also became more hierarchically stratified, reflecting the stratification of power and authority in civil society. All these factors contributed to the eclipse of any sense of community’ (Azevedo, quoted by Ihenacho, ‘Small Christian Communities’ available in <http://www.smallchristian>). In the spirit of Vatican II, therefore, Small Christian Communities

‘are groups of christians who, at the level of family or in a similarly restricted setting, come together for prayer, scripture reading, catechesis and discussion on human and ecclesial problems with a view to a common commitment. These communities are a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization’ (Ihenacho).

4.2.2. The African Synod,1994. A major step in the development of SCC was the First African Synod of bishops which took place in Rome in 1994 on the theme “The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission towards the Year 2000.” It approved the creation of Small Christian Communities in the parishes so that by the year 2000 they will have a new model of being a community of communities (Healey).

Among the interventions on SCCs made during the synod were the following: 1) from Bishop Francisco

Joao Siloto of Chimoio Diocese, Mozambique. He said “these communities are an expression of African communitarianism and the only true way of inculturation for the African Church.” 2) Archbishop Cornelius Fontem Esua of Bamenda, Cameroon emphasized that “ it is necessary and urgent to put Sacred Scripture into the hands of the faithful so it can be the source and inspiration for the life and activities of Small Christian Communities.” (quoted by Healey, in “Historical Development of the Small Christian Communities” available in <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>)

Small Christian Communities, therefore, are a “follow-up and implementation of the recommendations of the First African Synod” (Healey, 2013:4).

4.2.3. Small Christian Communities in Cameroon.

Here, I will talk about Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Bamenda in Cameroon, which comprises of the four suffragan dioceses of Buea, Mamfe, Kumbo, and Bamenda. Its geographical demarcation is almost the same like the civil, thus forming what is commonly known as Anglophone Cameroon, or the former Southern Cameroon, that is , the English-speaking part of Cameroon which is made up of North West and South West Regions. I chose this area for two main reasons: 1) I know the area very well, having lived and served there for long; 2) the Catholic Church in this area has gone a very long way in the follow- up and the implementation of the communion ecclesiology and the Family model of Church, through the creation of Small Christian Communities, as recommended by the Second Vatican Council.

The Catholic Church in Cameroon has vigorously embarked on a new evangelization in a bid to stop the on-going loss of her members to new churches. In an interview on Vatican Radio conducted by Fr. Moses Hamungole, Archbishop Joseph Atanga of Bertoua, current President of the Cameroon Episcopal Conference, said:

“Many of our parishioners leave our churches and go to new churches. We have to do something to keep them in our churches, and not let them go. If they are leaving our churches, they must have reasons, and we are trying to know the reasons. . . and see what we can do.” (“Church in Cameroon begins a New Evangelization”, available in

http://en.radiovaticana.va/storico/2012/10/25/church_in_cameroon_begin).

This and many other problems were discussed during the 2009 Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. After this meeting, the archdiocese of Bamenda decided to build community in the church. In this respect, Archbishop C.F. Esua said:

“We decided to use the Small Christian Communities as a pattern, a pastoral approach, within which the Christians know one another, they live together, they share the Gospel. Knowing one another, knowing the capacities of one another, they invite the different members of the community to play a specific role in one of the aspects of evangelization. We call these pastoral commissions.” (“Church in Cameroon begins a New Evangelization” , <http://en.radiovaticana.va/storico/2012/10/25>)

It is worth mentioning that, as regards SCCs, the Catholic church in Cameroon, to a great extent, has learned from the East and South African experiences.

4.2.4. Bible Sharing in Small Christian Communities.

The aim of the Biblical Apostolate Commission is to “ make Christ known in and through the Scriptures and to make the Bible the first and preferential Handbook and Prayer book of the Christians” (*Ecclesia in Africa* N. 58). It therefore sensitizes the communities on the importance of owning, reading, sharing, praying and living the Bible; it also helps the Christians to respect the Bible as the Written Word of God.

Each SCC has at least one Bible sharing group which meets once every week in one of the member’s home for Bible sharing. In fact, the meetings are rotatory. Sometimes food and drink is served. There are trained animators who facilitate the meetings. I said above that there are many methods of Bible sharing used in SCCs. In the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province in Cameroon, the most common method of Bible/Gospel sharing is the Seven-Step Method of Lumko³⁹ in South Africa.

³⁹ . Lumko is the Missiological and Pastoral Institute of the Southern African Catholic Bishop’s Conference.

4.2.4.1. The Seven Step Method of Bible Sharing.

Bible sharing is a way of reading the scriptures in groups “ prayerfully to hear what the Spirit is saying to us, individually and corporately” (cf. *Lectio Divina*, available in <http://www.liturgy.co.nz/lectionary/readings.html>). All the members of the group are given the opportunity to read the Bible together, to meditate on it , connect it with their lives, and to put it into practice (cf. “Catholic Biblical Federation – Lumko Seven Step Method”, available in <http://www.c-b-f.org>). This method was developed by the Lumko Institute.

- **First Step: Inviting the Lord.** Once the group has assembled and settled down, the facilitator asks any member to volunteer “to invite the Lord” either through prayer or a hymn, or in any other liturgical way. The group wants to meet the risen Lord, remembering Jesus’ promise : “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I shall be there with them.” (Mt. 18:20).
- **Second Step : Reading the Scripture passage.** The facilitator announces the selected text, and when everyone has found the passage, he or she then invites someone to volunteer to read the text. It is first read aloud, with the others just listening. A moment of silence follows, and afterward it is quietly read again.
- **Third Step : Listening to words (or dwelling on the text).** From the passage, participants choose words (that is , single words, or short sentences, or short phrases) which are important for them. The facilitator asks : “Which words strike you in a special way?” One by one participants spontaneously read the word or words that have impressed them aloud in a prayerful way. They are encouraged to repeat those words silently to themselves three or four times, thus allowing the message to “soak in”. No explanations and no comments are given.
- **Fourth Step: Silence.** After spending time on the individual word or phrases, the entire passage is read again aloud and slowly. Then the facilitator announces a time of silence, maybe 3 – 5 minutes, during which participants listen to God in quiet and meditate the text.
- **Fifth Step: Sharing.** After the time of quiet, the facilitator announces the next step: “We share with each other what we have heard in our hearts.” The members then tell the group why they chose certain words or sentences, what they discovered in the text, what they find important, what

they wonder about, what they acclaim, what they feel angry about, what associations they have, what thoughts and experiences have come to their minds. At this stage, there are no direct responses from others and no discussions. The aim is to share with one another your own faith experience and to help each other to grow in the faith.

- **Sixth Step : Conversation.** The facilitator announces: “We search together.” Which aspects of mission are mentioned in the text? How does the text speak to the participants about their church and their mission? To what kind of engagement concerning mission does the text encourage the participants? Now the time has come for the participants to examine their lives in the light of the Gospel. At this stage, a small Christian community might discuss everyday problems such as:
 - Someone needs help in the neighbourhood
 - Children need instruction in the faith
 - Who will lead the Service of the Word next Sunday, since the priest will not be there?
 - How can we settle a discord that has arisen, or reconcile people and make peace, or fight for the cause of justice, or solve the problem of water crisis, or tackle the issue of HIV and AIDS ?

The important thing here is that the group connects, relates and apply the Bible (Gospel) to daily lives and experiences. The **See-Judge-Act** process is used. Normally, a practical action or task is chosen to be carried out during the next week, as a response to the Word of God. It may be connected to or flow from the Gospel text that was read, and may be related to the pastoral priorities and activities of the parish.

- **Seventh Step: Conclusion.** At this stage, the facilitator invites everyone to pray. Through a prayer the Bible Sharing session is summarized and concluded. The words of Scripture, the various experiences of God’s Word, the daily problems, all become fuel or the building blocks for

prayer.⁴⁰

After having seen how the vernacular Bible is used, I shall now proceed with the critical examination and analysis of some of the consequences of the use of the Bible in the vernacular. This leads us to the next chapter which deals with the impact of Bible translation in Africa.

4.3. USE OF THE BIBLE IN AFRICAN INDIGENOUS CHURCHES.

It is a common phenomenon in Africa to see prophets and members of indigenous churches along the streets with a bell and Bible in their hands asking the people they meet questions such as : “Have you given their live to Jesus ? Do you believe that Jesus is your personal Lord and Saviour? The Bible is a very powerful and effective weapon for evangelization. They use it for preaching, exorcism, and for healing. However, I would like to limit this section to the use of Psalms in African Indigenous churches, for example, the Aladura Churches among the Yoruba people of Nigeria.

According to Adamo, the early missionaries made Nigerian Christians abandon their traditional ways of protecting, healing and liberating themselves from evil powers, but did not teach them how “to use the Bible as a means of protecting, healing, and solving the daily problems of life, but by reading the Bible . . . we have found ways of appropriating it for our context” (Adamo, in West and Dube, eds., 2000:336). Hence, they have classified Psalms into categories according to their cultural world-view : there are protective, curative or therapeutic, and success Psalms. Adamo tells us that the Yoruba people like their African counterparts belief in the existence of evil ones and enemies such as witches, sorcerers, wizards, evil spirits and ill-wishers who bring fear to the society. To them, phenomena such as infant mortality, barrenness in women , impotence in men, motor accidents and dullness in school children are attributed to evil forces and enemies (Adamo, in West and Dube, eds., 2000:337-8).

Since they had rejected charms as a means of protection against evil, the Aladura Christians of Yoruba in Nigeria found that the book of Psalms contained some secret power if used and recited at the right time, in the right place after a certain number of times. This led to the practice of using the Bible for protection, therapy, and for success among the Yoruba Christians and other indigenous Churches

⁴⁰ . Source : I have taken the seven steps method from two sources : ‘Catholic Biblical Federation – Lumko Bible Sharing Method’ available in <http://www.c-b-f.org> , 2002; and ‘Bible Sharing’, available in <http://www.unsere-mission.de/fileadmin/user> .

(Adamo, in West and Dube, eds., 2000: 339-40). For example, “Psalms 5, 6, 28, 35, 37, 54, 55, 83, and 109 are classified as protective Psalms. Psalms 1, 2,3,16,27,28,51,100,102, and 109 are considered therapeutic Psalms. Psalms 4, 8 ,8 ,23 , 24, 27, 46, 51, 134 ... are seen as success Psalms (Adamo, “The Bible in Twenty-First-Century Africa”, in *The Africana Bible*, Page, ed., 2010:29). This practice is common mostly in African Indigenous Churches, and also among some members of mainstream missionary churches in Africa.

By reciting Psalm 55 and pronouncing the name of God, *Jah*, very often or every day, for example, ones enemies will “die by their own evil deeds.” Psalm 35 is used to ward off the evil plans of enemies such as witches. As Adamo says, it should be read accompanied by some prayers between 12 midnight and 3am, in the open air while the reader is naked (Adamo, in West and Dube, eds., 2000:40).

Furthermore, Adamo informs us that the Yoruba people make Psalms into amulets to be worn around the neck or around the body. Chief J. O. Ogunfuye , for example, prepares Psalms into amulets for various usages. Adamo also notes that the Yoruba combine Psalms with indigenous methods of healing such as the use of herbs, potent words, animal parts, water, fasting, prayers, laying of hands, etc (Adamo, in West and Bube, eds., 2000:41).⁴¹

⁴¹ . I shall comment on the use of Psalms in African indigenous Churches in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5.

IMPACT OF BIBLE TRANSLATION IN AFRICA.

“For every action there is an equal and opposite re-action” (Newton’s third Law of Motion)

5.1. INTRODUCTION. In the history of Bible translation, we saw that at some point in time, the Catholic Church restricted the translation of Scriptures into other languages in some countries and regions, for example, in France, Germany and Britain. The reason was to fight against heresies ,corrupt unauthorized translations⁴², and to preserve the unity of the church. But unfortunately, the more restrictions were placed, the more the Bible was translated into languages that the people could understand.

The cause-effect theory is a common phenomenon that touches most, if not all, aspects of human life. The human mind has a natural tendency to seek the causes and reasons of reality, and in so doing, it discovers that there is no cause without effects and vice versa. That said, I shall now turn the spot light of this study to the effects of using the Scriptures in the vernacular, in other words, the impact of Bible translation into African languages. Jerome’s Bible translation into Latin immensely impacted the Middle Ages; Luther’s Bible translation shaped German language and literature, and it had a lasting impact on Protestant theology and missions; the King James Version and other English Bible translations shaped the life and faith of Britain in its colonies; vernacular Bible translations in other European countries significantly shaped the culture (cf. Brian M. Sandifer, ‘Turning Points’, available in www.slideshare.net/sandiferb/turning-pts-chpt-13-ble-trans , Accessed in October 2012), what about Africa? In this chapter, therefore, I shall endeavour to answer the following question: What are the effects of translating the Bible into African languages ?

⁴² . For example, the council of Trent established an Index of Forbidden Books including unauthorized translations of the Bible, or by those considered incompetent for the job (Bulmann, 2006:12).

5.2. EFFECTS OF TRANSLATING THE BIBLE INTO AFRICAN LANGUAGES.

5.2.1. Continuation of the drama of Pentecost and Church history. When the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles on Pentecost Day, they began to talk in other languages about the great things God has done. A large crowd gathered from different parts of the world, and they were all excited because each one of them heard the believers speaking in their own native languages (cf. Acts 2: 1-12). This dramatic event marked the birth of the Christian Church. As at Pentecost, therefore, people hear the message of the Bible in their own tongues thanks to Bible translation. In this regard “The Gospel message of the universality of salvation becomes more real when it arises from within a culture rather than outside a culture.” (Brian M. Sandifer, “Turning Points” available in www.slideshare.net/Sandiferb/turning-points-chapter-13-bible-translation)

God wants everybody to be saved and to come to know the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). The message of salvation is communicated through the Bible, and when the Bible is translated into other native languages, the readers and hearers of the receptor/target languages hear God speaking to them in their own language from within their own culture. Sanneh (1990:13) spells out the particular, peculiar Christian understanding of culture from the perspective of the New Testament. Based on Judaism, the early Christians thought that the Law and the synagogue were the only standards of religious truth. However, from their understanding of the life and work of Christ, they came to realize that God acts in all cultures without discrimination. Sanneh says

The watershed for this new understanding was Pentecost which set a seal on mother tongues as sufficient, autonomous channels of access to God, a piece of cultural innovation which enabled the religion to adopt the multiplicity of geographical centers as its home. Christians continued to cherish their Judaic roots in the context of growing pluralism within the Church, a pluralism at the core of which is the principle that no culture is the exclusive norm of truth and that, similarly, no culture is inherently unclean in the eyes of God. So Jews, Gentiles, barbarians, Scythians, Cypriots, Arabs, Goths, Ethiopians, Copts among others, were all to be found within the fellowship (Sanneh, in Stine, ed., 1990:13).

From the above religious status of culture, Sanneh (1990: 13) proposes two major consequences, namely, “the *revitalization* of all cultural arrangements”, and “the *de-stigmatization* of all Gentile or taboo cultures”. According to God’s plan of salvation therefore, all cultures are equally valid. Furthermore, Sanneh explains what sustained this important change, and what its lessons are for Christians today. Mother tongues have a salvific potential, a fact which St Paul understood from the specific and general implications of Pentecost. According to Sanneh, therefore, Paul maintains that the effect of the gospel “was to de-stigmatize the culture and the people associated with it: Jews, Gentiles, Barbarians and provincials all now stand on an equal footing under God’s salvific purpose” (Sanneh, 1990:14). From this position therefore Paul constructed the majestic edifice of Christian pluralism in Romans chapter 12 and in 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

It is pertinent to state clearly Sanneh’s argument as presented by James Karanji. He maintains that by its very nature Christianity is a “vernacular translation movement” that spreads by translation and not by “diffusion” and in the course of this it relativizes a culture into which it moves. At any rate, if the vernacular is good to become the vehicle of divine revelation and if God’s name is chosen from the existing ‘high gods’ alternatives in that language, then it has some trust in that culture and language. Based on this argument, Sanneh strongly calls for the need to appreciate the contribution made by missionaries through the revitalization of Africa through Bible translation projects (Karanji, 2009: 119-120).

To underscore his point, Sanneh introduces the concept of radical pluralism according to which all languages and cultures are equal in expressing God’s word. From this analysis stems the idea that no culture is excluded from the Christian dispensation or even judged solely or ultimately by Western cultural criteria (visit www.slideshare.net). He says:

There is a radical pluralism implied in vernacular translations wherein all languages and cultures are , in principle, equal in expressing the word of God. Equally important, such stress on the Bible as alone sufficient to effect God’s purpose conferred on the vernacular an autonomous, consecrated status as the medium of God’s word, a consideration often more in tune with indigenous attitudes towards

language than the attitude of missionaries toward their own culture (Sanneh, 1989:7).

Sanneh's point is relevant in the sense that Anglo-Saxon was thought to be of lower status and lacking the exegetical vocabulary to sustain a translation of the Bible (Long, 2003:7f).

5.2.2. Mass evangelism. According to Meg Soni (www.kenyaplex.com , posted on 24/11/2011), Bible translation into African languages has led to mass evangelism. Many people read the Bible and, by so doing, **God's** Word reaches more people and the church grows and spreads to the four corners of the continent. For example, Abu Rumi's Bible elicited wide-spread interest in reading the Scriptures, and led to the formation of an Evangelical Church in Ethiopia (Aren, 1978:44). The Bible serves as a guide to belief and action. Genevieve N. Ihenacho underscores this point when she talks about Small Christian Communities and evangelization. she says:

Many Catholics today, through the Small Christian Communities have developed a new love for scripture and as such, they give witness to the truth of these words. They now explicitly discover the Word of God in the *Bible* as a source of nourishment for their religious life. The Word of God in scripture always serves as a source of inspiration and stimulation for their lives and actions." (Ihenacho, "Small Christian Communities as a New Way of Evangelization in Africa", available in <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/africa>)

This quotation is relevant because it shows in a concrete way the positive impact of vernacular Scriptures in the lives of the faithful. Ihenacho has rightly pointed out that when members of the SCCs come into contact with Scriptures through Bible Sharing, they are evangelized by the fact that they become familiar with the Word of God. Prayerful reading of the Scripture enables them to link faith and life (Ihenacho, <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/africa>).

The translation of the Bible into the vernacular has led to an increase interest in the Bible and a change of mentality. As Alfred Vensu , one of my informants, testifies, " some years back, the Bible was seen as a sacred book to be used only by the clergy. But now, there are growing needs for people to have bibles in homes. At the translation center, people come to

buy the translated New Testament for personal use and as gifts to friends. Recently, a female student raised money to buy her own copy of the New Testament in Lamnso.”

In addition, the translation of the Bible into many African languages has brought about the massive presence of Christianity on the African continent (Bediako,1995:62).

Talking about the place of the Bible in the lives of Africans Davidson, Ukpong, and Yorke say:

Phrases such as ‘The Lord is my Shepherd’ or ‘The Lord is my light and my salvation’ written on commercial vehicles suggest the place of the Bible in the lives of Africans. Many Christians sleep with the Bible under their pillows, believing in its power to ward off evil spirits. They read the Bible to derive comfort and consolation in moments of trouble .⁴³

Here, Davidson and the other writers have brought out both the positive and negative impact of using the Scriptures in the vernacular. They have exposed the negative impact of the superstitious way of using the Bible which I will comment on later in this chapter.

However, there is a historical problematic relationship between the Bible and Africans. This stems from the fact that the arrival of the Bible to Africa was implicated in the colonial oppression of Africans (Davidson, Ukpong, and Yorke, 2010:40). To appreciate the relationship between the Bible and Africans therefore, they ask the following questions: “Why are Africans so attached to the Bible introduced by Europeans who turned out to be oppressors? What are the issues in the dialectical relationship between the Bible and Africans?” (Davidson et al, 2010:40). In answering these questions, they examine the historical process of the arrival of Sacred Scriptures in Africa.

It was through European missionaries that the Bible first came to sub-Saharan Africa. This coincided with the colonization of the continent. According to Davidson, Ukpong, and Yorke, “missionaries used the Bible to condemn aspects of African culture and religion. Africans had to sing hymns they did not understand and that held no meaning for them”. Furthermore, they say that “The missionaries referred to African cultures and religions as pagan, needing to

⁴³ . Davidson, Ukpong, and Yorke, “ The Bible and Africana Life: A Problematic Relationship” in The Africana Bible, Hugh R. Page et al eds., Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2010:39.

be exterminated in order to implant European culture through Christianity. They used the Bible to justify the subjugation of Africans” (Davidson et al, 2010: 40).

Consequently, this had a dual impact on the way Africans reacted to the Bible and the project of colonialism. On the one hand, there was a total rejection and dismissal of the Bible and Christianity by some people, for example, the “Goddian” religion in Nigeria, and “Africana” religion in Ghana (Davidson et al, 2010:40).⁴⁴ It can be said that these religions are modern expressions of African traditional religion void of Western Christianity and the Bible. They were founded by former Christians and are characterized by the practice of animal sacrifice, the offering of libations to ancestors, and the worship of deities (Davidson et al, 2010: 40).

On the other hand, some African Christians responded positively by accepting and reading the Bible . With the translation of the Bible into local languages by the missionaries, Africans were able to read and write, and by so doing they acquired a deeper knowledge of the Bible which they had not known hitherto. In the words of Davidson and others we read:

They saw in the New Testament a Jesus who heals the sick, liberates the downtrodden, and drives away demons. In a situation where people are afflicted by evil spirits, hunger, and oppression, Africans discovered a “Bible” that makes an impression on them. They developed strategies to circumvent the oppressive use of the Bible and came to read it differently (Davidson et al, 2010:40).

According to Philip Turner’s analysis, African acceptance of Christianity demonstrates her acceptance of the Bible. There are three ways in which Africans accepted Christianity, namely, by “immediate adaptation”, by “compartmentalization”, and by dealing with elements which are strange to be compatible with the indigenous culture.⁴⁵ In terms of the Bible, immediate adaptation refers “to a situation where elements in the Bible are taken as ‘another version of something already familiar’. Thus, Africans can accept the concept of God and the Ten Commandments because these are similar to their own culture” (Turner, 1971, quoted by

⁴⁴. For more on this, see Udobatta R. Onunwa 1989, “Goddianism: A Resurgence of an Old Cult in Christian Garb.” *Africa Theological Journal* 18 (2): 116-25; and Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995.

⁴⁵. Philip Turner, “The Wisdom of Our Fathers and the Gospel of Christ: Some Notes on Christian Adaptation in Africa”, in *Journal of Religion in Africa* 4 (1) , 1971: 45-68, as quoted by Davidson et al, 2010:40.

Davidson et al, 2010:40). In the second way of acceptance, that is, the way of compartmentalization, new elements which are considered strange or incompatible with the local culture are “locked up in tight compartments and become operative only in certain situations.” (Turner, as quoted by Davidson et al, 2010 : 40).

In terms of missiology, Turner describes this phenomenon as “syncretism.” To illustrate his point, he says that “for Africans, religion is meant to solve practical problems. Accepting the Bible therefore guarantees answers to problems. In instances where the guaranteed result does not occur, African Christians seek recourse in traditional religions” (Turner, quoted by Davidson et al, 2010:40). Then finally, in the third way, the indigenous culture may either be modified or destroyed by elements which are not compatible with the local culture. For example, the killing of twins at birth in some African cultures because according to these cultures it is believed that twins are a curse from God; or the practice of human sacrifice which was common in some parts of Africa. With the influence of the Bible these practices have been abandoned/abolished. (Turner, as quoted by Davidson et al, 2010:41)

Mass evangelization also takes place in form of the composition of and the singing and dancing of biblical songs, Christian songs, gospel music, songs of faith, etc. in many African languages. This is a phenomenon that has swept across the continent (especially in the sub-Saharan region) like a tsunami: for example, in Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Serra Leon, Cameroon, Kenya, South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, etc. Hundreds of thousands of gospel music and religious songs have been produced in modern storage devices such as the CD and the DVD. These are used in liturgical and many other celebrations, they are played in homes, schools, offices, in beer parlours and bars, in public transport vehicles, during sports, games and leisure, on radio and television, etc. And through all these channels and avenues the Word of God spreads to a great multitude. It is an indirect way of reading the Bible. Many people listen to the gospel music, meditate on it, and are touched by its liberating and challenging message.

5.2.3. Superstitious beliefs and Lucrative Business? Looking at it from face value, one will easily and naturally commend those who promote the reading, listening and spread of the Bible as mentioned above. Per se, it is praiseworthy, and therefore needs to be encouraged. But

beneath the surface lie their hidden motives and intentions which are a cause for concern. From my personal experience, I have realized that many African Christians and even non-Christians read and use the Bible in a superstitious way. As they read the Scriptures they discover that the prophets as well as Jesus used the word for miracles. Hence, they claim those words for healing, protection, and success in life. They search for specific passages, especially in the book of Psalms as we saw in chapter 5, and use them for this purpose.

Consequently, during sickness they refuse to take medical treatment believing that by reading the so-called therapeutic Psalms, they will be cured (e.g.,in the Born Again Church). This is suicidal for it jeopardizes the life of the person. It is a natural right to protect, sustain and preserve one's life. Some travel with quotations of "protective Psalms" attached on their bodies with the hope that they will be protected and unharmed in case of an accident or spiritual attack. Still for others, especially students, there is no use to prepare for an examination. It only suffices to read one or more Psalms of success and your success is assured.

The truth is that in these practices the Bible is regarded as a fetish object, or serves the purpose of fetishism or some *Juju* stuff. Belief is no longer in the saving and healing power of Jesus Christ, but rather in the mere written words of the Bible; in other words, they attribute some supernatural powers to the written words. Furthermore, the Bible is not meant for solving material problems, nor for bringing success and progress in life. Its message is not the gospel of material prosperity, success, and progress in life. It is first and foremost to reveal God's love for humankind through the saving death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. This knowledge generates faith in the believer (cf. Rom. 10). Knowing and believing in God does not prevent failures and setbacks in life. Suffering and endurance are part of the cost of discipleship.

I would equally like to point out that the use of Psalms as we saw above encourages the spirit of revenge and intolerance, and fundamentalism . This goes against the teaching of Jesus about love of enemy, and doing good to those who persecute you. It is also good to note that prayers are answered or effective not because they are said at a particular hour or period of the day, and standing naked, but ultimately because of God's free largess.

Commercial purposes and search for supernatural powers, cheap popularity, self-aggrandizement, etc., are some of the hidden motives for gospel music, and the claim of

miraculous powers. With the current economic and global financial crisis, many Africans are looking for a way out, and many have found a safe haven in gospel music which has become so lucrative and money-rewarding. Hence, in most cases the primary aim is not the propagation of the Word of God, or the gospel message as such, but rather a means of generating income to sustain a living. The spread of the gospel message comes as an unavoidable accident. The launching of the gospel music CDs and DVDs illustrates the point. The choice of the venue is often well selected and calculated, and with the touch of a business mind: it is hardly in the villages, or remote areas where the poor are found, but in the big towns and cities, in expensive hotels, council halls, and big churches where the rich are found. Invitation cards are often served to those who can donate money, and an elaborate publicity takes place in a manner of a business-minded venture. It is very common to entice people to support financially by singing the biblical verse "God loves a cheerful giver". Still, some venture into gospel music because they want to be stars, that is, popular and famous, to showcase their musical talents and angelic voices.

Well, one can argue that this is a better option than that taken by some who, for example, resort to stealing, killing, laziness, or what has popularly become known in some African countries as "Four-one-nine (419)".⁴⁶ Hence, it is a lesser and tolerable evil, since it is a source of self-employment, of entertainment, and more importantly, a means of spreading the Good news, directly or indirectly. But the question that calls for an answer here is: does the end justify the means?

The quest for miracles is very common in our societies nowadays. When some people read the Bible they are inspired by the miracles of Jesus and of the prophets. They would like to have the same miraculous powers. For them, this is possible through long periods of prayer and fasting accompanied by some ascetic exercises. Thus after completing such periods, they claim they now possess miraculous powers capable of healing, casting out demons, and even raising the dead to life. Consequently, they declare themselves prophets, divine messengers, or men of

⁴⁶.Four-One-Nine (419), originated from Nigeria, and stands for someone who dupes people, that is, a trickster, or swindler.

God; they often form their own indigenous churches⁴⁷, organize prayer crusades , vigils, healing and deliverance sessions (often in the night). During such periods, miracles are faked, and in some cases people are trampled to death because their so-called spirits are very stubborn; some “deliverances “ are performed in beds through sexual intercourse with the leader or organizer (pastor or priest), at times for over weeks or months. This includes young girls and married women. And since some women are fully involved as prayer warriors, or animators, they neglect their family and marital duties. These problems have led to devastating and far-reaching consequences such as open physical confrontations, and marriage breakdowns.

5.2.4. Development of Local Languages. In 1917 William C. Townsend (Christian missionary) went to Guatemala to distribute Spanish-language Bibles. Remember the challenging question asked him by a native Guatemalan, as I narrated the story on page 33 above (see ‘Bible translations in the Modern Period’). Townsend settled in a Cakchiquel speaking area for 14 years, learning the language so as to translate the Bible in Cakchiquel (www.slideshare.net/sandiferb/turning-pts-chpt-13-ble- , October, 2012). This experience illustrates the connection between mission and translation. Wherever the Word of God comes into contact with a given culture, something happens: there is communication (translation), transformation (conversion), and conservation(printing and publication). These elements are intimately intertwined and play a very important role in the work of missions. By its very nature the Bible necessarily invites the hearer, reader and believer to a change of heart, a *metanoia* or conversion. Such were the messages of the Old Testament prophets, and of Jesus (cf. Isaiah 58: 6-7; Hosea 14:1-2; Joel 2:12-14; Jonah 3:1-7; Matthew 5-7,). Translation enhances understanding and conversion.

In the history of Christianity , missionaries have sought to translate the Bible as a weapon and a strategy to spread the Good News of salvation. Consequently, they were faced with the task of committing the local languages into writing. This entailed the development of signs and symbols which convey meaning in a given language. In other words, they invented an

⁴⁷ . I shall talk about African Indigenous Churches in point 5.2.6 below.

alphabet so that a language could be written down. With the written form, therefore, the message can be communicated, understood, and preserved through the work of translation.

Bible translation into African vernacular languages has led to the development of these languages (Meg Soni, in www.kenyaplex.com 2011). As I mentioned earlier in chapter two, Bible translation has enhanced literary work in Africa, thereby promoting the native tradition through the collection and publication of oral literature: folklores, myths about the origins of tribes, proverbs and figurative expressions, stories with moral lessons, traditional prayers, songs etc, now exist in a written form in so many African languages. Talking about the impact of vernacular translation of the Bible Sanneh says

... in numerous significant cases missionary translations were the first attempt to write down a language. Where this was the case Christian translators have had to produce vernacular alphabets, grammars, dictionaries and vocabularies of the language, supplementing these with compilations of proverbs, idioms, axioms, ethnographic materials, and accounts of local religions, customary practice and law, history and political institutions. (Sanneh, "Gospel and Culture" in Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church, Philip C. Stine, ed., 1990: 16)

This is a very sure and lasting way of preserving a people's culture and identity, their philosophy and world view. It also fosters unity among them, and makes it easy for foreigners to learn the language. The reading, telling and listening of stories, and the singing of songs in the vernacular are a very good source of entertainment which brings relief and reduces stress. Finding answers to riddles, or trying to interpret a wise saying or figurative expression helps sharpen the cognitive powers, as well as facilitate the acquisition of the wisdom of the land and of the ancestors. Lea Kingha, one of my informants, argues that with the development of the alphabet, schools and adult literacy centers have been established, and many people can therefore read and write in their own mother tongue.

In connection to this, Mbiti argues that when Africans read the Bible in their own language, they gain some knowledge, and they are filled with joy and excitement. They

. . .hear the story of God's salvation, love and grace unveiled in their own language, the language they understand with their whole being, the language of their childhood and old age, the language of their dreams and expectations, their fears and their hopes. . . Africans hear and see a confirmation of their own cultural, social and religious life in the life and history of the Jewish people as portrayed and recorded in the pages of the Bible (Mbiti,1986:26).

On the other hand, it can create a cultural barrier and self-consciousness in the sense that people of a particular language expression may tend to identify only with themselves and to close up to those outside their cultural context. This may sow the seeds of tribalism and discrimination. In as much as some local languages have been introduced into the school curriculum in some places, and are being used to dispense lectures in lower and higher institutions of learning, there is a pedagogic danger. For instance, in some parts of Cameroon, like Kumbo in the North West Region, Lamsno (the language of the Nso people) has been introduced in primary schools. In some cases, teachers decide to explain concepts , ideas and lessons in the mother tongue. In Kenya, Swahili is the language of instruction right up to the university level, while in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lingala is also used in schools. This has had a devastating influence on the pupils and students; it has negatively affected their pronunciation, writing skills, and mastery of the languages of their colonial masters, such as English and French. This explains why , in Cameroon for instance, the speaking of vernacular languages are prohibited in secondary schools and in the universities.

5.2.5. Moral Impact. One heritage of Christianity in Africa is that the Bible is now widely read throughout the continent. For example, in the previous chapter, I pointed out the different usages of the Bible in the vernacular especially in Small Christian Communities (Bible sharing). It plays an important role in the lives of believers. "They see it as a rule of life and a source of morality" (Davidson,Ukpong, and Yorke, 2010: 39). John Mbiti declares that "Africa is deeply immersed in the Bible".⁴⁸ They try to model their lives to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and other biblical heroes. They are touched and moved by the stories of Sodom and

⁴⁸ . John S. Mbiti, "Do you understand what you are reading? The Bible in African Homes, Schools and Churches", *Missionalia* 33, 2005, p. 247 , quoted by Ezra Chitando, *Living with Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS 1*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2007, p. 6.

Gomorrah ,of Joseph sold as a slave to Egypt, of Susana, the prophets and the call to repent and turn to God, the parables and miracles of Jesus Christ, the exhortations of St Paul, etc. In short, through Bible reading , many Africans have learned an array of moral lessons and ethical values, for example, Jesus’ teachings about anger, about adultery, marriage, divorce, revenge, love and charity, forgiveness, reconciliation(cf. Matthew 5,6,and 7), the Golden Rule : “Do for others what you want them to do for you” (Matthew 7:12). These have proven to be very necessary for a peaceful and harmonious living in the society, as well as for personal growth and enrichment. This has greatly influenced their worldview, their perception of reality, their relationship with other people, as well as their behavior/character.

Members of the Small Christian Communities in Cameroon, for example, are involved in the process of reconciliation and peace-building, in the fight against, corruption, social injustice ,oppression, discrimination against women, child labour and child trafficking, abortion, the eradication of harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation, widowhood, etc.

When African Christians read the Bible they see themselves in it. It is like a mirror in which they can see their inadequacies, shortcomings, failures, successes, aspirations, dreams, and nature. In this connection, David Tuesday Adamo concludes that “The consequences of original sin can be seen in the Bible. The stories in the Bible are stories of everyone’s life journey.” (Adamo, “The Bible in Twenty-First-Century Africa” in The Africana Bible, Page et al. eds., 2010:26) Along the same line, Getui suggests that

“there is no position in life, no place of human experience, for which the Bible does not contain valuable instruction. Ruler and subject, master and servant, buyer and seller, borrower and lenders, parent and child, teacher and student--- all may here find lessons of priceless worth”. (Getui, as quoted by Adamo, 2010:26)

With the HIV and AIDS pandemic, for example, many Africans are now conscious of the consequences of their sexual behaviors, the importance of fidelity in a relationship, and of the need to avoid frivolous, and irresponsible sexual behavior . However, in the early stage of the epidemic the Bible was read in a way that does not affirm life. This way of reading the Bible is

still common in some areas today. Many African Christians strongly believe that the AIDS epidemic is a curse or punishment from God. Hence, to account for the sufferings and deaths of people with HIV and AIDS, they turn to passages such as “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Others would refer to the Old Testament mentality in which Yahweh rewards good and punishes evil, and in which sickness and calamities are considered a curse from God (cf. Ezra Chitando, 2007: 8). This way of reading the Bible has generated stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS. And this poses a challenge to the Church in Africa especially as concerns the role the Bible plays in her response to HIV and AIDS. African Christians need to read the Bible in a life- affirming way.

In this way , Sacred Scriptures can truly act as a guide to belief and action; it can be used as a resource to meet the exigencies of life so that the church in Africa can be given a caring and compassionate face. I would like to mention that , in this regard, the church in Africa is now deeply involved in diakonia, thus illustrating her legacy of compassion, solidarity, charity, preferential option for the poor, providing services to, and defending the vulnerable social groups, etc.

5.2.6. Growth of African Independent Church Movement and Schisms. The African continent is very large, having diverse cultures, histories and experiences. Chitando tells us that “ The Church in Africa is equally characterized by diversity, with various modes of expression. Alongside the ‘mainstream’ or ‘mainline’ Protestant and Catholic churches, African Independent or Indigenous or Instituted or Initiated (AICs) and Pentecostal churches have a significant presence”⁴⁹. The appellation African Independent Church covers a variety of forms of religious expressions ranging from Orthodox Christian sects to neo-pagan cults. There are three main groups : Ethiopians who separated from orthodox mission churches; Zionists who advocate an indigenous expression of Christianity but recognize Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour; and the Messianic Movements, that is, those who claim a special relationship to God. They operate

⁴⁹ . Ezra Chitando, “Naming the Phenomena: The Challenge of African Independent Churches”, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 31, 2005, pp. 85-110, quoted by Chitando, *Living with Hope*, 2007, p.4.

under a charismatic leader (Phillip M. Steyne, “The African Zionist Movement” in Dynamic Religious Movements, David Hesselgrave, ed., 1978: 20).

The origin of African independent church movement can be traced back to the early nineteenth century (Phillip M. Steyne, “The African Zionist Movement” in Dynamic Religious Movements, Hesselgrave, ed., 1978: 19). It is also referred to as sects, splinter-churches, or simply independent movements. It is a commonplace that they are born where there is tension and strain ⁵⁰. According to Baur (1994:350) the first independent churches were formed as a result of deliberate schisms, that is, separatist, movements of protest , while others were spontaneous developments. For example, in South Africa the protest was against “ the colour bar within the church, in Nigeria against missionary domination, in Kenya against cultural alienation”. Some missionaries even favoured these movements, and advocated separate native churches, for example , in South Africa. One would imagine that this was something praiseworthy, but far from it. Their reason was that Africans in a European church would always have to be treated as less important than the Whiteman (cf. Baur, 1994 : 350). The Ethiopian Church in South African split from the Methodist Church about 100 years after the Methodist Church itself had separated from the Anglican Church (Kuhn, 2008:47).

The general consensus is that the term *Zion* was first introduced by missionaries from the apocalyptic church in Zion, Illinois. Their central doctrines emphasized divine healing, triune immersion and the *Parousia* or second coming of Christ. In 1904, the first group of 27 Zionist African believers were baptized in South Africa. And in 1908, P.L. le Roux received “the baptism in the Holy Spirit.” (Steyne, 1978: 20) This marked the beginning of the African Zionist church in Kwasula (Zululand) with their strong Pentecostal inclinations and practices. From here, it has spread to almost every tribe in South Africa. According to Kuhn (2008:52), the Zionists’ main reference is to the Holy Land and mount Zion, and baptism is by “ full immersion in a pool of river representing Jordan.” Again, he points out that many Zionist churches are found among the Zulu and Swazi, and have roots in Protestant Christianity; and that after having strong links

⁵⁰ . Bishop Stephen C. Neill, “Foreword” , in Schism and Renewal in Africa, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1968, by David Barrett.

with the American Zionist Church for a long time, Zulu and Swazi leaders took over the leadership of these churches with no reference to Illinois anymore, except for a few cases like the Zion Evangelical Ministries of Africa. Their important characteristics include speaking with tongues (an indication that Zionism is a South-African form of Pentecostalism), and elements of Traditional African Religion (e.g., spirit possession) (Kuhn, 2008:52). Some circumstances like the racist 'apartheid' regime fostered the growth of AIC in South Africa (Kuhn,2008:52).

In 1918 the "Church of Jesus Christ on Earth Through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu" was launched in Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo. According to Marie-Louise Martin, "it is in this part of Africa where we first find what we might term an independent African church." (Martin, "KIMBANGUISM: A Prophet and His Church" in Dynamic Religious Movements, Hesselgrave, ed., 1978: 41). Martin claims that this church split from the Roman Catholic Church during a period of spiritual and material crisis, but this claim is put to question by Kuhn. He says that Kimbangu received his religious education from the Baptists, and a revelation from God telling him to be a shepherd of the people (Kuhn, 2008:55). The church of Kimbangu, generally referred to as the 'Kimbanguists', puts strong emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit. He preached against witchcraft, pagan dances, and polygamy. Due to his great success, missionaries and the Belgian colonial government were suspicious (Kuhn, 2008:55). This was because agriculture and industry had come to a standstill since many people were flocking to his church, Catholic churches were being deserted, and the movement itself was seen as anti-colonial (Anderson 2001:126, quoted by Kuhn, 2008:55). Consequently, Kimbangu was arrested and imprisoned, and later on he died as a prisoner.

However, his younger son, Joseph Diangienda, continued his legacy and in 1970 he joined the World Council of Churches (WCC), still maintaining the Baptist's form of worship. But the church had a serious problem with the WCC and other ecumenical councils because Kimbangu and some of his sons were regarded as "incarnations of the Holy Trinity" (Kuhn, 2008:55).

Still in Congo, a national Christian Kongo religion was founded by a young Mukongo girl called Kimpa Vita or Dona Beatrice. It was christened the Movement of the Antonians after Saint Anthony from whom she got her revelation/vision and mission. (Martin, 1978: 42).

Talking about African Initiated Churches which are independent of the originally European sending denominations, Peter Beyer says:

In many cases such as the Harrist churches of Ghana, the Aladura churches of Nigeria, the Kimbanguist churches of the Congo, and the Zionist churches of South Africa, these were founded by independent prophets or leaders whose movements ended up breaking away from the Europeans . . . because these did not seem to offer the Christian message in a sufficiently African form, or simply because Africans found European missionary control too restrictive and unnecessary (Maboia, and Ositelu, quoted by Beyer, 2006:144).

The origin of independent movements is closely connected to the publication of the Bible in a local language, and this has made the African Christian to develop a spirit of questioning and enquiry: he begins to ask critical questions about some teachings and claims of the missionary. In this regard, Bishop Stephen Neill says:

One of his most interesting observations relates to the connection between the publication of the Scriptures in a local language and an independency movement. At the start, the missionary was the sole and absolute authority ; he alone had access to the sources and his word was accepted as infallible. The moment the African Christian could read the Bible and especially the Old Testament for himself, he found himself introduced to a world much more closely resembling his own than the world of the European. Inevitably he began to ask questions.⁵¹

It is therefore evident that the translation of the Bible into the vernacular was a factor in a new process of growing self-awareness. The sudden importance and significance of the mother tongue as well as of one's culture and tradition became a factor in a new process of national awakening (Daneel,1987:85).

⁵¹ . Ibid.

5.2.6.1. Some Causal Factors of African Indigenous Church Movement. Missiologists have tried to identify the various factors that led to the foundation of any instituted or indigenous churches, much less of all of them. David Barrett in his *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, (1969:100-153) made an initial study and came out with about 18 factors. But unfortunately he concentrated on the missionary factors, and neglected the African factors. In *Mission and Ministry* (1971: 208), Adrian Hastings suggested ten main causes. So far the most balanced analysis has been made by M.L. Daneel who proposed nine factors in his *Quest for Belonging*, (1987:68-101) (Baur, 1994:352). The following factors considered as causes for the origin of Independent Churches are thus taken from Daneel's book (1987:76-88).

- *Poor communication:* This was evident precisely in the failure of mission to understand the African society, religion and psychology, and secondly the failure of mission to translate the biblical concept of love into concrete reality. David Bosch observes that poor communication was a cardinal cause of church schism. Western missionaries could not imagine that Christianity in Africa would have to be different from the one in Europe. But when the difference was glaringly staring at them attempts were made to suppress such distinctive developments and to direct African church life to the stereotyped patterns of the West. Barrett describes this lack of understanding of the African as "a failure in love" (Barrett as quoted by Bosch who in turn is quoted by Daneel, 1987:76).

Daneel's point about poor communication is somehow lopsided: he cannot state categorically that missionaries did not understand the African society, and that this was a failure in love. As I pointed out in the history of Bible translation in Africa (chapter 3), there are many missionaries who made a considerable effort to understand the Africans by learning their language in order to translate the Bible into a language they understand better, that is, their mother tongue. Learning their language entailed learning their culture as well, and understanding their worldview. Secondly, many missionaries, if not all, underwent a cultural adaptation from the point of view of food, clothing, shelter, African life style, etc. Granted that they could not have

understood everything, we need to appreciate and acknowledge the efforts they made to understand something.

The missionaries' love for the African was paternalistic, that is, "the love of a superior being who knows what is good for an inferior one"(Daneel,1987:76). For example, missionaries ignored the role which ritual, ceremonial and symbols can fulfill in the lives of Africans. Instead, the emphasis was put on the intellectual aspect, while emotion was suppressed as something that belongs to the lower order. Little was understood as regards the real belief in witchcraft and evil spirits. Polygamy was equated with unchastity. Consequently, the gospel which is the good news began to sound a negative note for many Africans. In this respect, Eugene Nida observes that it is unfortunate that some of the essential elements of the gospel are not talked about. Instead, missionaries teach Africans that Christianity involves a new set of taboos: "You mustn't drink; you mustn't smoke; you mustn't have more than one wife, etc. And so people often have a very strange idea of what this thing Christianity really is all about." (Nida, quoted by Daneel, p.77) Nida concludes that in this way " the good news about salvation becomes the bad news about monogamy".

The above indications gradually created a favourable climate for schism or church secession. According to H.L. Pretorius,this inability to communicate the gospel to the African in his own cultural context is manifested particularly in the areas of ancestor cult, magic, illness and sexuality. (Pretorius, quoted by Daneel,1987:77)

However, I would like to comment that missionaries took a great risk to leave their home lands to very unfamiliar, unfriendly, and difficult environments with virtually no medical facilities, no electricity, no motor-able roads, and many other facilities. Some places were completely enclave. In most places, missionaries initiated road constructions to link villages (communication), they built schools, hospitals, and carried out many other social projects to ameliorate the lives of the Africans they were evangelizing. All these are an eloquent and commendable expression of love.

- *Superficial , impoverished gospel.* The gospel proclaimed by European missionaries was often superficial and impoverished. Preaching and catechesis did not touch the many facets of the life or struggle of the African, his physical needs, daily struggle for existence and human requirements. Suffice to note that the majority of missionaries “were products of the Pietistic revival in Europe and America, and/or of Puritanism” (Daneel,1987:78). According to them therefore, salvation was understood in a partial rather than integral fashion, that is, as saving souls and not the entire human person; sin was defined exclusively in terms of sex, licentiousness, pleasure, carnal indulgence or desires, etc. The inability was most clearly manifested in the domain of illness where the church was unable to offer a message. This created a vacuum that was later filled by the Zionists who proclaimed a message of deliverance. (Daneel,1987:78)
- *The translation of the Bible into the tribal vernacular.* This brought about a significant change in the sense that Africans could now distinguish between the missionary and Scriptures. Biblical passages translated into the vernacular became a standard of reference, “and intelligent Christians soon began to realize that certain things in Scripture sounded different from what the missionary had told them, that the missionary was silent about certain scriptural values whereas others he exaggerated.” (Daneel,1987:84) For example, it was discovered that the Bible does not only speak of the salvation of the soul, but of social justice as well, in a way that the missionaries tended to hide or cover; that in the Bible there was “a spontaneity, a vitality and a dynamic which was apparently largely lacking in the rigid structures of the missionary agencies.” (Daneel,1987:84-85).

Furthermore, there was the discovery of the agreement between the African world-view and that of the Old Testament (OT). The condemnation of polygamy by the Western missionaries prompted some questioning, since great Old Testament figures like “ Abraham (‘the father of all the faithful’) and Moses and David (‘the man after God’s own heart’) were all polygamists.” This created the impression that the OT gave more green light for fertility and sexuality than the missionaries did. (Daneel,1987:85)

More importantly, the OT apparently supported ancestor cult. The fourth commandment has great prominence among Seventh Day Adventists. This view is backed up by the fact that Paul calls the fourth commandment “honour your father and mother” the first commandment with a promise “that your days may be long”. This ties up closely with traditional African spirituality. (Daneel, 1987:85) One of the consequences of all this is an extremely fundamentalist and literal interpretation of the Bible.

- *Western Denominationalism*: Daneel has rightly observed that the multiplicity of Protestant missions had a detrimental effect on Christianity in Africa. A glaring case in point is South Africa which has the highest number of missionary groups concentrated on one territory. In many African and Asian countries, Protestant missions successfully entered an agreement according to which a particular missionary territory was divided up between different missionary agencies in such a way that there was no overlapping. No such agreement was achieved in South Africa despite several attempts. This unavoidably led to considerable confusion (Daneel, 1987:83) .

The situation was further compounded by the fact that various missionary groups in the same territory competed and slandered one another. In addition, qualifications for membership, and disciplinary regulations differed. (Daneel,p.83) Hence, “ A member ... dissatisfied with the discipline meted out by his church could easily transfer to another church in the same locality where his “transgression” would be regarded in a less serious light – or he might simply not divulge the real reason for his switch of allegiance” (Daneel, p.83). However, this phenomenon of overlapping and multiplication of missionary bodies was also experienced in other African countries such as Malawi (Daneel, 1987:84) .

Such fragmentation did not only lead to actual schism, but at a deeper level it planted the idea that schism was something ordinary. In other words, fragmentation became a justification for schism (Daneel, 1987:84).

Other reasons for the creation of indigenous churches include discrimination against black mission agents, disputes over resources, and a feeling of being marginalized (Isichei, 1995:179).

According to Baur (1994:352), Daneel's factors could be reduced to or put into two main categories, namely, Colonialism and Protestantism. The former, as a background factor, fostered anti-European feelings among African Christians as well as "a colonial mentality of European superiority." (Baur,1994: 354) . This mentality caused a lack of adaptation and a failure to dialogue, listen, accept, trust and share. In many cases it has been the immediate reason why the African pastor, followed by his flock, left the mission church (Baur,1994:354).

It has been observed that Protestantism has favoured secession in various ways and therefore could be called its main cause. In itself it is a protest movement and, ipso facto, it provided the justification for protesting and leaving the mother church (Baur, 1994:354). It is not uncommon therefore to hear parting leaders utter such slogans as "I make use of my Protestant birth right", "We do as Luther did on October 31, 1517" (Sunkler 170, quoted by Baur, p.354). Since it is essentially a lay church, Protestantism made it easier for modest lay leaders to start a new church. Generally, many independent churches, especially charismatic ones, are lay foundations (Baur,194:354).

5.2.6.2. Characteristics. The following are some of the characteristics of African independent/indigenous churches.

- *Theology: Heretical or Authentically African?* African Indigenous churches have been established by former members or faithful of missionary churches . In most cases, they are men who have taken part in evangelization, hence they rely on missionary teaching as a principal source of their doctrine. (cf. Jassy, 1973: 104) They put more emphasis on some aspects of Christian doctrine depending on the religious origin of the founder. For example,

The influence of the Seventh Day Adventists makes itself felt in an apocalyptic trend encountered in numerous churches. A Pentecostal vein is recognizable in the frequent use of biblical themes borrowed , in

particular, from Genesis and the importance accorded the gifts of the Spirit. The influence of Mennonites, Seventh Day Adventists, and Pentecostals are all found in prohibitions against dancing, tobacco, and alcohol. (Jassy, 1973:105)

H. Turner has observed that “there are numerous and new heresies in these independent churches” (quoted by Baur, 1994:357). Here, it is important to distinguish between the secession-born African churches and the prophet-born Spirit churches. The former, which separated as a group, follow and respect the theological tenets and discipline of their mother church, but are more liberal in admitting polygamists. (Baur,1994: 357). According to Jassy (1973:106), movements that belong to the second group “are a product of a revelation received by a prophet: his mission has been entrusted to him directly by the divine will”. Unsound theological doctrine is common among the Spirit churches. They read the Bible but, as Jassy tells us “ the texts are invoked to justify the church’s point of view, often in contravention of the general sense of the passage” (1973:105). In a footnote, he recounts his argument with a priest of the Nomyia church on whether or not circumcision is necessary for salvation. For over two hours they exchanged contradictory quotations, which unfortunately could not change his conviction that circumcision is necessary for salvation (Jassy, 1973:136) .

Beginning with biblical passages and some Christian elements the founders elaborate their message. They often refer to certain traditional themes such as the struggle against evil spirits, and problems such as colonial oppression and the division between rich and poor, and reinterpret them against the backdrop of the Christian dialectic of good and evil (Jassy, 1973:105).

However, instead of talking about theological heresies or deviations, Baur prefers the appellation “defective or exaggerated teaching than formal heresies.” (194:357) . On his part, Turner admits that “ there is often a special African cultural twist to these heresies, and herein lies their special contribution to the development of the much-talked-of African theology.” (Turner, quoted by Baur,1994:357) That notwithstanding , Baur points out a major problem concerning independent churches, precisely that “the very positive aspects of their theological

tenets include also the negative ones.” (Baur, 1994:357) . For example, he cites the case of “the authority of the Bible which is approached from the traditional African world view which at once focuses on the corresponding world of the Old Testament, accepting its patriarchal polygamy and legal taboos as divine dispensations. The lack of historical sense prevents realizing that the Old Testament has been overtaken by the New one” (Baur,1994:357) Furthermore, another danger lies in the fact that the prophet’s dreams and visions are identified as revelations of the Holy Spirit (Baur,1994:357).

5.2.7. Religious Freedom. The translation of the Bible into so many African languages and cultures has brought about religious freedom and the development of a local Christian identity (Holter, 2008: 208). Talking about religious movement in Africa, Hesselgrave says that rather than resort to revolution the African preferred to voice out his grievances through religious structures by “ asserting his nationalism and tradition in a meaningful religious ways of life” (1978: 20). And consequently, these have developed into indigenous expressions of African Christianity. The missionaries focused on Bible translation because to some extent the Bible was considered as a door to the Christian faith. Bible translation was seen as a solution to some of the challenges faced by the early missionaries, for example, high mortality rates resulting from malaria and other tropical diseases, and the difficulties of reaching beyond the coastal areas. The vernacular Bible would remain and continue the legacy of the Church after the departure of the missionaries. Furthermore, it could be brought to geographical areas and cultural settings where the missionary had no access (Holter, 2008 : 208 - 209).

5.2.8. Political Liberation: In Africa, Bible translation into the vernacular served as a driving force to political liberation. By reading the Bible, oppressed people gradually realized that their human rights and dignity were being violated. This was an eye opener for them to eventually demand their corresponding political rights (Holter, 2008 : 209) . This was also encouraged by missionaries and their support for the Movement for independence. Though at first the missionaries in most cases collaborated with the colonial masters in suppressing and

subjugating the Africans , they later on supported the idea of African liberation and independence. At the level of Episcopal Conferences, the Catholic Church was ready to support African nationalism. Many of them issued Episcopal Letters which showed sympathy to the African aspirations for independence. For example:

The Bishops of Madagascar in 1953 called political freedom one of “the fundamental human freedoms and responsibilities”; the Bishops of French West Africa declared in 1955: “The aspiration is legitimate”; while those of Cameroon in the same year said that they “encourage the sons of the land to take progressively into their hands the direction of their country”. The pope followed suit in his 1955 Christmas Message and again in the encyclical *Fidei Donum*, telling the colonial powers that they could not refuse “ the progressive emancipation of their colonies” (Baur, 1994, 286.).

The urgency for political independence was further necessitated by the disappointing experience of African Christian elites who adopted the God of the Europeans and their life style but unfortunately were not accepted in the white man’s society. This led to the movement of African self-assertion. In this connection Baur (1994: 284) says :

African nationalism had its very origin in the disappointment of the African elite, who had adopted the white man’s God and his ways of living but still were not accepted in his society. Francophones went hopefully to France but were rejected by the society of Paris. Anglophones sought admission in British clubs and were turned away. Even with equal education and the same religion no equality was to be found. There was no future in being “ a Black European” . Hence, to assert their dignity, the French-speaking intelligentsia discovered “la negritude”, and the English-speaking the “African personality”.

This led to a commitment to indigenous priorities such as national self-preservation, cultural self-understanding ,vernacular pride, social awakening, interest of the emerging African church, traditional learning and culture. In the words of Sanneh (2009:163) we read:

In their vernacular work, missions nurtured sentiments of national self-preservation; the mother tongue fomented and crystallized the anti-colonial impetus. The dramatic effects of vernacular translation overshadowed colonial assumptions and presumptions... Vernacular Bible translation outdistanced and outlasted the forces of ephemeral colonial rule .

This point can be appreciated better if we remember the central role of the Christian churches in South Africa to liberate the blacks from the apartheid regime in South Africa. They drafted the '*Kairos Document*' in 1985 which was "a black Christian response to the crisis and called on all the churches to face the 'moment of truth' and reject apartheid" (Kim and Kim, 2008:73-74).

5.2.9. Popular Biblical Interpretation. One consequence of Bible translation into the vernacular is that "the church leadership lost its interpretative control of the biblical texts" (Holter, 2008, 210). Formerly, the prerogative of interpreting the Bible belonged to the clergy, but now with the Bible available in the mother tongue, the laity do not only read it but, more so, interpret it in their own way irrespective of what church leaders teach. Popular biblical interpretation nowadays is not only done by professional interpreters such as evangelists, priests and pastors, but also by a large majority of ordinary readers of the Bible, that is, lay Christians some of who become self-appointed Apostles, Preachers, and Evangelists. The interpretation of the Old Testament texts is a cause for concern and a source of danger as some people use them to legitimize African cultural and religious traditions of sacrifice, circumcision and polygamy. They argue that "similar traditions were practiced by the heroes of faith in the old covenant" (Knut, 2008: 210). A case in point here concerns Apostle Robert Martin Gumbura, founder and leader of End Time Message Ministry. He has married 9 women, and is targeting 11 more wives in order to increase his church membership, drawing his inspiration from the Bible, so he claims. He says :

"As I read the Bible I discovered that Old Testament leaders had many wives who became their followers and that is the route I am taking. Many followers deserted me after I preached about polygamy in October 2000 and I was left with less than 50 people. As my wives bear many children, I will have many followers to my ministry since many are leaving me because of that truth I am preaching". (Available at <http://www.gistmania.com/talk/topic>, posted on 25th April, 2013, accessed May 5th, 2013).

This way of reading and interpreting the Bible poses a very serious threat to the work of evangelism as well as to the society. It becomes a religious and a social problem in the sense

that it distorts the Good News of salvation , misleads people and brings confusion and further schism. Polygamy exposes people to the danger of contracting HIV virus. In a polygamous set up there is no guarantee that the bevy of wives and children will be taken good and proper care of in respect of decent accommodation, adequate living space, feeding, medical care, education, proper up-bringing , etc. It is highly probable that many of the children may turn out to be delinquents , thieves, prostitutes, or will be experiencing untold hardships due to lack of sufficient financial resources. Religious freedom cannot justify the distortion of biblical truths nor does it mean putting the lives of others into danger. One can thus understand why “ it was sometimes argued that a translation of the Old Testament would have to wait until the target group was spiritually mature” (Knut,2008: 210). The above example is an abusive use of the Bible to justify an excessive and insatiable libido.

It is wishful thinking to argue that many wives will bear children and together all will become followers of a particular religious expression . There is no guarantee that all will willingly and freely adhere to that religion, and to coerce or to put pressure on them would be tantamount to the violation of their right to religious freedom, that is, to choose their religion or not to belong to any.

Another reason why some people are polygamous is due to socio- traditional institutions and socio-economic status. In many African societies, a person’s wealth, dignity and importance are reckoned in terms of the number of wives, children, cattle, etc, he has. The many wives will take good care of him especially in terms of feeding, washing of clothes, and working in his farms; the children are considered a gift and blessings from God, as well as providing a strong labour force; the girl child will bring some additional wealth in the form of the payment of bride price on her behalf. Polygamy is also sanctioned because it constitutes a core cultural aspect in Africa. It is a means of propagating and ensuring the growth of the family lineage, the clan, and the tribe. This finds its parallel in a passage such as : “Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control” (Genesis 1:28). This divine injunction appeals to the practice of polygamy in African tradition. Hence, family heads, quarter heads, chiefs, traditional rulers and administrators are automatically and

constitutionally polygamists. These traditional institutions are hereditary, meaning that the successor inherits the wives, children, and all the property of the predecessor⁵².

5.2.9.1. Comments: It is worth to note that even though the Bible is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament (e.i. covenants or dispensations), it should be read as an entity. The Old dispensation belongs to the period of creation and God's dealing with humanity. He enters into human history and reveals himself progressively, promising to send a savior who will save all mankind. It is a period of preparation for the coming of the savior in the person of his son Jesus Christ.(cf. "Constitution on Divine Revelation " No. 15 , in *Vatican II*, 1966:122) Thus, the Old Dispensation provides the background for understanding the New which fulfills the promises of the Old, and inaugurates a new era of the messianic kingdom with the coming of Christ, while still being continuous with God's earlier actions in history. (McGrath, 2011:123) What then should be our attitude towards the Old Covenant?

Our attitude towards the Old Covenant is based on the fact that not everything of the Old Covenant is taken up by the New. Theological themes such as the notion of a sovereign God who is active in human history are taken up by Christianity; cultic practices such as circumcision, laws on diet, and sacrificial rites (McGrath,2011:123), as well as socio-cultural practices such as polygamy and divorce are not taken up.

5.2.9.2. How then, are the Old and the New Covenants related? In the debate concerning whether they are related or not, two outstanding and opposing schools of thought have been postulated. On the one hand, there is a radical option developed by Marcion who defected from Christianity in the year 144 AD. (McGrath, p.124) He argued that "the Old Testament was the sacred text of a religion which had nothing to do with Christianity." He contrasted the legalistic and violent God of the Old Testament with the merciful and loving God of the New Testament who redeemed the world and was concerned with love. He then concluded that the Old Testament relates to a different God from the New. Furthermore,

⁵² . However, in some cases, the successor has defiled such cultural practices in favour of religious affiliations and convictions.

according to Marcion, Christ came in order to depose the God of the Old Testament, and then to usher in the worship of the true God of grace. (McGrath, 2011: 124-125)

Faint echoes of Marcion's ideas are found in the writings of Martin Luther. Although Luther differed with Marcion on the basis that both the Old and the New Testaments relate to the actions of the same God, he nevertheless insisted that law and grace are totally opposed. For Luther, Judaism was concerned with the idea of justification by works, with the belief that one could merit favour in the eyes of God by one's achievements or good works. Whereas, contrary to this, the gospel stressed that justification was completely free, and depends only on the free grace of God. (McGrath,2011:125)

On the other hand, Christian theology emphasizes the continuity between the two testaments, while at the same time noting the distinction between them. In this regard, John Calvin provides a lucid discussion of their relation. He maintains that there is a fundamental similarity and continuity between the Old and the New Covenants based on three considerations: the immutability of the divine will in both testaments, both celebrate and proclaim God's grace manifested in Jesus Christ, and lastly, both testaments possess the same signs and sacraments, and bear witness to the same grace of God. (McGrath, 2011:126) For Calvin, therefore, the two testaments are basically identical, having the same substance and content. Thus, there is no radical discontinuity between them. (McGrath, 2011:126) According to Vatican II, God is the inspirer and author of both the Old and the New Testaments, and following his plan, the New is hidden in the Old and the Old is made manifest in the New ("Constitution on Divine Revelation" No.16, p.122)

5.2.10. Impact on Land Dispute. Land dispute is a very common and recurring phenomenon in Africa. The dispute is often between two tribes or villages, or between members of the same family, or between neighbours sharing the same boundary, or between farmers and livestock rearers,etc. Africans hold their land in high esteem: it is sacred and endowed with some

supernatural powers⁵³; it is the source of their livelihood and sustenance (used for farming and cultivation of food crops, for hunting, and collection of medicinal herbs, plants, roots and barks of trees) ; land of their ancestors containing important graves (burial sites), shrines and sacred places which they have to defend and jealously protect. This partly explains why most of them have a fighting and conquering spirit, for example, among most of the tribes in the Grassland region of Cameroon which comprises the Western and the North West Regions. Here, land disputes are a general characteristics and a perennial as well as social problem. The annexation and occupation of land are interpreted in the light of Old Testament conquest traditions, like in the case of the Book of Joshua, and Naboth's vineyard (1Kings 21:1-3).

With the Bible now in the vernacular, most African Christians interpret their experiences in the light of the Bible. For example, the Boers (South African agricultural settlers who included German settlers and Huguenots or French Calvinists) saw themselves as God's chosen people on their way to the Promised Land , and the Africans they met on their way were seen in the light of Joshua's experiences with various Canaanite peoples .⁵⁴ Kim and Kim (2008:75) also allude to the struggle to reclaim land in South Africa and Zimbabwe, and observe that the African world-view has a lot to do with land distribution. Furthermore, they assert that "The seizure of the land of Africa by Europeans had a devastating effect on the people, and land distribution is a burning issue for Africans today..." In the struggle for land , many African Christians draw a lot of inspiration from the Bible.

However, despite their attachment to the land , and their strong desire to fight for, to defend or reclaim their land for whatever reason, the consequences are often severe particularly on women and children: loss of lives, destruction of valuable property, displaced persons accompanied by the spread of diseases, problem of food, water, accommodation and

⁵³ . In my tribe (Nso in the North West Region of Cameroon) for instance, and in most of the Grassland area in Cameroon, it is believed that the land/soil is capable of meting out sanctions/punishment on criminals, culprits, or trouble makers. This can be in the form of a deadly illness, misfortune or calamity, or a sudden death.

⁵⁴ Knut Holter, "Whose Book is it , By the Way?" in *Mission to the World: Communicating the Gospel in the 21st Century*, Tormod Engelsviken et al. eds., Regnum in Cooperation with Egede Institute and Areopagos, 2008: 207. See also Kim and Kim, *Christianity as a World Religion*, 2008:71-72.

sanitation, etc. The oppressive side of interpreting the Bible promotes and kindles the flames of land disputes.

5.2.11. Social Action (Liberation Theology). Among African Christians and even non-Christians, the Bible is considered as a document with a liberating character. In South Africa for example, Biblical passages were used extensively to combat the apartheid regime (Adamo, “The Bible in Twenty-First-Century Africa”, in *The Africana Bible*, Page Jr., ed., 2012:25). Archbishop Desmond Tutu for instance, found liberating themes in the Bible (e.g. the oppression and the cruel treatment of the Israelites in Egypt (Exodus 1:1-22)), as well as liberating figures such as Moses. The Bible was seen as an effective tool for liberating the people from suffering, oppression, and other difficulties. Similarly, many members of the Small Christian Communities are actively involved in social actions. In chapter six, I mentioned that Bible sharing leads to action: the members connect, relate, and apply the Bible to their daily lives and experiences, using the see-judge-act process.

When people read the Bible, they become very critical of the government, the church and their tradition. In this regard, Alfred Vensu, one of my informants, says

Yes, as they go deep into the Bible, they see some things the government does which are incompatible with scripture. Students of the Word of God even find some church tradition within their denomination not binding with scripture. The issue of Gospel and culture is becoming more relevant in Nso’ today because the study of the Bible is causing people to critically examine traditional beliefs and practices vis-à-vis the Bible. It is through the Bible that they determine which government action is acceptable by scripture and so on.

In addition to this, Mbit argues that ‘the Bible in African languages is causing a religious restlessness. It drives Christians to examine imported forms of Christian and Church life, with a view . . . to criticizing, questioning, abandoning, modifying, and affirming a wide range of teachings and practices.’ He also confirms that even traditional African religion is not spared from this critical examination (Mbiti, 1986:41).

Consequently, inspired by the biblical teachings and values such as service- leadership, detachment from material goods, option for the poor, love, justice and mercy, etc., it is not

uncommon for Christians to be critical of the pastoral praxis of the Church, of her leadership style, the fact that the hierarchy in many cases has not been shining examples or models, their fundamental option for, and attachment to the rich, their failure to be transparent especially in financial records, the way they treat their employees, subordinates, and domestic workers, for example, the cooks, drivers, catechists, primary school teachers, assistant parish priest or pastor. Many civic leaders, traditional leaders, as well as church leaders have come under the scrutiny of the Christians as regards bribery and corruption, misappropriation of the common goods, embezzlement, mismanagement, human rights violation, nepotism, favoritism, tribalism, electoral manipulation and rigging, lies telling and failure to keep promises particularly politicians who make promises during campaigns but disappear after elections. These have orchestrated public demonstrations, or petition writings in some places in a bid to get rid of some leaders, or the government, or system put in place. In some cases, there is total rejection through open confrontation and the use of physical force.

5.2.12. Source of Christian Unity .The translation of the Bible into local languages in Africa has aided the coming together of Churches in Africa. The post Reformation period was characterized by theological and biblical wrangling, dissensions and serious tension especially between the Catholics and the Protestants. Bible translations were done independently of each other; missionary activities and evangelism were carried out in an atmosphere of fear and suspicion, and in some cases this degenerated into open confrontation, war, bloodshed and loss of life(for example, in the case of The 30 Years War). The rift between the Protestants and the Catholic Church became wider and wider. However, since the 20th century till today the situation has changed and improved tremendously. This has been due, among other things, to the joint translation of the Bible by the different Christian denominations, under the supervision of organizations such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), and Bible Societies, for example, the Bible Society of Cameroon. The result is the production of ecumenical Bibles used by members of various different Christian Churches. For instance, the ***The New Testament in Nso*** published in 1990 as *Saka Nyuy Wo Jung* by the Bible Society of Cameroon is used by the Baptist church, the Presbyterian church, the Catholic church, the Church of Christ, and many

Pentecostal Churches. To this effect, the missionary movement has now become ecumenical (cf. Mbiti, 1986:180).

5.2.13. Enhances understanding of Scriptures, and conversion of the Faithful.

According to Leah Kingha, one of my informants, Bible translation into the vernacular has led to a rediscovery and better appreciation of the Word of God. When the Scriptures are read in church in the vernacular, people would exclaim: "Has this always been part of Scriptures!" They feel God is talking to them directly, and so they can understand better, and respond readily and accordingly. This shows how much African peoples feel at home in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Talking about the value of a vernacular heritage in African Christianity, Bediako says:

By rejecting the notion of a sacred language for the Bible, Christianity makes every translation of its Scriptures substantially and equally the Word of God. Thus, the existence of vernacular Bibles not only facilitates access to the particular communities speaking those languages, but also creates the likelihood that the hearers of the Word in their own languages will make their own response to it and on their own terms (Bediako, 1995:62.).

This also exemplifies what Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber (1982) say concerning communication and the response of the receptors. For them, communication is not merely informative, but "must also be expressive and imperative . . . That is to say, a translation of the Bible must not only provide information which people can understand but must present the message in such a way that people can feel its relevance (the expressive element in communication) and can then respond to it in action (the imperative function)" (Nida and Taber, 1982:24). It was thanks to the translation of the Bible into Amharic in Ethiopia that some "Abyssinians from Hamazin came to know the truth through the reading of these Bibles and became converted" (Aren, 1978:104).

In the same vein, Tomas Sundnes Drønen talks about a change of behavior among the Dii people of Cameroon which resulted in the 'New Dii Christian Identity.' This was due to the preaching of the Gospel which brought about a new orientation (Drønen, 2007:183-84). He also

talks about the conversion of these people, through the translatability of their tradition. They believed in the *gbaa*, a kind of an amulet which they carry along with them. The idea is that

...the *gbaa* through the ancestral spirits provided protection against accidents and sickness. This protection ought to be interpreted as simultaneously material and spiritual. It was a physical protection against snakebites, leopard attacks and malaria as well as protection against different types of sorcery...

But, as Drønen tells us, with the influence of Christianity, they abandoned this practice and embraced Christianity which ‘they must have regarded as bearer of strong spiritual powers.’ Protection was no longer attributed to the *gbaa*, but rather to the new religion, and the Christian rites replaced the ones of traditional religion (Drønen, 2007:186).

5.2.14. Promotes African Traditional Religion. In chapter 6, we saw that SCCs provides a platform for discipleship, for witnessing and practicing the Christian faith: Bible sharing leads to concrete action. Life in the SCCs encourages and promotes the practice of virtues such as love of neighbor, reconciliation, justice, unity and the building of the human family, sympathy, solidarity, good relationship, option for the poor, etc. This reflects a fundamental character of African religion which is “humanistic: centered on the human condition. This humanism colors all of life and its relationships” (Lugira, 2004:106). This may be summarized in the African idea of *Ubuntu* as explained by South Africa’s Archbishop Desmond Tutu: “It has to do with what it means to be truly human, it refers to gentleness, to compassion, to hospitality, to openness to others, to vulnerability, to be available for others and to know that you are bound up with them in the bundle of life, for a person is only a person through other persons” (Tutu, quoted by Lugira, 2004:107). In the Nso language (*Lamnsò*) of the North West Region in Cameroon, this humanism is reflected in the expression *Wir dze wir bi wir* (literally “a person is a person because of a person”). This principle provides a common ground between ATR and SCCs, as well as a fertile ground for inculturation, especially in the area of the model of Church as family.

Ecclesia in Africa (No. 23) defines inculturation as “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity into the various human cultures.” Through the Small Christian Communities, the

Scripture is incarnated into the culture, after the example of the Word that was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Ihenacho (2013) underscores this point in the following words :
“The good news has to be made flesh and blood in the lives and circumstances of those to whom it is proclaimed.

CHAPTER 6

IMPACT OF BIBLE TRANSLATION ON THE AFRICAN CULTURE.

6.1. CRITIQUE OF SANNEH. In the missiological debate on the connection between culture and communication, Lamin Sanneh has argued that “it is precisely the mother tongue which forms the core of the culture, because individuals use it both for thinking and for expressing themselves” (Ahonen, 2010:169). To convey the Christian faith to a new culture (contextualization) entails the process of translation, and the most important tool of contextualization is the language used by the people of the context in which it is spoken. This explains why Sanneh maintains that Christianity is a “vernacular translation movement” (Sanneh, 2009: 7). In line with Sanneh, it can thus be argued that by its nature theology is translation, that is, “making faith comprehensible, or the search for words, expressions and meanings for the basic questions of existence” (Sanneh, quoted by Ahonen, 2010:169). Bediako concurs with Sanneh by pointing out the significance of Pentecost –“God speaks to men and women, always in the vernacular. Divine communication is never in a sacred, esoteric, . . . language; rather, it is such that ‘all of us hear . . . in our own languages . . . the wonders of God.’” In this respect, Christian faith becomes culturally translatable, (Bediako, 1995: 60-61).

Culture is dynamic since it creates new forms and interpretations, and for this reason “the dialogue between faith and culture can lead to an authentic internalization of faith within a culture, and then that faith can come to be deeply felt to be a constituent part of the people’s own culture.” (Ahonen, 2010: 169) Talking about the cultural contribution in the theological understanding of faith, Ahonen maintains that contextualizing the Christian faith is fundamentally a linguistic task. For faith to be experienced as personal, its message and meaning need to be translated into the local language (Ahonen:2010: 170).

6.2. Tension between Faith and Culture. However, it is very important to point out that there is a tension between faith and culture. Though culture is part of a people’s way of life, though it plays a major role in the way they react to various life situations, the way they

interpret their experiences and events in life, and the way they perceive their environment, that is, their worldview, Ahonen tells us that it is mostly based on the values, judgments and thought patterns established by the social network and the process of education. This explains why culture is limited to a particular place and time wherein lies its power and at the same time its weakness. The concrete nature of a culture gives it its strength: it is creative and to a great extent it develops society and promotes human welfare through its positive aspects and values (social, moral/ethical, religious, etc). But then, its limitation lies in the fact that it is combined with the experience of only the people of that particular culture (Ahonen, 2010: 176-77). In this regard Reinhold Niebuhr rightly argues that:

... the ultimate question for every culture is how it confronts its own limited nature. The durability and creativity of a culture depend... on how the culture becomes aware of and accepts its own boundaries. If a culture is incapable of seeing its own limitations, it is weakened in the face of history and the merciless struggle for survival. (Niebuhr, quoted by Ahonen, 2010: 177)

On its part faith is not bound up to a particular culture, but it takes shape in all cultures, transforming and transcending them all.

Furthermore, Sanneh talks about “the instrumental view of culture”, that is, “ the question of language and its relationship to religion and culture in traditional societies.” He also alludes to the problem of the one and the many, “the question of the particular and the universal, of the general and the specific, of truth as one and of culture as many in its diverse manifestations and contingences...” (Sanneh, “Gospel and Culture” in Bible Translation and the spread of the Church , Stine, ed. , 1990: 17) Granted that the concept of God is present in many cultures and the reality is expressed/translated using different names, the understanding of God’s nature is different according to the various cultures. It is difficult, for instance, to conceive of a plurality of persons in one God (the Trinity) in some African religions. This would insinuate a plurality of Supreme Gods, and therefore, polytheism, whereas traditional African religion is monotheistic, having different manifestations of One Supreme Being, God the Creator.

Furthermore, in some African cultures (e.g., the Bansa of NW Cameroon), the idea of a Supreme Evil (that is, Satan, Lucifer, or Beelzebul) does not exist. That is why the name “Satan” is not translated in their Bible, whereas the name “God” is translated as **Nyuy** (cf Lk 4:1-13). Evil spirits and demons are rendered as **nyuy wo wu jivir wir** (Lk 4:31, 10:20) in the singular or **anyuyi jiviri** in the plural (Matthew 8:28; Lk 8:26). Literally, it means lesser gods who disturb, bother, pester, or confuse a person. This rendering describes what the evil spirits do. The perception is that some and not all people are possessed or bothered by lesser gods/evil spirits who endow their victims with some supernatural powers and want to use them for their own purpose. With the intervention of the medicine man or woman, the person can be liberated and his/her powers are directed to doing good. The concept of Satan as such does not exist, and this makes it difficult to perceive Christ’s death and resurrection as victory over Satan.

And again, in some cultures, to have only one child is considered a misfortune, thus it will not make much sense to talk about the only begotten Son of God. Furthermore, in most African cultures there are no equivalent concepts for words like “Alleluia”, “Amen”, or for the titles of Jesus such as “Son of David”, “Son of Man”, “Messiah/Christ”, etc.⁵⁵ Hence, it is difficult to accept Sanneh’s position that “vernacular languages are endowed with divine significance, so that they may substitute completely for the language of revelation” (Sanneh, “Gospel and Culture” in *Bible Translation*, Stine, ed., 1990:18). It seems to contradict his other statement, which I accept, that all languages are “inherently inadequate and that religious truth ultimately... transcends human words” (Sanneh, 1990:18).

6.3. Limits and Corruption of Culture. Although all cultures are capable of communicating God’s message as Sanneh maintains, they do have their limits and corruption. Every culture has both constructive and destructive elements, positive and negative aspects. The destructive elements tend to ruin or bring down the culture from within thus weakening its structures. For example, this is evident in the struggle for power which has rendered many

⁵⁵ . I shall talk about interpreting these titles and the problem of constructing an African Christology below under “the Role of Ancestors in Traditional Revelation.”

leaders blind to their own limitations and transformed the development of culture to a show of strength (Niebuhr, quoted by Ahonen, 2000: 177). Again Niebuhr asserts that

. . .the test of every culture's maturity is the question of power and freedom. The increase of power and the enjoyment of power can lead to a sense of self-sufficiency within the culture; its members no longer have the need to concern themselves with other nationalities and cultures or even cultural minorities among their own people. The weight given to this demand for power may lead to the crediting of their own culture with exaggerated or even absolute value, and the feeling that people of other cultures represent inferior cultures, and are more or less barbarians. (Niebuhr, quoted by Ahonen, 2000: 177)

Ahonen has rightly pointed out that it is a great error to deny that each and every culture is a system created by human beings and as such corrupt. According to him "Culture bears the stamp of human sin. As a result not everything in a culture is necessarily valuable and good. In evaluating culture the distinction must be made between what is constructive and what is destructive of humanity." (Ahonen, p. 177) However, he admits that a critical analysis of culture is not a simple task, nor is it easy to find reliable criteria. That notwithstanding, there is a warning signal when a culture turns inward and withdraws into itself. Introversion and lack of concern for others has serious and terrible consequences as was the case in Rwanda, Burundi, Sierra Leone, and Democratic Republic of Congo (cf. Ahonen, p.178) . From this perspective, therefore, I agree with Ahonen that "Blindness to self is part of the essence of sin...every culture has its own blind spots... As every individual needs critical feedback from others, so does every culture." (Ahonen,p. 178)

To support his thesis Sanneh gives a historical examination of how Bible translation has been a major component of the expansion of the Church and the expression of theology. Translation has an impact on indigenous culture, on Christianity and on global history as well. The translation of Scriptures into local languages brings about pluralism in the Church ,a pluralism which revitalizes cultures instead of creating " cultural relativism" (Sanneh, 2009: 1, 73).

I differ with Sanneh from the perspective of approach and focus. His main focus is on the missionary impact of translation on culture, wherein he demonstrates how Christianity was

translated out of the Jewish culture to the Greek (Gentile), and subsequently the cultural ramifications of this diffusion and breakthrough upon other cultures (Sanneh, 2009: 1-2). I am examining and analyzing the general impact of Bible translation into the vernacular with particular focus on Africa: impact on culture, on the Christian Church in Africa, on African traditional religion, on the individual and society.

The kernel of my thesis is that while Bible translation is absolutely necessary for missionary expansion, it has both positive and negative effects . The negative effects are partly due, to a large extent ,on misinterpretations of the Bible, and on how some people view and approach Bible translation, and their reasons for doing so. While some people have a genuine reason for the enterprise, others do not. On the other hand , the negative effects are due to the way the faith was introduced, the praxes of the Church, and the needs and exigencies of the people. Bolaji Idowu has observed that “It has become increasingly clear, and disturbingly so, that the Church has been speaking in Africa and to Africans in strange or partially understood tongues ... we realize that both the tools and the method of evangelism as employed in this continent are now calling very loudly for a careful overhauling” (Idowu, “Introduction” in Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs ,1969:9). Then the positive consequences are due to the power of God’s word, that is , it cannot go out and come back without transforming and effecting some change on the receptors. It generates faith in the hearers and is interiorized in their hearts, for as St Paul says “... faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes from preaching Christ” (Rom.10:17). It is also due to the knowledge of God and the seeds of the gospel already present in local cultures.

CHAPTER 7

THE BIBLE AND TRADITIONAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

7.1. INTRODUCTION. It is commonplace that after a long period of growth, Christianity has taken root in Africa especially through the instrumentality of Bible translation. However, some African Christians are beginning to ask how the Church's heritage is related to African thought, ideas, and life. This was part of the focus of the consultation of African theologians, held in 1966 at Ibadan, Nigeria, under the auspices of the All Africa Conference of Churches (A.A.C.C.) (Samuel H. Amisshah, "*Foreword*" in Biblical Revelations and African Beliefs ,by Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworgh, eds., 1969:vii). In order to understand the concept of African traditional religion, it is necessary to look at the wider context in which it is conceived of and practiced, that is, its cultural setting (Wendland, "Traditional Central African Religion", in Bridging the Gap: African Traditional Religion and Bible Translation, Stine and Wendland, eds., 1990: 7). There is a variety of definitions of the concept of culture. But I will not venture into that because it will lead us far away from our focus. For the purpose of this study, I shall simply bring out the essential elements .

Culture has to do with people's ways of thinking and behaving, their values and belief systems (Kuhn, 2008:213). Whenland talks about people's *world-view*, and their *life-style*. These two aspects , he says, are closely connected, since thought gives rise to action. The world-view consists of four dimensions: 1) belief system of a people, that is , their major principles, presuppositions, and perspectives on life; 2) their basic needs – material , physical, psychological, social, esthetic, and ethical; 3) values which play the role of fixing the norms and standards of popular thought and behavior in a given society. Here lies the dynamic nucleus of a given culture. In most African societies, religion remains the key factor that establishes and influences their system of values; 4) personal affections which include feelings, attitudes, biases, esthetic tastes, preferences, etc. (Wendland, "Traditional Central African Religion", in Bridging the Gap: African Traditional Religion and Bible Translation, Stine and Wendland, eds., 1990: 8-9)

At this point, I would like to comment on what happens when Christian faith comes into contact with a given culture. It borrows the positive aspects/values in that culture with the

intention of making itself meaningful , intelligible, and relevant to that culture. And at the same time it leavens and transforms the culture from within ridding it of its destructive elements. This is what is commonly referred to as inculturation. Shorter (1994:ix) describes it as “the dialogue between faith and culture, as an indispensable aspect of evangelization”. Its related synonyms include “contextualization”, and “adaptationism” all of which have to do with the question of how far people’s culture has an influence on their faith (Kuhn,2008:213). Kuhn tells us that inculturation should aim at both translation and transformation, thus, it should not be a one-sided process, but rather its goal must be “ at once a culture transformed by faith and a faith that is culturally re-expressed “ (Shorter in Kuhn,2008:213). As Kuhn further asserts, the evangelization of individual people and communities is inevitably the evangelization of culture, so that Christianity can “become a more holistic “way of life” rather than being a theological system of thinking only” (Kuhn, 2008: 213, 214). The Bible thus has a dynamic and transforming power compared to the effects of snow and rain on soil and the crops (Isaiah 55:10-11).

7.2. AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION (ATR). It differs from other religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in many ways. For instance, it has no founder or a central historical figure like Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad, but it originated with the people themselves as an expression of thousands of years of living close to the land and of seeking answers to the mysteries of life (Lugira,2004: 11-12). Secondly, ATR has no churches or mosques like in Christianity and Islam. Instead, it has shrines and geographical or natural features such as a mountain or a large tree or a lake where people may turn to for sacrifice. Furthermore, there is no single ordained priesthood, but a variety of religious leaders who carry out religious duties. These include priests and priestesses, healers, diviners, mediums, seers, rainmakers, elders, and rulers, each having a special role to play. There is no holy book such as the Bible or the Koran. Their cultural beliefs and moral principles are orally passed down from generation to generation. (Lugira,p. 12)

In African traditional religion, there is no distinction between religion and other aspects of life. The basic beliefs of this religion are so closely bound to their culture that religion and culture are one. (Lugira, p.12) The two “are so intertwined that it is impossible to speak of one

without the other” (Thomas, 2005:7) Religion is therefore part of the fabric of living. Although there is a Supreme God, there are also lesser gods, spirits, intermediaries, and ancestors who accompany the living, and guide and direct them. Sometimes they are displeased by those who do not heed them. People interact and communicate with the gods through ritual, prayer, and sacrifice. (Lugira, p.12)

Although Christianity has existed in Africa for centuries, the question of African traditional beliefs and practices is still a very important and topical issue. One cannot hesitate to ask in what ways do traditional beliefs help a believer understand the Bible (God’s message) and in what way do they lead people away from it and from God? (O’Donovan,1996: 219). Why is it that African traditional religion continues to survive at the existential and subconscious of many African Christians (Thomas,2005:6) despite the fact that they now possess at least a portion of , or the entire Bible in their mother tongue? John Mbiti has argued that “although many Africans have outwardly embraced Christianity or Islam, they have not totally abandoned those traditional forms of life that have their foundation in African religio-culture.” He has stated that

. . . acceptance of Christianity or Islam in Africa means that Africans “come out of African religion but they don’t take off their traditional religiosity. They come as they are. They come as people whose world view is shaped according to African religion. (Mbiti, quoted by D.E. Thomas,2005:6-7).

Lugira corroborates Mbiti’s point by saying that African Traditional Religion has a great influence on the African society, and that Africans are tied to their religion by bonds of culture; their religious feelings and ideas are shaped by their environment; that though they may be converted to other religions, they cannot give up their Africanness because it is part of them and African religion is part of that Africanness (Lugira, 2004:108).

This puts to question the real authority of the Bible on the lives of African Christians. To what extent does it have an authority or influence over the lives of African christians? In this connection, Ndjerareou has rightly remarked that “though the Bible is well respected by

Africans, it has often served as the primary source only insofar as it approves major African religious beliefs. It is used to identify the Supreme God of traditional religions with the God of the Bible” (Ndjerareou, “The Contribution of Mother-Tongue Bible Translation to the Formulation of African Theology”, in *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol.15, No. 2, 2012:42, Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Culture and Culture, Ghana).

In what follows, I shall discuss the above –stated concerns in the light of some African traditional beliefs and practices such as divination and ancestor veneration (communication with the dead).

7.3. DIVINATION.

7.3.1. A case Study.

Once, I was on a relief duty in St. Kizito’s Parish, Sabongari which lies at the border between the North West and the Adamawa Regions in Cameroon. It was entrusted to the care of a European priest of a missionary group known as the Missionaries of St Joseph, or simply, the Mill Hill Priests, with headquarters in London. There, I noticed the regular presence of one man during Holy Mass. He was always attentive, and used to sit on the last pew at the back of the church. But as soon as the mass was over, he disappeared immediately. One day, after mass, something strange drew my attention. I saw a group of people behind the kitchen in the presbytery. They were about 15 in number. Out of curiosity I went to see what was happening for, I thought, may be the people had caught an animal and were sharing the game. I discovered that they were the very people who were in church a couple of minutes ago. They were queued up and, at the head of the queue, one person was kneeling down while two or so stood by watching and listening to him keenly. He was bent- double over and above a small hut constructed over a small hole. My curiosity had intensified and drew me closer to the scene. I noticed some pieces of papers, shaped in the form of playing cards, scattered all around the

small hole. Each was marked with a symbolic sign. What an amazing scene! It wasn't an animal they were shearing and sharing though. Then what was it they were actually doing there?

They had gathered for "consultation": each had come to present his/her problems, worries and fears to the great, powerful, and undisputable diviner, seer, soothsayer, and witchdoctor. To my greatest surprise, the very person who was inclining above the hole was the same person who is always present and attentive in church; he is the great and famous diviner. The hole represented the dwelling place of a giant tropical tarantula (I.e., a large spider), and the small hut protected and designated it as a sacred place, where consultation, communication, and revelation take place. When the people saw me coming they started dispersing. By then I knew what was going on, so I urged them to stay and accomplish their mission. When I arrived at the scene the diviner was saying something to a "patient" or client whose turn it was to consult: "Please, the Spider is no longer speaking, so throw more money⁵⁶, for the one you gave isn't enough." The person was hesitating due to my presence which was more or less a hindrance to the unfolding and the progress of the divinatory session. So I encouraged him to comply. He did, and after communicating with the spider, the diviner continued to transmit his message:

You did not give your mother a befitting burial. Instead, you threw her in a bush, and right now she is not happy with you. She wants you to transfer her mortal remains to a better place, and to give her a dignified burial, else your children will continue to be sick and eventually die, and your activities will not progress. In fact, they will come to a standstill, or may even be regressing, and you will continue to suffer, and suffer till you die.

What happens is that, on the eve of a divinatory session, the man places the cards around the hole of the spider. At night the spider comes out and scatters them to different directions. The following morning, when the man comes, he observes the position of each card carefully and starts to interpret the meaning according to the position and symbol of each card.

⁵⁶. In my culture and in most African cultures, money is not given directly into the hand of the diviner or traditional healer. Instead, it is thrown to the ground or floor, the reason being that in case it has been "spoiled" or tempered with, or is being given with an evil intention, the ground (considered sacred and neutral) will protect the receiver.

After the above mentioned session, I had a mixed feeling and reaction. On the one hand, I was terribly disappointed with those Christians who, according to my judgment, were living a double standard: with one foot in Christianity and the other in traditional religion. To me it was an eloquent expression of counter witness, and of not taking seriously the Christian message of salvation that Jesus Christ has won for mankind through his death and resurrection. "Do they take Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour?" , I wondered aloud. On the other hand, I had the golden opportunity to witness a divinatory session, thus I was "an eye witness" and not "an ear witness" to this practice. Secondly, I discovered where Christians usually and naturally take their problems to, and that divination in the cultural setup remains a serious and challenging problem to Christianity.

Consequently, my first reaction was to ban the practice of divination from the church premises, and to stop Christians from taking part in it. So I approached the said soothsayer, and ordered him to take his "traditional clinic" away from the church yard. Fortunately, he had not been baptized yet. But then, he told me that the European priest is aware of what he is doing, and had approved of it. In fact, he authorized him to practice in that particular spot and land, since a spider hole was found there. As if that was not enough, he gave me another shocking piece of information: that the priest in question was his pupil or apprentice learning the art of divination. This was not easy for me to digest.

After sometimes, I met the priest and initiated a discussion about spider divination, expressing my disapproval of it, and the fact that it is diametrically opposed to Christian teaching, hence should not be practiced or encouraged. In his characteristic manner, he laughed and said you Africans don't know what you are missing. There is nothing wrong with spider divination; it is simply an art that can be learned by any one, and it works very effectively and efficiently. He has been making very good use of the knowledge and skills he acquired from his master. If you kill a tarantula you automatically become his enemy, and he may not "hesitate to say a requiem for it".

7.3.2. Meaning of Divination. The practice of divination is not only limited to traditional African society, but it extends to every society, even to the modern, thoroughly secularized urban areas. It is performed “when a decision must be made that the actor feels should be based on more information than is available or on more valid principles of judgment than he or she commands. In such a situation, divination is intended to provide the missing information or principle of judgment...” (Mfusi, “Religious Communication: Prayer, Sacrifice and Divination”, in African Independent Churches Today, M.C. Kitshoff, ed., 1996:191). Simple divinatory practices such as flipping a coin to decide between two alternatives are very common in modern day society. For example, which football team to kick the ball in which direction, or which movie to attend, or which way to follow at a crossroad, etc, are the prototype of divination (cf. Mfusi, 1996:191).

Surely, for the secular person who flips the coin, the rite is regarded as a means for random selection between equally attractive alternatives so as to hasten decision or settle a dispute. But for a diviner, such a ritual “is believed to reveal something about nature, including its future, which is hidden from the senses and which requires supernatural complicity to unravel” (Mfusi, 1996: 191).

According to de Waal Malefijt, divination is defined as “a form of religious communication in which supernatural powers give or are coerced into giving, direct information” (Quoted by Mfusi, p. 191). Wilbur O’Donovan sheds more light to this definition when he describes divination in Africa in the following words:

“In Africa, divination is a practice commonly used to discover the person who supposedly caused someone’s sickness, difficulties, or death. It is used to get advice or to make decisions, such as whom one should marry, when to plant certain crops, or when to make a particular journey. It is used to learn how the ancestors have been offended and how that situation may be corrected. People use divination to find out which ritual or sacrifice will solve a particular problem. Sometimes they want to get revenge on an enemy. Divination can also be used in foretelling the future. It is a common practice in non-Christian traditional cultures throughout the world. Divination is a way of getting knowledge or advice about a situation without depending on God, yet people who have this power

often claim that God gave them this power (Ezek. 13:6,9)” (O’Donovan, 1996:242)

Even though O’Donovan’s definition is more detail and down to earth in the sense that it brings out practical and concrete examples and reasons for divination, it somewhat contradicts Malefijt’s brief definition. The latter says divination is “a form of religious communication...”, whereas the former claims that it is “ a way of getting knowledge or advice ... without depending on God”. This can ignite a debate: Is divination a religious communication or not? From the perspective of African traditional religion, I would argue that divination is a religious communication or ritual. Like I said earlier, according to traditional African understanding, culture and religion are inseparable. Since divination is an essential part of their culture, it is also part of their religion. Divination is intended to discover the will and intention of the gods. Moreover, nature is considered sacred and as a medium through which God can communicate to and with people. God can use natural objects for the interest of His people just as Jesus used natural objects for the interest and benefit of the people: he used spittle to heal a deaf-mute (Mark 7:33), bread as a symbol of his body offered for our deliverance, etc. The science of interpreting objects is considered as a gift from God for the common good of the society. Though the diviner may misuse the gift, this does not take away its usefulness.

However, this form of communication cannot be compared with that effected through Jesus which is final and definitive. That notwithstanding , God still communicates with mankind through other people, and through nature, for the heavens proclaim the greatness of God and the earth brings forth the work of his hand. It all depends on what interpretation we give to objects and why. We should not forget that it was through casting of lots that Jonah was identified as being responsible for the sinking of the ship (Jonah 1:7-8), and that Matthias was chosen to succeed Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:26).

7.3.3. Forms and Techniques of Divination. The practice of divination has various different forms. These include the shaking of gourds, observing the pattern of small sticks, shells, or pebbles, or cards, or cowries thrown on the ground, swinging a stick over certain code objects, interpreting dreams and visions, examining the lines on the palm of the hand, laying out cards

or cowries, etc. (cf. O'Donovan, 1996:242-43). As a ritual leader, the work of a diviner is to unveil the mysteries or the hidden knowledge of the past and future, and then to pronounce what may be the cause of problems in the society, or to decide the guilt or innocence of an individual (Lugira, 2004:76-78; see also Mfusi, 1996:192). Since divination plays a significant role in diagnosing illnesses and unveiling mysteries, diviners are most highly revered and raised to the position of divinities. For example, in the Yoruba religion (in Nigeria) the diviner is known as the Father of Mystery (Lugira,p.77).

In some cases, the practitioner would take some shells, or cowries, or bones, or other assorted objects, address and sing the praises of his or ancestral spirits and throws the objects down. The conception or the belief is that the spirits of the ancestors would communicate a message to the practitioner through the way the shells, or the cowries, or the bones lie (cf. Mfusi, 1996:192-93). Divination is usually followed by prayer or sacrifice.

7.3.4. Can the Bible replace Divination? Deuteronomy 18:10-12 warns against pagan practices such as the sacrifice of children, the practice of divination, the interpretation of omens, and the casting of spells on others. Those who do these things are detestable to the Lord. According to O'Donovan, God condemns divination because it “reveals that a person is trusting in someone or something rather than trusting in the living God.” Those who put their trust in any other thing apart from God sin by breaking the first commandment (Deut. 5:7). They expose themselves “to the possibility of demonic deception and influence” (O'Donovan,1996:243).

In spite of what O'Donovan says, many Christians do not see divination as something evil; they tend to think that the diviner or the medicine man or the witch-doctor is the friend of the community. For them there is nothing wrong with finding out who caused their sickness or problem. O'Donovan argues that divinatory powers come from Satan, and therefore those who rely on the words of the diviner are deceived by the lies of a demon or evil spirit (O'Donovan, p. 244).

Divination usually attributes the cause of sickness or misfortune to another person or to the spirit of our ancestor, whereas the Bible attributes “the cause of our problems to our own personal sin and rebellion against God” (O’ Donovan, p. 244). Again, O’Donovan states that it is God, not our ancestors, who disciplines his people since God corrects and punishes those he loves (Heb. 12:6). Divination encourages and promotes the tendency to seek revenge on those identified by the diviner as the witch or sorcerer causing sickness. He further argues that only God can know if a particular person has really placed a spell or curse on someone. It is sinful for the diviner to put himself in God’s place. The Bible condemns revenge, thus the “whole foundation of divination is sin and deception, whether it seems to be for the good of the whole community or not.” (O’Donovan, p.244)

Here, O’Donovan touches a delicate and sensitive issue: the problem of evil, causes of misfortunes, failures, deaths, etc. To me what he says can land us into a theological quagmire. It is illogical and theologically unsound to argue categorically that our personal sins and rebellion against God are the causes of our problem; and that God uses misfortunes as a weapon to discipline his people. There are so many innocent people who suffer greatly and unjustly: think of the babies who are aborted, or killed after birth, victims of accidents, the victims of war and natural disasters (drought, floods, cyclones, earthquakes). What sin(s) have they committed, or how have they rebelled against God to merit what befalls them? Jesus was confronted with such problems, but his answer was quite different: he said the person born blind did not sin, the innocent children killed by Herod, and those on whom the tower fell during pilgrimage to Jerusalem were not sinners than those other ones who were not victims. O’Donovan’s way of reasoning turns God into a sadist, and this cannot be reconciled with his infinite love, mercy, and compassion. In the final analysis, the problem of evil remains a mystery.

Isichei informs us that many Africans put strong emphasis on temporal benefits such as health, long life, prosperity, and children. Many believe in witchcraft, and tend to attribute misfortunes such as sudden deaths to its malice. Furthermore, they have their mechanisms for discerning witches, and obtaining protection against them. And missionaries who considered

witchcraft an illusion could not meet these deep-seated needs of the Africans (Isichei,1995:96). Talking about the causes of misfortune in folk religion, Engelsviken (2001:47) says:

Among some African peoples, *witchcraft* is seen as the cause of most misfortunes including sickness, accident, crop failures, hunting failures and any general lack of success. The notion of coincidence or probability does not provide a sufficient reason for these types of failures. There must be answer as to *why* they happen to this individual and , for some, witchcraft is the 'obvious' answer.

Oduro et als. have observed that like any other people all over the world, Africans have their hopes and fears. They hope for “ a life of satisfying will-being, health, good social relations and favorable living conditions.” At the same time, “there is *fear* that their well-being will be threatened or damaged.” Their greatest fear is not what the ancestors can do or will do, but rather witchcraft and sorcery. Furthermore, Oduro et als. tell us that according to the African worldview, bad events or things such as “illness, misfortune and untimely death are not only caused by visible or natural factors (such as accidents, droughts or war), but also by unseen or supernatural spirits and powers to the work of evil powers “ (Oduro et als., 2008:20-21). The problem , therefore, is not that Africans are not aware of natural causes/factors, but rather that they combine both the natural and the supernatural causes, and that in most cases the natural causes of sickness, death, and misfortune are suppressed or simply ignored. Since evil and misfortune are an integral part of traditional religion, what should be done about spiritual conflicts? Engelsviken (2001:49) gives some useful guidelines which can help change many people’s worldview and approach to the problem of evil and misfortune. He talks about

the need to see Christianity as not merely a satisfying theology, but the power of God to deal with the issues they face in their world. Teaching on spiritual conflict must be part of a holistic approach to mission and theology. There is a need for an approach that relates the social, economic and personal, and not merely sees the demonic as the sole cause of evil.

Furthermore, he says those who have been involved in magic, should, like the New Testament converts, “destroy the paraphernalia they have used”. This is necessary in order to break with the past and enter a new life in Christ. Christians need to be aware that those accused of witchcraft are often poor widows, old isolated people, etc. Hence, there is need to be open to

the Christian message so that social harmony may be restored through reconciliation and mutual acceptance (Engelsviken, 2001:50). Since worldview is not static but changes with time, events, and circumstances, Engelsviken strongly advocates a Christian worldview.

7.4. ANCESTOR VENERATION.

7.4.1. Case Study. A fervent practicing Christian once died after having expressed his intention, in a written will, to be given a Christian burial and consequently to be buried in the church cemetery. Preparations for his burial began, and everything was moving on swimmingly until some elders, notables, and family representatives from his far-away village appeared. Contrary to his will, they insisted that he must be buried in the traditional way. When the children expressed their intention to follow the will of their father, the traditionalists threatened them seriously. This instilled some fear in them, so they started declining, for they knew the consequences of contravening the injunctions or warnings of the traditionalists. Some Christians advised, encouraged and assured them that nothing can happen to them if they have faith in God. After some consultations and private talks they came to a compromise and struck a deal with the traditionalists: that after religious services in church, the corpse will be handed back to the traditionalists. In fact, this was a maneuver, because the intention was to bury the corpse in the mission cemetery immediately after the Mass and funeral ceremonies. A grave was already dug for this purpose.

Mass and the eulogies were now over. The final commendations were about to be finished and the corpse was soon to be conveyed to its final resting place, when the traditionalists stormed the church foaming with fury. They had waited for long and had apparently exhausted their patience. In addition, and more importantly, they realized that they have been outwitted and deceived. Now they had come to get their own share of the deal by hook or by crook. This was clearly written on their angry faces. So in order to preempt it, we decided to surround the coffin and started praying. But this could not scare those fellows, for they meant serious business, and they wanted to be taken seriously. One of them gave one of my colleagues a “strong pagan slap.” It was needless for us to start fighting over a corpse in the

church. It would be tantamount to desecrating the place of worship, and scandalizing the people of God. So we let them have their way.

The reason for insisting on traditional burial is that after sometimes the mortal remains will be exhumed and decapitated. The skull is then transferred to a shrine inside the house or around the premises for subsequent veneration by performing rituals. This is a common, religio-cultural practice among the Bamileke of Cameroon. The Catholic Church has been battling with it, and so far has not succeeded to stamp it out completely from among her Christians.

7.4.2. veneration of Ancestors. Interaction between the living and the living-dead is a common feature in African traditional religion. This may consist of rituals, sacrifices and offerings made to satisfy or to appease or to persuade the ancestors. The relationship between the living and the living-dead may also take the form of communication with the dead either through divination or through direct words from spirit possessed people. These traditional beliefs develop into ancestor cults and cause the living to turn to their ancestors for guidance, help, correction, and blessing (O'Donovan, 1996:222). Ancestor cults are also a means of bringing the spirit of the deceased back into the community and to reaffirm or reinforce the connections between the dead and the living. Neglect of this religio-cultural duty to the ancestors will bring about misfortune and sickness to the family (Mfusi,1996:186-87).

7.4.3. African Traditional Revelation. The veneration of ancestors as well as divination, both of which are component elements of African traditional religion, can better be appreciated within the framework of the nature of African traditional revelation and the conception of God in African traditional religion . Revelation in African traditional religion is praxis centered, that is , it is based on experience and pragmatism; "... a faith sewn into the cultural fabric of the society" (Thomas, 2005:40-41). As Kibicho puts it

Through their various acts of worship, sacrifices and prayers, rites and ceremonies and festivals, etc., God's presence among the people is kept alive, heightened..." The practical nature of revelation is also kept alive in "myths and legends..., proverbs and wise sayings through which important beliefs and values

are kept alive, strengthened and passed on” (Kibicho, quoted by Thomas, 2005:41).

The African bases himself on experience which teaches him that fortune and misfortune are concrete realities of life. Geluwe maintains that African revelation is grounded in ideas that are also expressed by David Hume, an empiricist philosopher. His main argument is that knowledge is acquired through the senses and is contingent upon experience. Based on Hume’s philosophy, therefore, Geluwe says that “The Content of Revelation in Traditional Religion appears to affect only what man has experienced or does experience. And based on this experience, Africans have come to define four distinct categories of spiritual entities or potencies” (Geluwe, quoted by Thomas, 2005:36).

The first involves the African conception of deity. “He is kind and benevolent to man - the source of all the good things that man experiences, such as water, food, good health, wealth, old age and fame. He is . . . the final explanation of all phenomena” (Geluwe, quoted by Thomas,2005:36). Next to this ontological model of revelation is the role of divinities or spiritual beings , or deified ancestors who assist the Supreme Being in his various duties. They provide a channel by which communication is made possible between the visible and invisible realms, the natural and the supernatural. These spiritual forces can either be good or bad, and can speak truth or promote falsehoods (Thomas,2005:36-37). Naturally, the good spirits are a source of blessings for human beings, while the evil ones cause havoc, diseases, or even death (Geluwe, quoted by Thomas, p.37). The third religious hierarchy or spiritual force operating in African traditional revelation is the ancestors. And lastly, God’s will and purpose for mankind is revealed through nature: the beauty of creation, the awe, the grandeur and immensity of the physical world reflect something of God’s attribute. Kibicho corroborates this point in these words:

The whole of nature or creation, by its very existence, beauty, its mystery; by its orderliness and dependability, and by the life it continually brings forth and sustains ... by all these and other related features of it the whole of creation has always and constantly pointed the African peoples to the Creator and to his wonderful nature (Kibicho, quoted by Thomas, p. 39)

The role of ancestor deserves a special attention to which I shall now turn.

7.4.4. Role of the Ancestors in African Traditional Revelation. Belief in spirits and the spirit world is very fundamental to African thinking. To them, “every physical event has a metaphysical coordinate” (Steyne, “The African Zionist Movement’, in *Dynamic Religious Movements*, Hesselgrave, 1978:24). This means that nothing happens for nothing, for there must be a reason or cause somewhere beyond the physical world. Due to this phenomenon, some observers have concluded that “the African Christian holds his Christian faith in one hand and in his other hand the mysterious world of his traditional culture” (Reyburn, quoted by Steyne, 1978:24). In his understanding of reality, the African recognizes ‘life force’, ancestors and spirits. They all play a basic role in African socio-cultural structures and pervade the life of the individual (Steyne, 1978:24). For example, physical life is closely related to the realm of the departed dead. Life is not limited to the time span of earthly life, nor is it terminated by biological death. Rather, the meaning of life includes ancestor-hood as well as the union, interaction and dependence that exists between the living and the dead (Steyne, p. 24-25).

The role of ancestors is manifested in the form of reward and punishment: they reward the living for their good deeds, and punish them for the bad ones. When there is a problem, the diviner finds out in what way the ancestors have been offended, and proposes a solution. In connection to this Malidona Patrice Some says:

In Africa people’s welfare and rights are safeguarded by the ancestors. It is the ancestors who ultimately punish wrongdoing, by sending trouble or illness, even death, to the transgressor. When trouble comes, the diviners inquire as to the reason and are able to determine which of the ancestral laws has been broken. In this way abuses are corrected and people are given an opportunity to make amends and turn their lives around (Some, quoted by Thomas, 2005: 37).

Acting as emissaries of the Supreme Being, the ancestors bestow blessings and gifts, both spiritual and material to the living. Those who live a life pleasing to the ancestors will be blessed

in this life and in the hereafter, whereas those who did not live in consonance to traditional societal norms will live in misery and die a bad death. (Awolalu, quoted by Thomas, 2005: 132). According to African culture and the philosophy of religion, human beings are expected to live in harmony with all things in existence, that is, to have a good relationship not only with humans but with all of nature as well. This ontological harmony provides for cosmic balance among all that exists, and it is considered a sin to destabilize or to upset its equilibrium (Thomas, p.132). Traditional Africans are conscious of the consequences of such a disharmony. Awolalu sheds more light on this point in the following words:

Africans are persuaded that those who offend sacred tradition will first receive punishment in this life. The divinities and ancestors are usually responsible for carrying out the punishment for such offenses. If and when violators are made aware of their violation, they must immediately make amends, which usually requires offering a sacrifice. Without appeasing the offended divinity or ancestor, one is expected to die a bad death at the hands of the offended spirit. Those who die bad deaths are not permitted to become ancestors and are not given a proper burial. (Awolalu, quoted by Thomas, 2005:132-133)

From this perspective, one can thus understand why there was a fight between the traditionalists and the children over the corpse of their father in the above cited case study. The children were afraid of what may befall them if they did not respect the tradition of their father.

In African traditional understanding, not every person or just anybody qualifies to be an ancestor. Rather, an ancestor is someone who lived an exemplary and good life, a model or icon of traditional moral values. It is believed such a person is now living a life of bliss with the Supreme Being, and from that vantage position, he can mediate between God and the living; he can intercede for them and mediate their cause. In this regard Thomas says

The concept of death in most traditional African societies is viewed as a gateway by which one enters the afterlife. It is within this realm that those who lived uprightly become deified. Becoming an ancestor is equivalent to receiving the crown, which is spoken of in certain African American Negro spirituals. Entering ancestor hood ensures that one's family now has an advocate in the spirit world who can intercede for them and mediate their causes. The divinities and ancestors...are fully engaged in the affairs of humanity.(Thomas, p. 132)

Hence, ancestors are honored, remembered, and venerated, not worshipped as some people have wrongly concluded. For example, O'Donovan claims that it is "a form of idolatry" (O'Donovan, 1996: 223). This explains why "African Christian bishops have charged those who accuse Africans of worshipping ancestors as misinformed" (Thomas, 2005: 37). Then he quotes Isizoh who prefers to talk about 'presence of ancestors,' and 'service of ancestors.' In African culture, family bond does not end with death, hence ancestors are still part of the family they have left behind. The living maintain the bond by remembering and honoring the ancestors (Thomas, 2005:37). This practice is similar to the Christian practice of venerating/commemorating the saints, which is common especially in the Catholic Church. Prayers cannot be offered to, or libations can't be poured on behalf of, a "bad ancestor".

Ecclesia in Africa (The Church in Africa)⁵⁷ recognizes this fundamental role of family in African culture and tradition which explains why they venerate their ancestors, and which may prepare and nurture belief in the communion of saints. This document declares:

Open to this sense of the family, of love and respect for life, the African loves children, who are joyfully welcomed as gifts of God. "*The sons and daughters of Africa love life*. It is precisely this love for life that leads them to give such great importance to the veneration of their ancestors. They believe intuitively that the dead continue to live and remain in communion with them. Is this not in some way a *preparation for belief in the Communion of the Saints?* (*Ecclesia in Africa*, No. 43, 1995)

Herein lies a synthesis between faith and culture, and some of the positive values of African culture and tradition : the role of the family, their love for life, and their sense of solidarity. Other positive values include their sense of the sacred, their religiosity, belief in the existence of God the Creator and in a spiritual World. They are also conscious of the reality of sin, and of the need for purification, reconciliation and expiation (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 1995, No. 43). All this is exemplified in their efforts to live in peace , unity and harmony with their living-dead and with God; their efforts to avoid offending them, and whenever there is a transgression they reconcile with the ancestors and with God through expiatory rites. This predisposes them for the

⁵⁷ . *Ecclesia in Africa* is the Post Synodal Exhortation of John Paul II to all the Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Men and Women Religious, and the Laity of the Catholic Church in Africa, following the first ever African Synod of Bishops held in Rome in 1994.

reception of the gospel and the acceptance of the authority of Scriptures over their lives. This is where traditional religion brings the African Christian closer to God and provides an area as well as an entry point of inculturating the faith so that it can be incarnated in the African culture and truly become part of it and at the same time integrate the culture into the Christian faith.

God can also reveal his purpose and will through other human beings and through natural phenomena : “Whether God speaks in a still, small voice or through lightening or rain, African people wait quietly to ascertain the meaning and purpose of God that needs their attention” (Thomas,2005:39). Africans also believe that God and the ancestors speak to human beings through happenings and dreams. Geluwe asserts that “An unusual or unexpected event may easily be considered a kind of revelation from the spirits” For example, in the Ashanti (Ghana) and Yoruba (Nigeria) traditions, to stumble over one’s feet and hit one’s big toe is a divine sign, and to have a dream with certain animals present is also a revelatory sign (Geluwe, quoted by Thomas, 2005:39) . Some events are considered extraordinary acts of God viewed as modes of revelation from God. They may be mediated through natural disaster or sickness, etc. (Thomas, 2005:40). Although these may be based on subjective imaginations and hallucinations and may not, therefore, be authentic and reliable, it however indicates the idea that traditional African religion is conscious of divine presence and operations in the lives of the people; of God’s immanence and transcendence.

Another mode of revelation is what may be described as a human quality “ a sort of higher wisdom or deep intuition of otherwise hidden but most important features of reality; it is like a sixth sense.” The Kikuyu people of Kenya describe this medium or revelation as “*meciria* (reason and more) (Kibicho, quoted by Thomas, p.40).

In the final analysis ,divination may be considered an esoteric source of revelation in African traditional religion. From what I said above it is clear that divination is a reality in the lives of many people, and plays a major role in their search for meaning, and for answers to the problems of life. From my research findings, I realized that though Christianity appeals to Africans, it does not address their existential yearnings, their deeper needs and aspirations for

which traditional religion provides the answer here and now. This can be understood from the perspective of the concept of salvation in African traditional religion. Thus Mbiti argues that:

Salvation in African religion has to do with physical and immediate dangers that threaten individual or community survival, good health and general prosperity or safety. Salvation is not just an abstraction, nor is salvation in African religion something to be realized at the end of time. It has been experienced in the past, and it is being experienced in the present (Mbiti, quoted by Thomas, pp. 133-34).

There is a discontinuity between Christianity and African Traditional Religion in the sense that while the former “bases its faith on a historical founder” – Jesus Christ, the latter does not have “a sacred history”, and this posits a Christological difficulty (Parratt, quoted by Kuhn, 2008:220). In this case, how can Christological titles such as “Messiah-Christ, Son of Man, Son of David etc” be interpreted? In this regard, Kuhn remarks that the title “Kyrios” which means “Lord” would find an equivalence in the African context since it might be associated with the functions of a chief which are known by the local people. However, considering the fact that there are many different ethnic groups in Africa, the chief’s function might have many variations, and in some cases the chief may not even play a role. As a solution to this dilemma, Kuhn suggests that “we have to go back to a theology of ancestor-hood as the best way of connecting the lordliness of Jesus with a position of supremacy in TAR” (Kuhn, 2008:220). In this regard, Jesus can be considered the Proto-Ancestor, the Great Healer, Liberator. In the Lamnso Bible which I referred to above, “Messiah” is translated as *Mfeer* which etimologically means remove or liberate, and the real meaning is “Saviour”.

7.5. SYNCRETISM OR AN INDIGENOUS CHRISTIANITY? Tippett defines syncretism as “the union of two opposite forces, beliefs, systems or tenets so that the united form is a new thing, neither one nor the other” (Tippett, “Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity” in *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?*, Yamamori and Taber, eds., 1975:17). From the case studies I presented above, what can be said about African Christians who are Christians on Sunday and practitioners of traditional religion on Monday : who stand one foot in Christianity

and the other in traditional religion? Is it a form of syncretism or what might be called indigenous Christianity? Or to use the appellation of Alan R. Tippett, “Christopaganism or Indigenous_Christianity?” (Tippett in *Christopaganism or Indigenous_Christianity?*, Yamamori and Taber, eds., 1975:13) This raises a whole nest of problems and some missiological concerns: how can the word of God be transmitted into a new culture in such a way that an indigenous Christianity is formed without syncretism? How can Christianity ,brought by Western missionaries ,be planted in an African cultural context and yet be relevantly part of that culture? How can pure faith be preserved and at the same time given in an indigenous garment?

Tippett has sounded a warning signal of the danger of planting foreign western Christianity on mission territory. He observes that when Scriptures or part of it is translated into a language whose vocabulary has been formed solely for a pagan worldview and belief, two problems are confronted: that of translation and that of reception. Yet for the saving experience to be transmitted, the Bible must be incarnated in the linguistic flesh of the receptor people (Tippett, 1975:14). The fundamental problem would be how to communicate the pure core of the gospel or the “supracultural core of the gospel” without it being contaminated by non-Christian forms? (Tippett, p.14). We should not forget however that Ulfilas received little support for his translation project because it was thought that the pure gospel could not be translated into the impure language of the Goths (Tippett, p.14) . What then is the pure faith, and who determines it?

For Roman Catholics, the ultimate authority which determines the pure faith is the Church on the basis of tradition and Sacred Scripture interpreted by the hierarchy and articulated by the Pope. For Protestants, it is the Bible alone (*Sola Scriptura*). For some Christians today (both Roman Catholics and Protestants) who want to free Christianity from all “western cultural accretions,” the ultimate authority is neither the Pope nor the Bible but the direct experience of Christ (McGravran, “The Biblical Base from which Adjustments are made”, in *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?*, Yamamori et al. eds., 1975:36-37).

In my own humble understanding, Christianity (or the Christian religion) is a message not a culture, not a tradition, nor an ideology or philosophy. It is a message about God's love for humanity and how mankind should respond to that love; it is about God's plan to save mankind through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ; about how humankind can live in love, peace, and harmony with his or her neighbor and environment. I even dare say that Christianity is a Person : God himself who enters into dialogue and communicates with humankind in order to save him or her. This underscores the meaning of the incarnation – God offering himself in love as a gift to humankind, and at the same time offering salvation through the death and resurrection of his son Jesus Christ. Briefly put, the core of the Christian religion is belief in the Triune God, in the Bible as the only inspired Word of God, and in the doctrines as defined by the great creeds (cf. Mcgravran, 1975:41). To me, this epitomizes the “supracultural core of the gospel”. It is recorded in the Bible but communicated in various different languages so that people can hear God speaking to them in their own language.

It is worth to note that Christianity is not and cannot be tied down to one particular culture. Instead, it transcends all cultures borrowing the good and positive elements of culture in order to make itself intelligible, and at the same time it transforms cultures from within and make them instruments of its spread/propagation. Pobe, quoted by Thomas Oduro et als. (2008: 19), points out since Christianity was born in the Jewish culture, it took the form of that culture, but later on it adopted the Greek worldview. And many years later it came to Africa dressed in European culture. The history of Scripture translation, however, reminds us that the gospel, which is above culture, has to be presented in a meaningful cultural form (Tippett,p.15).

Tippett has rightly pointed out that the churches of the 19th and 20th century mission territory, Africa included, manifest one of two situations. In the first place,

...they may be thoroughly western in form , teaching and values and quite unrelated to the cultural ethos, so that people live a borrowed, foreign kind of existence, or a dichotomous one which compartmentalizes the religious and secular. Or second, we may have the tragic manifestation of syncretistic worship, Christopagan, more animistic than Christian, because the thinking is animistic and the ritual magical. (Tippett, p.15)

Based on this situation, Thomas therefore argues that Christianity has been unable to provide Africans with the direction and solace they need in moments of crisis. Only traditional religion can speak to those deep, existential yearnings in the lives of Africans (Thomas,2005:7). On the same vein and in addition to this ,Mbiti maintains that in moments of crisis Christianity and Islam do not seem to remove the sense of frustration and up rootedness.

It is not enough to learn and embrace a faith which is active once a week, either on Sunday or Friday, while the rest of the week is virtually empty. It is not enough to embrace a faith which is confined to a church building or mosque, which is locked up six days and opened only once or twice a week. Unless Christianity and Islam fully occupy the whole person as much as, if not more than, traditional religions do, most converts to these faiths, will continue to revert to their old beliefs and practices for perhaps six days a week, and certainly in times of emergency and crisis. (Mbiti, quoted by Thomas, 2005:8)

However, I would like to differ with Mbiti on the reason why most African Christians backslide or revert to traditional religion. According to him it is because Christianity does not fully occupy the whole person as much as traditional religion. That is not the case, at least from my research findings. In most Christian churches, emphasis is placed on christian witnessing not only on Sundays but throughout the week, and in fact everywhere(office, market, along the street, when travelling, at home, in schools, etc) and throughout one's life. Services are conducted not only on Sundays but during the week (for instance, in the Catholic Church there are daily masses), and church buildings are available during the week for anyone who wants to communicate with God. Moreover, Christian crusades and prayer vigils are very common nowadays among Christian churches. All these are concrete ways of occupying Christians, so Mbiti cannot claim that the Christian faith does not occupy the whole person, and that the Christian faith is confined to a church building.

In addition, African traditional religion does not occupy the whole person as such, nor does it organize services for people to gather together and pray to God or worship him. Prayers are offered on specific occasions , which may not even be so frequent, and during moments of crisis and problems, for example, during birth and naming rites, during initiation, marriage,

death, coronation, sickness, drought, or other problems like childlessness and failure in business. And most of these involve only those who are concerned.

From my research findings, I learned that some African Christians consult traditional healers or diviners because they cannot afford the conventional western medicine and therapy : for example, paying consultation fee or an operation, buying drugs, cost of transportation to and from the hospital, etc. Moreover, in most of Africa, it is believed that all sickness has an origin that must first be traced before attempting to treat certain manifestations of an illness. The source of many illnesses can be ascertained only by consulting a diviner who in turn consults the unseen world. Healing takes place at two levels – the spiritual and the physical. It begins with the spiritual state in the spiritual world which is then translated into healing of the physical disease in the physical world. Healing in the spiritual world must precede healing in the physical world else no healing will be possible (Thomas, 2005:175). According to African pharmacology therefore, “ illness is not simply a biological disorder but is primarily a manifestation of disharmony that one’s Chi or Ori is experiencing in the spirit world”(Thomas, 2005:175).

African traditional religion is based upon the assumption that human beings are spiritual creatures who reside temporarily in a material body, and that harmony must exist between humankind and the cosmos. Thus, healing aims at restoring the necessary balance within the individual that is need to maintain good health. In connection to this, Isizoh says

To effect healing it is necessary, first of all, to re-establish harmony between the major elements which constitute the human person. Such healing will not be efficacious if it does not at the same time restore relations with the environment and the supreme being, spirits, ancestors and other people (Isizoh, quoted by Thomas,2005:176).

Furthermore, syncretism is due to lack of conviction on the part of some African christians. This stems from the fact that many converted into Christianity out of economic necessity. Their conversion was motivated by material, academic, and economic reasons , more than by faith. (Somé , quoted by Thomas, 2005:69). Africans were also prompted to accept Christianity because it enabled them to gain their freedom from slavery (Thomas,2005:69). This

was not a turning away from traditional religion as such, but rather an acceptance of some good elements of Christianity in order to mix them with the good elements of traditional religion(Kibicho, quoted by Thomas, 2005:69).

Election is one of the biblical themes that permeate both the Old and the New Testaments. God's chosen people are to be his people exclusively; people who will not tolerate polytheism or syncretism (cf. Exodus 20:2-6). In Deuteronomy 4:14-19; 5:6-9; and 6:12-15, Moses tells the chosen people of God to go in and possess the land that God had promised to give them, but warns them not to traffic with the idols or fertility cults of Canaan. From this perspective, one can argue that since the Bible has been translated into the vernacular, and is being used by African Christians, then they must accept its authority, because by virtue of their baptism they are the new people of God, His elect and chosen people; people of the new covenant.

CHAPTER 8

SHOULD THE BIBLE BE TRANSLATED OR NOT?

8.1. REASONS FOR TRANSLATING.

After the above discussion, I would like to point out that despite the negative consequences of translating the Scriptures into the vernacular, the Bible remains a most precious heritage of the Christian Churches. And ipso facto, “they must be made ‘available to all the Christian faithful’ by means of ‘appropriate and correct translations made into different languages’ (DV 22).” (Beal, et al. eds., 2000:980) This would facilitate the active participation of the lay faithful in any liturgical service in which they take part, especially in the Lord’s Supper, or the Breaking of Bread, or the Mass as it is variously called.

Secondly, the Bible needs to be translated because it remains the undisputable source of authority in matters of faith, doctrine, spiritual nourishment and growth for all followers of Christ.⁵⁸ That explains why the Vatican II intended to make Sacred Scriptures “the soul of the Church’s life and mission, its source, its origin, its inspiration.” (*L’OSSERVATORE ROMANO*, 08/23/09 issue). The Bible is a spiritual handbook that continuously accompanies the Christian wayfarer on his/her journey to ‘the Promised Land.’ It is a source of inspiration for the believer’s life and thought. Scriptures in the vernacular give room for the common person to know God better, to read His Word, meditate on it and put it into practice. John Paul II, while presenting the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on the interpretation of the Bible, said:

“It is cause for joy when one sees the Bible in the hands of poor and humble people, who can provide a more penetrating light – spiritually and existentially – into its interpretation and realization, than that which comes from a science that is very certain about itself.” (*L’OSSERVATORE ROMANO*, 08/23/09 issue)

⁵⁸. Protestants would not quarrel with this statement, hence they are at home with it. But for Catholics, it is somehow faulty because it is incomplete without the mention of Tradition and the *Magisterium* which is the teaching authority of the Catholic Church.

Thirdly, the translation of the Bible is very vital for ecumenical movement, for it provides “propitious ground for dialogue, in which the Word of God and ecumenism are seen together.” (*L’OSSERVATORE ROMANO* 08/23/09 issue) . Many ecumenical Bibles now exist , jointly produced by translators from different Christian Churches, and are used by Christians in their various and different denominations. In using the same translated Scripture, Protestants, Pentecostals, and Catholics together profess one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, and one Family of God’s children, believers united in Christ. This is an eloquent expression of the much needed Christian unity.

Fourthly, the dogmatic constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, in Latin *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC 26,34) of the Second Vatican Council lay emphasis on the public nature of liturgical celebrations and the need for understanding and for simplicity. Sanneh testifies that this laid the foundations for innovations in language use, thus vernacular was adopted as the convenient means to allow the faithful play their role in Mass (Sanneh, 2009:277). Formerly, that is prior to Vatican Council II, mass was said in Latin. However, this council marked the dawn of a new era which recognized the importance of the mother tongue in the life of the Church. Thus mother tongue from hence forward could be used in the administration of sacraments, celebration of mass, liturgical readings, prayers and chants (SC 36.2)

Furthermore, Wendland has observed that for a message to be considered as genuine and relevant to a person, it must be conveyed in his mother –tongue, not a foreign language. The publication of the Bible in the vernacular is and has always been one of the important factors influencing the growth of the church in Africa. People do not only demand the New Testament, but the Old Testament as well, because it speaks to them in a special way due to the many social and cultural similarities between the Jewish and the traditional African way of life (Wendland, “The Challenge of Bible Translation in Africa Today” in *WLQ*: Volume 80, No. 4).

Under the history of Bible translation, we saw that the Bible was translated from Hebrew and Greek to Latin, and subsequently to many other languages so that the reading of Scripture might be possible also for people of other languages. In addition to this, Martin Chemnitz has

pointed out that while on the cross, Jesus used the words of the Bible in the Syriac dialect, and that the apostles made great use of the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Thus, he concludes that Christ himself and the apostles approved “the custom of translating the sacred books into other native and popular languages “(Chemnitz,1971:197-98). Furthermore, he argues that

“God did not so set apart only one certain language for the Holy Scripture that it is a sin to translate it into other native and popular languages, so that whatever of the heavenly doctrine God wanted written down in either Hebrew or Greek could be read and understood by all. For God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (Chemnitz, 1971:198).

In addition, the vernacular Bible is the preserve or the deposit of the Christian faith. Andrew Walls argues that “Christian faith rests on a divine act of translation- the Word became flesh and dwelt among us- (Jn1:14)” (Walls, quoted by Mojola, 2012:5). This means that just as the Word became Jesus and dwelt among us, so too the Christian faith is preserved or remains in the vernacular Bible. For this reason, Mojola together with some observers have remarked that “the survival of the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches to this day is in no small measure testimony to the power of Bible translation and of the written Word” (Mojola, 2012:5). And from this perspective, he underscores “the necessity of rooting Christian discourse and practice deeply in the common culture and dialect, in the everyday practices of the ordinary person in their mundane daily existence” (Mojola, 2012:5).

This, naturally, connects to another importance of vernacular Scriptures, namely, its contribution to the formulation and articulation of African theology. In this connection, Bediako argues that “African Christianity is inconceivable without the existence of the Bible in local languages.”⁵⁹ One cannot engage in any biblical and theological discussion without the Bible, which is “the primary source of theological formulation about the living God” (Ndjerareou,

⁵⁹ . Bediako, quoted by Abel Ndjerareou, “The Contribution of Mother-Tongue Bible Translation to the Formulation of African Theology”, in *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2012:42, Journal of Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture, Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana.

2012:42). However, for some African theologians, their primary sources remain African traditional religion. My own stance is that we need both the Bible and African traditional religion for a balanced, unbiased theological discussion and formulation. That is why inculturation is an essential element in theological and missiological discussions. Faith and culture must seek to understand each other in order to find a common ground for evangelization, growth and enrichment. Sanneh and Bediako argue for the value of mother-tongue translation in constructing African theology. According to Sanneh, local languages contain concepts “that express the salvific value of traditional religions”, and Bediako argues that “the names given to the God of the Bible by Africans are not only dynamic but they also express the reality of the living God more clearly than the concept of God of the Greeks or of the West” (Sanneh and Bediako, quoted by Ndjerareou, 2012:41).

8.2. HOW SHOULD THE BIBLE BE TRANSLATED?

After having discussed the impact of Scriptural translation into the vernacular, and after pointing out the need for Scriptures in the mother tongue, we are still faced with one pertinent question: what is the way forward? What can be done to avoid the problems that arise as a consequence of translating the Bible into vernacular? This question calls for some instructions on principles and methods to be used in Bible translation. In this respect, I would like to refer to a document produced in 2001 by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (the agency in charge of liturgical matters in the Catholic Church). It is called *Liturgiam Authenticam*, in Latin “The Authentic Liturgy” (available in <http://www.bible-researcher.com/liturgiam-au> accessed on 28/01/2013). It lays out some guiding principles and methods of translating both liturgical texts and the Bible into vernacular languages. In what follows, I shall present excerpts of some of the salient points of this document.

8.2.1. General Principles on the Translation of Liturgical Texts into Vernacular languages.

The words of the Sacred Scriptures, as well as other words spoken in liturgical celebrations, are not intended primarily to be a sort of mirror of the interior dispositions of the faithful; rather, they express truths that transcend the limits of time and space.

Since the Latin liturgical texts of the Roman Rite are the fruit of the liturgical renewal, and in order to preserve such a rich patrimony and pass it on through the centuries, it is to be remembered that the translation of the liturgical texts of the Roman liturgy is not so much a work of creative innovation as it is of rendering the original texts faithfully and accurately into the vernacular language. While it is permissible to arrange the wording, the syntax and the style in such a way as to prepare a flowing vernacular text suitable to the rhythm of popular prayer, the original text, insofar as possible, must be translated integrally and in the most exact manner, without omissions or additions in terms of their content, and without paraphrases or glosses. Any adaptation to the characteristics or the nature of the various vernacular languages is to be sober and discreet.

Especially in the translations intended for new converts to the Christian Faith, fidelity and exactness with respect to the original texts may themselves sometimes require that words already in current usage be employed in new ways, that new words or expressions be coined, that terms in the original text be transliterated or adapted to the pronunciation of the vernacular language, or that figures of speech be used which convey in an integral the content of the Latin expression even while being verbally or syntactically different from it. Such measures are to be submitted to the discussion of all the Bishops involved before being inserted into the definitive draft. In particular, caution should be exercised in introducing words drawn from non-Christian religions.

Adaptations of the texts are to be considered on the basis of true cultural or pastoral necessity, and should not be proposed out of a mere desire for novelty or variety, nor as a way of supplementing or changing the theological content of the *editiones typicae*;

Whenever the biblical or liturgical text preserves words taken from other ancient languages (as, for example, the words Alleluia and Amen, the Aramaic words contained in the New Testament, and the Kyrie eleison of the Order of Mass, as well as many proper names) consideration should be given to preserving the same words in the new vernacular translation

It is not permissible that the translations be produced from other translations already made into other languages; rather, the new translations must be made directly from the original texts, namely the Latin, as regards the texts of ecclesiastical composition, or the Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek, as regards the texts of Sacred scripture

So that the content of the original texts may be evident and comprehensible even to the faithful who lack any special intellectual formation, the translations should be characterized by a kind of language which is easily understandable, yet which at the same time preserves these texts' dignity, beauty, and doctrinal precision.

8.2.2. Other Norms Pertaining to the Translation of the Sacred Scriptures .

- To prepare any version of the Bible, it is preferable to follow the principles of sound exegesis and of high literary quality.
- It is necessary that the translation of Scriptures be characterized by a uniformity and stability so that only one approved translation should exist in a given area or region.
- Care should be taken to ensure that the translations be conformed to the understanding of Biblical texts used in the liturgy from the time of the primitive church according to the tradition of the Fathers of the Church. Hence, the translation must express the traditional Christological, typological and spiritual sense, and must show the unity and the inter-relatedness of the Old and the New Testaments. For this reason, the translation must be done under the supervision of a competent authority such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL); other ancient versions of Scriptures should be consulted such as the Septuagint. The divine name Yahweh, expressed in the Hebrew texts, in Latin *Dominus*, is to be rendered into any given vernacular by a word equivalent in meaning.
- Translators are advised to pay attention to the history of interpretation in the writings of the Fathers of the Church.

- In order not to obscure the historical context of the biblical passages, translators should take cognizance of the fact the word of God proclaimed in the liturgy is not simply a historical document. The Bible does not only deal with the great persons and events of the Old and New Testaments, but also of the mysteries of salvation, and thus is relevant to the faithful of today and to their lives.
- In addition to the above principles, it is important that anyone embarks on a translation business should undertake a course in Bible translation in a recognized institute or Bible translation center.

CHAPTER 9

GENERAL CONCLUSION

At the outset of this study I stated that the Bible is the hand book of the Christian faith; for the Protestants, it is the only, undisputable source of authority. This makes it the most important book in Christianity. This present study set out to answer the question whether the Bible should be translated into African vernacular languages or not. In case it should, what are the consequences to the church, the individual, the society in Africa, and to African traditional religion and culture? The importance of the Bible stems from the fact that it is the Word of God addressed to his people; it contains God's plan to save mankind. It is a message that needs to be translated into vernacular languages so that even the common person can hear and understand it in his or her own language. However, this translation has been problematic like a double edge sword with far reaching consequences which I highlighted in chapters two and five. In chapter two I presented a brief history of Bible translation in which I traced its origin from the Septuagint to the present time; its development, and some of the problems encountered in the course of Bible translation. It was an important task that was so time consuming; it was full of challenges and even risky at times; it required courage, determination, and a strong conviction that for ordinary Christians to grow spiritually, it was absolutely necessary for them to know God, and to hear him speaking to them in their own mother tongue.

In the history of Bible translation, the Reformation period distinguished itself as the watershed, the climax, and the turning point with Martin Luther and Tyndale as the chief protagonists. It was a giant and bold step, a great leap for Christendom: first because it was an open expression, a confirmation and affirmation of Sacred Scriptures as the only source of authority in the life of a Christian, summarized in the famous dictum *Sola Scriptura*. This was in direct opposition to the Catholic position which in addition to the Bible recognizes other sources

of authority, namely the *magisterium*⁶⁰ and tradition. Secondly, Luther's translation of the Bible into the German language marked the beginning of a Christian revolution that ushered in the birth of Protestantism and consequently the split in the Christian Church. It can be likened to the opening of the flood gates which subsequently led to individual translations and interpretations of the Bible, as well as the proliferation of independent Churches. O'Donovan corroborates this point in these words

Printing and distribution of the Bible was an important change which led to many Christians breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church. This led to the Protestant Reformation in which M. Luther and Calvin were leading figures. (O'Donovan, 1996:33)

I would like to make it clear that Luther did not intend to create a church or to break away from the Catholic church, nor to create confusion in Christendom. Yet these became the unavoidable outcomes of his great inspiring work.

Over the last few centuries the Church in the Western world brought the gospel to Africa. Nowadays there is much talk about the global flow of Christianity from the north to the south (esp. Africa and Latin America) and to Asia. Brian M. Sandifer has pointedly observed that “ One of the crucial developments of the 20th century has been the shift of Christianity's center of gravity from the Northern hemisphere to the Southern hemisphere. Percentage of Christians in the global south has been slowly rising.” (Sandifer, “*Turning Points*”, available in www.slideshare.net/sandiferb/turning-points-chapter-13-bible-translation ; see also Bediako, 1995:1) Since Bible translation has always been a decisive moment in the history of Christianity, this flow was accompanied by, and unavoidably associated with, the translation of the Bible into many African local languages. In confirmation to this point, Philip C. Stine says that recently, the explosive church growth in Africa as well as other Third World countries “ that began with the modern missionary movement... brought with it a parallel mushrooming in the number of languages into which all or part of the Bible was translated.” (Stine, “Introduction”, in Bible

⁶⁰ . *Magisterium*, refers to the Church as the divinely authorized teacher in the realm of faith and morals. It is made up of the Pope and his closest collaborators, the bishops. For more on this, see Bernard L. Marthaler et al. eds., New Catholic Encyclopedia, Second Edition 13, Thomson Gale, The Catholic University of America, 2003:247.

Translation and the Spread of the Church, 1990:vii) This explains why I dedicated chapter three to the history of Bible translation in Africa. This showed how the local situations necessitated Bible translation into the mother tongues. It also laid the foundation for the impact of bible translation in this continent.

The focus of chapter four was to examine the various and different ways the vernacular Bible is used in Africa, for example, in churches during liturgical celebrations, in private and public devotions, in small Christian communities, as a healing tool, in songs and music, etc. Chapters five, six, and seven constitute an analysis of the impact of Bible translation into the vernacular in Africa. In chapter 5, I discussed both the positive and the negative impact of Bible translation into the mother tongue in Africa. It has left a tremendous impact on the individual African Christian, on the African society at large, and on the Christian church in Africa. There is no gainsaying that Bible translation has contributed immensely to the growth of the Christian church in Africa. While some African Christians make good use of the vernacular bibles for the spread of the good news, for spiritual growth and development, for prayers, to give praises, glory, thanksgiving and worship to God, as a moral guide, as an effective tool for the liberation and the transformation of the society, others use the vernacular Bibles for their own self-interest and self-aggrandizement, to gain cheap popularity, to claim spiritual powers and personal revelations and visions, as a money-making tool and a ticket/passport to material wealth. Still some use the vernacular texts to justify certain religio-cultural practices which are not in consonance with the Christian faith, and others use them to justify their schisms and fundamentalist tendencies. This only brings about a multiplier effect in sowing the seeds of division, confusion and tension, as well as a purely subjective interpretation of the bible.

If bible reading and interpretation are not guided, directed and supervised by a competent body or authority, there is bound to be more chaos and confusion, more heresies, further division and split among and within the Christian churches, etc. And consequently, the desired effect will not be realized.

Since language is intimately related to religion and culture in traditional societies (Sanneh, “Gospel and Culture”, in Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church, Stine,1990:17), chapter 6 examined the impact of bible translation on the African culture. Here, I discussed some pertinent issues raised by some African theologians , for example, Lamin Sanneh who argues that “ missionary translators saw a natural congruence between indigenous cultures and the gospel.” (Sanneh, 1990:17) Furthermore, he talked about the problem of the *One* and the *Many*, of the particular and the universal, and concluded that in employing vernacular languages for translation, missionaries saw these languages “as endowed with divine significance, so that they may substitute completely for the language of revelation.” (Sanneh, 1990:18)

In making a critique of Sanneh’s radical pluralism, I shared his view that Christianity is a vernacular movement, and that by its very nature theology is translation. However, I brought out the tension that exists between faith and culture, and the limits and corruption of culture. Culture is limited to a geographical location, but faith is not. Instead, faith transcends and transforms all cultures. All cultures have both constructive and destructive elements, positive and negative aspects. Not everything in culture is necessarily valuable and good.

My discussion and analysis would have been in a vacuum without some concrete , practical application: without some perspective on traditional beliefs and practices. In chapter 7 therefore, I pinpointed some of these beliefs and practices (e.g., divination and ancestor veneration) which throw light on the character of syncretism, and which still pose a challenge to Christianity in Africa, and put to question the relevance of the Christian faith to the African context, and the authority of the Bible in the lives of African Christians. The key question here is “Why is it that the Church in Africa suffers from syncretism, in other words, why do most African Christians mix religio-cultural practices with Christian belief? Why are they both Christians and practitioners of traditional religion at the same time when they now possess and read the Bible in their mother tongue?

In my analysis, I pointed out that the answer to the above questions has to do with the African yearning and conception of salvation, their longing for integral healing, and for concrete, quick and immediate results. Salvation is a practical matter. Secondly, it also concerns the way Western missionaries implanted the gospel in the local context. They did not address the most pressing issues in the local circumstances, but were instead preoccupied with issues not relevant to the local situation. The context of the African communities was not taken seriously. The consequence is that the local communities continue to struggle for their identity (cf. Schreiter, 1997:24ff, 41ff) . Western Christianity did not address those existential yearnings for which only the African religio-culture has the answer. The gospel was not presented in a meaningful cultural form so that it could become part of the new context and give rise to an indigenous Christianity. That notwithstanding, the phenomenon of Christopaganism or syncretism in Africa calls for an open and truly sincere dialogue between Christianity and African traditional religion in a bid to see how the former can be relevant to the latter without losing its purity or essential elements.

In chapter 8, I gave some reasons for translating the Bible into the local languages in Africa. In addition, I argued about how this should be done, and in this respect I suggested some general principles to be followed in translating liturgical and Biblical texts. Thereafter, I presented the bibliography of the entire thesis.

From the foregone discussions so far, it is clear that Bible translation, reading and interpretation on the continent of Africa have both positive and negative impacts. The response of the Africans has often been complex and varied. Translation and reading of the Bible remain an absolute necessity, but need to be directed, guided, and supervised by competent, officially recognized translators.

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