



A MISSIONAL APPROACH TO THE TRADITIONAL SOCIAL
ASSOCIATIONS OF THE NSO' PEOPLE OF CAMEROON

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, except for the references to other people's works, which have been duly acknowledged; "A Missional Approach to the Traditional Social Associations of the Nso' People of Cameroon" is as a result of my own research and that it has not been submitted elsewhere for another degree.

Additionally, I take responsibility for any inaccuracies and shortcomings, which may be detected in this work.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my elder brother, Gaius Yuwong for his tireless efforts in seeing to it that all of us in the family grow responsibly.

“I do not claim that I have succeeded or have already become perfect. I keep striving to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has already won me to himself”

(Philippians 3:12).

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ABSTRACT

This research deals with Christian missions and African cultures. It focuses on the traditional social associations of the Nso' people of Cameroon. The main problem the research addresses is that missionaries who came to Nso' mostly imposed their culture on the Nso' and by extension Africa in the name of Christianity. What this research refers to as traditional social associations is what the missionaries prejudicially termed secret societies. The research argues that these traditional social associations are not secret societies. They are rather custodians and preservers of Nso' culture. Their activities are largely social, and revolve around eating and drinking.

The research compares the case of Nso' with missionary endeavours in North Africa: Egypt, Axum and Nubia and in Sub-Saharan Africa. In all these areas, the following commonalities are found: insufficient interest in the indigenous languages, syncretism, the tendency of mission to always link with colonialism and to despise the African worldview. In all these areas, the result was conflict between mission and indigenous culture, and conflict within the traditional cultures.

In order to appropriately engage contexts in Africa that have traditional social associations like Nso', the researcher proposes the use of an integrated missional approach. By *integrated missional approach* the researcher means a perspective that takes theology, anthropology, sociology and culture seriously when carrying out the mission of God (*missio Dei*). The researcher presents an integrated missional approach that is constructed in the light of contextualisation. This approach is based on Niebuhr's typology that is described in his book *Christ and culture* and as analysed by Kraft in his *Anthropology for Christian witness*.

The following sociological theories: functionalism, conflict theory, phenomenology and social identity theory are used to discuss how certain realities operate in human communities.

Using content analysis as his predominant methodological approach to the data collected, the researcher concludes that culture has been, is, and will continue to be the main vehicle for mission. Hence, the traditional social associations of the Nso' people, which form the core culture of Nso' need to be seen as an opportunity for evangelisation. The research shows that the missionary era in Nso' in particular and Africa in general has ended and that the era in which the local church is finding its own identity is underway.

KEY WORDS

Christian missions, African cultures, a missional approach, traditional social associations, Nso' people, Cameroon, mission churches, and worldview.

ABBREVIATIONS

ART	African Traditional Religion
Dr	Doctor
Rev	Reverend
BM	Basel Mission
PCC	Presbyterian Church in Cameroon
RCM	Roman Catholic Mission
WCC	World Council of Churches
TEF	Theological Education Fund
TSA	Traditional Social Association(s)
SIT	Social Identity Theory
A.D.	<i>Anno Domini</i>
B.C.	Before Christ
CMF	Christian Men Fellowship
CMA	Catholic Men Association
CWF	Christian Women Fellowship
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
PECA	Presbyterian English Choirs Association
TCK	Temple Choir Kumbo
CCUI	Cameroon Christian University Institute
NSODA	Nso' Development Association

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

It has been established beyond any reasonable doubt that the Christianity that the Western missionaries brought to Africa was a mixture of the Gospel and Western culture (Taylor 1963:6; Bosch 1991:292; Bediako 1995:206; Lingenfelter 1998:12; Oduro, *et al* 2008:37). They were so mixed that it was difficult to draw a line between Christianity and Western culture. Worst of all the missionaries believed that their culture was superior. In addition, they saw African culture not only as beneath Western culture, but also as undesirable and even dangerous to converted Africans. Interestingly, converts were told that African culture was to be dismissed, and were encouraged to adopt Western habits and values. Their aim was to ‘civilise’ the Africans. Hence, Christianity, commerce and civilisation were intertwined (Oduro, *et al* 2008:37). The missionaries then did not only serve as agents of evangelisation but as agents of colonisation of Africa. The results were that both Western missionaries and the mission churches they formed tended to have a negative view of African culture (Oduro, *et al* 2008:38).

Following his experience in the churches in Cameroon, Lingenfelter (1998:12), rightly observes that it is difficult to find in the two-thirds world a truly indigenous church. Most churches, he says, reflect more the culture of the missionaries who planted them than they do the culture of the new believers. Missionaries, he goes on, have succeeded in bringing a biblically informed worldview, but one that is thoroughly contaminated by their culture. Then he asks: “Is it possible to bring a truly transforming gospel, or are we always limited to reproducing our own cultural reflection of Christianity wherever we carry the message?” (Lingenfelter 1998:12).

One of the things that entangled the missionaries and disrupted their view of Africa among others was their Western worldview (the Enlightenment). In the West, the period from the 1700 onward was known as the ‘modern period’ of the Enlightenment. The supporters of this period said that they have moved from the ‘dark’ Middle Ages with superstition to a time where people used the ‘light’ of the mind and science to free themselves from ignorance, misunderstanding, and false beliefs (Oduro, *et al* 2008:38-39). They believed that education, economic

development and modernisation would encourage people to 'see the light' (Walls 1996:199 quoted in Oduro, *et al* 2008:39). The main idea of the Enlightenment as Oduro, *et al* (2008:39), put it was faith in humankind. The supporters of such a concept as they indicate, put humans rather than God in the centre of things and had a strong influence on the thinking and practice of Protestant mission.

Following Bosch (1991:274, 267,286), Oduro, *et al* (2008:39) indicates that, "the entire missionary enterprise is, to a very real extent, 'a child of the Enlightenment.'" The consequences of following the views of the Enlightenment included: the feeling of spiritual superiority, and the consideration of African cultures as nothing and the assumption that people could be classified into: the civilised and the 'uncivilised', the colonists and the indigenous people. According to Bosch (1991:344; 290,312) as cited by Oduro, *et al* (2008:39) 'only very few of those missionaries; however, managed to escape the spell cast over them by the worldview of the Enlightenment, and even then, only partially.'

The package missionaries brought to Africa thus included both the Gospel and Western culture, which was not just absorbed willingly but imposed onto the African people (Oduro, *et al* .2008:39). While some parts of Western culture were helpful to Africans, there were others that proved to be most damaging to the development of the church and its witness in Africa. The failure to take the traditional worldview of the African converts and all it implied greatly affected the planting of Christianity in Africa (Oduro, *et al* 2008:40). Africa was therefore served with a Christianity that was wrapped in a Western cultural lining. Given the shift of the centre of Christianity from the West to Africa, one could be right to say with confidence that the time has come for Africa to unwrap Christianity from the Western cultural lining and proclaim it following their own realities.

The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation was held in Cape Town, South Africa from the 16 – 25 October, 2010. It brought together 4.200 evangelicals leaders from 198 countries. The Congress has as its goal to bring a fresh challenge to the global church to bear witness to Jesus Christ in every nation, in every sphere of society, and in the realms of ideas (The Cape Town Commitment 2010:4).

The Cape Town Commitment which emerged out of this Congress was based on “A Confession of Faith and a Call for Action.” This theme was certainly based on the realities of change so, The Cape Town Commitment states:

We must respond in Christian mission to the realities of our own generation. We must also learn from the mixture of wisdom and error, of achievement and failure that we inherited from previous generations. We honour and lament the past, and we engage with the future, in the name of the God who holds all history in his hand (The Cape Town Commitment 2010: 4).

In mission, we look back to the failures and successes of the past in order to shape the present and focus onto the future, but the present realities are always more central than the past and the future. Hence, we can never remain in the past; we have to move on, because mission is an ongoing process. However, there is a need to struggle not to repeat the errors and failures we inherited from the previous generations.

1.2 Research problem

The problem is that the missionaries imposed a foreign form of Christianity, which is irrelevant to the cultural context of Nso’ and by extension Africa. Following the large number of Christians today, Africa is largely credited as a centre¹ and hope of Christianity. However, Christians from Nso’ like other African Christians have persisted in their religio-cultural practices, which have been termed as “pagan” or “unchristian” since the time of the missionaries. For example, a story is told of Mathew the catechist, (Jumbam 1980:141-148) who belonged to Christianity and to a traditional social association – *ngwerong*, coined by the missionaries as a “secret society”. One day Big Father (the parish priest) held the big mask of the dreaded masquerade (juju) – *kibarankoh*, lifted it and behold the person in it was Mathew, the catechist (Jumbam 1980:148). Interestingly, the *kibarankoh* came out to mourn Father Comas, whose death was believed to have been precipitated by Big Father (the parish priest) under whom Father Cosmas was serving.

¹It is generally accepted that the centre of gravity of Christianity has shifted from the North to the South most especially to Africa (Shenk (ed.) (1993:25), (Walls 1996:85), Cape Town Commitment (2010:4), Kim, K. & Anderson, A. (eds.) (2010:127). Todd, M. Johnson as cited in *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Now and Tomorrow* (2010:127) indicates that in 1910 less than 2 percent of all Christians lived in Africa but has skyrocketed to almost 22 percent by 2010.

Mathew is a model of an African Christian who fellowships both in Christianity and in the traditional social association. He is seen by some Christians and church theologians as being syncretistic. This could rightly be termed the missionary mindset. Today some catechists and clergy still belong to this same traditional social association. One would wonder why early missionaries to Nso' stood against the traditional social associations, especially *ngwerong* and *ngiri*. Is there anything in these associations that is contradictory to the gospel? In other words, if there is something in them which is evil, what is the role of the church? Would the catechists, pastors and priests who are members of these associations not serve as better 'missionaries' to the members given the fact that they are all indigenes? From the anthropological perspective, it has been noted that Africans as a group oriented people hardly live in solitude. Unfortunately, this lifestyle has been misinterpreted by outsiders in particular. The continuous misinterpretation of this lifestyle may rob Africa of its central place in Christianity. This research sees a need for the study and recognition of the roles of the traditional social associations.

The study is aware of the fact that African theologians and others have grappled with the changing cultural realities resulting in efforts to contextualise theology. Consequently, in an attempt to understand these traditional social associations, the research engages the contextualisation debate. It does so from the missional perspective and uses Nso', one of the largest indigenous peoples in the North West Region of Cameroon as a case study because of its rich religious and cultural heritage. Nso'land occupies the eastern corner of this region (see map 1, page 274). The language that Nso' people speak is called Lamnso'. They have two main traditional social associations – the *ngwerong*² and the *ngiri*³. These two formed what is considered “the core culture of Nso'” (Mzeka 1978).

Nso' is considered by many Cameroonians as both a stronghold of Christianity and a strong upholder of culture. The predominant mission churches in Nso' are the Roman Catholics and the Presbyterians. The first Roman Catholic mission (RCM) began in Nso' in 1912 with the arrival of missionaries from Germany (Lafon 1988:8). With their collaborators, they functioned as a new religious association of Christian believers. The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) is the historical and

²*ngwerong* is a traditional social association of males only with an executive, and ceremonial functions.

³*ngiri* is a traditional social association for the royals – males only from the *dui* – extended royal family.

constitutional successor of the Basel Mission (BM), which was established in 1886 as the external arm of the Evangelical Missionary Society of Basel in Switzerland (PCC Constitution 1998:1). The BM's work was influential in Douala, Bombe, Fouban and Bali. The subsequent coming of the PCC to Nso' was ushered by the arrival of the Basel missionaries to Kishong in 1932 (Keller 1968:71). Everywhere the BM functioned as a competitive religious body with the Roman Catholics alongside with the traditional ones. These churches have different approaches, but the missionaries failed to understand Nso' culture and religion sufficiently.

In addressing the research problem stated above, the following questions serve as a guide to the discussion:

- Why is there always syncretism when Christianity meets another religion?
- Why was missionary endeavour in Africa so intertwined with colonialism?
- What can Christianity tap from African Traditional Religion (ATR) to enhance the spread of the gospel in Africa with focus on Nso'?
- How can the mission churches respond to both compatible and incompatible activities of traditional social associations of the Nso' people?
- How can the mission churches in Nso' engage their context in such a way that use is made of Christians who are members of traditional social associations, rather than stigmatise them?
- How can members of traditional social associations be both true adherents of their culture and committed Christians?

1.3 Aim/Objectives of the Research

The main aim of this research is two-fold: First, to find a missional approach that can heal and uphold the relationship between Nso' people who still hold firm to their culture and those who see culture as evil. Second, to seek ways by which Nso' people can feel at home in Christianity and in their culture. In order to pursue this, aim the following objectives serve as a guide:

- To study the relationship between Christian missions and African cultures with a focus on Nso' and to see the parts each has to play for the wellbeing of the community.

- To describe and evaluate the reasons for which Christian mission was inevitably intertwined with colonialism.
- To explore the relationship between inculturation and syncretism and see if it possible to avoid being syncretistic especially when Christianity and ATR meet.
- To explore and describe ways by which Africans knew and worshipped God before the introduction of Christianity to Africa.
- To indicate that an understanding of the worldview of a people is a primordial necessity for evangelisation.
- To explore ways by which the presence of Christians in traditional social associations can impact positively on the members of these associations and the community at large.

1.4 Relevance of the study

In the last forty years, African theologians and others have grappled with the cultural identity crises resulting in the efforts to contextualise theology. These cultural identity crises which have been triggered by modern culture and the Christian message have impacted on African communities in both positive and negative ways, but certainly often in unexpected ways. Theologians therefore have an important role to play in grappling with these cultural identity crises, and finding ways in which the church can promote peace and life-giving practices.

Today, Africa is rightly held as the centre of Christianity. Yet African Christians still fellowship both in church and in traditional social associations considered “pagan” or “unchristian” since the missionary prejudicial opposition. Following the prejudiced position of the missionaries, some of their collaborators have continually stigmatised the Christians who fellowship in these associations without proper knowledge of what they do there. The research is therefore an endeavour to find a true expression of the Christian faith in the Nso’ culture and context that can enable Nso’ people to feel at home in Christianity and in their culture. The research thus engages the contextualisation debate from a missional perspective.

The WCC 10th Assembly that was held in Busan in 2013, pointed out that the history of Christian mission which has been characterised by conceptions of geographical expansion from a Christian centre to the ‘un-reached territories’, to the ends of the

earth is today facing a radically changing landscape, where the majority of Christians are either living, or have their origins from the global South and East (WCC Resource Book 2013:52). The assembly further indicated that the understanding of missions as a movement taking place from the centre to the periphery and from the privilege to the marginalised of society has changed:

Now people at the margins are claiming their key roles as agents of mission and affirming as transformation. This reversal of roles in terms of the envisioning mission has strong biblical foundations because God chose the poor, the foolish and the powerless (1 Corinthians 1:18-31) to further God's mission of justice and peace so that life may flourish. If there is a shift of the mission concept from 'mission to the margins' to 'mission from the margins', what then is the distinctive contributions of the people from the margins? (WCC Resource Book 2013:52-53).

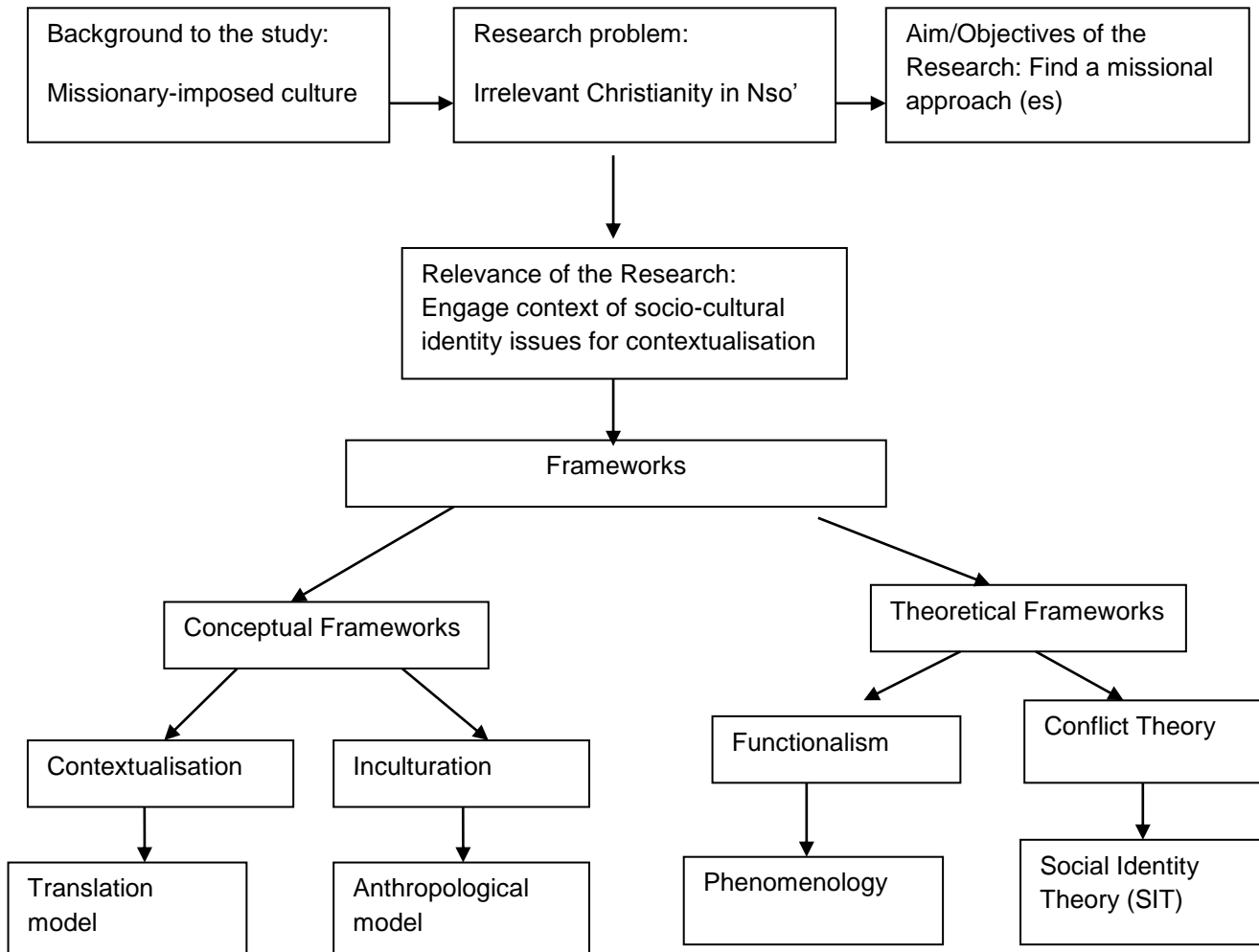
This shift of mission concept echoes Bediako's view that the history of Christian expansion from its origin is not marked by inexorable, uniform, and cumulative growth in every context of its manifestations. For example, he indicates that over the centuries, the history of the expansion of Christianity shows both accession and recession (Bediako 2008:108). Hence, there is no such thing as a permanent centre of Christianity. Thus, Bediako is right in pointing out that "every centre is a potential periphery, while every periphery is a potential centre" (2008:108). That notwithstanding, there is a need to consolidate the present centre, which is Africa before the day of its periphery arrives. This can only be feasible if we find a true expression for the Christian faith in Africa so that Africans can be Christians and at home in their culture.

1.5 Conceptual and theoretical frameworks

Theoretical frameworks are sometimes referred to as conceptual frameworks. But as Grant & Osanloo (2014:16) point out, these terms are neither interchangeable nor synonymous. Hence, it is important to differentiate them. The difference according to Grant and Osanloo (2014:16), lays in the fact that a theoretical framework is derived from an existing theory and/or theories that has/have already been tested and validated by others and is considered a generally acceptable theory in scholarly literature. It serves as the researcher's lens with which to view the world.

Miles & Huberman (1994), as Grant & Osanloo (2014:17) point out has categorised a conceptual framework as a system of concepts, assumptions, and beliefs that support and guide the research plan.

Mind map A, below is provided to facilitate the understanding of sections 1.1 to 1.8 of this chapter. Reference to it would grant further understanding of the processes involved in the study.



Mind Map A: Background to Frameworks

Accordingly, the conceptual framework ‘lays outside the key factors, constructs, or variables, and presumes relationships among them’ (Miles & Huberman quoted in Grant & Osanloo 2014:17). In addition, following Camp (2001), Grant & Osanloo (2014:17), indicate that a conceptual framework is a structure of what has been learned to explain the natural progression of a phenomenon that is being studied.

More importantly, the conceptual framework offers a logical structure of connected concepts that help provide a picture or visual display of how ideas in the study relate to one another within the theoretical framework. Finally, the conceptual framework also provides an opportunity for the researcher to specify and define the concepts within the problem (Grant & Osanloo 2014:17).

The research uses the concept of contextualisation, with a focus on an anthropological model of contextualisation (Bevans 2005:54-69), and the translation (incarnational) model (Sanneh 1989: 51-53; Bosch 1991:421; Luzbetak 1996:69; Walls 1996:26-40; and Bevans 2005:37-57).

The theoretical framework is based on some sociological theories which are used to discuss socio-cultural issues in the study. These theories are: functionalism, conflict theory, phenomenology, and social identity theory.

The concepts and theories mentioned above are explained below.

1.5.1 Conceptual framework

The main concept used in the study include: contextualisation (incarnation and inculturation) with a focus on the translation and anthropological models.

1.5.1.1 Contextualisation

Contextualisation here is understood as the various processes by which a local church integrates the gospel message (the 'text') with its local culture (the 'context') (Luzbetak 1996: 69). Shenk (1999:56) calls it a process whereby the gospel message encounters a particular culture, calling forth faith and leading to the formation of a faith community, which is culturally authentic and authentically Christian. According to him control of the processes involved in contextualisation resides within the context rather than with an external agent or agency. In this way, culture is understood to be a dynamic and evolving system of values, patterns of behaviour, and a matrix shaping the life of the members of that society (Shenk 1999:56). In this research contextualisation is considered as a necessary practice of all churches in mission within their own cultures as discussed in 1997 by the Lausanne Consultation (Mission-Shaped Church 2004:90). The strength of contextualisation lies in the fact that it lays emphasis on praxis (Bosch1991:423). Hence, the research equally suggests practical ways through which the cultural context of Nso' could be engaged with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Historically, contextaulisation as a technical term within mission theology emerged within ecumenical Protestant circles in the early 1970s as an alternative way to describe what had often been called inculturation (Ukpong 1987 cited in Skreslet

2012:88). The need for this new terminology was prompted by the closing of the modern colonial era. Earlier it had been assumed that mission usually occurred as a movement of diffusion spreading out globally from recognised centres. Missionaries took with them already worked-out-theologies, which needed only to be adjusted slightly to fit novel circumstances. Whether one talks of a necessity of indigenisation or inculturation, the initiative was thought to remain in the hands of foreign evangelists, who alone were considered qualified to determine how Orthodox beliefs and settled practices ought to be expressed in new situations (Skreslet 2012:88).

The terminology of contextualisation as Skreslet (2012:88-89) points out indicated a shift of emphasis from the centre to what had been considered the periphery and from the missionary to the local church. The task of theologising now became more dialogical and less a matter of one-way applications. The experience of indigenous communities took on a much greater importance, first for suggesting which problems were most in need of a theological response and then by supplying the idioms and conceptual frameworks within which these conversations would be constructed. In this way, the universal pretensions of Western theology were about to be seriously tested.

The word contextualisation appeared in the 1972 report of the Theological Education Fund (TEF), *Ministry in Context* (Bosch 1991:420, Shenk 1999:56). According to TEF director, Shoki Coe the difference between indigenisation and contextualisation is that indigenisation is derived from the natural world and has a static, even past oriented character. What is needed as he points out is rather a concept that suggests dynamic interaction with the diverse living contexts in which the churches are found today, enabling them to engage the vital issues of life and death for the people in each society. He further points out that the fundamental difference between these two concepts is that responsibility for contextualising the message of the gospel no longer rests with the individuals from outside the culture; rather that responsibility lay with the church and its leaders from within the culture (Shenk 1999:56). This change was sudden and dramatic. Hence, Shenk observes: “never has a major conceptual shift been made with such apparent suddenness as the change from indigenisation to contextualisation” (1999:56).

However, following Bosch (1991:421), the research uses the indigenisation model of contextualisation, which presents itself either as a translation or as an inculturation model. Other theologians such as Sanneh 1989; Walls 1996 and Bevans 2005, affirm the relevance of translation in contextual theology. Worthy of note is the fact that translation goes together with inculturation and incarnation. The translation and the anthropological models are discussed in further detail below:

1.5.1.1.1 Translation model of contextualisation

According to Andrew Walls (1996:27), incarnation is translation. Hence, he states that “when God in Christ became man, divinity was translated into humanity, as though humanity were a receptor language” (Walls 1996:27). Translation in other words is unveiling, which according to Walls (1996:27) its relation to language is specific to a people or an area – because no one speaks generalised ‘language.’ Therefore, when divinity was translated into humanity he did not become a generalised humanity but a person in a particular locality and in a particular ethnic group, at a particular place and time (Walls 1996:27). Accordingly, the translation was effected under very culture-specific conditions, which soon extended to other areas through re-translation from the Palestinian Jewish original (Walls 1996:27).

Following the Great Commission in Mt. 28:19-20, Walls (1996:27) opines that various nations are to be made disciples of Christ and that the national distinctiveness – the cultures of such nations are within the scope of discipleship (Walls 1996:27). This implies that Christ can become visible within the very things which constitute nationality (Walls 1996:27). Accordingly, the incarnation – the first divine act of translation into humanity thus gives rise to constant succession of new translations (Walls 1996:27). In this wise, Christian diversity becomes the necessary product of the incarnation (Walls 1996:27-28). Furthermore, (Walls 1996:28) points out that as Christian faith is about translation it is as well about conversion since these two are parallel in that all use existing structures in the process of change. In translation (the incarnation) God in Christ became man while in conversion the existing structures are turned to new directions (Walls 1996:28). This is not about substitution, the replacement of something old by something new, but about transformation, turning of the already existing to new account (Walls 1996:28).

In the incarnation, Christ was fully translated, taken into the functional system of the language, into the fullest riches of personality experience and social relationship (Walls 1996:28). The right human response to the divine act of translation is conversion: the opening up of the functioning system of personality interest, emotions, relationship to new meaning, to the expression of Christ (Walls 1996:28). Conversion then becomes the “turning, the re-orientation of every aspect of humanity – culture-specific humanity to – God” (Walls 1996:28). Christ was a full expression of God in human medium. Conversion remains a continuous process and not a single act in the past. Yet it has a beginning, but we cannot presume to posit an end (Walls 1996:28). The mission of the church is thus represented by Bible translation, which as a process is both a reflection of the central act on which the Christian faith depends and a concretisation of the Great Commission (Walls 1996:28). Walls further indicates that as the incarnation took place in terms of a particular social context, so translation uses the terms and relations of a specific context (Walls 1996:29).

Walls (1996:29) implies that as God became man – (the incarnation) in a human-specific culture by translation, which set the space for further re-translations into other cultures. However, these re-translations have to follow the very pattern of the original translation.

Vincent Donovan (1978) and Lamin Sanneh (1989) have also used the translation model in their works. Donovan had to yield to the realities of the Masai in order to allow the gospel message to reach them. Sanneh believes that there is need to avoid “cultural diffusion” and find ways to “translate the message” into the language of the people. Translation helps to bring people to new ways of viewing the world, beginning a process of revitalisation that reaches into both the personal and the cultural spheres (Sanneh 1989:53). In the encounter of Christian faith with human culture, for example, the translation model regards culture somewhat positively but focuses more on the faithful transmission, rather than something good and revelatory in itself (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:48).

According to Tennent (2010:325) God’s greatest self-revelation, the incarnation, took place within all of the particularities of a specific time and culture. Following Andrew Walls, he points out that in the incarnation, God became, ‘at home in specific

segments of social reality' (Tennent 2010:325). Bearing this view in mind, he further indicates that without ceasing to be God, Jesus fully entered into the frame of reference of a first century Jew. In this wise he thus states:

The incarnation is the ultimate example of what we call the translatability of the gospel. In this context, the translatability of the gospel refers to the ability of the gospel to be articulated, received, appropriated, and reproduced into potentially infinite number of cultural contexts. Jesus embodies the good news and, in the incarnation, that good news became wonderfully present in specific setting (Tennent 2010:325).

Hence, Tennent (2010:325), points out that at the heart of any *bona fide* missionary preparation is learning to effectively communicate the gospel into a new cultural context. This he says implies the need to understand how to re-present Christ within the context of new segments of 'social reality.' Nowadays, contextualisation resides within the people in their own culture. Yet they still need some skills to communicate the gospel since they have to engage various realities.

1.5.1.1.2 Anthropological model of contextualisation

Bevans (2002) describes his models of contextual theology as models of operation and of theological method. Each of them presents a different way of theologising with distinct theological starting points and distinct presuppositions (Bevans 2002:31). Thus, each model has to take its context seriously. Anthropology is a social science which deals with the study of human society and cultural identity. Thus, the anthropological model of contextual theology, "centres on the value and goodness of *anthropos*, the human person" (Bevans 2002:55). Bevans emphasises the value and goodness of the human person in this model of contextual theology as follows:

It is within every person, and every society and social location and every culture, that God manifests the divine presence, and so theology is not just a matter of relating an external message- however supracultural or supracontextual to a particular situation; rather theology chiefly involves attending and listening to that situation so that God's hidden presence can be manifested in the ordinary structures of the situation often in surprising ways (2002:55).

The anthropological model of contextual theology therefore lays emphasis on cultural identity. Consequently, the development of a local theology from the perspective of this model "begins with the needs of a people in a concrete place, and from there moves to the tradition of faith" (Schreiter 1985:13). The anthropological model starts with a basic trust of culture's goodness and revelatory possibilities, and proposes

that the wealth often hidden in a culture might offer new riches to the Christian self-understanding (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:48).

1.5.2 Theoretical framework

As mentioned above the sociological theories used in this research include: functionalism, conflict theory, phenomenology, and social identity theory. Sociological theorists express their assumptions or hypotheses systematically and discuss in a comprehensive way how far their theories explain social life. More importantly, they provide new insights into behaviour and the workings of societies. The way in which sociological theory sets out its ideas is a quality it shares with the theory of any other discipline: psychology, physics, genetics, and the rest. Like with the theory of other disciplines, sociological theory relates innumerable events, with many apparent differences, to general principles that bring out their similarities (Wallace & Wolf 2006:3).

Although sociological theory shares the essential systematic qualities of all theory, in other ways it often differs from what is usually meant by the term. The classical definition of a theory is essentially a deductive one. It starts with definitions of some general concepts (and often, a few clearly stated assumptions); lays out rules about how to classify the things we observe in terms of these different categories; and then puts forward a number of general propositions about the concepts. Once observers have classified their subject matter, a generalised theory allows them to deduce logically a number of specific statements about its nature and behaviour (Wallace & Wolf 2006:3).

Each theory has its most elementary building blocks – concepts. A concept is described as a word or a symbol that represents a phenomenon (a label we use to name and classify our perceptions and experiences) or an abstract idea generalised from particular instances (Wallace & Wolf 2006:4).

The key concepts of a theory also enable us to see parts of social reality that may have escaped us otherwise. Concepts are an essential first step in understanding and analysing social phenomena. The crucial of sociological theories differ from deductive model drawn from the natural science. This is the crucial aspect of their methodology. Theories also differ in three other dimensions: their subject matter, the

assumptions underlying their approach, and the types of questions they believe social theory can and should answer (Wallace & Wolf 2006:5). Though these theories exhibit some differences, it is necessary to note that they serve in complementing each other as can be seen below. And none in effect could be said to be better than the other since they handle different and/or same issues accordingly.

1.5.2.1 Functionalism

This theory has over the years been called 'structural-functionalism', after especially its two major theorists, Talcott Parsons (American) and Robert K. Merton (American), who have often been referred to as structural-functionalists (Wallace & Wolf 2006:17). Wallace & Wolf now refer to it as functionalism for two reasons: First, they say it clarifies the link to the functionalism of its forerunners, especially Emile Durkheim. Second, both of their major theorists, Parsons and Merton now prefer the term functionalism (Wallace & Wolf 2006:16).

Functionalism is defined as

The analysis of social and cultural phenomena in terms of the functions they perform in socio-cultural system. In functionalism, society is conceived of as a system of interrelated parts in which no part can be understood in isolation from the whole. A change in any part is seen as leading to a certain degree of imbalance, which in turn results in changes in other parts of the system and to some extent to a reorganization of the system as a whole. The development of functionalism was based on the model of the organic system found in the biological sciences (*A Modern Dictionary of Sociology* 1969, quoted in Wallace & Wolf 2006:17).

Functionalism has a macro sociological focus because it is concerned with the overall characteristics of the social structure and the general nature of social institutions. In analysing social systems based on this understanding, functionalists emphasise three elements:

- The general interrelatedness, or interdependence, of the system's parts
- The existence of a 'normal' state of affairs, or state of equilibrium, comparable to the normal or healthy state of an organism
- The way that all the parts of the system reorganise to bring things back to normal (Wallace & Wolf 2006:17).

The first most important feature of functionalism will always be some reorganisation and tendency to restore equilibrium. While it will be easier to restore equilibrium in

some cases, it may be more difficult to do so in others (Wallace & Wolf 2006:17). Wallace & Wolf (2006:18) point out that in analysing how social systems maintain and restore equilibrium, functionalists tend to use shared values or generally accepted standards of desirability as a central concept. The second most important feature of functionalism is its emphasis on values. According to functionalists, value consensus means that individuals will be morally committed to their society. Their emphasis on values contrasts with the other macro sociological perspective. For example, functionalism contrasts with conflict theory.

While functionalism emphasises the unity of society and what its members share, conflict theorists stress the divisions within a society and the struggles that arise out of people pursuits of their different material interests (Wallace & Wolf 2006:18).

Modern functionalism's most important intellectual ancestors are the sociologists Augustine Comte (French), Hebert Spencer (British), Vilfredo Pareto (Italian), and Emile Durkheim (French). While Comte, Spencer, and Pareto emphasised the interdependence of parts of the social system, Durkheim emphasised integration or solidarity (Wallace & Wolf 2006:18). The emphasis of all these functionalists essentially lays stress on interrelatedness and integration.

This study takes the focus of Emile Durkheim, who is considered the most important sociological forerunner of modern functionalism (Wallace & Wolf 2006:19; Smith 2001:9).

As far as the concept of integration, the incorporation of individuals into the social order is concerned; Durkheim held that integration (or social solidarity) is important for the maintenance of social equilibrium. He viewed social evolution as a movement from the mechanical solidarity of tribal societies to the organic solidarity characterised by industrial societies (Smith 2001:9; Wallace & Wolf 2006:9). Furthermore, he argued that traditional societies were characterised by a strong collective conscience, which he defined as 'the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society' (Wallace & Wolf 2006:20). However, as division of labour increased, so did individualism. Consequently, there was corresponding decrease in collective conscience and a shift to organic solidarity, characterised by the interdependence of roles, and a lack of self-sufficiency that held people together.

Durkheim as Wallace and Wolf (2006:20) indicate, also set out to create a proper subject matter for sociology, the realm of social facts. He defined a social fact as that 'which is general over the whole of a given society while having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations' (Wallace & Wolf 2006:20). His examples of such facts are laws, morals, beliefs, customs, and fashions. He later elaborated on the meaning of social facts and used the term institution, meaning the beliefs and modes of behaviour instituted by the collectivism (Wallace & Wolf 2006:20-21). He thus defined sociology as 'the science of institutions, their genesis and their functions' and this made it clear that Durkheim viewed macrostructural (large-scale or society wide) phenomena as sociology's subject matter (Wallace & Wolf 2006:21).

Lastly, it seems necessary to note that Durkheim's most important contribution to functionalism is *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. It shows how in the most traditional tribes religion was a strong integrative force through its installation of common values and identification. In addition, functionalism closely follows Durkheim's approach, referring to values as 'widely shared concepts of the good' or 'beliefs that legitimise the existence and importance of specific social structures and kinds of behaviour that transpire in social structure' (Wallace & Wolf 2006:24).

Functionalism fits very squarely in Nso' traditional religious system as it instils common values and identification. It fits partially in the context of traditional social associations of the Nso'. Some of the activities therein require other theories to tackle them. Hence, there is need to examine conflict theory, which seems complementary to functionalism.

1.5.2.2 Conflict theory

Conflict theory is the major alternative to functionalism as an approach to analysing the general structure of societies, and it is increasingly popular and important in modern societies. It is also a less unified perspective than the others discussed in Wallace and Wolf. The disagreements among its proponents are said to be bitter compared to those they have with theorists who use other approaches. What an interesting revelation, that conflict theorists are themselves also in conflict! That notwithstanding, conflict theorists of all types share a number of important

assumptions and preconceptions, which together create a distinctive way of looking at the world (Wallace & Wolf 2006:68).

Functionalists as we have seen, look at societies and social institutions as systems in which all the parts depend on each other and work together to create equilibrium. They do not however deny the existence of conflict; but they believe society develops ways to control it, and it is these they analyse. Conflict theorists' perceptions of society could hardly be more different. Where functionalists see interdependence and unity in society, conflict theorists see an arena in which groups fight for power, and the control of conflict simply means that one group, is able temporary to suppress its rivals. Functionalists see civil law, for example, as a way of increasing social integration, whereas conflict theorists see civil law as a way of defining and upholding a particular order that benefits some groups at the expense of others (Wallace & Wolf 2006:68).

The general conflict orientation incorporates three central and connected assumptions. The first is that people have a number of basic interests; things they want and attempt to acquire that are not defined by societies but rather are common to them all. According to Wallace & Wolf (2006:69) conflict theorists are not always explicit about this view of humanity, but is present in all their works. The second assumption of conflict theorists, which is even central to the whole conflict perspective, is an emphasis on power as the core of social relationships. They always view power not only as scarce and unequally divided – and therefore a source of conflict – but as essentially coercive. The third distinctive aspect of conflict theory is that values and ideas are seen as weapons used by different groups to advance their own ends rather than the means of defining a whole society's identity and goals (Wallace & Wolf 2006:69).

1.5.2.2.1 The two traditions of conflict theory

The basic elements of conflict theory described above are common to all its proponents, but conflict theory can be divided into two different traditions. This division is based on the fact that they differ above all in their view of social science and in whether they believe that conflict can ever be eradicated (Wallace & Wolf 2006: 69).

The first group of theorists believes that social scientists have a moral obligation to critique society. This group refuses to separate or to admit that one can really separate analysis from judgement or fact from value. Theorists in this group also often (but not always) believe that it is possible, in principle, for a society no longer to have ground for social conflict. The second group, by contrast, considers conflict to be an inevitable and permanent aspect of social life; it rejects the idea that social science's conclusions are necessarily value-laden. Its proponents are rather interested in establishing a social science with the same cannon of objectivity as informs the natural sciences (Wallace & Wolf 2006:69).

Theorists in the first group (social science) – falls under modern Marxism, neo-Marxism, the Frankfurt School. C. Wright Mills, and Pierre Bourdieu, are most influenced by the work of Karl Marx. The second group of conflict theorists falls under the works of Ralf Dahrendorf, Lewis Coser, and Randall Collins. Though Marx's influence is still felt, the most important continuities are the writings of Max Weber (Wallace & Wolf 2006:69-70).

In this study, therefore we will consider the main personalities: Marx and Weber because the elements of conflict theory were set out by them. Much of Weber's work as Wallace & Wolf (2006:70) point out incorporates a debate with Marx and Marxist analysis, but with these two authors, they say, we find the same two concerns: first, with the way social positions bestow more or less on their incumbents; and second, with the role of ideas in creating or undermining the legitimacy of a social position.

1.5.2.2.1.1 Karl Marx (1818-1889) (a German)

According to Wallace & Wolf (2006:70) conflict theory in sociology is the creation of Karl Marx. Marxism and conflict theory are sometimes discussed as if to say they were synonymous. Here we cannot go to any detail discussion of Marx's biography, but rather concentrate on some basic elements of conflict theory in Marx's work as outlined by Wallace & Wolf (2006: 71):

- Marx believed that people have an essential nature and clearly defined interests. Consequently, Marxists argue that if people do not behave in accordance with these interests it can only mean that they have been

deceived about what their 'true interests' are by a social system that works in others' favour.

- Marx analysed both historical and contemporary society in terms of conflicts between different social groups with different interests.
- Marx emphasised the link between the nature of ideas or ideologies and the interests of those who develop them, and he insisted that the idea of an age reflect the interests of the 'ruling class.'
- Marx emphasised the primacy of technology and patterns of property ownership in determining the nature of people's lives and course of social conflict.

Wallace & Wolf (2006:71) point out that while Marxist and, to a lesser degree, other critical conflict theorists retain this emphasis, other analysts from Weber on have seen it as important, but only a partial explanation. Thus, the divide between the two approaches comes from the central differences between Marx and Weber themselves. Conflict theorists in conflict!

1.5.2.2.1.2 Max Weber (1864-1920) (a German)

Like Marx as Wallace & Wolf (2006:72) point out, Weber saw peoples' activities as largely self-interested. Yet, he believed that in addition to such universal interests, as the acquisition of wealth, a historian and sociologists must recognise, the importance of goals and values specific to a society.

Weber was however, very concerned with power and with the ways in which some people secure domination over others. As a result of his concern, he suggested three main foundations for successful claim to authority (three 'ideal types'):

- Charismatic authority: This authority rests on a leader's personal quality, so that 'the governed submit because of their belief in the extraordinary quality of the specific person.... The legitimacy of the charismatic ruler thus rests upon the belief in magical powers, revelations, and hero worship.' In this light, Jesus' disciples followed him because of what he was, not because of some position that he held (Wallace & Wolf 2006:73).
- Traditional authority: This authority is also personal, but it is enjoyed because it has been handed down from the past. For example, a king or a tribal chief

may not personally be capable or effective, but he enjoys authority legitimated by custom (Wallace & Wolf 2006:73).

- Rational-legal authority: This type of authority is derived from formal rules. Hence, modern bureaucrats are obeyed because and insofar as statutes empower them to do certain things because our societies accept statutory laws as the ultimate source of authority. In this light, Weber holds that the anchoring of legitimacy in particular sorts of rules is central to modern society's ongoing 'rationalisation' of everything (Wallace & Wolf 2006:74).

Wallace & Wolf (2006:74) indicate that Weber did not disagree with Marx's view that economic interests often underlie people's behaviour, even when not acknowledged. However, they indicate that Weber believed Marx to be wrong in identifying economic characteristics as the sole crucial determinant of both social structures and people's chances in life. He argued that someone's religion, education, or political faction may, be as important a source of power and success. His argument, they say has had great influence on modern analytic theorists who, like him, believe that economic factors are not always the major determinants of people's lives and power.

It is obvious that some people get into some positions not for economic reasons but to demonstrate wealth, prowess and to seek fame and or recognition. For example, when the rich in Nso' *tang* ngwerong as seen in chapter six of this study, they want to demonstrate wealth and seek for recognition as the "powerful" people of the society.

1.5.2.3 Phenomenology

Compared to functionalism and conflict theory, phenomenology is one of the most recent sociological perspectives. Like conflict theory, the word phenomenological sociology encompasses several types of sociological analysis. The three most prominent ones are: Harold Garfinkel's ethno-methodology, Peter Berger's social reality construction, and Dorothy E. Smith's feminist standpoint theory (Wallace & Wolf 2006:262). The focus here is on Peter Berger's social reality construction for its relevance to the research.

Before discussing how Berger's theory operates, it seems necessary to briefly say something more about phenomenology in general. According to Wallace & Wolf (2006:262), the word phenomenon is derived from the Greek meaning 'appearance'.

The Encyclopaedia of Sociology defines phenomenology as ‘a method in philosophy’ that begins with the individual and his own conscious experience and tries to avoid prior assumptions, prejudices, and philosophical dogmas. Phenomenology thus examines phenomena as they are apprehended in their ‘immediacy’ by the social actor (Wallace & Wolf 2006:262).

Furthermore, Wallace & Wolf (2006:262) points out that phenomenology asks us not to take the notions we have learned for granted, but to question them instead, to question our way of looking at and our way of being in the world. Simply put, this perspective as they indicate, asks us to assume the role of the stranger, like a visitor from a foreign country. In addition, phenomenological sociologists study how people define their social situations once they have suspended or ‘bracketed’ their learned cultural notions.

The intellectual roots of phenomenological sociology are Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Alfred Schütz (1899-1959), all of German origin. Husserl is said to have been the first to use the word phenomenology. He defined it as an interest in those things that can be directly apprehended by one’s senses (Wallace & Wolf 2006:263).

According to Wallace & Wolf this is the essential point about phenomenology:

It denies that we can ever know more about things than what we experience directly through our senses. All our knowledge comes directly from these sensory phenomena. Anything else is speculation, and Husserl argued that we should not even try to speculate (Wallace & Wolf 2006:263).

Consequently, phenomenological sociologists see the task of sociology as describing precisely how we see the world, although they emphasise that our perceptions are moulded intrinsically by our concepts (Wallace & Wolf 2006:263). With this background, the researcher now concentrates on one of the phenomenological approaches – the social construction of reality, as mentioned above. He already bears in mind that phenomenology has to do with one’s worldview.

The social construction of reality is represented by the work of Peter Berger, an Austrian, born in 1929. The theoretical underpinnings for his work appears in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), which he co-authored with Thomas Luckmann (Wallace & Wolf 2006:285).

As far as key concepts for *The Social Construction of Reality* are concerned, Berger and Luckmann as Wallace & Wolf (2006:285) point out, takes a sociology of knowledge approach. In it, they focus on the ‘processes by which *any* body of ‘knowledge’ comes to be socially accepted as ‘reality.’” By reality construction Berger and Luckmann mean the process whereby people continuously create, through their actions and interactions, a shared reality that is experienced as objectively factual and subjectively meaningful. Furthermore, they assume that everyday reality is a socially constructed system in which people bestow a certain order on everyday phenomena, a reality that has both subjective and objective elements. By subjective, Berger and Luckmann mean that the reality is personally meaningful to the individual. By objective they refer to the social order, or the institutional world, which they view as a human product (Wallace & Wolf 2006:286).

According to Wallace & Wolf (2006:286), the heart of this theory deals with the question of how everyday reality is socially constructed. And as Berger and Luckmann put it, ‘How is it possible that subjective meanings become objective facilities?’ Their phenomenological analysis is focused on the subjective experience of the reality of everyday life, the here and now. This reality as Berger and Luckmann explain it also includes the past and future: ‘My attention to this world (of everyday life) is mainly determined by what I am doing, have done, or plan to do in it.’

Their focus is not however, on a self-contained world, for the reality of everyday life is described as an ‘intersubjective world, a world that I share with others.’ In this wise, Berger and Luckmann are convinced that face-to-face interaction is where the real action is. According to them, face-to-face interaction is the prototype of social interaction and that all other cases of social interaction derive from it (Wallace & Wolf 2006:286-287). Wallace & Wolf (2006:287) point out that the including of both objective and subjective realities in their framework makes their theory to be viewed as an attempt to bridge the micro-and macroscopic levels of analysis.

Berger and Luckmann’s theory has three key concepts, which they describe as ‘moments’ of dialectical process: externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation (Wallace & Wolf 2006:287). A brief explanation for each of processes is given below:

The first moment in the continuing dialectical process of the social construction of reality is *externalisation*, wherein individuals, by their own human activity, create their social worlds. Berger and Luckmann view the social order as an ongoing human production. According to them, the social order is the 'result of past human activity' and 'exists only insofar as human activity continues to produce it' (Wallace & Wolf 2006:287). Externalisation thus has two dimensions. First, human beings can create a new social reality, like forming a new friendship or starting a new business. Second, human beings can recreate social institutions by their ongoing externalisation of them, like maintaining and renewing old friendships or paying income taxes (Wallace & Wolf 2006:287).

The second moment, *objectivation* is the process whereby individuals apprehend everyday life as an ordered, prearranged reality that imposes itself upon but is seemingly independent of human beings. For the individual as Berger and Luckmann put it, 'the reality of everyday' life appears already objectified, that is, constituted by an order of objects that have been designated as objects before my appearance on the scene (Wallace & Luckmann 2006:288). For example, language is the means by which objects are designated. Berger and Luckmann explain, 'The common objectivations of everyday life are maintained primarily by linguistic signification. Everyday life is, above all, life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowmen. An understanding of language is thus essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life' (Wallace & Wolf 2006:288). Following this explanation, the role of language in maintaining common objectivations as Wallace & Wolf (2006:288) point out suggests that changes in language will be resisted.

There is therefore no doubt that one of the crucial issues that cut across the study is that of language. The indigenous people preferred their own language to any. In some cases, like in Nso' the introduction of a new language – Mungaka by the missionaries faced an outright rejection.

Internalisation, the third moment of the dialectical process is a kind of socialisation by which the legitimation of the institutional order is ensured. According to Berger, successful socialisation means that there is a high degree of symmetry between both objective and subjective reality and objective and subjective identity. Whereas 'objectivation implies the production of a real social world, external to the individuals

inhabiting it; internalisation implies that this same social world will have the status of reality within the consciousness of those individuals' (Wallace & Wolf 2006:289).

Wallace & Wolf (2006:290) indicate that the social construction theory argues that whenever individuals engage in internalisation, they are conforming to the expectations of existing social institutions, and they are also recreating that social institution. Accordingly, the creation of a new institution occurs in the moment of externalisation; once externalised, it is objectified; and once objectified, it acts back on the individual as an internalised entity. As Berger and Luckmann sum it up: 'Society is a human product' (externalisation); society is an objective reality' (objectivation); and 'man is a social product' (internalisation) (Wallace & Wolf 2006:290).

1.5.2.4 Social identity theory

McLeod, (2008) defines social identity as a person's sense of who he or she is based on his or her group membership(s). Simply put, it is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s).

It seems necessary to note that the social identity theory was propounded by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979). The theory explains that part of a person's concept of self comes from the groups to which that person belongs. An individual does not just have a personal selfhood, but multiple selves and identities associated with their affiliated groups. A person might act differently in varying social contexts according to the groups they belong to, which might include a sports team they follow, their family, their country of nationality, and the neighbourhood they live in, among many other possibilities.

Tajfel (1979) as McLeod points out proposed that the groups (e.g. social class, family, football team etc.) which people belong to are an important source of pride and self-esteem. Groups give us a sense of social identity: a sense of belonging to the social world.

McLeod indicates that in order to increase our self-image we enhance the status of the group to which we belong. For example, England is the best country in the world! We can also increase our self-image by discriminating and holding prejudice

views against the out-group (the group we don't belong to). For example, the Americans, French etc. are a bunch of losers!

An example from Cameroon is when the French-speaking Cameroonians call the English-speaking ones, Anglo-fools and the English-speaking ones in turn call them Franco-fools.

Following Tajfel, McLeod indicates that in this categorisation, we divide the world into “them” and “us” based through a process of social categorisation (i.e. we put people into social groups). This, they say, is known as in-group (us) and out-group (them). Social identity theory as they further point out states that the in-group will discriminate against the out-group to enhance their self-image.

Furthermore, McLeod points out that the central hypothesis of social identity theory is that group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their self-image.

For example, he indicates that prejudiced views between cultures may result in racism; in its extreme forms, racism may result in genocide, such as occurred in Germany with the Jews, in Rwanda between the Hutus and Tutsis and, more recently, in the former Yugoslavia between the Bosnians and Serbs.

Henri Tajfel (1969) proposed that stereotyping (i.e. putting people into groups and categories) is based on a normal cognitive process: the tendency to group things together. In doing so we tend to exaggerate:

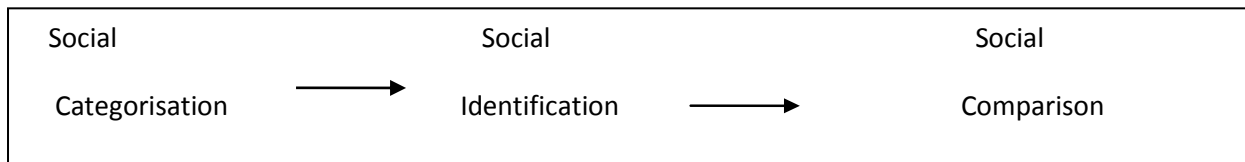
- the differences between groups
- the similarities of things in the same group.

Practically, we categorise people in the same way. We see the group to which we belong (the in-group) as being different from the others (the out-group), and members of the same group as being more similar than they are. Social categorisation is one explanation for prejudice attitudes (i.e. “them” and “us” mentality) which leads to in-groups and out-groups.

McLeod gives the following as examples of in-groups – out-groups: Northern Ireland: Catholics and Protestants; Rwanda: Hutus and Tutsis; Yugoslavia: the Bosnians and

Serbs; Germany: Jews and the Nazis; Politics: Labour and Conservatives; Football: Liverpool and Manchester United; Gender: Male and Female; Social Class: Middle and Working Classes.

As far as social identity theory outline is concerned, Tajfel & Turner (1979) proposed that there are three mental processes involved in evaluating others as “us” or “them” (i.e. “in-group” and “out-group”). These take place in a particular order:



The three mental processes above are explained as follows:

Social categorisation: Just as we categorise objects in order to understand and identify them, in a very similar way, we categorise people (including ourselves) in order to understand the social environment. Some examples of social categories include black, white, professor, student, Republican, and Democrat. By knowing what categories, we belong to, we can understand things about ourselves, and we can define appropriate behaviour according to the groups that we and others belong to. An individual can belong to several groups at the same time.

Social identification: We adopt the identity of the group that we belong to, and we act in ways that we perceive members of that group act. For example, if you identify as a Democrat, you will most likely behave within the norms of that group. As a consequence of your identification with that group, you will develop emotional significance to that identification, and your self-esteem will be dependent on it.

Social comparison: After we categorise ourselves within a group and identify ourselves as being members of that group, we tend to compare our group (the in-group) against another group (an out-group). To maintain your self-esteem, you and your group members will compare your group favourably against other ones. This helps explain prejudice and discrimination, since a group will tend to view members of competing groups negatively to increase self-esteem.

McLeod points out that this is critical to understanding prejudice, because once two groups identify themselves as rivals, they are forced to compare in order for the members to maintain their self-esteem. Competition and hostility between groups, he goes on is thus not a matter of competing for resources like jobs but also the result of competing identities. In social identity theory the group membership is not something foreign or artificial which is attached to the person; it is a real, true and vital part of the person.

In this research, the social identity theory (SIT) is used to explain why there is always some tension when different groups meet and perhaps throw light on how such tension could be curbed.

The other three sociological theories are complementary to each other in that where the one does not fit well the other does. For example, while functionalism focuses on values, conflict theory stresses on interests. The table below gives a summary comparison of sociological perspectives of the three theories:

Points under consideration	Functionalism	Conflict theory	Phenomenology
Level of analysis	Macro	Macro	Micro
View of human beings	Predictable	Predictable	Creative
Motivation for human social action	Values	Interests	Values
Scientific approach	Deductive	Deductive	Inductive

The Table is adapted from (Wallace & Wolf 2006:11) and modified.

1.6 Literature review

This section attempts a review of relevant missional literature for the study. Mindful of the vast literature that has been produced in the domain of Christian missions, the review concentrates on two main areas: the relationship between Christian missions and cultures, and the theological foundation of Christian missions. The literature thus paints the picture of what happens when Christian mission and culture meet. It is from this review that the research gap is determined for the study.

1.6.1 The Relationship between Christian missions and cultures

In his renowned book, *Transforming Mission*, David J. Bosch (1991:291) identifies culture as one of the four “relationships” which are the major compromises of the Christian mission across the centuries. The other three are: relationships with the state, with disunity in the church and with money. As far as culture is concerned, he points out that the West’s feeling of superiority at the Enlightenment did not distinguish between religions and cultural supremacy. For example, he indicates that in the early years of its existence, the American Board distinguished between darkness, blindness, superstition and ignorance among pagan nations then light, vision, enlightenment and knowledge in the West. Both religion and culture in the West were intertwined. Consequently, just as the West’s religion was predestined to be spread around the globe, the West’s culture was to be victorious over all others. For example, Bosch (1991:292) cites the objectives of the American Board with respect to American Indians; which was described as making ‘the whole tribe English in their language, civilised in their habits, and Christian in their religion.’ Bosch (1991:297) however affirms that the gospel always comes to people in the cultural robes of the bearer and that there is no such thing as a ‘pure’ gospel, isolated from culture. Hence, it was therefore inevitable that Western missionaries would not only introduce ‘Christ’ to Africa and Asia, but also ‘civilisation’. By so doing, they presented their own religious culture, which has been an obstacle for the inculturation of the gospel in Africa.

The Church Growth School of missiologists as cited in Newbigin (1995:124) raises some basic questions summarised in three fields. One of these questions is the relation between gospel, church and culture (conversion and culture). In discussing this issue, Newbigin (1995:141) following McGavran’s points out that one of the hindrances to church growth is a failure to recognise and honour differences in culture. “The consequence of this failure” he says, “is that conversion separates converts from their culture, robs them of a great part of their human inheritance, and makes them second-class adherents of an alien culture” (Newbigin1995:141).

Wilbert R. Shenk (1999:48) however points out that the way people think about culture has changed greatly over the past two hundred years. It has moved from what he calls “a pre-critical” to “a critical understanding” and from a critical to a

constructive view of culture. He affirms that all human beings are conditioned to experience life from within the cultures into which they are born and reared. On cultural understanding and practices, he makes the following summary observations:

First, culture is important theologically because God created human beings to live in culture and to contribute to culture formation. Second, the fact that culture is theologically significant calls for critical evaluation of the issues posed by a particular culture.... Third, we must abandon the notion that there is a blueprint, a master culture, by which we can engage in evaluation of other cultures.... No culture may be equated with God's reign. Each culture is a flawed product of human effort (Shenk 1999:50).

Considering the observations above, Shenk (1999:50) suggests that it is culture rather than theological vision that has been central to formulating conceptions of mission.

Affirming this view, a report from a working group of the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Council indicates that any theology concerning the nature and shape of the church in a new missionary context must address the appropriate place of culture in shaping the church (Mission-Shaped Church 2004:90). The new missionary context that is meant here would likely be missional in approach.

Similarly, Kirk (1999:75) points out that the gospel is conveyed through culture since it is always culturally mediated. In addition, and based on ethnic and national identity, he indicates that each people is immersed to their own culture so much so that it is hard to see its defects or the strengths and goodness of other cultures. On the Western nature of Christian faith, Kirk (1999:80) like Bosch above cites the problem of cultural estrangement, stemming from the fact that one of the effects of the modern missionary movement has been to bring about a renaissance of other religions and cultures. The problem of this cultural estrangement, he says has two dimensions:

- Conceptual dimension, where it becomes difficult to separate belief in the gospel from values and institutions of the Western society in which the gospel has been subtly shaped. It is also difficult as he points out, to relate the gospel to societies moulded for so long by vastly different belief systems as Christianity is generally seen as an intruder.

- Practical dimension, where to become a Christian appears to be a betrayal of loyalty to family, group or nation. Baptism in particular, he states is seen as a sign of abandoning one's cultural roots and joining a foreign religion.

This echoes the view of Yaya, one of the main characters in *The White Man of God* (Jumbam 1980:32). Yaya denounces baptism and clings to the fact that she sees nothing wrong with her own ancestors. Similarly, a leader of the Coptic Evangelical Church of Egypt is quoted to have said to some missionaries: 'We would like to go to heaven with the help of brothers. But if you want to send us to heaven by being our masters, we will prefer to go to hell' (Hopkins 1977:11). This was certainly a reaction to the missionaries' portrayal of superiority over the Egyptians.

Furthermore, and with reference to the history of mission, Kirk (1999:81) alludes to the fact that the gospel brought by Western missionaries to Africa, Asia, and Latin America, had an impact on indigenous cultures in that they were misunderstood, caricatured and humiliated. Consequently, the churches born as a result became subcultures alienated from the living traditions of the people.

In his conclusion that maps the way for mission in the third millennium, Kirk (1999:233-234) holds that announcing the good news in culturally authentic ways among other issues will remain the core missionary activity of the church still attuned in the third millennium to the voice of its leader saying, "Come! Follow me!" This indicates that, this study on Christian missions and African cultures is relevant.

According to McGavran and Newbigin, any failure to recognise and honour culture leads to the separation of converts from their context, robs them of a great part of their human inheritance, and makes them second-class adherents of an alien culture (Newbigin1995:141). Shenk (1999:48) adds the issue of life experience as an important element of the notion of culture. He affirms that all human beings are conditioned to experience life from within the cultures into which they are born and reared. Hence, mission needs to take culture seriously.

Kirk (1999:75) holds the view that culture affects every aspect of mission and is central to mission at every point. The gospel can only be proclaimed in a culture, not at a culture, any theology concerning the nature and shape of the church in any given context must address the appropriate place of culture in rooting the gospel (Mission-Shaped Church2004: 87-90).

Alluding to external influences and their impact on Nso' culture, Yele (2008:40-41) points out that many converts were taught to refrain from associating with those ceremonies considered 'pagan'. For example, these converts began to shun the authority of the *Fon* (the sacral ruler of Nso' people) and by extension stigmatised Nso' people who were members of traditional social associations.

The life experience of Paul supports the fact that Christianity is only lived in culture(s): "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews..." (1Corinthians 9:19ff).

This view affirms that fact that announcing the good news in culturally authentic ways requires cultural identity. African churches and African theologians are struggling to recover cultural identity as a sense of authenticity in response to the gospel (Castro 1985:11). They do this by affirming values of the traditional culture and ATR, not simply as a way to facilitate the penetration of the gospel, but to contribute to the total spiritual riches of the Christian church.

In addition, they explore the many links existing between the biblical story and Africa (Castro1985:11). For example, Kwesi A. Dickson as cited in Castro (1985:11) elaborates on the continuity between the Old Testament and African life and thought. Meanwhile preachers in Africa are known for always pointing to the Exodus story, the Queen of Sheba, King Solomon and very peculiarly to the refuge provided by Egypt to the infant Jesus and his parents. The most significant illustration of this search for roots and identity Castro (1985:12) says is provided by the 'Confession of Alexandria', drafted by the General Committee of the All Africa Conference of Churches in Cairo, Egypt, in 1976 which dwells on African consciousness of her rich heritage and the call for liberation from all forms of injustices. Christian missions cannot do without the cultural factor. Hence, there is a need to continue the search and recovery of cultural identity in undertaking Christian missions.

The Melbourne Conference of 1980 on "World Mission and Evangelism" contributed a great deal to the ongoing search for cultural identity (Scott in Anderson), (1982:43). The Conference observed that the Bible as 'the Canon of the churches' proclamation must be read and acted upon by the people in the light of their local struggles. It was also stressed that the churches must live with the tension between the gospel and

the local culture. Furthermore, it was stated that there is a risk of syncretism for all churches in relation to their context, but that must not prevent the churches from struggling with the necessity of relating the local churches to the kingdom of God (Anderson (ed.) 1982:119).

The issue of syncretism is re-echoed in *Mission-Shaped Church* in which the report states that all attempts at inculturation struggle with the danger of syncretism. Yet in any attempt to be 'relevant' one may fall into syncretism, and in the effort to avoid syncretism one may become 'irrelevant' (Mission-Shaped Church 2004:91).

The report affirms that "any theology concerning the nature and shape of the church in a new missionary context must address the appropriate place of culture in shaping the church" (Mission-Shaped Church 2004: 87-90).

Similarly, Fochang in Dah (ed.) (2007:177-178) opines that culture is a necessary vehicle for mission. He indicates that if mission means being sent, then the messenger has a message. The message to be communicated, he goes on, must be intelligibly communicated and since every culture has formulated a grid for interpreting the world around them, anything that is coming new can be comprehended only by using the original categories of analysis. Furthermore, he states that we cannot begin to take in new ideas except in terms of ideas we already have. Such he says is the ambivalence of culture's impact on mission.

Hesselgrave (1991:115) is therefore right to point out that the missionary must note that every culture has elements of divine order and satanic rebellion; each has the potential for the revelation of God's truth and for its concealment or mutilation. Furthermore, he indicates that the missionary cannot communicate without concerning himself/herself with culture because communication is inextricable from culture. He adds that just as the Word became flesh and dwelt among people, so propositional truth must have a cultural incarnation to be meaningful. Pushing the point further, he states that the missionary cannot communicate Christianity without concerning himself/herself with culture because, although Christianity is supracultural in its origin and truth, it is cultural in its application (Hesselgrave 1991:119).

Affirming the importance of culture in mission, Bevans and Schroeder state that:

Culture, whether prized as holy ground from the anthropological model or looked on with some suspicion, as in the counter-cultural model is still regarded as of utmost importance for theology and Christian life. Human beings are not abstract creatures; they are radically cultural beings (2004:389).

From every indication, so far, culture is very essential for mission. Mission cannot be done void of culture.

Kuitse in Shenk (ed.) (1993:123) affirms this fact as follows:

For mission the cultural issue is important. Human beings are cultural beings.... There is no culture which cannot be used by the Holy Spirit as an instrument to bring people in contact with the divine revelation in Christ, with the word of God that has become flesh. The Spirit judges and uses human culture: The Spirit can change and transform culture (Shenk 1993:123).

The incarnate Word does same penetration and transformation of cultures without discrimination.

Azumah in Singh (ed.) (2011:65) indicates that the contrasting attitudes toward the doctrine of incarnation is carried into the understanding of scriptural and cultural translation in Islam and Christianity. But as far as Christianity and language is concerned, Azumah states:

Language wise, Jesus spoke and taught in Aramaic but the New Testament was written in Greek. Thus, right from its inception, Christianity had no sacred language. On the contrary, at the Pentecost experience in Acts chapter 2, the Holy Spirit caused the disciples to testify in 'other tongues', i.e. languages other than their own, to the amazement of foreign visitors who were astonished to hear Galileans declare the wonders of God in their own native tongues. The Pentecost events for many, provides a clear Biblical case, indeed, imperative, for the place of the mother tongue and, therefore, scriptural translation in Christian mission (Azumah 2011:65).

Language is one of the cultural identities of each and every people. Hence, the relevance of the translation of the Scripture into various languages (mother tongues) is imperative for the understanding of the incarnation.

That is the more reason why Walls (1996:85) makes it clear that Christian mission is not simply about multiplication of the church but involves the following activities: fulfilling the Great Commission, penetration of the cultures of African peoples and the ways of thought (philosophy of life) that relates to the word or message about Christ. The translation of the word into flesh has to be the starting point of the encounter. The incarnation that brought the Divine Son to live in the very culture-specific

situation of Jewish Palestine has to find its place in African cultural contexts. Mission is about the translation of the Scripture into thought and action as the word about Christ is brought to bear on the points of reference within culture, the things through which people know themselves and recognise where they belong.

Yet, Marvin K. Mayers (1974:15) rightly points out that change seriously affects the mission of the church in either Christian growth or in evangelism. He indicates that a church tradition programme within the church may force a continual flow of membership out of the church in search of meaning. That notwithstanding, he also indicates that some Christians may conform so completely to the traditional programme of the church or mission that it loses vitality or self-motivation. In this way, he intimates that the church thus drifts from the truth to falsehood without ever realising what is happening, 'having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof' (2Tim.3:15), (Mayers 1974:15). Furthermore, Mayers states:

There is so little understanding of cultural differences that the Church and its mission extension refuse to prepare for multicultural confrontation and thus any adjustment or adaptation to more than one life-way is banned on the grounds of compromise of belief. Even innovation within the Church arouses suspicion, since it resembles that which exists outside the culture or subculture of the Church. If it has not been done before, its soundness is questioned. The end result is a static worldview that places high value changelessness and on the continual reinforcing of the 'form' or the way something is expressed, instead of on meaning (Mayers 1974:15).

Given the fact that the beliefs of Christianity are so different from those of other religions, Mayers indicates that some change will be necessary if the missionary is doing his/her work.

The group that handled the theme seven "Christian Communities in Contemporary Context", *Edinburgh 2010 Volume II, witnessing to Christ today*, affirms that history attests to the need to acknowledge and appreciate people's cultures and the lay foundation for mission in order to be effective (Daryl & Kim (eds.) 2010:190). The group points out that within the East African context it is necessary to consider communal values and therefore do mission from the grassroots. Furthermore, they indicate that it is essential to understand cultural dynamics in evangelising a community. The group affirms that the basic Christian values of justice and love remain the guiding values of mission in whatever time and place. In the context of mission in contemporary East Africa the group points out that these values translate

into: sharing, compassion, integrity, equity as opposed to charity, humility, and respect for the human person and building community beginning with family values (Daryl & Kim (eds.) 2010:190). From every indication, it is clear that culture and the contextual realities serve to guide how mission should be carried out. Yet there is need for further guidance.

In 1991 writing competition organised by the then Presbyterian Theological College, Kumba, now the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Jum Ignatius wrote on “Christianity in Nso’: A Balance Between Culture and Faith”. In this essay, Jum examines the early missionary approaches to Nso’ culture and its consequences. His examination includes the Roman Catholic and the Protestant missionaries. His examination brings out the reasons for the success and survival of Christianity in Nso’ Fandom endowed with a cultural heritage without much conflict, destruction and distortion (Jum 1991: ii).

The approach of the missionaries in the coastal regions of Cameroon led to conflicts between them and the natives as they were considered as idol worshippers. In his book *The History of the Presbyterian Church in West Cameroon*, Werner Keller (1963:64) mentions that some of the idols and jujus were drowned in rivers while some were taken to Europe. Jum (1991:7) calls this act of the missionaries a suffering from misunderstanding, misconception and misinformation. However, as the missionaries moved into the grassland area of Cameroon, Jum (1991:12) mentions that their attitude towards culture changed greatly for the better. For example, the Roman Catholic Fathers accepted some social groups like *samba* (a socio-cultural group for men only) and *chong* (a socio-cultural group for women only) to operate in the church premises. The Protestants accepted local instruments for music in church, later translated some hymns to *Lamnso’* and this attracted many Nso’ people to join them in worship (Jum 1991:14).

On the contrary, in his Diploma thesis titled, “The Family Life of the Nso People, Before and After the Coming of the Christian Missions”, Wirdzeka Fai Godlove unlike Jum above indicates that the approach of the missionaries to Nso’ culture was not positive, especially in the area of polygamy [polygyny]. Wirdzeka intimates that according to Nso’ culture a person with many wives is considered rich. He says that the law of the Christian missions against polygynists is provoked more by the social

and economic life of the day and not the Bible. In his opinion there is no place in the Bible that condemns polygyny, even the Ten Commandments (Wirdzeka 1994:38-40). He strongly objects to the Christian teaching that to become a full member of the Christian Church a polygamist has to send away some wives and remain with only one (Wirdzeka 1994:41). Furthermore, he goes on to say that Christianity has brought a sort of *coup d'état* and toppled Nso' tradition in many ways: divided families, split homes and broken marriages (Wirzeka 1994:41). This indicates that there is a need to understand culture for effective mission.

1.6.2 Literature review on foundations/mandates for Christian mission

In his book, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, John Stott (1975:37), locates the foundation and mandate for mission in the Great Commission wherein emphasis is placed on evangelism – preaching, converting and teaching (cf. Mk.16:15; Mtt.28:19-20; Lk. 24:47; Acts 1:8). On the other hand, he points out that the Johannine version of the Great Commission Jn. 17:18 and 20:21 is the crucial form for the church's mission modelled after that of Christ: “as the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” Hence, as Christ came to serve, Christian mission is also for service to mankind. Stott (1975:40) cites another aspect of the mission of the son – the incarnation, where Christ took to himself our humanity, our flesh and blood, our culture.

Christ identified with us so we should identify with others but without losing our Christian identity (Stoott 1975:40). Finally, Stott places the Great Commission and a great commandment side by side and states that the Great Commission neither explains, nor exhausts, none supersedes the great commandment. What it does, is to add to the requirement of neighbour-love and neighbour-service a new and urgent Christian dimension (Stott 1975:46). Accordingly, we are sent into the world, like Jesus to serve. This he says is the natural expression of our love for our neighbours. “We love.” We go.” “We serve” (Stott 1975:47). Mission in this respect is Christ centred, yet God's mission.

Similarly, Shenk (1999:7) indicates that for mission to be authentic it must be thoroughly theocentric. Such a mission begins in God's redemptive purpose and will be complete when that purpose is fulfilled. Hence, the God-given identity of the church he says arises from its mission. This order of priority as he puts it is

foundational. In other words, the church is known by its God-given mission and without mission its existence is questionable. This attests to the fact that the Christian faith is intrinsically missionary (Bosch 1991:8) and affirms the assertion that ‘the church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning’ (Emil Brunner quoted in Bevans & Schroeder 2011:116).

On the other hand, criticising Warneck, Bosch (1991:4-5) places the foundation of mission under two sources: “supernatural” and “natural.” With regard to the supernatural, mission is founded on Scripture (Matthew 28:18-20) and on the monotheistic nature of the Christian faith. Then regarding the natural foundation of mission, four points are advanced: i) the absoluteness and superiority of Christian religion when compared with other religions; ii) the acceptability and adaptability of Christianity to all peoples and conditions; iii) the superior achievements of Christian mission on the ‘mission fields’; and iv) the fact that Christianity has, in the past and present, shown itself to be stronger than all other religions.

Furthermore, Bosch (1991:519) like Shenk above holds the view that mission is *missio Dei*, but adds that such a mission seeks to subsume into itself the *missiones ecclesiae*, the missionary programmes of the church. He stresses that it is not the church which ‘undertakes’ mission; it is the *missio Dei* which constitutes the church. He however points out that the mission of the church needs constantly to be renewed and reconceived. The *missio Dei* he says, purifies the church, sets it under the cross – the place where it is ever safe, the place of humiliation and judgement as well as the place of refreshment and new birth. Hence, as a community of the cross he points out, the church then constitutes the fellowship of the kingdom, not just ‘church members’ but invites people to the feast without end.

Wilbert R. Shenk (ed.) (1993:25) opines that the foundation for mission should be based on the messiahship of Jesus. He argues that during the last century (twentieth) theologies of mission have been written emphasising culture, anthropology, kingdom of God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, eschatology, the mission of God, and the church. This he says has been marked by uncertainty as to the proper basis for mission, producing varieties of mission, such as “cultural mission”, “spiritual mission” and “post-Christian mission” (1993:26). Shenk (ed.) (1993:28) has described the first two varieties of mission above as inadequate and the last one

irreconcilable with mission. The degree of the inadequacy and the irreconcilable nature of these varieties of mission, notwithstanding, there is a need to agree that something is wrong somewhere and needs to be redressed. If Christian mission has to be authentic it must engage cultures with a greater degree of seriousness.

That notwithstanding, he bases his argument on the fact that Jesus criticised Jewish proselytising mission. Yet he stresses that Jesus did not condemn and reject the mission but transformed it. Hence, he sees the need for the transfiguration of mission. He agrees that missiological approaches will have to change in the next century (twenty first), and a relevant missiology will be one that helps the church embrace its mission fully through a clear discernment of the times (Shenk) (29-30). In other words, mission, will have to follow the contextual realities. There will however be no context without culture.

Wright (2010:20) points out that the Bible shows God sending many people 'on a mission from God', and the missionary movement in the book of Acts begins with a church responding to that divine impulse by sending Paul and Barnabas out on the first missionary journey (2010:23). People are sent for mission to carry out a number of activities. For example: God sent Joseph to save lives in a famine (Gen.45:7); Moses to deliver people from oppression and exploitation (Ex.3:10); Elijah to influence the course of international politics (1Kings 19:15-18); Jeremiah to proclaim God's Word (Jer. 1:7); Jesus was sent to preach the news, to proclaim freedom, to give sight to the blind and to offer release from oppression (Lk.4:16-19; cf. Is. 61:1) (2010:23). Furthermore, the disciples were sent to preach and demonstrate the delivering and healing power of God (Mtt.10:5-8). Following John Stott, Wright (2010:24) points out that 'Mission arises from the heart of God himself, and is communicated from his heart to ours. Mission is the global outreach of the global people of God.'

Wright (2010:27) indicates that there is a need to think carefully about what the Bible as a whole has to say about who exactly are 'God's people', and in what sense they are (and always have been) a people with a mission. He includes so much exposition of Old Testament texts in this book and argues that the New Testament Church did not actually have the New Testament when they set out on the task of world mission (Wright 2010:29). He points that it was the Scriptures of the Old

Testament that provided the motivation and justification for their missional practice, as well as the underlying theological assumptions and expectations that reassured them that what they were doing was 'biblical' (Wright 2010:29).

Furthermore, Wright (2010:48-9) sees the need to connect the understanding of Christian mission to the Old Testament, from Genesis as the beginning of the Bible, for the Bible begins and ends with creation. Additionally, he points out that human life and creation are integrally bound together (Wright 2010:54-55). God's people are indeed "people who care for creation" so they have a mission of caring for creation ((Wright 2010:49). Hence, holistic mission involves the care for the whole creation.

1.7 Research gap

The research gaps identified from the review above are five-fold: First, there is a difference in methodology and contexts. For example, (Newbigin 1995; Kirk 1999 and Shenk1999) write about Christian missions and cultures in general terms and from a Western perspective. This research treats traditional social associations as aspects of African cultures from the perspective of an insider. Second, *ngwerong* and *ngiri* have been approached from the perspective of social institutions (secret societies) by Mzeka (1999:74-74, 111) and Yele (2008:34) but this research looks at them from the perspective of traditional social associations. This is because the name 'secret society' from its origin is prejudicial. Third, when the story of Mathew, the catechist who fellowshiped both as a Christian and a member of the traditional social association – *ngwerong* is told, some Christians and church theologians see him as a model of syncretism and as one who pays double allegiance (cf. Jumbam1980:148). This research uses present examples of catechists, pastors and priests who are members of these traditional social associations in Nso' as missional agents to these associations. Fourth, Yele (2008:41) mentions that some of the new converts into Christianity began to shun the authority of the *Fon* and by extension stigmatised Christians in traditional social associations. There seems to be no tangible reasons for stigmatisation of members of these associations. This research finds out and seeks possibilities for de-stigmatisation. Fifth, churches born out of the misunderstood, caricatured and humiliated cultures of Africa, Asia, and Latin America became sub-religious cultures alienated from the living traditions of the people (Kirk1999:81). Efforts are being made in the area of contextualisation to make the gospel more relevant to the African contexts and others. This research

joins the debate from the perspective of missional approach which is not yet known in the context of Cameroon.

1.8 Research methodology

Missiology is basically theological in nature, but it is unable to deal with its theological concerns without the aid of both theological and secular disciplines. Simply put, missiology is interdisciplinary in nature (Luztebak 1996:14). Given this fact, the qualitative empirical method of research is used in conducting the study.

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artefacts; cultural texts; and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. In these ways, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:2-3). Furthermore, qualitative researchers draw upon and utilise the approaches, methods and techniques of ethno-methodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminist, interviews, cultural studies, survey research and participant observations, among others. All of these research practices, 'can provide important insights and knowledge' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:6).

Denzin & Lincoln (2000:8) point out that qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relation between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

Following Holloway & Wheeler, Nieuwenhuis (2007:51), affirms that qualitative research typically studies people or systems by interacting with and observing the participants in the natural environment (*in situ*) and focusing on their meanings and interpretations. In this way, he indicates that the emphasis in qualitative research is on the quality and depth of information and not on the scope or breadth of the information provided as in quantitative research.

According to Denzin & Lincoln (2000:19-20), the four major interpretive paradigms that structure qualitative research are: positivist and post-positivist, constructivist-

interpretative, critical (Marxist, emancipator), and feminist post-structural. A brief meaning of these contrasting terms seems necessary: the positivists assert that objective accounts of the real world can be given, while the post-positivists believe that only partially objective accounts of the world can be produced, because all methods for examining them are flawed (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:19-20). Interpretivists focus on people's subjective experiences, on how people 'construct' the social world by sharing meanings, and how they interact with or relate with each other. They also assume that reality is not objectively determined, but is socially constructed. Interpretivists equally consider that by the richness, depth and complexity of phenomena we can develop a sense of understanding of the meanings imparted by people to phenomena and their social context. Furthermore, they propose that there are multiple and no single realities of phenomena, and that these realities can differ across time and space. They also indicate that as researchers, our knowledge and understanding are always limited to the things we have been exposed, our own unique experiences and the meanings we impart.

In simple terms, the ultimate aim of interpretivist research is to offer a perspective of a situation. This is done by analysing the situation under study to provide insight into the way in which a particular group of people make sense of their situation or the phenomena they encounter (Nieuwenhuis 2007:60).

In this study, the researcher is following the post-positivists and the constructivist-interpretive perspectives because of their inclusive nature. However, it seems necessary to note that the choice of the research design as Nieuwenhuis (2007:70) points out is based on both the researcher's assumptions, research skills and practices, and influences the way in which he collects data. Hence, the use of a phenomenological perspective is invaluable in this endeavour.

1.8.1 Nature of data collection

Data collection methods used in this study include: document analysis, participant observation, interviewing and focus groups.

1.8.1.1 Documents

As far as research is concerned, the term "documents" is used to mean unpublished materials (primary sources) like letters, minutes of meetings, reports,

correspondences, etc. Simply put, unpublished material means original source document while published materials (secondary sources) refer to any materials, for example, books, articles, etc. that are based on previously published works (Nieuwenhuis 2008:82-83).

For this study data sources include: relevant books, magazines, printed and online journals, church documents, thesis, other online resources and databases. Most of the information gathered from the sources mentioned above was in historical, systematic and hermeneutical forms.

1.8.1.2 Participant observation

Simply put, participant observation involves watching people, events or phenomenon and obtaining first-hand information relating to particular aspects of such people, situations or phenomena (Nworgu 1991:82). Nworgu (1991:82) identifies two major types of observation: participant observation and non-participant observation. He points out that in participant observation, the observer is a member of the setting, or may have been a long-standing member of the setting or may join the group for the sole purpose of carrying out the observation. In the context of this study, the researcher is a member of the setting, which is the case study, Nso’.

According to Adler & Adler observations have been characterised as ‘the fundamental base of all research methods’ in the social and behavioural sciences and as ‘the mainstay of the ethnographic enterprise’ (quoted in Angrosino & Mays de Perez 2000:673). Even studies based on direct interviews, as Angrosino & Mays de Perez (2000:673) point out employ observational techniques to note body language and other gestural cues that lend meaning to the words of the person being interviewed. Angrosino & Mays de Perez (2000:673) indicate that social scientists are observers both of human activities and of the physical settings in which such activities take place. They also mention that this method is also call ‘naturalistic observation’ or fieldwork.

Adler & Adler have further suggested that in the future, observational research will be found as ‘part of a methodological spectrum,’ but that in that spectrum, it will serve as the most powerful source of validation.’ According to them observation rests on ‘something researchers can find constant,’ by which they mean their own direct

knowledge and their own judgement' (quoted in Angrosino & Mays de Perez 2000:674).

In the context of this research, for participant observation, the researcher first attended church services and masses. For church services, he attended Presbyterian Church Kumbo three times and Presbyterian Church Tobin two times. For masses, he attended the Kumbo Cathedral two times, Roman Catholic Church Rifem one time and Roman Catholic Church Tobin one time. In these churches, he observed and took note of the way rites and sacraments are performed. He also took note of the languages used for sermons and singing in the church, cultural symbols, as well as types of musical instruments found in these mission churches.

Second, he attended two cultural festivals, *Ngonnso* in December, 2014 and *Kpu Ye Wiye* (cultural festival in memory of the late Fons) in Mbiame, February, 2015. Here he observed how certain traditional rites are performed and found out the meaning of some signs and symbols to see how related and/or unrelated they are to the signs and symbols used by the mission churches in the same area. He noted the words used in Nso' traditional religious ceremonies.

1.8.1.3 Interviews

Denzin & Lincoln define "The interview" as:

a conversation, the art of asking questions and listening. It is not a neutral tool, for at least two people create the reality of the interview situation. In this situation answers are given. Thus, the interview produces situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes, including race, class, ethnicity, and gender (Denzin & Lincoln 2000: 633).

According to Nworgu (1991:94) interview involves eliciting information from respondents through verbal interaction between him/her and the researcher. Nworgu (1991:94) however cautions that in order to achieve better results, the interviewer must be skilled in asking the right questions and must know how to get the respondent to supply the needed information. Hence, the questions have to be properly framed in such a way that the interviewee can easily understand what information is being asked for (Nworgu 1991:94). He further indicates that the following guidelines provide for a good interview: rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee, avoidance of technical jargons, provision for a context for each question and avoidance of wrong interpretation of responses (Nworgu 1991:94-95).

Holstein & Gubrium (2004:140-141) point out that interviewing has become more popular than ever before. Interviewing, they say, provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives. In this respect, interviews are special forms of conversation. They further indicate that while these conversations may vary from highly structured, standardised, quantitatively oriented survey interviews, to semiformal guided conversations, to free-flowing informational exchanges, all interviews are interactional. They intimate that the narratives which are produced may be truncated as forced-choice survey answers or as elaborate oral life histories, but they are all a product of the talk between interview participants.

Holstein & Gubrium (2004:141) also indicates that while most researchers acknowledge the interactional character of the interview, the technical literature on interviewing stresses the need to keep that interaction in check. Guides to interviewing – especially those oriented to standardised surveys – are primarily concerned with maximising the flow of valid, reliable information while minimising distortions of what the respondent knows.

According to Rapley (2004:16) contra to most of the current literature on ‘how to’ interview, interviews do not need massive amounts of technical detail (and moral) instructions on how to conduct qualitative interviews. Interviewers, he goes on do not need to worry excessively about whether their questions and gestures are ‘too leading’ or ‘not empathetic enough’; “they should just get on with interacting with the specific person” (2004:16). He further stresses that interviews are, by their nature, social encounters where speakers collaborate in producing retrospective (and prospective) accounts or versions of their past (or future) action, experiences, feelings and thoughts (2004:16). The use of interviewing to acquire information is so extensive today that it has been said that we live in an ‘interview society’ (quoted in Fontana & Frey 2000: 646). Increasingly, qualitative researchers are realising that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results. Thus, the focus of interview is moving to encompass the *how’s* of people’s lives (the constructive work involved in producing order in everyday life) as well as the traditional *what’s* (the activities of everyday life) Fontana & Frey (2000: 646).

For this study, the researcher used the unstructured (open-ended interview) because of its ability to provide a greater breadth of data than other types, given its qualitative nature. This unstructured: the open-ended, ethnographic (in-depth) interview is referred to as the traditional type (Fontana & Frey 2000:652).

The researcher identified and interviewed the following categories of persons of Nso' origin: Clergy, from both the Roman Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, traditional rulers, Christians from both the Roman Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. Most of the people interviewed belong to one of the three main social groups in Nso': *Mtaar*, (the commoners), *nshiyilav* (*ngwerong* group), and *dui* (the *ngiri* group). In analysing interviews, the researcher followed Rapley (2004:16) in analysing what actually happened, how his interaction produced that trajectory of talk.

1.8.1.4 Focus groups

According to Mandriz (2000:835), the two major techniques used by researchers to collect qualitative data are participant observation and interviews. Focus groups, or group interviews, she says, possess elements of both techniques while maintaining their own uniqueness as a distinctive research method. Fundamentally, she goes on, they are 'a way of listening to people and learning from them'. One good thing in focus groups is that it allows access to research participants who may find one-on-one, face-to-face interaction 'scary' or 'intimidating.' Madriz (2000:835) further indicates that by creating multiple lines of communication, the group interview offers participants a safe environment where they can share ideas, beliefs, and attitudes in the company of people from the same socio-economic, ethnic, and gender backgrounds. She also points out that some of the studies that have been conducted on focus groups show that group participants find the experience more gratifying and stimulating than interviews.

Although focus groups are sometimes referred to as 'group interviews', the moderator does not ask questions of each focus group participant in turn, but, rather, facilitates group discussion, actively encouraging group members to interact with each other. This interaction between research participants – and the potential analytic use of such interaction – has been described as 'the hallmark' of focus group research (Wilkinson 2004:178). In a group interview as Fontana & Frey

(2000:651) point out, the interviewer/moderator directs the inquiry and the interaction among respondents in a very structured fashion or in an unstructured manner, depending on the interviewer's purpose.

Wilkinson (2004:178) goes on to state that typically, the focus group discussion is recorded, and the data transcribed, and then analysed using conventional techniques for qualitative data: most common is content or thematic analysis. According to him focus groups are distinctive, then, primarily for the method of data collection (i.e. informal group discussion), rather than for the method of data analysis. It is this, perhaps, which leads most contemporary accounts of the method to emphasise how to run an effective focus group, rather than how to analyse the resulting data. That notwithstanding, it seems necessary to point out that in most data analysis, one looks for the central themes repeated throughout the transcripts (Macnaghten & Myers 2004:65).

Focus groups provide a way of collecting data relatively quickly from a large number of research participants. Second, focus groups are more 'naturalistic' than interviews because they are closer to every conversation since they typically include a range of communicative processes, such as storytelling, joking, boasting, teasing, persuasion, challenge and disagreement. Third, the dynamic quality of interaction, as participants discuss, debate, and sometimes even disagree about key issues, is a general striking feature of focus groups (Wilkinson 2004:180). With focus groups, unexpected comments and new perspectives can be explored easily and can add value to one's study (Nieuwenhuis 2008:90).

For this research, two focus group discussions were carried out with a selected number of Nso' indigenes from different walks of life: clergy, law officers, teachers and technicians in various fields. They were predominantly from the two denominations - the Roman Catholic and the Presbyterian and from the two traditional social associations on which the research is focused. The discussions were carried out as follows: one at the beginning of the research and the other at the end. The first served as a sample and the second the main discussion. The discussions involved six and eight persons respectively.

The data so collected was analysed following a content analysis in qualitative research, which according to Wilkinson (2004:184) need not employ a formal coding scheme, nor needs be a precursor to any kind of quantification. Simply put, content analysis most basically entails inspection of the data for recurrent instances of some kind, irrespective of the type of instance e.g. word, phrase, some larger units, also variously labelled (e.g. 'categories', 'organising themes', 'interpretive repertoires'); and whether the instances – or larger units – are counted or not. Thus, most analyses of focus group data report recurrent instances of some kind, and do so more or less systematically, they are essentially content analyses.

Niewenhuis (2007:101) points out that the term 'content analysis' refers to the analysis of such things as books, brochures, written documents, transcripts, news reports and visual media. He further indicates that sometimes content analysis is used when working with narratives such as diaries or journals, or to analyse qualitative responses to open-ended questions on surveys, interviews or focus groups. Hence, content analysis is a process of looking at data from different angles with a view to identifying keys in the text that will help one to understand and interpret the raw data. In other words, it identifies and summarises content. It is as well an inductive and interactive process where one looks for similarities and differences in text that would corroborate or disconfirm theory (Nieuwenhuis 2007:101).

For the purpose of this research, salient and recurrent points and/or issues that were obtained from the interview, participant observation and focus groups' discussions supplement the study. The contributions from participants are indicated and acknowledged accordingly. In the bibliography, all the names of those interviewed and those who participated in discussions are stated and where possible their social groups are indicated. For the sake of confidentiality, names of respondents are not mentioned within the body of the research, the researcher uses the term informant(s) when he cites or acknowledges contributions from the participants.

The predominant data analysis technique used in this work is content analysis.

1.9 Definition of terms

The terms described and/or defined below are mainly key words to the research and those that form its title.

1.9.1 Christian missions

The term “Christian missions” is used in this work in two main senses: first it refers to the mission churches. For example, the Roman Catholic Church, the Basel Mission Church, the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and the Baptist Church. Second, the term refers to the activities of these churches, which are geared at evangelisation and *diakonia* services as their participation in the one mission of God (*missio Dei*). Ironically mission (*missio Dei*) is wider than missions, specific tasks assigned to a person or group that are to be accomplished as steps toward the wider mission (Wright 2006:23).

Following the explanation above the study concentrates on the following definitions of mission: “the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus, wagering on a future that verifiable experience seems belie. It is the good news of God’s love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world” (Bosch 1991:519), and “.... our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation” (Wright 2006:23) as working definitions for the study. These definitions bear in mind that mission is not for the sake of the church but for the sake of the world. Hence, it could easily set a missional approach to the traditional social associations of the Nso’ people of Cameroon.

1.9.2 African cultures

According to J. Andrew Kirk (1999:85-86), culture embodies beliefs, values and outward forms. The three main terms are worth noting: Beliefs constitute the theoretical foundation on which our sense of what is legitimate and illegitimate, appropriate and inappropriate is based. Values are the moral principles and standards which individuals or societies find acceptable or intolerable. They are used to justify particular ways of behaving or styles of life. Outward forms of culture are all those expressions of our beliefs and values which surround us and which we take for granted because we are immersed in them. The most fundamental of these is

language, followed by the broad world of art, then customs such as the forms of hospitality, greetings, naming, courtship, food. Then the institutions: the family, law, the educational system and economic structures. Worthy of note is the fact that cultures are not static: “each succeeding generation goes through a period of partial rejection of the values of the generation immediately ahead of it, only to adopt those values at a later stage and then give birth to another temporal group of rebels” (Kirk 1999:84).

Following Kluckhohn, Kraft defines culture as ‘the total life way of a people, the social legacy the individual acquires from his groups,’ a people’s ‘design for living’ (Kraft 1996:38). He adds that specifically, we may see a culture as a society’s complex, integrated coping mechanism, consisting of learned, patterned concepts and behaviour, plus their underlying perspectives (worldview) and resulting artefacts (material culture).

Following Kirk and Kraft, the study uses the term “African cultures” to embody various beliefs, values and expressions of these beliefs and values which fundamentally are languages, arts, customs, and the institutions, which include the family, law, the educational system and economic structures in African communities. One of the things the study notes is that culture like mission is not static. It undergoes changes from generation to generation.

1.9.3 A Missional approach

In his book, *The mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*, Christopher J. H. Wright simply defines the term missional as “an adjective denoting something that is related to or characterised by mission, or have the qualities, attributes or dynamics of mission” (2006:24). He adds that missional is to the word mission what covenantal is to the word covenant, or frictional to friction. Following this meaning, he explains that we might speak of a missional reading of Exodus, meaning a reading that explores its dynamic significance in God’s mission for Israel and the world and its relevance to Christian mission today. Furthermore, we might say as he indicates, that Israel had a missional role in the midst of the nations – implying that they had an identity and role connected to God’s ultimate intention of blessing the nations (Wright 2006:24).

Historically, the word missional gained its popularity in 1998, with the publication of *Missional Church* (Zscheile (ed.) 2012: xii; Gelder & Zscheile 2011:1). Since then, the word missional has been used by a wide range of church leaders and others. This divergent use of the word has made some of the contributors to *Missional Church*, such as Alan Roxburgh to suggest that it has led to the word losing its definitional value. This is evident by the following critique from him: ‘The word ‘missional’ seems to have travelled the remarkable path of going from obscurity to banality in only one decade’ (cited in Gelder & Zscheile 2011:1).

On the contrary, Gelder & Zscheile (2011:3) indicate that ‘missional’ displays an inherent elasticity that allows it to be understood in a variety of ways. This elasticity, they say, is actually evident in its use in *Missional Church*. At present, they go on; the inherent elasticity of the word ‘missional’ continues to be demonstrated through its use by various faith traditions to express an understanding of mission from within their own biblical and theological perspective. Thus, no one can cage such a word.

In his article “Missionary or Missional? A Study in Terminology”, Saayman (2010) seems to have made a more succinct distinction between the word missionary and missional. Since one does not need any detail in this explanation, the focus here is on the distinctive he makes on the term “missional”:

The first distinctive of the term missional is the context within which it originated: specifically, Western North Atlantic emerging postmodern culture. The development of the term was inspired by the works of Leslie Newbigin and David Bosch (Saayman 2010:11).

A second distinctive can be found in the aim or vision of the utilisers of the term. According to Guder *et al* (1998) it describes a vision for the sending of the church to North America (Saayman 2010:11).

A third distinctive lies in the relationship to and interaction with the so-called emergent church or emerging church movement as a distinctive characteristic of postmodern humanity. Here stress is laid on specific churches/congregations of a new kind – those that have emerged in response to the new postmodern context, and thus question the very nature of the traditional churches, as the traditional form

and nature of the church does not seem to be useful in the present context (Saayman 2010:12).

In this respect, emerging churches search for other metaphors in the New Testament, and choose for the so-called 'Jerusalem model' of gathering in house churches. Saayman (2010:13) however warns that this model may not be the solution reiterating that no part should be neglected. He points out that in terms of our missionary vocation we are equally and simultaneously for both 'Jerusalem' as well as 'the ends of the earth.'

Having discussed the three distinctive of the word missional, Saayman (2010:13) explains that the term is meant to refer fundamentally to *missio Dei*, just as the term missionary does. Furthermore, the term as he says is utilised especially in the missiological debate in the North Atlantic, where it originated as a result of the work of Leslie Newbigin and David Bosch. It is meant, he goes on to respond to the missional needs in America and European cultures deeply influenced by postmodernism. It is therefore not meant to be a synonym for missionary, and is part of a thoroughly contextual North Atlantic or Western Missiology.

That notwithstanding, the term missional can even rightly be claimed to have originated from the Third World. David Bosch, one of the contributors to the development of the term studied in Europe but spent all his professional life working in (Third World) South Africa. Saayman thus put it beautifully and convincingly:

So, in a real sense the spark originated in the Third World, and was imported by the North Atlantic sending communities in their process of contextualisation. If the Third World theologians now decide to utilise the concept, we are re-importing a concept which had originated here. We will then have to re-indigenise or re-contextualise the concept to make it really useful (Saayman 2010:16).

This seems to be taking place already. For example, in his article, "The Missional Congregation in the South African context", in *HTS, Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies; Vol 70 (1), 6 pages*, indicates that the term missional as used in the Department of Science of Religion and Missiology in the University of Pretoria refers to the local context in general, meaning that it is not limited to any culture, group or class. It thus relates to both the postmodern and the post-colonial/post-apartheid contexts. He stresses that the term missional refers to the local context of the local congregation, which in the South African context usually includes, a spectrum of

communities or residential areas. He further points out that these areas could be characterised on a spectrum between very rich and very poor, from modern and or postmodern to ones that are characterised by some or other combination of Western and traditional African cultures, and even in some areas, Eastern and Muslim cultures (Van Niekerk 2014).

He however indicates that, in the same Department of Science of Religion and Missiology, the term seems to have developed a clearly theological meaning, in the sense that it refers to the calling of the local congregation in its local context, irrespective of the culture or conditions in that context (Van Niekerk, 2014).

In a foreword to their book *Reformed Means Missional: Following Jesus into the World*, Wright (2013: ix) points out that when we refer to an activity, community, strategy as being 'missional', our tendency has been to think primarily of 'missions' as things that we do, activities we plan and execute 'for God' "to help him reach to places he seems to have difficulties reaching" (Wright 2013: ix). There seems to be something wrong with this view. Hence, in reconsidering it, he points out that we need to shift our perspective to see that, "like salvation, mission belongs to God.... Mission is not ours; mission is God's.... Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God's mission" (Wright 2013: ix).

Accordingly, a 'Missional Approach' as used in this study, therefore has to do with participating in God's mission (*missio Dei*) not as an appendix and or an optional venture but that which is at the centre of the Christian mission. Missional is thus used in this study as that which is central to the church's existence. Following Emil Brunner, as cited above, its use notes that 'The church exists by mission; like a fire exists by burning' (quoted in Bevans and Schroeder 2011:116). This type of approach is intended to redress the relationship between God, world, and church, which has been one of the great conundrums of twentieth century missiology (Gelder & Zscheile 2011:139).

In this work a missional approach is related to God, culture and Church. This approach is thus focused on the need of Christian presence and participation in the traditional social associations of the Nso' people of Cameroon. This follows the emphasis laid on the essential nature of the term missional and vocation of the church as God's called and sent people (Guder (ed.) 1998:11). According to Guder

(ed.) (1998:11-12), this nature of the church is five-fold: biblical, historical, contextual, eschatological, and can be practised. As far as the contextual nature of the church is concerned, he points out that every ecclesiology is developed within a particular cultural context. He thus emphasises that being incarnational is but one way to be the church, and this within a specific concrete setting (Guder (ed.) 1998:11).

1.9. 4 Traditional social associations

An association can be defined “as a group of persons banded together for a common purpose” (<https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/definition-of-an-association>). In Nso’ traditional social associations are groups in which Nso’ people meet, share fellowship, and discuss issues affecting their members in particular and the community at large. Some of these groups, like the *ngiri* and the *ngwerong* especially have been termed “secret societies” mostly by the missionaries and their collaborators. Following the social nature of these groups, which include: fellowship – eating and drinking together, and solidarity among others, this research calls them traditional social associations. The members of these associations, especially those who make up what is considered the inner circle are bound to keep some of their decisions and practices confidential, like many other groups in the world. It is this confidentiality that gave rise to the prejudiced name “secret societies”, the coinage of the missionaries. In the context of Europe these social associations may be called clubs.

1.9.5 The Nso’ people

The Nso’ people form one of the largest ethnic groups in Cameroon. Historically, Nso’ people are believed to have migrated from Tikari in the Adamawa region of Cameroon. They are known to have had a woman, called Ngonnso as one of their first leaders (Banbooyee 2001:5).

1.9.6 The North West Region of Cameroon

The North West Region of Cameroon is one of the ten regions of the Republic of Cameroon that is suited in the North West section of the country (see map 2, page 275). It is one of the two English-speaking regions in the country. The other is called

the South West Region and is situated in the South West section of the nation, Cameroon.

1.10 Reasons for using Cameroon as a prototype for Africa

In his book, *Corruption & Confusion in Poly-Ethnic Societies*, Walters (2005:41), points out that Cameroon has been called small Africa and some people might have been wondering why. The simple reason as he indicates is that a close look at the country's early history even extends her mysteries globally, qualifying it as the world in a small scale. This is substantiated by its geographic setting, early contact with the world beyond the African continent, invention of unique writing, a Negro script invented with 348 signs mostly of ideography and pictography attributed to Sultan Njoya of Bamum and by ethnographic, racial and linguistic representative ramifications, Cameroon as a long complex history. Furthermore, he states that judging from Cameroonian names such as Cheng, Penn, Peng, Chin, Yuri, Yukov; Jan-mann; Wakaie, Jakaie and about two hundred languages and numerous dialects, the continents of Asia, Europe, South America, Austria are culturally represented (Walters 2005:41).

Hence, the people of Cameroon have a diverse background. As indicated above, Walters mentions about two hundred languages. Dah (1996:7) and Su (2001:274) seem to agree with him though they mention 236 and 230 languages respectively. Regarding ethnic groups, Le Vine (1971: xx-xxi), indicates that there are more than 136 ethnic groups in French-speaking Cameroon and at least seventy in the English-speaking area of Cameroon. Mbaku (2004: 54) mentions that there are over 100 ethnic groups that speak 24 languages. All these differences attest to the diversity therein. Following this diversity, Cameroon seems to be a good example to be considered as a representative of African countries in matters of missions and cultures. This is intended to throw more light to the cultural context in which Christianity was planted in Africa.

1.11 Reasons for choosing Nso' as a case study

A few reasons for choosing Nso' as a case study for this work have been given in the problem statement above. Some of them being that Nso' has a rich cultural heritage and is as well considered by many Cameroonians as a stronghold of Christianity in

the country. The researcher himself comes from Nso' and thus writes as an insider. He is a pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and a member of the *ngiri* traditional social association by birth.

1.12 Limitations of the study

The predominant mission churches in Nso' are the Roman Catholics and the Presbyterians. This research is limited to these two cases. In the context of Cameroon, one can get works published on the history of mission to Cameroon but there is little or none published on the missional approach to mission issues. As far as the case study is concerned, the available and relevant materials (thesis' and books) concentrate on both the history of its origin and that of the inception of Christianity in Nso'.

The core culture of Nso' seems to be the only book from the context of Nso' that contains some substantial material about Nso' culture, especially on what this work calls traditional social associations in Nso'. The author of *The Core Culture of Nso'* seems to have done some thorough research based on interviews, and participant observation. He equally used some international journals having the works of renowned anthropologists like Phyllis M. Kaberry and Elizabeth Chilver. They were the first anthropologists to do some substantial studies in Nso' and some areas in the North West Region of Cameroon in the fifties and sixties. Most of the theological literature used for this study is therefore from outside Cameroon.

1.13 Research motivation and position of the researcher

The research is an attempt to seek an appropriate missional approach(es) which could be used in the context where culture and Christianity are in conflict. The researcher's interest in missiology has inspired him to read some works on Christian missions. In these works, he has seen that Christian missionaries made several mistakes and imposed most of their cultural values in Africa in general and Nso' in particular in the name of Christianity. Furthermore, the researcher as a pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon for over twenty years has had some reasonable experiences. Having worked in several capacities in the same church, the researcher has seen how the disrespect of the receptor's culture has led to the rejection of the gospel. In one of the parishes he was informed that many are not Christians because the first missionaries dispersed their culture.

The researcher comes from Nso' and uses Nso' as a case study. Nso' people belong to three main social groups: the *nshiyLav*, (the royal retainers), which forms the *ngwerong* traditional social association, *dui* (royal family), which forms the *ngiri* traditional social association and *mtaar* (the commoners). Membership into these groups is mostly by birth. The researcher belongs to the *dui* (the royal family) by birth. The researcher holds that the traditional social associations were derogatorily called "secret societies" by the missionaries and not Africans in general and Nso' people in particular. He opines that these associations are simply custodians and preservers of Nso' culture. Their activities are largely social and resolve around eating and drinking. However, some of the activities of these groups need to be engaged and checked in a humble and peaceful manner. As a pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, the researcher adheres to the reformed tradition, which ironically is still reforming. He holds the fact that *ecclesia reformata semper reformada* (a reformed church is continually reforming). He is a lover of culture but does not romanticise it. He rather seeks ways for its transformation.

1.14 Organisation of the study

CHAPTER 1: It handles the general introduction to the study with a focus on: the background to the study, research problem, objectives, and relevance of the study, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, literature review, and research methodology. It also defines terms, especially those that make up the title of the research. It equally gives reasons for choosing Cameroon and Nso' as the place of focus. Limitations of the study, motivation, and the researcher's position as well as organisation of the study are stated in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2: This chapter opens up the research from North Africa, with a focus on Egypt, Ethiopia and Nubia. The chapter focuses on some aspects of culture, language and the importance of the translation of the Gospel in the language of the evangelised. It argues that inculturation is a necessary tool for the incarnation of the Gospel in every given context. The chapter also indicates that some of the beliefs of the North African people if taken seriously would have enhanced the spread of the Gospel. Though not able to deal with the North African Church Fathers in any detail, the chapter however praises their efforts and the contributions they made to world Christianity. The chapter alludes to the issue of syncretism and allows further discussions about it for the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: It tackles the relationship between ATR, Christianity and Syncretism. This chapter demonstrates the relationship between ATR, Christianity and syncretism. It lays emphasis on the fact that in the attempt to be ‘relevant’ one falls into syncretism and in the effort to avoid syncretism one becomes irrelevant. The chapter traces Christian roots in ATR, and discusses the African worldview, whose understanding is necessary for evangelisation in Africa. Then missionary motives and missionary encounter with various cultures are also discussed. Finally, it examines the term syncretism and argues that it is inevitable especially when it comes to inculturation. Yet, there is a need to be selective.

CHAPTER 4: This chapter concentrates on the missionary enterprise in Sub-Saharan Africa with a focus on Cameroon. The chapter begins by considering though in brief, an overview of Christian missions in Africa. The chapter stresses on the fact that Africans had a traditional religion, political and social systems as well as economic, educational and health systems before mission and colonialism appeared on the scene. The chapter shows how the introduction of Christianity in Cameroon was intertwined with colonialism. It also discusses missionary motives for missions in Cameroon and their attitudes towards Cameroonian cultures in the areas of polygamy and language.

CHAPTER 5: This chapter begins with the coming of the Roman Catholic and the Basel missions to Nso’. It focuses on the encounter of these two Christian missions with Nso’ traditional religion. It argues that Nso’ people knew and worshipped God before the introduction of Christianity to Nso’. It discusses the ways in which Nso’ people worship God and gives examples of their religious ceremonies: *cu nyuy*, *ntangri*, *mekan* and *kidiv*. It treats rituals of cleansing with focus on *nshilah* (incest). It briefly discusses the rituals of naming and tells how naming in Nso’ was not just done randomly but with consideration. Yet, it makes a critique of names that are given to children following some negative events and explains the negative impact these names have had on them. It sees nothing wrong with the “child’s bag” that is given at the naming ceremony and suggests that such a practice should be upheld by the Christian churches in Nso’ and be used during baptism.

CHAPTER 6: This chapter handles the main issue, Christian missions encounter with the traditional social associations of the Nso’ people, with focus on the core

culture *vis-à-vis* – *ngiri* and *ngwerong*. It discusses the tension that existed between Christian missions and the *ngwerong* association in particular. It considers the activities of these two main associations which are looked upon as compatible and incompatible *vis à vis* the tenets of Christianity and suggests the way forward that is discussed in the last chapter.

CHAPTER 7: It is the last chapter and concentrates on a summary of research findings, conclusion, and recommendations. The chapter discusses the following findings that cut across from North Africa to Cameroon and Nso': the importance of indigenous languages in the transmission of the gospel, mission and colonialism Christianity and syncretism. With regard to the findings from the case study the chapter reiterates the place of culture in Christian mission and suggests some missional approaches that need to be used in the context of Nso' in relation to traditional social associations.

Following Bevans & Schroeder's *Constant in Contexts*, the chapter concludes that culture remains an indispensable vehicle for mission in all ages: in the past, it has been, in the present it is and in the future, it will continue to be. Then, using some approaches from Kraft and Niebuhr, the researcher suggests an integrated missional approach to African culture in general and Nso' traditional social associations in particular. Finally, the chapter makes some recommendations to the mission churches in Nso' and some for further research.

CHAPTER 2

EARLY CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN EGYPT⁴, ETHIOPIA AND NUBIA

2.1 Introduction

Africa was not well known to the outside world in ancient times. In order to understand how Africa was looked upon, this chapter traces its ancient knowledge, which was received mostly through exploration. This provides the limits which indicate what could reasonably be understood as the available field for any missionary endeavour at that time (Groves 1948:33). Then a brief narration of Christianity in Africa in the apostolic age follows. The beginning of Christianity in North Africa with focus on the Early Church in Egypt comes next. Here the following aspects are taken into consideration: the environment (context) in which Christianity developed in Egypt, the persecutions of the third and fourth centuries, factors that facilitated the growth of Christianity therein, for example, the use of the native language and monasteries. Factors that retarded the growth of Christianity in Egypt, for example, theological controversies and the challenge of Islam to Christianity are also considered. The chapter also touches briefly on the missionary enterprise beyond Egypt, but still in North Africa with a focus on two places, Axum in Abyssinia now Ethiopia, and Nubia, now northern Sudan, (see map 3, page 276). The chapter centres on the period within the first and the seventeenth century A.D.

In addition to the reasons already given for using Egypt in this study, (see the footnote), both Egypt and the other places are chosen because some of the missional issues in their contexts are linked to Cameroon in general and Nso' the case study in particular. For example, the issues of syncretism, language, cultural identity, translation and/or inculturation. Furthermore, some lessons could be drawn from both the Coptic Church of Egypt, the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia and the North African Church Fathers. The North African Church Fathers followed the contextual realities at the time and contributed enormously to the growth of world Christianity.

⁴ This research uses Egypt as the starting point of Christianity in Africa because of its biblical and historical evidence, which seemed to be convincing so much so that one would be right to conclude that there would have been no Christianity had Egypt not provided refuge for Jesus Christ. Historically, Egypt is one of the world's famous cradles of civilization. "Modern Egyptian Christians are proud to trace back the origin of their faith to the origin of Christianity itself" (Buar 1994:21).

Additionally, the North African Church has been seen as one of the great gifts to global Christianity because it demonstrated that Africans were in the Church from the outset and confounded the Anglo-Saxon apologists who held that men from the Dark Continent were latecomers to Christianity (Ellis 1974:161). 'Africa, not Rome, gave birth to Latin Christianity' (Dean Milman quoted in Ellis 1974:162). The Ethiopian Church is reckoned as the first to have taken note of the needs and thoughts of Africans (Ellis 1974:162).

Space may not permit for a full discussion on the North African Church Fathers, but it seems necessary to mention here that the great historian of the early church, Adolf von Harnack in his book *Mission und Ausbreitung* (Mission and Expansion, my translation) is quoted to have concluded his chapter on the fate of the Church in North Africa as follows: "As a Church province, Africa has a timeless endurance in the history of the Church through its three great sons: Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine..."(quoted in Sundkler & Steed 2000:30). Just a cursory look at their contributions would testify how these illustrious sons of Africa influenced the growth of Christianity in North Africa and even beyond.

There are two important historical links that Cameroon has with North Africa, one with Carthage and the other with Egypt. The first link with Carthage concerns the Carthaginian, Hanno, the navigator, who is known to have explored the coast of West Africa and reached as far as the Cameroon Mountain in around the 5th century B.C. (Keller 1968:1).

In her article "Cameroon: Exploring the Ancient Kingdoms", Kate Esthelby (2015:1) mentions and describes the Western Region of Cameroon as "the home of the Bamelike people – descendant of ancient Egypt." The Bamelike people are culturally and geographically connected to the Grasslands regions of Cameroon. The area called Fumban which is occupied by the Bamum people is historically connected to Nso'. Typically, the Bamum people and the Nso' people have a common ancestry. Ngonnso, the founder of Nso' dynasty, Mfombam the founder of Nditam dynasty and Nchare the founder of Bamum dynasty all belong to one father (Banbooyee 2001:5).

2.2 Ancient knowledge of Africa

The entire African continent was not known to the ancient world as only the two of its lands were most familiar. Namely, Egypt and the portion of North Africa that lay

across the straits from Italy and Sicily and at the centre of it was the African Proconsularis of the Romans (Groves 1948:31). Egypt had intimate relations with Palestine and Syria from the second millennium B.C. confirmed by clay tablets of the period in cuneiform from an Egyptian governor were found in these countries (Groves 1948:31). Egypt was then involved in the politics of the Near East until the conquests of Alexander the Great, and later the eastward march of Rome refashioned the map of that part of the world (Groves 1948:31). In both these two lands that were known to the ancients, the vantage-points held for their fertility were the Nile valley in Egypt and a coastal territory of highlands, plateaux and border ranges with a mean width of some 200 miles in North Africa (Groves 1948:31). Beyond these limits, Groves (1948:31), points out that the voyages were made early down the east coast to Somaliland near Cape Guardafui and beyond. Worthy of note is the fact that the slave trade was already active in those days, around the sixth century B.C. (Groves 1948:31-2).

2.3 Exploration of Africa

The first explorers who came to the West coast of Africa were the Carthaginians (Groves 1948:32). These were Africans from North Africa. They started trading along the Atlantic coast of the present Morocco as early as the sixth century B.C. (Groves 1948:31-2). This expedition was however started by Hanno in the early decades of the fifth century B.C, when he set out from Carthage with a fleet of sixty ships and was commissioned to establish colonies along the West African coast, designed to trade with friendly peoples where they were to be found (Groves 1948:31-2). Groves (1948:31-2) indicates that in those days much of the coast was apparently more favourable and that a detailed record of the geographical features and colonies established has survived. Furthermore, he intimates that Hanno passed Cape Verde and the estuary of the Gambia, and even went further to Sierra Leone and the Sherbro Sound (Groves 1948:32). Unfortunately, Hanno's great enterprise was not emulated and the southernmost settlements in due course vanished (Groves 1948:32-3). As if that was not enough, Rome conquered Carthage and took over her maritime possessions. Rome's interest beyond the straits however lay to the north, in Gaul and Britain resulting to the slipping off of the direct knowledge of the Atlantic coast of Africa (Groves 1948:32).

Groves (1948:33) further points out that, explorers overland had to face greater obstacles still than those of the maritime adventurers. The Nile he says, seemed to offer an artificial highway into the heart of the continent but it was however not passable because the drifting vegetation torn from the banks of the Nile which makes its way through extensive swamps of papyrus and reeds barred the way by water to the interior (Groves 1948:33). Thus, Khartoum was apparently the limit of knowledge toward the south. Nevertheless, there remained the possibility of a desert transit, whether from Egypt or North Africa, to make contact with Sudan (Groves 1948:33). In addition, Groves (1948:33) indicates that it would seem that in Carthaginian times there was commercial activity along the route from Tripoli to Chad, running through the desert people – the Garamantes, lying midway on this route. Furthermore, he opines that in Roman times two distinct expeditions are recorded to the south of this route. The first being that of the Roman officer who made a three-months journey beyond Garama to ‘the land of the Ethiopians’ and, the second that of a citizen of Leptis who went for four months beyond, and reached ‘the assembling place of the rhinoceros’, which is presumed to be Lake Chad (Groves 1948:33). Desert transport was facilitated by the camel, which was first introduced into Africa during the period of the Roman occupation. The coming of the camel provoked the opening of new routes and oases, which made the desert journey undertaken with a “new confidence”. It indeed marked an epoch of the relations between North Africa and Sudan (Groves 1948:33).

The last source of knowledge of ancient Africa is based on two ancient geographers who co-ordinated material available to them in order to deduce the form and scope of the continent (Groves 1948:33). These geographers were Eratosthenes (circa.200 B.C.), and Ptolemy (circa. 150 A.D.). According to Groves (1948:33-34), Eratosthenes believed in a very restricted Africa, with the Atlantic coast swinging south east and then sweeping across to join the east coast wholly north of the Equator, while Ptolemy on the other hand was more cautious in delimitating the unknown to both the south and west for he assigned no definite frontier. However, he conceived of the coast swinging across to China, as the southern land frontier of the Indian Ocean. These two incompatible accounts of the form and extent of Africa are sufficient proof to the limited knowledge in the ancient world of what lay to the south

of the Sahara Desert. That was the limited Africa which could be regarded as the field of enterprise by the earliest Christian missionaries (Groves 1948:34).

2.4 Christianity in Africa in the apostolic age

The New Testament has no records of missionary activity in Africa but indications of various contacts (Groves 1948:34), which show that Christianity came very early to North Africa. In affirming this view, Peter Falk writes:

...it is evident that the gospel came very early to North West Africa. Simon of Cyrene carried the cross of Jesus Christ; it is thought that he became a believer, for his son Alexander and Rufus are among the people known to those to whom the Gospel according to Mark was written (Mark 15:21; Rom. 16:13). Cyrenians are listed among the people present at Jerusalem when God's revelation on the Day of Pentecost took place (Acts 2:10). Cyrenians and Cyprians brought the gospel to Antioch; so, it appears that the gospel had been planted in Cyrene (Acts 11:20). The records of the development of the church in this area have not been preserved. However, according to Synesius' letters there were half a dozen bishoprics in the area in 410 (Falk 1997:26).

Other contacts which give evidence for the early beginning of Christianity include the easy accessibility of Africa from Palestine as shown by the story of the flight into Egypt of Joseph and Mary with the infant Jesus as recorded in Matthew (2:3-15) (Groves 1948:34). Affirming this scriptural record, Sanneh (1983:1) adds that it is in effect the first tradition connecting the African continent with the Christian story. African Christians are glad to know that their continent provided refuge for the Lord in a time of need (Groves 1948:34). This is affirmed by the Coptic liturgy: 'Be glad and rejoice, O Egypt, and her sons and her borders, for there hath come to Thee the Lord of Man...' (Isichei 1995:17).

According to Groves (1948:34), Simon of Cyrene, bore the cross, though he came from North Africa was apparently a Jewish settler in a Greek settlement lying in the Barca district of Tripoli. Other Cyrenian Jews are referred to in Acts (2:20; 6:9; 11:20; 13:1) (Groves 1948:34). Appolos, Alexandrian Christian, appears in Corinth and Ephesus as a missionary preacher, but it is not known when and where he became a Christian (Acts 18:24-19:1) (Groves 1948:34). However, one passage in the New Testament, gives the first definite record of an African – from Ethiopia, becoming a Christian convert (Acts 8: 26-40) (Groves 1948:34). Interestingly after his baptism nothing is heard about him apart from that Irenaeus⁵ and Eusebius⁶ claims him as a

⁵ Irenaeus was one of the earlier Church Fathers

missionary to his people but Eusebius adds that his legendary name was Judich (Groves 1948:35). These claims are thus yet to be proven (Groves 1948:35).

As far as tradition in the Apostolic Age is concerned, there seems to be no apostle reported as evangelising on the African soil. Nevertheless, it is true that tradition sent Thomas to India, and it is claimed that his route lay via the Nile and across to the Red Sea, and Groves (1948:35) affirms that a possible period in Alexandria would be feasible. Yet there is no proof for all is considered as legend, which is scarcely favourable to the recovery of historic fact (Groves 1948:35). One other tradition which rests upon the authority of Eusebius, records that John Mark, the evangelist, was an active missionary in Egypt, and first established churches in the city of Alexandria, could have been considered true, but Eusebius introduces the report with a cautious 'they say'(Groves 1948:35).

Furthermore, Harnack in Groves (1948:34), remarks: 'We have no means of checking this statement.' Davidson (2005:249) however affirms the tradition associating John Mark as the founder of the Alexandria Church and adds that he was said to have been the first Bishop of Alexandria and to have been martyred in 68 A.D. Yet he intimates that one cannot tell if this tradition is reliable. Sanneh (1983:4) however warns that whether John Mark as mentioned above actually founded the Coptic Church, the tradition which claims that he did appears firm, and historians who venture behind it will find themselves in unfamiliar ground. That is in summary what seems to be known of the introduction of Christianity in Africa in the Apostolic Age. The next section deals with the beginning of Christianity in North Africa with the focus on Egypt.

2.5 The beginning of Christian missions in North Africa

It is generally agreed that the first area in Africa to know Christianity was its northern part, especially Egypt (Groves 1948:36; Sanneh 1983:6; Isichei 1995:13; Falk 1997:25, Kalu 2005:26, and Vumisa (ed.) 2012). North Africa is part of the Mediterranean world. The growth of Christianity therein is properly analysed with development from elsewhere. For example, Clement of Alexandria who was born in Greece, reached Alexandria in 180 A.D. and left it for good after twenty-two years (Isichei 1995:13). Furthermore, Valentine, the Alexandrian Gnostic, spent many

⁶ Eusebius was one of the earlier Church Fathers

years in Rome and ended his days in Cyrus. These two personalities certainly brought in ideas from outside, which surely had some influence on African Christianity. In addition, Greeks have lived in Egypt from the seventh century B.C. and their history equally had a great influence on the development of Christianity there (Isichei 1995:13). Most interestingly, the city called Alexandria was founded in 331 B.C. by Alexander the Great. When he died, his three generals – Antigono, Seleucus, and Ptolemy divided his empire. Antigono got Asia Minor, Seleucus, Syria while Egypt fell to Ptolemy. It became part of the Roman Empire in 30 B.C. when the last of the Ptolemies by name Cleopatra died. Linguistically, Greek remained the language of scholarship and of the great cities while Coptic that of the countryside (Isichei 1995:13).

Roman rule was however not the best. It brought impoverishment and desperation. A third of the corn consumed by the Romans was provided by Egypt; the weight of taxation caused peasants to flee their land and escaped to Palestine. Jews and Egyptians had to pay a poll tax while the Greeks and the Romans were exempted. This left the former peoples with relative deprivation (Isichei 1995:13). Isichei (1995:14), points out that it is against this background of suffering that most historians interpret the appeal of mystery religions in general, and Christianity and Gnosticism in particular. Yet she intimates that perhaps this is to oversimplify, indicating that most ages have seemed epochs of crisis and a threat to those who lived in them and a golden age appears only in retrospect. This echoes what our people usually refer to as “the good old days” as if to say they were without crises and threats. Simply put, they see only the goodness in retrospect.

2.5.1 The Day of Pentecost and Christian missions in Africa

The history of missions in Africa is said to have begun on the day of Pentecost about 30 A.D. when the apostle Peter preached his renowned sermon to the multitude and about 3000 people were baptised. As indicated in Acts 2, Jews from Egypt heard the sermon and some of them who were certainly converted took the gospel back to Egypt, more precisely to Alexandria where a good number of Jews lived (Wedepohl in Vumisa 2012:19). A legend identifies Saint Mark (the John Mark of the Acts of the Apostles and writer of the gospel according to Mark) as the founder of the church in Alexandria. Despite Mark’s role it seems he was not certainly the founder of the

church at Alexandria *per say*, since ordinary Jews who were converted on the day of Pentecost are said to have taken the gospel there first. Jews from “the parts of Libya near Cyrene” in Jerusalem (Acts 2:10) who were present on the day of Pentecost most likely took the gospel with them to North Africa (Wedepohl in Vumisa 2012:19). The Ethiopian Eunuch, an important official in-charge of the treasury of Candace, the queen of Ethiopians converted in Acts 8, certainly took the gospel to this part of Africa. Furthermore, some of the leaders, Simeon called Niger and Lucius of Cyrene of the church at Antioch, the great missionary-sending congregation at the time were probably from Africa (Wedepohl in Vumisa 2012:20). Simeon was simply identified as a black man, and was possibly from the Ethiopic countries (Sanneh 1983:3). It is even held that after the Pentecost event in Jerusalem, the disciples followed the Lord’s instruction and went to Judea and then to Samaria. After that the next place the gospel came to before spreading to Europe was Africa (Hildebrandt 1996:5). Hence, as Africans were very involved in missions in the early church the effort should be continued from generation to generation.

2.5.2 The beginning of Christian missions in Egypt

Though Christianity seems to have come to Egypt as early as the first century A.D., Kalu (2005:54) however, agrees with Falk (1997:26), who dates it based on the episcopate of Demetrius of Alexandria (189-232 A.D.). This could be the period Christianity flourished (Kalu 2005:54). With the nearness of Egypt to Palestine, a large number of approximately a million Jews settled there and the pioneer Christian missionaries as Groves (1948:36) indicates went first to the Synagogues. This shows that Christian activity in Egypt began quite early. Yet it is only with the episcopate of Demetrius of Alexandria (189-232 A.D.) that the church in Egypt appears on the stage of history (Groves 1948:36). Demetrius was apparently the first to appoint three other bishops, and the number increased to twenty-three by his successor (Groves 1948:36; Falk 1997:26).

It seems necessary to note that Egyptian Christianity grew amidst the influence of three ethnic groups. Namely: the Jews, the Greeks and the Copts. Baur (1994:21) distinguishes three stages to which each of the three ethnic groups in Egypt successfully played a dominant role in the beginning of Christianity therein: Jews (100 A.D.), Hellenists (200 A.D.), and Copts (300 A.D.). Following Baur (1994:21), it

seems important to briefly consider what happened in each of the periods as named above:

2.5.2.1 Jewish Christianity – Link with the apostles (100 A.D.)

A group of Christian Jews, who lived in Jewish settlements in Egypt between 50 and 100 A.D. is said to constitute the link of the church in Egypt with the apostles (Baur 1994: 21). Baur (1994:21) points out that the unanimous Egyptian tradition venerates St. Mark as the founder of the apostolic see of Alexandria having ordained its first Bishop Annianus in 62 A.D. Even though historians often dismiss this assertion because it is found only in the Church History of Eusebius (320 A.D.), and not in earlier extensive though non-historical writings of Clement and Origen, Baur (1994:21), holds fast to it. He emphasises first, that the authenticity of this tradition is supported by the fact that Mark was the companion of Peter to whom the mission to the Jews had been entrusted. Second, he indicates that Alexandria as the home of the greatest Jewish diaspora was certainly visited by Peter and Mark. Hence, the year 62 A.D. could be referred to as the founding date of the first church in Africa (Baur 1994:21).

Furthermore, Baur (1994:22) outlines three discoveries as a proof of Christian existence in Egypt. The first and the clearest proof which indicates that a Christian community existed in Egypt around 100 A.D., is found in the many *papyri* discovered in various sites. The second discovery from the sands of Egypt is the mummies exhumed at *Fayyum*. Their pictures are painted on their coffins and some of them wear a wreath of laurels, the ancient sign of having won the crown of martyrdom. The third discovery, made at *Nag Hammadi* in 1948, sheds light on Judeo-Christian Gnosticism – the great tragedy that befell the Christian Jews in Egypt and elsewhere. The main discovery has been a whole library of the Gnostics literature, a proof of a great Gnostic community still flourishing in the fourth century, which explains why the majority of the Judeo-Christians had become heretics quite early.

2.5.2.2 Hellenistic Christianity: The link with the universal Church (200 A.D.)

Egypt was conquered by Alexander the Great (332 B.C.), some three hundred years before Christ (Baur 1994:22). As a result, Egypt was then exposed to the intensive influence of Greek colonisation, called Hellenisation (Hellenes=Greeks) (Baur

1994:22). The Greek language and culture permeated Alexandria and other cities in Egypt and were accepted by practically both Greeks and Egyptians (Baur 1994:22). Worthy of note during this period is the *Alexandrian Theological School*, which was meant to teach Christians to stand firm against the Gnostics of the time. The Gnostics taught that salvation was to be found in knowledge (gnosis) and reduced Christianity to philosophical speculations, mixed with some Egyptian pagan rituals of Alexandria (Baur 1994:22). The Alexandrian Theological School was able to quench the thirst for knowledge of the young Christians of Egypt, and avoid the pitfalls of the Gnostics (Baur 1994:22). More about this school is found in the section concerning factors which facilitated the growth of Christianity in Egypt (see page 79).

It however, seems relevant to mention here two renowned teachers of this catechetical school - Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Clement of Alexandria was indeed the first Christian scholar of his time. Although he warned his students against the errors of the philosophers, he insisted on accepting from the Hellene 'whatever is good, whatever is beautiful' (Baur 1994:22). Origen on the other hand had a passion for working all the elements of faith and philosophy into a theological system (Baur 1994:22). According to Baur (1994:23), Origen followed three steps in this process: First, he started with Scripture, establishing a secure text by comparing the various versions and interpreted it, always looking for a deeper (often allegorical) meaning of the text. Second, he explained the biblical faith further by bringing it into the context of Greek philosophy and presenting it as a systematic unity. Third, he pointed out the way of perfection to the Christian soul. Hence, he looked for both contextual and spiritual relevance of the text. Baur (1994:23) points out that even though in today's Africa south of the Sahara, we may be less inclined to follow Origen's theological speculations, we have to learn from him as well as from Clement the art of giving to our faith a standing that will be respected by the educated elite of our time. Besides, he goes on their work is an incentive to us, to formulate this faith in the context of our African background and culture. This is partly what this study on Christian missions and African cultures is attempting to do.

2.5.2.3 Coptic Christianity – The proper Egyptian Church (300 A.D.)

The word 'Copt' refers to non-Islamised Egyptians. It has however also been adopted for the early non-Hellenised population of Egypt (Baur 1994:23).

Furthermore, Buar (1994:23), points out that the term 'Copt' is the Arabic spelling of 'Egypt', and is today applied to non-Islamised Egyptians but has been also adopted for the early non-Hellenised population of Egypt. Isichei (1995:26) seems to give a more explicit meaning of the word. According to her the word Coptic can refer to a people, a language, or a Church. While Buar (1994:23) sees its origin from Arabic, Isichei (1995:26) indicates that both 'Copt' and Egypt come from a Greek word *Aigyptos*. The Copts lived in the country side and Upper Egypt (Buar 1994:23). Coptic Christianity grew out of persecution and was mostly expressed in the lives of the Desert People (Isichei 1995:26). A mass turning away from the old religion towards Christianity seems to have taken place at the peak of the persecution, at the middle of the third century (Isichei 1995:26). Although some of the reasons why Egyptian people accepted Christianity are associated with the sufferings of Egyptian peasantry and the relative deprivation of Jewish and Egyptian elites, the main reason seems to be the inability of the gods to halt its spread (Isichei 1995:26).

The Coptic Church (the Egyptian Church) grew amidst unprecedented persecution. For example, when Emperor Sempitimus Severus prohibited all conversion to Christianity in Egypt, a great number of Coptic neophytes from Thebes, were brought to execution. Furthermore, during the persecution under Decius (250 A.D.), Coptic liturgical books were burnt, which proves that a local Coptic liturgy had already been developed (Baur 1994:23). That notwithstanding, around 300 A.D., the full Bible was translated into the Sahidic dialect of Upper Egypt, and in 350 A.D. Athanasius decided to preach in the Coptic language even in Alexandria (Baur 1994:23). Hence, Baur (1994:24) intimates that at the end of Athanasius' episcopate (373 A.D.) Egypt must have been a Christian nation. Thus, indigenous language plays an important role in the spread of the gospel. Besides, Egypt like many African countries had been 'notoriously religious' already in pre-Christian times. Consequently, her traditional religion had several stepping stones to Christianity (Baur 1994:24). The veneration of many gods of old in Egypt as Baur (1994:24), indicates had been reduced to the cult of Osiris, the father god, Isis, his sister and spouse; and Horus their son. According to the practice of this religion,

Horus would lead the good souls after death to Osiris who made them share his divinity and immortality; Isis was the heavenly mother who protected them already in this life. Thus, resurrection and eternal life through Christ and the veneration of Our Lady as Mother of God was for the Copts but a new version of their faith (Baur 1994:24).

This example from Egypt seems to cut across most if not all African countries, though in different degrees. It could also be related to the Athenians' 'Unknown God' in Acts 17.

2.5.3 Some characteristics of the Coptic Christianity

Worthy of note are three factors that characterised the Coptic Church at the time: martyrdom, monasticism and monophysitism. These factors influenced the growth of Coptic Christianity in various ways, which seem to be necessary to know.

2.5.3.1 The Coptic Church and martyrdom

The Coptic Christians embraced martyrdom so much so that one could be right to state that Coptic Christianity grew out of martyrdom. They witnessed in the midst of unprecedented persecution of the fourth century A.D. Affirming their brevity, Baur writes:

The greatest glory of the Egyptian Church is the crown of martyrdom which many Coptic Christians won with courage unheard of in other countries. Their witness took place chiefly during the persecution under Diocletian. In the years 303 to 306 there were daily executions of twenty, thirty or even more Christians (Baur 1994:24).

Indeed, the Copts were so brave during the persecution so much so that the Romans called it the 'stubborn resistance of the peasant population' (Baur 1994:24). Following the intensity of martyrdom and the impression it made on Christian Egypt, a new chronology was started, beginning with the era martyrdom – the reign of Diocletian, 283 A.D. We are told that the Coptic Church continued to use this chronology even when the other churches began counting the years from the birth of Christ (Baur 1994:24).

2.5.3.2 The Coptic Church and monasticism

In addition to martyrdom, the Coptic Christians also believed that the crown of heaven could be acquired through asceticism, what Baur, describes as "a kind of unbloodied or 'white' martyrdom" (1994:24). This took the specific form of monasticism in Egypt and turned out to be the greatest contribution the African continent made to the universal Church (Baur 1994:24). Monastic life was the ordinary Christians' total commitment to the Gospels' invitation to leave everything and follow Christ. These ordinary Christians thus left "house and field" (Mtt. 19:17),

and went to the desert, where they combined a life of asceticism and contemplation (Baur 1994:24).

Although this monastic life was good, many young men who tried it despaired or got lost in idle extravagances (Baur 1994:24). That notwithstanding, it is worth noting that the monks played a vital role in the lives of the people around. For example, during harvest season some would leave their monasteries and help farmers, while the ones, who confined themselves in their cells, served the Christian community as spiritual counsellors (Baur 1994:24). Besides, monasticism attracted a lot of visitors – pilgrims and equally made Egypt a country of living saints (Baur 1994:24).

2.5.3.3 The Coptic Church and monophysitism

While martyrdom and monasticism seemed to have contributed to the growth of Coptic Christianity, monophysitism greatly disrupted it and severed her relationship with the rest of Christendom. In simple terms, monophysitism was the Christological controversy in which the monks played a decisive role. They emphasised the divine nature of Christ to the extent of overlooking his human nature. Monophysitism could thus be called One Nature doctrine (Baur 1994:25). The debate continued in the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) and that of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) and all attempts at reconciliation failed and the Coptic Church was cut off from Constantinople as well as from Rome and denounced as Monophysite (Baur 1994:25).

With a good knowledge of this controversy, Baur (1994:25), intimates that modern theologians would agree that the theological issue was mainly one of terminology. Hence, he states:

The basic problem was that the Council of Chalcedon spoke in the abstract terms of Greek philosophy: 'one person in two natures', while the African Copts could only think in concrete terms: two natures meant for them two persons. An additional problem was that the theologians at Chalcedon spoke of the two equal natures forgetting to mention the generally admitted primacy of the divine, while the Egyptian thirst for divination preferred to forget the human – in Christ as well as in the Christians! (Baur 1994:25).

It seems the problem of terminology has always haunted Christianity and where ever there is misunderstanding the other party moves to form her own church and follow her own doctrine and /or understanding. Sometimes it is not only that but insatiable thirst for power.

In addition to these three factors that influenced the growth of Christianity in Egypt, it seems also important to note the types of environment in which Christianity developed in Egypt.

2.6 The environment in which Christianity developed in Egypt

Groves (1948:36-37) identifies two types of environment in which Christianity developed in Egypt as described below.

2.6.1 The first was the Greek-speaking population of the Delta (Alexandria)

This population shared the religious and cultural influences common to the Hellenised provinces of the Empire (Groves 1948:36). Religiously, the first sacred Hebrew Scriptures was first translated into Greek for the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria, while culturally, philosophy was the order of the day, demonstrated by the influence of Platonic ideals on both Jews and Christians (Groves 1948:36). In other words, Christianity followed the realities of the time, linguistically and culturally.

2.6.2 The native Egyptian population

The native Egyptian population, later known as the Copts, provided the second environment to which Christianity was exposed (Groves 1948:37). Earlier on Groves (1948:37) has affirmed this by indicating that the popular Egyptian religion was much concerned with magical mysteries, demonstrated by the famous cult of Osiris. The natives believed in a future life and held that such could be secured through Osiris who, though slain by evil, had triumphed in a resurrection (Groves 1948:37). The ambition of the Egyptian devotee was to carry out successfully the magical rites by which Osiris had overcome the enemy (Groves 1948:37). In this practice, a moral demand was not wanting since there was weighing of good and evil before passing to the enjoyment of future happiness (Groves 1948:37). This belief and practice could serve as a fertile ground for the seed of the gospel. Hence, Christianity, with its proclamation of a Saviour who conquered death was expected to find a sympathetic hearing, but not without syncretism (Groves 1948:37). This seems to testify that we may never have a pure religion void of syncretism. The issue of syncretism is taken up in the next chapter.

2.7 Factors that facilitated the growth of Christianity in Egypt

Just as certain conditions such as the availability of sunlight and water are necessary for the germination of seeds, there are factors that enhance the growth of Christianity. Below are some of the factors that facilitated the growth of Christianity in Egypt.

2.7.1 Language

One of the decisive evidence of the expansion of the church among the original Egyptian population of the Nile valley was the use of the Egyptian language (Groves 1948:39). At first, given the Hellenic culture that prevailed at the time in Alexandria, Greek was the general medium of communication for Christians until the expansion of the message beyond the cultivated Greek-speaking population to the original Egyptian inhabitants that some translation of the New Testament books was required (Groves 1948:39). Three of the native Egyptian dialects - the *Sahidic*, the *Bohairic* and the *Bashmuric* in use became the media for the new versions of the Scriptures. The *Bohairic* version later became the official dialect for the Coptic Church (Groves 1948:39-40). In addition to the canonical books, there was an apocryphal Egyptian literature that according to Groves (1948:40), witnessed to the appetite it sought to satisfy because of its emotional, uncritical quality and its free handling of incidents without concern for historical accuracy.

For, example, 'the Copts were tireless in producing embroideries upon the Biblical stories, and perhaps in rewriting older documents to suit their own taste.' One of the characteristics of this reshaping was what M. R James terms 'the reckless identification of the Virgin Mary and other Marys of the Gospels' (Groves 1948:40). Worthy of note is the fact that the creation of what is known as Ecclesiastical Latin took place in North Africa, in and through Tertullian's writings (Sundkler & Steed 2000:22). Sundkler & Steed (2000:28) point out that a great difference between the fate of the Church in North Africa and its fate in Egypt seemed to have come from the Berber attempt at writing Latin. In order to elucidate this point, they write:

In Egypt, the Coptic Church was Coptic, in and through its very own language, proudly possessed, and its means of expression in personal prayer and common worship. In North Africa, the Church spoke Latin and the Bible translations were in Latin, a language appropriated for the Church's elite by

Tertullian, St Cyprian and St Augustine, but never fully assimilated by the laboring masses on the inland estates (Sundkler & Steed (2000:28).

This is indicative of the importance of the transmission of the gospel to the people through their own language. If Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine had embarked on the Berber language to pass the gospel message to their own people it would have been better assimilated.

Augustine is considered the greatest theologian that Africa has produced. He was a renowned preacher of his time and preaching in his congregations he was aware of the linguistic problems in the Hippo Diocese. Latin and Punic were the two main languages used and since Punic was related to Hebrew, Augustine used Punic words when he wished to explain biblical words. Some of the Latin-speaking class of his Christians looked down upon Punic as inferior but Augustine insisted on Punic as an honourable part of their native heritage (Sundkler & Steed 2000:25-26). He did not himself however preach in the language but used interpreters when necessary and by his reference to Punic words and proverbs, he gained the good will of the audience and increased the cheerfulness of the congregation (Sundkler & Steed 2000:24). Hence, the importance of native language in the transmission of the gospel cannot be overemphasised.

2.7.2 Custom of burial

Groves (1948:40), opines that this action serves as a reminder that the expansion of Christianity in any region must always be measured in two dimensions: the area of the population that becomes attached to the new faith and the depth to which the new religion penetrates in reshaping faith and life. He points out that in the second respect growth was more gradual in Egypt. As an example, Groves (1948:40) alludes to archaeological evidence seen in the disposal of the dead, wherein the excavations at Antinoë in Upper Egypt brought to light a cemetery containing Christian dead indicating slow transition from earlier Egyptian custom. Furthermore, the embalming of the dead continued, a belief which had been linked with the belief in the passage of the soul to and fro between the realms of Osiris and the tomb (Groves 1948:40).

Indeed, many other cultural practices in respect of the dead continued as indicated below:

Apparently, offerings of food were still made to the dead by Christians, a survival of the Egyptian idea of magical food for the deceased. A Christian cemetery in the oasis of el-Khargeh has tombs of the pre-Christian pattern to which chambers with niches for offerings are attached. Moreover, the custom of burying with the dead wine jars and baskets for bread is revealed at Antinoë. It is suggested these may refer to the mystic Eucharist, for the custom of placing the holy elements in the coffin was at one time practiced. Other objects, such as images of saints and evangelists, have been found replacing the figures of the gods of an earlier period. In a striking case of a supposed Christian priest, he is depicted on the outer wrapping holding a cup in one hand and corn-ears in the other (probably emblems of the Eucharist), with the swastika on his shoulder and the boat of Isis below (Groves 1948:41).

This reveals that inculturation was already feasible in Egyptian Christianity. Groves intimates that “the pull of the old religion, with its vivid conception of the future and hope of a life beyond, together with such means as were believed necessary to realise this hope, gave to Egyptian Christianity a distinctive character” (1948:41). As a support to this fact, Groves cites Harnack, who states:

Christianity in Egypt more than anywhere else perhaps, with the exception of Greece, adjusted itself to certain cardinal traits of the old national religion.... If the Egyptians were for the most part Christians by the middle of the fourth century, then they had created a sort of the national religion for themselves out of the new religion by grafting on the latter to the cravings and remnants of the old (Groves 1948:41).

Thus, it is important to consider the custom of the people in mission as a tool for the spread of the gospel message, essentially beginning from what they already know and hold in high esteem.

2.7.3 The used of art

The Christians of the first two centuries tended to regard visual art for religious purposes with great suspicion for two main reasons. The first being that the Ten Commandments contained a strict prohibition on the manufacture and use of graven images (Ex. 20:4-6); Deut. 5:8-10) and both Christians and Jews considered this rule binding. The second reason was that by deliberately not using religious and imperial images, cult statues, and idols, Christians emphasised the distance between themselves and the pagan world (Davidson 2005:292).

As time went on, Christians, did however, routinely depict symbolic aspects of their faith on a variety of everyday object, including jewellery and household items such as tableware, drinking vessels, and lamps. In the second century, quite a number of

'innocent' secular images were gradually adapted to a Christian context. For example, the symbol of the Good Shepherd was adapted from the pagan world (Davidson 2005:293). This indicates that even though Christians continued to deplore the evils of idolatry, they were prepared to differentiate between images as objects of worship and visual art as an expression of faith and a sign of belonging within the family of God. In addition to make the symbols more relevant to the contexts, classical forms were revamped to portray express biblical images in a variety of ways. Considering that so many could not read the Scriptures for themselves visual art had a teaching purpose, aiding devotion for them (Davidson 2005:295).

Hence, in the representation of favourite scenes and images from the Hebrew Scriptures and the Gospels, ordinary believers were reminded of their communal identity with the people of faith in every age, and the artistic forms reflected the ways in which sacred texts were appropriated in Christian interpretation and worship (Davidson 2005:295). These arts aided their understanding somehow and they could visualise what they believe in more concrete terms.

The activity of the Copts in Christian art facilitated the growth of Christianity in Egypt as they made remarkable developments in decorative design after the fourth century (Groves 1948:41). According to Groves (1948:41-42), the Copts seemed to have derived methods and motives from Iran, probably by way of Syria, but they developed their own forms of expression. They were active producers and distribution was wide, with the evidence that bronze vessels of Coptic type have been found even in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries.

2.7.4 Monastic life

The development of monastic life was an outstanding contribution that Egyptian Christianity made to the whole of Christendom (Groves 1948:42). Monastic life did not however begin in Egypt. As an ascetic element in the Christian ideal it was present from the Apostolic Age (Groves 1948:42). It was developed by the Christian reaction to the sensual pleasures of pagan cities and was encouraged from the philosophic side by the view of the spirit as opposed to sense. It was aimed at liberating one from the thralldom of sense so that one could achieve a spiritual experience. This development of an ascetic Christian ideal was found in Alexandria

and seems to have made a special appeal to the Egyptian converts (Groves 1948:42). Two Egyptians of Coptic origin, Anthony and Pachomius founded two types of monastic life, solitary (eremitic) and community respectively (Groves 1948:42). As a young man of twenty, on hearing the story of the young rich ruler (Mtt. 19:17ff), Anthony disposed of his goods and eventually retired into the desert. Many people emulated his example and this resulted to the formation of several colonies of hermits, notably in the Nitrian and Scete deserts in Lower Egypt (Groves 1948:42). Ammonius, the father of monasticism in the Nitrian desert, exercised strict discipline among the hundreds of hermits who settled there (Groves 1948:42). Meanwhile Pachomius founded a monastery on an island in the Nile in the Upper Thebaid. This type of monastic community was more systematised than the hermitic one in the desert. For example, occupants were followed and sufficient food for an active life was allowed (Groves 1948:42). Parts of the Pachomius system was a common garb and the duty of obedience to a superior in control. Consequently, some eight monasteries existed modelled on his plan (Groves 1948:42).

Monastic life was so appealing to the untutored Egyptian Christian so much so that in the same fourth century, the state took action to secure the discharge of civic duty. This was because many had left for monastic life and the seriously depleted community was left behind to serve its citizens (Groves 1948:43). In 365 A.D., a law of Valens decreed that all who left the cities of Egypt should be compelled either to return to discharge their civic duties or to hand over their property to relatives who would (Groves 1948:43). The existence of monasteries also affected the functioning of the church in Egypt. For example, considerable power came to be wielded by them and their leaders who rivalled the Egyptian episcopate in their influence. Furthermore, in the controversies of the time they were violently active, even invading Alexandria with fanatical rioting and bloodshed and thereby staining the Christian name (Groves 1948:43). Following this violent attack in a bid to secure fame, one would agree with Groves that “the extravagant extension of monasticism in Egypt beyond what was required to fulfill a genuine sense of vocation greatly weakened the life of the Church in that country” (Groves 1948:43).

2.7.5 The influence of the Catechetical School of Alexandria

The famous Catechetical School of Alexandria served as a centre of Christian scholarship, though it trained both Christians and non-Christians in Greek philosophy (Groves 1948:36). According to Groves (1948:37), this was a genuine missionary activity, though it did not look towards the native population of Egypt or the underdeveloped peoples beyond (Groves 1948:37). Hence, it concentrated on the middle and upper class people of Alexandria and neglected the natives. Nevertheless, it influenced the growth of Christianity in Egypt and even beyond. The Catechetical School of Alexandria, founded about 180 A.D. contributed enormously to the growth of the Church in Egypt. This school was created to teach people about Jesus Christ, theology and the doctrine of the Church (Falk 1997:29).

It was situated in Alexandria, the great city of learning, which flourished from the second to the third century A.D. (Walker 1985:89). It was certainly the first theological school in the known world (Groves 1948:37), which was probably founded as a reaction against Gnosticism (Isichei 1995:20). The word Gnosticism comes from 'gnosis', which means intuitive knowledge, the knowledge of the heart. Gnosticism was understood as heresy, yet many Gnostics lived, taught, and died peacefully within the Catholic Church (Isichei 1995:18). The Gnostics laid emphasis on individual religious experience and quest as well as the importance of feminine in theology and praxis. In addition, they believed that the different religious traditions of mankind were distant echoes of the same ultimate truth (Isichei 1995:18). The catechetical school attempted to offer a reasoned and reasonable presentation of Christian truth both for the training of Christian believers and non-believers nurtured in Greek philosophy (1948:37). According to Groves (1948:37), this was a genuine missionary activity, though it did not consider the native population of Egypt or the underdeveloped peoples beyond.

The founder and first teacher of the catechetical school was a converted Stoic called Pantaenus (Groves 1948:36, Walker 1985:87, Isichei 1995:20). He was probably a Sicilian (Isichei 1995:20). When he died, Clement of Alexandria headed the school till 202 A.D (Walker 1985:89, Isichei 1995:21), when he fled from a 'savage persecution' (Isichei 1995:21) 'under.....for good and nothing is known about his life henceforth' (Walker 1985:89). When he fled in 202 A.D, Origen (185-253 A.D.), his

pupil took over leadership of the catechetical school. He was born of mixed Egyptian and Alexandrian Greek parentage and grew up in a fervent devout Christian family. He was the first major thinker of the early church to tackle the problems of Christology (Isichei 1995:21). After his death in 253 A.D. at the age of sixty-nine, Didymus the Blind (318-398 A.D.), took over as head of the school. He was blind from infancy. Yet he worked so hard and was credited with the invention of a script for the blind (Isichei 1995:23).

2.8 Factors that retarded the growth of Christianity in Egypt

Just as some factors facilitated the growth of Christianity in Egypt, there were some that retarded it.

2.8.1 Theological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries

Here the controversies are looked at from their effects to the relation of the Egyptian Christians to ecumenical Christianity and on the imperial power (Groves 1948:43). When Constantine accessed as sole Emperor in 323, Christians throughout the empire were both relieved of the oppressive statutes and given material privileges of the state religion. Unfortunately, the unity of the Church was threatened by internal controversy master-minded by Arius and Athanasius in a dispute as to the relation of Christ the Son to the Father, with Alexandria as the centre of the debate (Groves 1948:43).

The debate was centred on the issue of the Trinity and the nature of Christ. Arius held the view that the Logos is a creature called into being by God 'out of nonexistence' (Walker 1918:132). When the Pope of Alexandria, Alexander, heard these views presented in a debate between Arius and another teacher, probably Athanasius (Walker 1985:132; Isichei 1995:23) he gave his decision that Arius was wrong and must cease setting forth such opinions. The Bishop held the view that the Son is generate eternally, without reference to time, 'comes from God himself' rather than from 'nonexistence,' and is changeless and perfect. According to Arius, Alexander was teaching two coequal gods – two 'unbegotten' (Walker 1985:132). Despite the Pope's decision that Arius was wrong, he however stood his ground and in 318 A.D., he was excommunicated from the church (Isichei 1995:23).

Emperor Constantine decided to seek a solution for this and other matters in dispute by a common council of bishops. In 325 A.D., the first Ecumenical Council of the Church met at Nicaea where a creed⁷ was accepted for the first time proposed to the whole church as a standard of doctrine (Groves 1948:43). However, two bishops at Nicaea, both Egyptians, refusing to subscribe to it, the main purpose of the Council was temporarily achieved. Temporary only because, Arianism still spread and even beyond Egypt and succeeded to pull a following. Yet it was the cause of much sorry discord in the church in Egypt (Groves 1948:44). In the course of the Arian controversy, the question of the nature of the union between the divine and the human in Christ emerged. In addition, two non-theological issues cropped up: first the apparent ecclesiastical ambition of the bishops of Alexandria from 325 A.D., which involved a keen rivalry with the See of Constantinople. Second, there was always the imperial concern that for the well-being of the Empire there should be unity within the church as a State Church (Groves 1948:44).

Worthy of note is the fact that these controversies led to the convening of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. by an imperial edict, and attended by about 600 members. This Council determined that Christ was 'perfect alike in His divinity and perfect in His humanity, alike truly God and truly man... the same Christ in two natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably' (Groves 1948:45). The 'Orthodox' formula asserting two natures in one person, was thus, formally endorsed as the doctrine of the Church and the acts of the Council given imperial confirmation, and public disputation against the Council's decisions expressly forbidden (Groves 1948:45).

In Egypt, the teachings on the two natures of Christ were already both resolved into one by the incarnation, with the party name of Monophysites, but this view was held on political rather than theological grounds. On political grounds, there was opposition to irksome control from out of Egypt (Groves 1948:45). It is worth noting that monks from Egypt present at the Council hesitated signing the decision and begged to be excused on the ground that if they did they would be killed on their return home. A minority in Egypt who accepted the Orthodox formula were

⁷ The original 'Nicene Creed' is distinct from the Nicene Creed in current use (Groves 1948:43).

nicknamed Melkites or 'Caesar-Christians' (Groves 1948:45). Groves (1948:45) points out that the feeling in opposition was so violent that troops had to be dispatched from Constantinople to secure peace. Furthermore, the newly elected Bishop could not move without a military escort.

Yet, the problem was not solved. A succession of rioting and tumult brought about the spirit of faction, which became bitterer and resulted to deplorable deeds of violence, which again stained the record of the church in Egypt (Groves 1948:45). This was further triggered by the network of monastic settlements, which enmeshed much of the country, and the cry 'one nature!' became indeed their battle-cry (Groves 1948:46). The consequences of this violence were enormous. First, with the exception of the small party of Melkites in Alexandria, the Egyptian Church had virtually separated from the Orthodox Communion. Second, in the sixth century, the struggle cropped up with the appearance of Monophysite sects in Egypt, Syria and Armenia became the source of the Coptic, Jacobite and Armenian churches. Third, Emperor Justinian (527-565) attempted in vain to reconcile the situation; the Empress Theodora favoured the Monophysite view and actively assisted them in promoting it. Fourth, the Coptic Christians suffered persecution by the official Orthodox party, both in the reign of Emperor Justinian and his successors. This left a rankling resentment that persisted for many generations (Groves 1948:46). Ironically monasticism that brought about the rapid growth of Christianity in Egypt finally contributed to its fall.

2.8.2 A summary of other doctrinal controversies

These controversies are based on Falk (1997:42-44). They influenced the growth of the Church in North Africa in diverse ways. Hence, a brief look at what each of these teachings stand for seems to be necessary.

2.8.2.1 Neoplatonism

This teaching held that God was a simple, absolute, perfect existence from whom the lower existence comes. According to the Neoplatonists, the *Nous*, or mind, emanates from God. Then from the *Nous* the world-soul derives its being, and from it the individual souls derive their being. Matter, they said comes from world-soul and salvation was by the rising of the soul in mystic contemplation to God. Though

Neoplatonism had some influence on Christian theology, it was not accepted by all (Falk 1997: 42). For example, Neoplatonist did not accept the incarnation (Isichei 1995:20).

2.8.2.2 Montanism

Montanism presented the thought of the special dispensation of the Holy Spirit and of an early return of Christ. The early church we, are told, maintained this idea. But in about 156 A.D., Montanus deviated from this proclamation and declared that he was the passive instrument through whom the Holy Spirit spoke. Prisca and Maximilla soon joined Montanus. They proclaimed that the heavenly Jerusalem would be established in Phrygia and called the believers to practice strict asceticism. This teaching influenced Tertullian (Falk 1997:42). He was one of the most famous North African Church Fathers. It seems necessary to note that Montanism gave rise to the Christological discussions which seemed to have had an indirect consequence on monasticism and gave rise to the Monarchians, who asserted the unity of God. It led to the church's expression of her faith in the Nicene Creed in 325 A.D., (Falk 1997:42-43).

2.8.2.3 Manichaeism

Manichaeism was a teaching based on the Old Persian dualism of light and darkness, which they thought were eternally at war. This teaching saw the human body as basically a prison house of the realm of evil; in which only a portion of a realm of light was confined. Manichaeism became a strong rival to Christianity as its spread was so rapid during the fourth and fifth centuries. Despite that it did not divide the church like Donatism as explained below (Falk 1997:43).

2.8.2.4 Donatism

Following modern terms Sundkler & Steed (2000:26) refer to the Donatists as a 'holiness' movement. According to the Donatists the true Church consists of holy members. Sundkler & Steed indicate that in the Catholic propaganda of the period, Donatism was seen as an example of denominationalism. The Donatists were named after Donatus who, in the time of the Great Persecution of 303A.D – 305A.D, has become a Bishop in North Africa and represented the claims of the holiness tradition in the Church with vigour. He claimed that his church was the Catholic

Church of Africa, 'sanctified by the martyrs and purified from its errors by their leader Donatus'. This movement was later weakened by inner divisions and finally the conference of 411 A.D., between the Catholics and the Donatists during which the Donatists were defeated. The debate lasted for three days and that each side was represented by not less than 280 bishops. The sanction was that the Donatist clergy were to be railed and dispatched to remote corners of the Empire (Sundkler & Steed 2000:27). Hence, it is never easy to defeat an institution or a system.

2.8.2.5 Pelagianism

It is believed that Christ became man in order to redeem man. Pelagianism virtually denied man's need for redemption. It is said that this teaching was propounded by Pelagius, a monk from Britain who wrote a commentary on the Epistles of Paul in 409 A.D., and went to North Africa in 411 A.D., (Falk 1997:49). Pelagius taught that:

every man is created with perfect freedom to do good or evil; that unbaptized children are saved, and therefore the practice of infant baptism is unnecessary; and that through divine grace, which is with every person, and by choosing the good, there have been sinless people even before Christ (Falk 1997: 49).

However, Augustine and his friends opposed Pelagianism through Augustine's writings and at the synods of 416 and 418 A.D. held in North Africa and in Carthage respectively (Falk 1997:49). Augustine's clear and forceful presentation was so convincing that through it the Western church rejected Pelagianism. That notwithstanding, his contemporaries were not ready to accept his strong emphasis on the inner church life, with less emphasis on the eternal ceremonies. This resistance gave rise to Semi-Pelagianism – an attempt to reconcile the systems of the Pelagius and Augustine (Falk 1997:49).

These controversies that plagued the church greatly retarded the growth of Christianity in North Africa and unfortunately most if not all stemmed from within. This was a demonstration of lack of a common sense of direction. Consequently, the church remained divided, yet as an institution it could dogmatise but could not hinder individuals from personal reflections.

2.8.3 The persecutions of the third and fourth centuries

The persecutions of the third and fourth centuries resulted to martyrdoms in Palestine, Tyre and Egypt (Groves 1948:37). The outbreak of this persecution was under Emperor Sempitimus Severus and occurred with the edict of 202 A.D., whereby fresh conversions to both Christianity and Judaism were forbidden (Groves 1948:37). The persecution was indeed severe as can be seen from the following testimonies by Eusebius who was an eyewitness of martyrdoms in the Thebais⁸:

We also, being on the spot ourselves have observed large crowds in one day; some suffering decapitation, others torture by fire.... As soon as judgment was pronounced against the first, one after another rushed to the judgment seat, and confessed themselves Christians (Groves 1948:38).

Furthermore, Eusebius names some bishops and other members of the church in Egypt 'who suffered deaths illustriously at Alexandria and throughout Thebais' (Groves 1948:38). Following these martyrdoms, Groves observes that: 'No section of the hard-pressed Christian fellowship held a prouder record than did the Egyptian Christians under fiery trial. As in apostolic days, so now dispersion through persecution led to the further expansion of the Church' (Groves 1948:38).

2.8.4 Gnosticism

Gnosticism comes from 'Gnosis' which means intuitive knowledge, the knowledge of the heart. The Gnostics lay emphasis on individual religious experience and quest and the importance of feminine in both theology and praxis. Given the development of Feminine Theology, this emphasis makes the Gnostics immensely attractive today (Isichei 1995:18). An Egyptian peasant made what Isichei (1995:18) has termed a remarkable discovery in 1945: a library of forty-eight Gnostic books that had been translated from Greek into Coptic. These texts had been concealed because in the late fourth century A.D., when the manuscripts were written Gnosticism was a heresy (Isichei 1995:18).

They believed that magic charms would enable them to pass through the intervening levels to God. They equally believed that the different religious traditions of mankind

⁸ "The Thebais or territory of Thebes, lay some 500miles up the Nile, so that a considerable expansion of Christianity had taken place by this date" (Groves 1948:38).

were distant echoes of the same ultimate truth. Interestingly, they never formed a unified school of thought as each Gnostic teacher had her or his own teachings. For example, Basilides believed that he was the heir to a secret tradition that went back to either Peter or Matthias. It is said that his starting point was the utter transcendence of God. Valentine claimed that he inherited a secret tradition, received from Theudas, a disciple of Paul, and endorsed by mystical experience.

Like Basilides, his fundamental insight was a sense of the utter otherness of God, the inadequacy of all our analyses and descriptions (Isichei 1995:19). One could understand Gnosticism clearer based on the two traditions out of which it developed: philosophic Platonism and Ptolemaic astronomy. According to Plato, the spiritual world is separate from and infinitely superior to the material and the eternal soul is imprisoned in the body (Isichei 1995:20). This tradition greatly influenced the history of Christian thought, but Neo-Platonists could not accept incarnation (Isichei 1995:20) – the core of Christianity. Neo-Platonism became the preferred ideology of the educated opponents to Christianity. Christianity thus grew in Egypt against the backdrop of Gnosticism, the cultural milieu at the time.

Unfortunately, such was the unhappy state of the church in Egypt at the time when a new national force and religious faith – Islam, a rival power was coming to birth in Arabia and would soon enter Egypt (Groves 1948:46). And as can be seen below, the coming of Islam affected the growth of Christianity tremendously, affirming a saying that: “when two brothers fight, the stranger reaps the harvest” (Achebe 1958).

2.8.5 The challenge of Islam

Islam entered Africa through two main ways, from the east and south, wherein the carriers had to navigate through the waters of the Indian Ocean and the desert sands of the Sahara respectively. Worthy of note is that fact that the carriers of Islam could cross these spaces with appropriate means of transportation and navigational skills, and they were, we are told, excellent transmitters of religious and cultural influences (Levtzion & Pouwels 2000:1). Then from Egypt, Islam extended in three directions, through the Red Sea to the eastern coastal areas, up the Nile valley to the Sudan, and across the western desert to the Maghrib (Levtzion & Pouwels 2000:1).

The waters and the deserts that could be seen as barriers to others, instead facilitated the rapid spread of Islam in North Africa a manner that could not have been imagined. Hence, in referring to the rapid and unprecedented manner in which Islam entered Africa, Grove's states:

The only world religion to rise after Christianity was Islam. It has ever since been the most resistant of all to Christian missionary effort. The rapidity of its spread was spectacular. To take the westward expansion alone, within ten years of its founder's death it had invaded Egypt, and within a century it had swept across North Africa to the Atlantic In the process the Christian enterprise in Africa was overwhelmed (Groves 1948:69).

According to Isichiei (1995:42), the prophet Muhammed died in 632 A.D., and an Arab force invaded Egypt seven years later, that is 639 A.D. This conquest seems to have been largely aided by the divisions among the Coptic Christians and the Orthodox party (Isichei 1995:42-43) (Groves 1948:72-73). Affirming the devastating effects that these divisions had on Christianity, Levtzion & Pouwels writes:

During the early seventh century, Byzantine had been racked by the controversy between the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Alexandria over the orthodox interpretation of Christology. Constantinople advanced the doctrine of Christ's mysteriously double nature, divine as well as human (the Nicene Creed). Alexandria insisted on the more rational doctrine of God's single, divine nature descending into the human form of Jesus (Coptic Monophysitism). While the emperors vainly sought to impose a compromise formula, the caliphs took advantage of their disarray. "Do not speak of three (gods)," warns one of the inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock, disposing of Christology altogether. Islam was presented as the new, superior religion, built on clear, rational separation between a single, non-Trinitarian God and World (Levtzion & Pouwels 2000:22).

The debate resulted to the persecution of the Coptic Christians by the Orthodox party (Groves 1948:72). Cyrus who was appointed in 631 A.D. as both the political and imperial representative by Heraclius – the (Eastern Emperor, 610-642 A.D.), took a repressive policy towards the Coptic Church with the aim of pulling it into conformity with the Orthodox Communion, and as a civil administrator he even increased taxation, the result was the reduction of his popularity. Furthermore, Groves (1948:72) points out that during his ten years of leadership he aggravated a situation that led to his identification with the Antichrist. Worthy of note is the fact that the rapidity of the conquest with comparatively small forces was largely favoured by the disaffection prevailing among the Copts to whom Arabs came as deliverers from an oppressive imperial power. However, there was no religious landslide to the

Arabs at first and no direct pressure exerted on their part to produce it (Groves 1948:73).

Meanwhile Byzantine rule had been displaced by Arab conquest in Syria and Mesopotamia, resulting in the securing of the Fertile Crescent that overarched on the north their own peninsula (Groves 1948:72). In 640 A.D., an Arab army invaded Egypt and within a couple of years, Alexandria fell into their hands, and the campaign was complete (Groves 1948:72). Furthermore, by the twelfth century, the last indigenous Christians disappeared from North Africa, and by the fifteenth century the Christian Coptic population of Egypt itself was reduced to a minority of some 15 percent (Levtzion & Pouwels 2000:1). In addition, the Christian Nubians, who resisted Muslim expansion for almost six centuries, after having defeated the Muslims in what is termed “a memorable battle” that was fought before the walls of the Northern Nubian Kingdom of Mukuria (Levtzion & Pouwels 2000:118), steadily lost ground between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries. Ethiopia however endured as a Christian state even after the number of Muslims had grown considerably; Muslims could not own land and were excluded from higher government offices (Levtzion & Pouwels 2000:1).

On the other hand, there were some restrictions placed upon Christians and Jews: the payment of tribute, hospitality to the Muslims, prohibition of erection of new churches or monasteries, avoidance of all advertisement or display of Christian practices. No cross, for example, to be shown publicly. Other restrictions included distinctiveness in dress and in saddles and use of weapons, and even limitations in the height of the houses (Groves 1948:73-74).

Groves (1948:75) further indicates that distinction in dress seems only to have been largely required after the Arabs settled down to the civilised life of the conquered provinces, and there arose some temptation to imitate them. The following distinctions were set forth: the *zunnar* or girdle for Christians and Jews, on colour, Christians were to wear yellow cloaks and turbans, and their slaves a yellow patch in front and behind, Christian women were to wear a yellow wrapper out of doors (Groves 1948:76). This was not permanent, because a century later Al Hakin, the mad Caliph of Egypt ordered non-Muslims to wear black (Groves 1948:76). Each succeeding Caliph had his own way of handling the Christians, for example while

some never tolerated the building of churches, there was one – Umayyads (661-750 A.D.) who allowed new churches, convents and monasteries to be built and some even restored (Groves 1948:76).

Yet the severe treatment other Caliphs imparted on Christians encouraged the appeal to force and from time to time Coptic discontent expressed itself in revolt (Groves 1948:76-77). Through the Muslim rule the Coptic community was drastically reduced but the remnant has survived over the years (Groves 1948:77). It seems also necessary to note that Islam like Christianity underwent the same process of rancorous divisions before orthodoxy eventually emerged. For Christianity, it was the Christological controversy, meanwhile with Islam, the resentment began with the Caliphate and its ability to define doctrine. Hence, proclaiming a new religion was one thing and turning it into orthodoxy another (Levtzion & Pouwels 2000:22).

2.9 Missionary enterprise beyond Egypt

Though some places have been mentioned above other than Egypt, it seems necessary to be more specific here and touch on those areas in North Africa which played important roles in the spread of Christianity therein. Prominent places in North Africa that played important roles in the early history of Christianity are Nubia (where southern Egypt and northern Sudan are found today), Axum, and Cyrene (now Libya) Abyssinia (now modern Ethiopia). Simply put, beyond Egypt but still in North Africa Christianity spread to Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), especially in the kingdom of Axum, Carthage (now Tunisia) and Nubia (modern Sudan). Isichei (1995:18) points out that the churches of Egypt, Nubia and Ethiopia had close links with the rest of eastern Christendom and that there is a great unity of spirit between Egyptian and Syrian Christianity. For example, the Syrian churches rejoice in the fact that their language is the closest to the Aramaic spoken by Jesus (Isichei 1995:18), and the Egyptian churches would certainly rejoice in the other fact that Jesus took refuge in Egypt. This is affirmed by the Coptic liturgy: 'Be glad and rejoice, O Egypt, and her sons and her borders, for there hath come to Thee the Lord of Man...' (Isichei 1995:17).

2.9.1 Axum

Asum (Aksum) was a well-known kingdom situated to the north of Ethiopia (Abyssinia) (Groves 1948:51; Sanneh 1983:5; Isichei 1995:32; Sunkler and Steed 2000:34; Kalu 2005:30). According to Isichei (1995:32), there lived Christian and Jewish merchants in the cities of Adulis and Axum. Yet she opines that the Christianisation of the king and people came with “dramatic suddenness” in the early fourth century A.D., as a result of what she terms “romantically unlikely chains” (Isichei 1995:32). The introduction of Christianity to Axum is however linked to a certain philosopher, called Merope (Groves 1948:52) or Meropius (Isichei 1995:32).

The philosopher travelled from Tyre to India⁹ accompanied by his wards, Frumentius and Aedesius. They were travelling through the Suez-canal. On their way, back, they stopped at Axum and anchored the ship in the Red Sea. The inhabitants were very hostile. They attacked the ship and killed almost everyone except Frumentius and Aedesius, whom they took to their king as slaves. Interestingly, the king of Aksum immediately employed Frumentius as his secretary and Aedesius as his cupbearer. They remained in Axum for several years serving the king. Having proven their faithfulness, the king at his death-bed granted them freedom (Groves 1948:52). The queen-mother pleaded that they should stay and administer the affairs of the kingdom during the reign of his young son - Ezana.

Frumentius found out and encouraged Christian traders in the faith. At this time, Frumentius and Aedesius were free to depart; Aedesius went back to Tyre, but Frumentius, proceeded to Alexandria to inform the Bishop to send workers to Axum to help Christians there. Interestingly, Athanasius, the then Bishop of Alexandria instead consecrated Frumentius Bishop in 356 A.D., and sent back to Axum. When he returned there, he saw many converted to the faith (Groves 1948:52). Frumentius left an indelible mark to the people of Aksum, so much so that Ethiopian tradition written down much later call him ‘*Abba Salama*’, “father of light” (Isichei 1995:33) and/or ‘father of peace’ (Sanneh 1983:6), which seems to be a more correct rendition. As Bishop, he succeeded to convert the king, who as a result asked his

⁹ According to Isichei 1995:32) ‘India’ and Ethiopia are used interchangeably in the ancient world. Groves (Groves 1948:52) affirms that it was a term then also covering Southern Arabia and lands bordering the Red Sea.

people to become Christians and Christianity was declared the national religion (Groves 1948:53).

According to an Abyssinian legend, nine saints, who probably came from Syria towards the end of the fifth century helped to build up the Christian Church in the country (Groves 1948:53).

Groves (1948:530) intimates that these saints were probably Monophysite confessors who were expelled from Chalcedon. On the probability that these nine saints were Monophysites, Isichei (1995:33) agrees with Groves. Kalu seems to be more certain that these were Monophysites, as he writes: “The nine saints or *Sadaqan* (Syrian Monophysite exiles) not only extended rural evangelization, but established monasteries that became important in rooting the gospel and an identifiable spirituality” (Kalu 2005:31). These missionaries (nine saints) translated the Bible into Ge’ez from a version of the Septuagint in use in the Patriarchate of Antioch (Isichei 1995: 33). This lofty endeavour did not however remain intact, rivalry cropped up between the abbots and the king and political influence which greatly affected Axum.

The consequence was that the power of Aksum declined and the centre of Ethiopia shifted south from the Tigre (Kalu 2005:31). Yet some positive contributions were realised. For example, inculturation of the gospel within the vernacular: retention of Jewish traditions of the early church; liturgical innovations that utilised ingredients of traditional culture; and virulent debates on Sabbath observation and other finer points of theology (Kalu 2005:31). Furthermore, this led to Ethiopian contributions to Christian art, architecture, music, literacy and liturgy which have remained enduring. In addition, the Ethiopian church, with its large number of aesthetic crosses, as Kalu points out remained in “splendid isolation and served as an ingredient of national culture...” (Kalu 2005:31).

2.9.1.1 Monasteries in Ethiopia

Monasteries played an important role in the development of the church and church leaders in Ethiopia like in Egypt. Healers, prophets, seers, scribes and scholars, confessors, fathers and mothers, icon painters, musicians, vestment makers, carpenters and masons, chefs and bakers, weavers, farmers, and those who lived in

solitude for five days a week and would re-emerge on Saturdays and Sundays. The differences in activity and focus imply that motivations equally varied (Kalu 2005:109).

2.9.1.2 The influence of the Gospel in Ethiopia

Following Tamrat, Kalu (2005:109) highlights seven themes, which in his opinion serve as a guide through what he calls the rich tapestry of the presence of the gospel in Ethiopia and the people's responses: The first theme is the relationship between the church and the state, especially the roles of various monarchs in determining the expansion of the faith. The second is the level of popular participation and how the gospel challenged the cultural soil of Ethiopia. The third concerns theological development as could be preserved in some of the doctrinal debates about two-day Sabbath. The fourth theme is about patterns of spirituality and fashioning of liturgical tradition, especially achieved by the distinguished lives of monastic figures. The fifth is the challenge from Islam. The sixth theme concerns what Kalu calls "the disastrous attempt" to integrate Ethiopian Christianity into the Papacy and the seventh is based on the resurgence of Ethiopian Christianity in the twentieth century after some dark days.

The first and the second themes seem to be more relevant to this research and therefore needs to be looked into even though in brief. The first theme concerns the relationship between the church and the state while the second is the level of popular participation and how the gospel challenged the cultural soil of Ethiopia. These two themes are thus treated under the church and the state of Ethiopia and the gospel and Ethiopian culture.

2.9.1.2.1 The Church and the State of Ethiopia

Generally speaking, the relationship between the church and the state has over the years been that of suspicion and even romanticism in that major decisions of the church were influenced by the secular authorities. For example, Emperor Constantine summoned the Council of Nicaea (Isichei 1995:24).

In Ethiopia, the fortunes of the church were always being tied to the fortunes of the throne and bound with legal cords (Kalu 2005:109). In this way, he indicates that the crown practically funded the clergy, founded most of the monastic houses and

supported them by donating revenues from parts of the kingdom or the payments from Egypt for using the waters of the Blue Nile. One outstanding example of such a relationship is that Emperors provided diplomatic cover in the negotiations for the *abuna* (chief Bishop of the Ethiopian Church) (Falk 1997:55) from Egypt and promoted the struggle to have indigenous archbishops (Kalu 2005:109). This type of relationship indicates that the church could not have the power to be prophetic since under normal circumstances, it could not challenge the ones who supplied her needs. Nevertheless, there are instances when clergy rebuked the king when he was derailed. For example, when Emperor Made Zion (1314 – 1344) became sexually promiscuous, Abba Anorewos, confronted him.

Yet, the king had him whipped in public and persecuted many houses until he was stunned by an incredible fire outbreak that consumed his palace. The result was that the king repented and became one of the most generous patrons of the church (Kalu 2005:110). Furthermore, kings posed as arbiters in matters of doctrine, convoked debates on doctrinal matters and threw their weight on one side or the other (Kalu 2005:110) seemingly according to their personal interest. For example, Emperor Zeba Yacob (1434 – 1368) [1434 – 1468] intervened in the debate on the two days Sabbath, which enraged some indigenous heads of monastic houses against the Egyptian archbishops; but the king insisted upon two days to remember the period that Christ spent in the grave and the resurrection day. The king then summoned the council of Mitmaq in 1450 (Kalu 2005:110).

2.9.1.2.2 The Gospel and the Ethiopian culture

Bosch identifies culture as one of the four “relationships” by which major compromises of the Christian mission across the centuries have occurred. The other three are: the state, disunity in the church and money (Bosch 1991:291). The compromise in Ethiopia was that of culture. When Frumentius was consecrated Bishop and returned to Ethiopian about 341 A.D., the king accepted the Christian faith and made Christianity a national religion. Soon some changes followed: the early coins that bore the symbol of a crescent and disc was gradually replaced by the one that bore the cross. Then came, monasticism, which had a great influence in the life of the people. Monasteries and convents caused them to become thoroughly rooted in Christianity (Falk 1997:55). Furthermore, Falk (1997:55) points out that the

Coptic Church of Egypt followed the precedent set by Athanasius in appointing Frumentius as Bishop of Abyssinia and continued to appoint the *abuna* from among the Egyptian clergy. It is worth noting that many if not all of these men did not speak the Ethiopian language nor were they acquainted with the culture.

Ironically, one Jesuit priest, Pedro Paez, who came to Abyssinia in 1603 with his remarkable linguistic ability learned to read, to write and to speak the vernacular Ge'ez within twelve months of arrival and was soon recognised as an eloquent speaker of it (Groves 1948:139). Having accomplished the linguistic task, he opened a school at Fremona in Axum for both the Portuguese and Abyssinian pupils. 'He was the most capable and successful missionary that ever entered Abyssinia' (Groves 1938:139). An appraisal of Padro Paez states that:

He was a brilliant linguist and rapidly acquired a thorough knowledge not only of Amharic but of Ge'ez. He was an able schoolmaster, and he later trained himself to be an expert architect, mason and carpenter. But above all he was a man of great patience and discretion; he never tried to move too fast (Groves 1948:139-140).

As far as his relationship with the state is concerned, King Za Dengel received him, was convinced by his instruction, and declared himself for Rome and the reform of the Abyssinian Church. Furthermore, when he died, the next king took his foot step and in 1622 proclaimed his Catholic faith. When Paez died, the future of the Jesuit missions was still full of hope as could be deduced from the following observations: 'The king and his subjects' ... "had to mourn the loss of a true friend, and the wisest counsellor that Europe had ever sent into the country" (Groves 1948:140). This is similar to what happened in Nso' when Father Cosmas died. The Fon scheduled a day for the Nso' people to mourn the loss of the industrious and friendly priest (see section 6.5.1 of chapter six). Unfortunately, Paez's successor Alphonso Mendez, a Spanish Jesuit proved a most unhappy choice. The following description elucidates how Mendez behaved and how he was seen by the people:

In all ways that Paez had been wise, Mendez was foolish. He is described as overbearing and bigoted. It is enough to list the changes he attempted as soon as he was given power: all priests to be re-ordained, the people to be re-baptized, churches to be re-consecrated and the liturgy to be changed; the king was to swear fealty to him as the papal representative; images were to be introduced to the churches (Groves 1948:140)

The consequences of Mendez's approach were that the people became hostile to the changes and since they were deep-seated to be dealt with by the royal authority,

the king abdicated in favour of his son, Fasiladas (Basilides). Before handing over the throne to him, he issued the following edict:

Hearken, Hearken, Hearken. Originally, we gave you the Roman Faith believing it to be a good one. But Yolyos, Gabriel, Takla, Giyorgis, Sarsa, Krestos, and even the ignorant peasants of Lasta have died fighting against it. Now therefore we restore to you the Faith of our ancestors. Let your own people say their mass in their own churches; let the people have their own altars for the Sacrament, and their own Liturgy, and let them be happy. As for me I am old and worn out with war and sickness, and am not capable of governing: I nominate my son Fasiladas to succeed me as king (Groves 1948:140-141).

Following the Roman standpoint, this was the apostasy of Abyssinia. The new king, Fasiladas, was always loyal to his father, now determined to clear out the Jesuits root and branch, acted on his resolution. Mendez and others succeeded in escaping after a series of adventures (Groves 1948:141). The action of the king was triggered by Mendez's wrong approach and misuse of his power. This affirms one historical dictum, which states that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Groves (1948:141), points out that Jerome Lobo, a Jesuit who accompanied Mendez and remained until the expulsion of the Order has left a narrative that is a valuable contemporary record. In respect of the Church as Lobo found it, he admits that the Abyssinian Christians 'notwithstanding their separation from the Roman Church, and the corruption which have crept into their faith, yet retain in a great measure the devout fervour of the primitive Christians' (Groves 1948:141). Groves (1948:141) however, indicates that there are naturally features in the Abyssinian's form of faith which Lobo is critical, but he finds observances of which to approve:

They have however preserved the belief of our principal mysteries, they celebrate with a great deal of piety, the Passion of our Lord, they reverence the cross, they pay a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin, the angels, and the saints, they observe the festivals, and pay a strict regard to the Sunday. Every month they commemorate the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and are of opinion, that no Christians beside themselves, have a true sense of the greatness of the Mother of God, or pay her the honours that are due to her.... Every week they keep a feast to the honour of the Apostles and angels; they come to Mass with great devotion, and love to hear the word of God. They receive the sacrament often, but do not always prepare themselves by confession.... The severity of their fasts is equal to that of the Primitive Church (Groves 1948:141).

On public worship, Lobo found less acceptable what Groves describes as "the energetic and tumultuous expression of the congregation" (Groves 1948:141). In this respect, Lobo is said to have observed:

No country in the world is full of churches, monasteries and ecclesiastics as Abyssinia; it is not possible to sing in one church or monastery without being heard in another, and perhaps by several. They sing the Psalms of David of which as well as the other parts of the Holy Scriptures; they have the very exact translation in their own language.... The instruments of music made use of in their rites of worship, are little drums, which they hang about their necks, and beat with both hands.... They begin their consort by stamping their feet on the ground, and playing gently on their instruments, but when they have heated themselves by degrees, they leave off drumming and fall leaping, dancing, and clapping their hands, at the same time straining their voices to their utmost pitch, till at length they have no regard either to the time, or pauses, and seem rather a riotous, than a religious assembly. For this manner of worship, they cite the Psalm of David, 'O clap your hands or ye nations'. Thus, they misapply the sacred Writings, to defend their practices... (Groves 1948:142).

Lobo's observation is not unconnected to cultural bias and perhaps misunderstanding. If he were to come to Nso' and other Cameroonian congregations as we shall see in the subsequent chapters, he would have the same feeling. This could be seen as some aspects of inculturation; misrepresented and misinterpreted by Lobo.

2.9.2 The Church in Nubia

Nothing seems to be known about the Church in Nubia before the sixth century A.D. However, Origen who lived between 185 and 253 A.D. is said to have remarked: "... it is not claimed, the gospel has been preached to all the Ethiopians" (Groves 1948:49). That notwithstanding, Groves (1948:49) holds that there is no evidence of the effective establishment of Christianity there before the sixth century A.D. According to him, it was during the reign of Emperor Justinian (527–565 A.D.) that missionaries were sent to Nubia. The first one was called Julian, a presbyter in attendance on the patriarch of Alexandria, Theodosius, who was Monophysite (Groves 1948:49). Groves (1948:49), intimates that Julian was moved with a deep concern for the spiritual welfare of the people of Nubia. Consequently, being in Constantinople with the patriarch at that time, he laid his concern to Empress Theodora, who received the proposal with joy and promised full support for the undertaking. She informed the Emperor of her intentions.

The Emperor being against the Monophysites sent an embassy with rich gifts to the king and people of the Nobadae, and instructions to the governor of the Thebais to speed the embassy on its way (Groves 1948:49). When Theodora got this information, she sent a warning letter to the governor asking him to detain the

imperial embassy until Julian had reached his destination, or his life would answer for it: I will immediately send and take off your head' (Groves 1948:50). The governor took to the instructions and acted as the Empress desired. Julian received a generous welcome from the people of Nobadae and declared his mission unhindered. The Nobadae were gained to the Christian faith and came under the Monophysite patriarch of Alexandria (Groves 1948:50). The king of Nubia, his household and nobles were baptised. Julian then found a cool cave where there was water and there he instructed and baptised many people (Kalu 2005:79).

Julian remained in Nubia for two years, though he found the heat extremely trying. Before he left for Constantinople to report to the Empress, he handed the care of the work to Theodore, Bishop of Philae (Groves 1948:50). Theodore had converted the temple of Isis in Philae. When he took over, he then appointed a good number of priests to lead in Nubia's conversion (Kalu 2005:79).

On the other hand, the Orthodox mission dispatched by the Emperor failed to secure an entry among the Nobadae. It however seems to have turned to a neighbouring people of Nubia, the Makorites and to have succeeded in winning converts to the faith (Groves 1948:50). The evidence for the success of the Orthodox mission is attested by gravestones are inscribed with Greek and Byzantine texts (Groves 1948:50).

Furthermore, twenty years after the departure of Julian, Longinus another Monophysite was sent to encourage the Christians in Nobadae (Groves 1948:50). This was in 566 A.D., a year after the death of Emperor Justinian in 565 A.D. (Kalu 2005:80). Interestingly the successor Justin II immediately threw Longinus in prison and could not easily escape because he was bald, and anytime he tried to leave the capital he was recognised and arrested (Kalu 2005:80). Nevertheless, in about 569, he disguised himself with a wig, and slipped past security during a heavy storm. When he reached Nubia, he set up the organisation of the church (Kalu 2005:50). He is said to have 'built them a church, and ordained clergy, and taught them the order of divine service and all the ordinances of Christianity' (Groves 1948:50). He did it so well so much so that the people were happy and had to express it.

According to Groves (1948:50), John of Ephesus says he was present at court when a special ambassador from the Nobadae arrived and reported to the Emperor:

‘Though we were Christians in name, yet we did not really know what Christianity was until Longinus came to us’ (Groves 1948:50-51). Though Longinus visited Alexandria at one point, he certainly returned and continued his mission to the Alodiae, of the kingdom of Alwa to the south of the Makorites and even to the Makorites, who seemed to have been taken by the Orthodox mission, welcomed him with great joy and opened up for Christian instruction. This resulted in the baptism of the king and his nobles and later the king’s people (Groves 1948:51). It seems no one knows how long Longinus stayed in Nubia and whether he ever left (Groves 1948:51). He was indeed a daring, visionary and hardworking priest. How was the faith and life of the Church in Nubia?

2.9.2.1 Faith and life of the Nubian Church

The sources of the information concerning the Nubian faith and worship come from the pictures they left behind, the ruined churches and some documents. They give glimpses of what the leaders believed and what the Christians were taught. It seems necessary to note that the Christian faith and worship differed much from the earlier Nubian religion, which was based strongly around the king, his court and the nobility. For the Nubians, he states, there was a church in every village, and this became a part of their everyday life (Kalu 2005:90). This is exactly the same observation that one can make of Nso’ the case study. There is no village in Nso’ without a church.

2.9.2.1.1 Pictures and their meanings

Pictures are used both to teach Christian truth and for worship. Two types are identified for the Nubian Church: picture of the Nativity, the birth of Christ; and pictures of three men saved inside the fiery furnace. Interestingly, these pictures are placed at different entrances to the church and they stand for different meanings. The Nativity pictures were commonly found on the northern walls of the churches, the women’s entrance, but however, also visible for most worshippers on their left. This picture spoke of incarnation. That of the three men in the fiery furnace was usually found on the southern wall of the church, the men’s entrance, but could be visible to worshippers on their right. This picture signified salvation. The Nativity and the incarnation is based on “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” while salvation is based on “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” If these verses were written on the walls, they would hardly have been read since almost all

common people without exception were illiterate and only taught through pictures (Kalu 2005:91). Many other pictures abound but these two seem to serve the purpose here.

2.9.2.1.2 Languages used in the Nubian Church

According to Kalu (2005:92) three languages were used in the Nubian Church in different ways: Greek for the liturgy: prayers; songs and chants; and Scripture recitation. Coptic was used for communication with the patriarchate, the mother-church of Alexandria. Nubian languages were used to recite Psalms and prayers. As time went on, the Scriptures which were only in Greek were being translated into the Nubian language. Though at one point the Nubian Church developed its own lectionary, it did not divert from the practice of the church in Egypt (Kalu 2005:92). This demonstrates the need for the translation of the Bible into indigenous languages. It also indicates the need for churches to learn to set programmes that suits the realities of their contexts without necessarily detaching themselves from the global link with others.

2.9.2.1.3 Sacraments and activities in the Nubian Church

The sacrament of the Eucharist was celebrated with loaves of leavened bread as in the Coptic Church in Egypt. This celebration focused on the resurrected Christ and was a break from the Jewish tradition of the unleavened bread for Passover (Kalu 2005:93). Following the doctrine of other Orthodox churches, the church in Nubia insisted that the bread and wine were indeed Christ's body and blood. The Nubian Church practised the sacrament of baptism by total immersion, even for babies (Kalu 2005:93).

The activities the Nubian Church developed were in consonance with the life of Nubia itself. For example, on special feast and celebration days, Christians made pilgrimages to famous monasteries, caves belonging to a pious and powerful hermit and church centres. One of the great pilgrimages through the ages was that to the Holy Land (Kalu 2005:93).

2.9.2.1.4 Jesus, the Glorious Cross – centre of faith

The centre of faith in the Nubian Church was Jesus Christ. As seen in writings, hymns and pictures, Jesus in their understanding had a number of sides. Namely,

He is the bringer of the gospel, the good news; King of kings; Great Healer; Incarnate God; and Second Person of the Trinity (Kalu 2005:93). The Nubian Christians made the sign of the cross with only one finger, signifying that after the incarnation Jesus had one nature only, the nature of the God-man. One can surely agree with Kalu (2005:93) who doubts how much the common believer understood by all these signs. Furthermore, Christ's suffering on the cross hardly appears in the Nubian piety, which is said to have survived till date.

The cross to the Nubians was the omnipresence of their faith. Young babies were branded on their foreheads with the sign of the cross. The cross for the Nubian Christians meant Jesus Christ (Kalu 2005:94). Their devotion to the cross centred on 'the Glorious Cross', which is a square cross, festooned from arm to arm, anchored in the soil, but sprouting up with live shoots. This cross represented the resurrected, reigning and coming Christ, and stands for the living Christ who heals (Kalu 2005:94). In the past, the Nubians paraded the goddess Isis through their land for fertility, now the cross brings the 'watering of seeds' as well as hope to people with nothing – the slave, the poor, the forlorn. In the faith of the Nubians, the glorious cross was the representation of the glory and power of Jesus Christ, standing for Him in a unique way (Kalu 2005:94). This belief echoes the practice of inculturation.

2.9.2.1.5 Saints and angels in the Nubian Church

In Nubia, saints appear frequently on the walls of cathedrals and must have occupied a large place in the believers' lives and devotions. While some of these saints were monks, some were Christians of all sorts. For example, St. George was a warrior, and remembered for that, while St. Menas was remembered for a prayer addressed to him by a barren woman owing to the fact that she conceived (Kalu 2005:94). Biblical saints for example, the Virgin Mary was addressed in people's prayers. Kalu (2005:94) intimates that she was a 'continuation of the goddess Isis' in Egypt, and very similar to *Kandaka* among the Nubians. Hence, this seems to conclude that her prominent place in Nubian Christianity was from this background. However, the Roman Catholic doctrine seems to elevate the Virgin Mary whether linked to their traditional beliefs or not. She occupies a large place in the Roman Catholic doctrine and prayer. In the context of Cameroon, there seems to be no single Roman Catholic Church without the picture of the Virgin Mary.

As far as angels are concerned, the Nubian Church had a particular fascination with archangels so much so that the attachment to them became one of their obsessions. According to their belief, the angel in the fiery furnace is Michael. Other spiritual beings, especially the “four living creatures” in Ezekiel 1:5ff and Revelation 4:6ff, held endless fascination for the common Nubian (Kalu 2005:95).

2.9.2.1.6 The organisation of the Church in Nubia

Nubian Christianity depended on the priest as the one who brought Christ to the table at the Eucharist. The priest had to be ordained by the Bishop. Since he came from the people, they were expected to marry; to have children; to farm or do something to support themselves. The consecration of the Bishops was either performed by the monastery or the patriarch, the Jacobite Bishop of Alexandria (Kalu 2005: 95). One peculiarity of the Nubian Church was the role of the kings, which was three-fold: First, the king was patron, the protector, of the Orthodox faith. Second, the church was the king’s protector and third, he was the builder and initiator of new church buildings. Hence, Sundkler and Steed are right to point out that:

Nubia’s Church history was that of its kings, taking up the aspects of a court religion, while the masses were, perhaps, only superficially incorporated into the church.... The king in Nubia was at the same time a high-ranking priest...” (Sundkler and Steed 2005:32).

Nevertheless, there was a danger that the king could ‘use’ the church for his purposes and *vice-versa*. There is the memory of a Zacharia resigning from kingship to become a monk (Kalu 2005:96).

Judging from this knowledge about the Nubian Church, one could say like Kalu (2005:97) that there was nothing Nubian or African about it. The Christians here recited the same Apostles’ Creed as did other churches. Hence, he intimates that, anyone looking for an ‘authentic early African’ Christianity of a distinct nature, should not look at Nubia:

Because the Nubians as Christians adhered to all the central beliefs and teaching of the Christian church there was no specific Nubian faith as if they had invented a new kind of Christianity. The Nubians were Christians in the full sense of the word (Kalu 2005:97).

That notwithstanding, Nubian Christianity remained shallow in the hearts of the natives, since it was somehow a court religion, the concern of the ruling caste. Besides there seems to have been very few local clergy. Priests and largely Bishops

who served in Nubia were foreigners (Sundkler and Steed 2005:34). Kalu adds and classifies the reasons for the collapse of Nubian Christianity under external circumstances and internal weaknesses. On external circumstances, he states:

- a) The involvement and interference of the Mamluke Egyptian government in affairs in Nubia (which of course was instigated by Nubian claimants to the throne);
- b) The Crusades made the times more tensed, and probably pushed Egypt into a higher degree of interference;
- c) Allowing Arab nomadic tribes to enter was the undoing of Nubia and Alwa. They spread Islam, but the great damage they caused was to break up Nubia completely;
- d) Isolation. Nubia was isolated. It could not find help when it needed it. In fact, at the fall of Alwa (the southern Nubian kingdom), the Egyptian Church was experiencing perhaps its most difficult testing time;
- d) The imposition of *jizya* after conquest by Egypt was an incentive to conversion to Islam (Kalu 2005:101).

Kalu (2005:101) adds that most of these circumstances came to the Nubian Churches unexpectedly and unintentionally. Hence, they could not have been anticipated or avoided.

The very circumstances could come to any church perhaps in one way or the other. Hence, there is a need to learn this lesson and prepare how to tackle them when they do come. As far as internal weaknesses in the Nubian Church and/or Nubian Christianity, were concerned, Kalu writes:

Every detail of its Christianity was sacred, too sacred – so it was untouchable and unchangeable. The Church did not function without bishops or priests or kings. No one dared to innovate: that would be interfering in the ways of God. The contrast may be seen in 1964. All missionaries, Catholic and Protestant, were swept out of South Sudan, Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains. Some expelled missionaries gloomily said or thought that the church was ‘condemned to death’. Although many churches were paralyzed for a time, Sudanese leadership emerged. There was a spirit of innovation – and the church grew powerfully (Kalu 2005:102).

Simply put, one could say that the Church in Nubia functioned without making use of the laity in its administration, so much so that one could even say that it never had catechists. When one compares the situation of 1964, wherein the church was in the hands of the indigenes, one could conclude that there was a need for local priests. The growth in Sudan in the absence of missionaries could be likened to that in Cameroon in the 1920s. The Basel missionaries left and work remained in the hands

of the Cameroonians. The number of Christians increased from 1768 to 8913 (section 4.7 of chapter 4, page 156).

2.10 Conclusion

Falk (1997:57) admits that the people of North Africa were the first to receive the Christian faith in Africa. Having received it, they applied it in their daily life, articulated it in theological terms, and retained it in spite of the persecution. The catechetical school helped to strengthen the church and combat false teachings. Though it was a genuine missionary activity, it did not look towards the native population of Egypt or the underdeveloped peoples beyond. Yet it influenced the growth of Christianity in Egypt and even beyond.

Theological controversies of the third and fourth centuries contributed to the decline of Christianity in North Africa. The invasion by Islam in later centuries made it worse. Since Christianity was divided in the later part of the sixth century, among Catholics, Donatists, and Arians, it lacked the unity to resist the suppression from Islam. Donatism, Arianism and other theological controversies that plagued the church at the time and greatly retarded the growth of Christianity in North Africa and unfortunately most if not all stemmed from within. This was a demonstration of a lack of a common sense of direction. Consequently, the church remained divided, yet as an institution it could dogmatise but could not hinder individuals from personal reflections. Some of the controversies however led to the holding of Council meetings, one of which resulted in the formation of the Nicene Creed.

Following Groves (1954:64-66), it seems important to note that the spread of Christianity in North Africa may be measured in three ways. First, geographically it was at the frontier of the Roman Empire as far as the end of the military post (Walker 1918:60) – Mauritania – Egypt, Nubia, Palestine, Syria, Rhine, and Britannica and down to Spain and Portugal was the Roman Empire. In a nut shell, the greater part of present Europe was the Roman Empire. Second, socially the gospel attracted those who were in school as well as traders. The Berbers, the natives were only very slightly touched. When the soldiers were retired, they remained around. Third, language wise, Latin was the official language. Church services were carried out in Latin and Christian literature was in Latin. Latin was foreign to the natives. The Punic language was however used in North Africa in Church literature while sermons were

preached and translated in Punic. Yet the gospel did not penetrate the natives much. The gospel was mostly the issue of the city, since it grew from the colonial presence. Hence, if Christianity sort of vanished from North Africa one central reason could be that it did not penetrate the natives, the Berber tribes. This is evidenced in the following statement from Groves:

Berber tribe was the immediate missionary challenge...the failure to win these peoples rooted in the soil was judgment passed in advance on the church...then there is no more vivid warning that to fail to share the faith with all around is to let it die (Groves 1954: 89).

That notwithstanding, if one follows Groves (1948:89, 113) entirely, one would be forced to think that Christianity vanished from North Africa in the early beginnings. Though Islam seems to have taken over almost all of North Africa, statistics show that there were still a good number of Christians there as can be seen from the following arguments from Kalu based on Jenkins:

By 500 A.D., argues Jenkins, there were about 8 million Christians in North Africa, this declined to 5 million by 1000, 2.5 million by 1200 and 1.5 by 1500. The argument is that Christianity grew at certain points in time under Islamic rule and that the decline accelerated during and after the Crusades. Nonetheless, Christian presence down the Nile continued to be important till the fifteenth century in Nubia and much later in Ethiopia (Kalu 2005: 73).

In Ethiopia, the translation of the Scriptures to Ge'ez, the language of the Axumites was a booster to the growth of Christianity therein. The opening of monasteries and convents in Axum, Nubia and Egypt had a great influence on the growth of Christianity.

As far as Nubia is concerned it seems true that anyone looking for an 'authentic early African' Christianity of a distinct nature, should not look at Nubia:

Because the Nubians as Christians adhered to all the central beliefs and teaching of the Christian church there was no specific Nubian faith as if they had invented a new kind of Christianity. The Nubians were Christians in the full sense of the word (Kalu 2005:97).

Yet, Nubian Christianity remained shallow in the hearts of the natives, since it was somehow a court religion, the concern of the ruling caste. Besides there seem to have been a very few local clergy. Priests and largely Bishops who served in Nubia were foreigners (Sundkler and Steed 2005:34). The importance of the native language notwithstanding, there was however that temptation to remain with the elite, since the language used in church was mainly Latin. As we have seen there

was a sort of colonisation by the Greeks as the Hellenes school did not reach the common people.

Therefore, one could be right to say that right from the very beginning Christianity failed to be rooted in the culture of the North African people. For example, while the Coptic Church was Coptic in and through its very language, the rest of the churches in North Africa spoke Latin and the Bible translations were in Latin, which was a language appropriated for the church's elite by Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine – North African Church Fathers.

A number of cultural factors, such as the belief in the Osiris, the resurrection, the Trinity and burial customs contributed to the spread of Christianity in Egypt. But the translation of the Bible in the local language of the people and the need to reach the common people with the gospel is demonstrated as central to the transmission of the gospel. Besides, Egypt like many African countries had been 'notoriously religious' already in pre-Christian times. Consequently, and as we have seen, her traditional religion had several stepping stones to Christianity. The Coptic Church and Ethiopian Church, certainly exploited some of these stepping stones and that could be reasons for their survival. Yet, some churches did not care to make use of these stepping stones perhaps for fear of syncretism, an aspect that is taken up in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION, CHRISTIANITY AND SYNCRETISM: AN OVERVIEW

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is set to show the relationship between African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity and syncretism. It lays emphasis on the fact that in the attempt to be 'relevant' one falls into syncretism and in the effort to avoid syncretism one becomes irrelevant' (Mission-Shaped Church 2004:91). The chapter begins by tracing Christian roots in ATR, followed by the African worldview, whose understanding is necessary for evangelisation in Africa. Then missionary motives and missionary encounter with various cultures are also discussed. Finally, it examines the term syncretism and shows various understanding of the word, which makes it difficult to draw a clear-cut meaning for it. Yet the chapter indicates that the practice of syncretism is inevitable, especially when it comes to inculturation.

3.2 Christian roots in African traditional religions

One of the central insights of scholarship about forty years ago, was that 'ATR', as it has sometimes been described did not exist. However, E. B. Idowu in his *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*; J.S. Mbiti in his *African Traditional Religions and Philosophy* as well as J. Parrinder in his *African Traditional Religions*, argued against this view (Isichei 1995:96). This disputed view was based on a wide range of exclusivist tendencies, which the history of missions bear witness to, the most glaring being the *tabula rasa* doctrine. It maintained that the culture of those evangelised cannot be looked upon in any way as a basis upon which to build; for Christianity to establish roots among the people, their culture, according to this doctrine, must give way altogether (Dickson 1991:124). Bediako (2000:21), points out that the common Western missionary view of traditional religion was that it formed 'the religious beliefs of more or less backward and degraded peoples all over the world', and held no 'preparation for Christianity.' This was certainly, a poor view of such religions, because, in more recent years, it has been shown that Christianity has spread most rapidly in 'societies with primal religious systems' – those akin to African Traditional Religions.

Bediako (1995:95), points out that these societies were, according to Turner, the Mediterranean world of the early Christian centuries, and tribal peoples of Northern and Western Europe and finally the primal societies of Africa, the Pacific and parts of Asia.

Earlier on in 1977, Turner as Bediako (1995:93) indicates had proposed a six-feature framework for understanding primal religions as authentically religions, rather than as mere epiphenomena of the social organisation of simple or pre-literate societies. These features in outline as discussed in Bediako (1995:93-95) are as follows:

- The first is a sense of kinship with nature, in which animals and plants no less than human beings, had ‘their own spiritual existence and place in the universe’ as interdependent parts of a whole.
- The second feature is ‘the deep sense that man is finite, weak and impure or sinful and stands in need of a power not his own.’
- The third feature which according to Turner is complementary to the second is ‘the conviction that man is not alone in the universe, for there is a spiritual world of powers or beings more powerful and ultimate than himself.’
- The fourth feature, which completes the third is the ‘belief that man can enter into relationship with the benevolent spirit world and to share in its powers and blessings and receive protection from evil forces by these transcendent helpers.’
- The fifth feature, which Turner saw as an extension of the fourth, relates to the acute sense of the reality of the afterlife, a conviction which explains the importance of ancestors or the ‘living dead’ in many primal religions, where they are believed to remain united in affection and in mutual obligations with the ‘living living.’
- The sixth feature is the conviction that man lives ‘in a sacramental universe where there is no sharp dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual’ in that the ‘physical’ acts as a vehicle for the ‘spiritual’ power ‘while the physical realm is held to be patterned on the model of the spiritual world beyond...’

In view of this general structural analysis of the primal religions, Turner, as Bediako (1995:95) indicates then made a number of comments: first that his proposal may be used for the understanding of other kinds of religion besides the primal and will be

found readily applicable to the Christian tradition.’ Second, in arguing for the educational importance of primal religions in religious studies ‘within...the Christian tradition’, he drew attention to a ‘special relationship of primal religions with Christianity, which arises from the fact that ‘in the history of the spread of the Christian faith...its major extensions have been solely into the societies with primal religious systems.’

According to Bediako (1995:96), this special relationship of the primal religions with Christianity and the existence of ‘affinities’ between the primal and Christian tradition could have far-reaching significance for our understanding of the nature of the Christian faith itself.

Unfortunately, the Western missionaries never took time to understand such relationships and as Kalu (1979:19) indicates, they had the conflict with African cultures because; they came with a different worldview.

Writing on conflicting worldviews and the missionary task Paul Hiebert, Cynthia Strong, and David Strong point out that Westerners’ fear of chaos has been a great hindrance to indigenisation. Christians in other lands they say, are often confused by the Western obsession with order and lack of relational skills. Furthermore, they opine that for Christians in non-Western societies, the central issue in Christianity is not order but right relationships. The gospel to non-Westerners, as they observe is good news because it speaks of *shalom* - of human dignity, equality, justice, love, peace, and concern for the lost and marginalised (Hiebert 1994:143-144).

From every indication, it seems necessary to note that Africans were not blank (*tabula rasa*) before the coming of Christianity. African primal religions, which form part and parcel of the African Worldview, served as preparatory grounds for the Christian missionary enterprise. What Mbiti calls *praeparatio evangelica*, and argues that:

We can add nothing to the Gospel, for it is an eternal gift of God; but Christianity is always a beggar seeking food and drink, cover and shelter from the cultures it encounters in its never-ending journeys and wanderings (quoted in Kalu 2005:5).

Besides, if we agree with Mbiti that “Africans are notoriously religious” (1989:1), then it is clear this was neither begun at the coming of the missionaries nor brought in by them. Rather, African religiosity was there and has accompanied them throughout

the ages. Indeed, in traditional life, Africans do not know how to exist without religion (Mbiti 1989:227). In substantiating this view, Mbiti puts it beautifully as follows:

Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to a beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament (Mbiti 1989:2).

Hence, one who seeks to understand their beliefs in and worship of God, needs to grasp their worldview and their knowledge of God as is explained below.

3.2.1 African worldview

Kraft (1996:52) defines worldview as the culturally structured assumptions, values, and commitments and/or allegiances underlying a people's perception of reality and their responses to those perceptions. He indicates that worldview is not separate from culture. It is included in culture, he says, as the structuring of the deepest-level presuppositions on the basis of which people live their lives. In other words, it provides the cultural bases and part of the structuring for people's actions (Kraft 1996 52).

In agreement with Kraft, Vumisa states that "the term worldview means culturally structured assumptions, values, and beliefs about life and the universe held by an individual or a group" (Vumisa 2012:45). Following Kraft and Vumisa, the term worldview as used in this section and the rest of this dissertation shall mean culturally structured assumptions, values, and beliefs about life and the universe held by African people and others as the case may be. Vumisa (2012:47) identifies five characteristics of African worldview, which seems necessary to note:

First, Africans lay emphasis on community life, being with others of the same family and clan, linking to the ancestors and on to the descendants. In other words, Africans know no individualism, one is because others are. Simply put, 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am' (Mbiti 1989:123). Second, the community of the living is bound up with the living dead. Almost all African societies have beliefs in the ancestors. They continue to exist and influence the lives of their descendants, as they are involved in important decisions. Third, there is strong awareness of the spirit world in Africa. Africans hold to the existence of God without any contention. Fourth, Africans tend to view life holistically rather than fragmenting

into politics, religion, social, etc. Everything is seen to belong together with no dichotomy. Finally, as far as time is concerned, Africans focus on the event and not on a linear approach as in the Western world.

Summarily, African cosmological and societal thought can be placed in the following four overlapping dimensions:

- the realm of the spirit (inclusive of the Supreme Deity, the sub divinities, the ancestral spirits), which is the source and preserver of all life
- The realm of tribal or ethnic community which, in equilibrium with the realm of spirit, constitutes the paramount goal of human life
- The realm of family, which in equilibrium with the realms of tribe and spirit, constitutes the principal guiding force for personal development, and
- The individual person who strives to integrate the three realms in his or her soul (Paris 1995:25).

Generally, given the interrelatedness of issues concerning the African worldview, one could liken it to the sociological theory, functionalism, which holds that systems do not function in isolation.

3.2.1.1 God as Africans know Him

According to Paris (1995:27) Africans understand God as the source and ground of all life. He also points out that scholars have always agreed that religion permeates every dimension of African life. He indicates that in spite of their many and varied religious systems the ubiquity of religious consciousness among African peoples constitutes their single most important common characteristics. Furthermore, Paris (1995:28) points out that contrary to their predecessors, contemporary scholars of African religion generally agree that all peoples throughout the continent believe in a self-existent deity who, as J. Omosale Awolulu claims,

is believed to be responsible for the creation and maintenance of heaven and earth, men and women, and who also has brought into being divinities and spirits who are believed to be his functionaries in the theocratic world as well as intermediaries between mankind and the self-existent Being (quoted in Paris 1995:28).

In addition, contemporary African scholars, as Paris (1995:28) points out, are also in general agreement that this supreme deity constitutes the primary cohesive power in every African cosmology: the power that unites the realms of nature, history and spirit. In large, he indicates that his thought on it relies heavily on Mbiti's classification scheme for depicting African cosmological thought:

- God as the ultimate explanation of the genesis and sustenance of both man and all things.
- Spirits being made up of superhuman beings and the spirits of men who died a long time ago.
- Man, including human beings who are alive and who are about to be born.
- Animals and plants, or the remainder of biological life.
- Phenomena and objects without biological life (quoted in Paris 1995:28).

Following Mbiti, Paris (1995:28) further points out that the notion of a supreme deity presiding over a realm of lesser divinities, ancestral spirits, and the whole universe as creator and preserver, therefore constitutes a clear rejection of the Western idea of African Polytheism: belief in and loyalty towards many autonomous divinities.

Accordingly, all divinities within the African pantheon are thought to be a derivative from and dependent on the Supreme Being, so much so that many scholars choose to refer to them as sub-divinities who function in ways similar to the heavenly angels in Jewish and Christian cosmologies (Paris 1995:28). As with the latter, Paris (1995:28-29) indicates that African mythologies are replete with the viewpoint that the numerous divinities, along with all other existent reality both in nature and in history, were created by the supreme deity and, hence, have no independent powers of their own.

Hence, in contrast with the predominant views of the many Christian theologians and missionaries, many African peoples, including contemporary African scholars describe a distinctive monotheism at the heart of ATRs. 'The God described in the Bible is none other than the God who is already known in the framework of traditional African religiosity' (Paris 1995:29).

In a good number of African societies as Vumisa (2012:54) points out, the attributes of the Supreme Being are reflected in the names by which God is called. For example, God is known to be Omnipotent ('all powerful') Omniscient ('all-knowing') and Omnipresent ('present everywhere simultaneously'). In order to elucidate this fact, Vumisa (2012:54) cites the following Zulu names for God: uMvelingqangi – 'One who was there before everything'; uNkulunkulu – literary – 'the Great One'; uMali – 'the creator.'

Furthermore, following Bediako, Vumisa (2012:57) points out that in African languages, the names of God are uniquely singular. For example: Mwari (Shona – Zimbabwe), Unkunkulu (Zulu – South Africa). In addition, Africans' understanding of God and their experiences of the divine in its different ways were and still are recorded in their songs, having the hope and aspirations of the people.

In Africa, God has many names, most of which are praise names that go with God's attributes. Vumisa (2012:57) indicates that sometimes researchers and other non-African people mistake these names for polytheism, thinking that an ethnic group has a multiplicity of deities, and conclude that they worship many gods. Thus, he intimates that it is rare in African religiosity to recognise more than one Supreme Deity, though He may be approached through different agents but He is the only Supreme Deity. The Mwari of the people of Zimbabwe as an example, is worshipped and praised as: Nyadenga – 'One who lives above'; Musika Vanhu – 'One who created human beings'; Mutanga Kugara – 'the first one to exist' (Vumisa 2012:57).

Consequently, one would be right to say that Africans knew and worshipped God before Christianity brought Christ. Hence, Christian churches in Africa as Dah (2014:119) suggests could be made to lay greater emphasis on God than on Christ as a starting point of Christian teaching. This is because Christ as he points out does not fit easily into the African scheme of things but the idea of a Supreme Being does. This as he indicates does not imply that Christ will be ignored, but it does mean that an understanding of Christ will be drawn out of an understanding of God, rather than the other way round.

3.2.1.2 Relationship with the universe: The use of myths

According to Luzbetak (1996:267), myth (Greek, *mythos*), originally meant the same as 'word,' 'message,' 'news', or 'story.' He indicates that the term is understood today by the students of religion and anthropology as follows:

a story of primeval or cosmic times, that is to say, times preceding the present order; it speaks of deities and other sacred beings; and it treats of ultimate questions – of a people's view of reality, of the meaning of life, of the origins of the universe and humankind, of ancestors, of ancestral heroes and models, of the unknowable future (Luzbetak 1996:267).

Africans use myths to explain observable mysteries in the universe. These particular myths explain the origin of the universe, the purpose of life, the problem of evil, the essence of death, and the complexities of the galaxies. Myths are essentially in oral forms through memory and word of mouth from generation to generation (Vumisa 2012:60). Myths reveal the philosophical make-up of Africans as intelligent people, who analysed situations and came up with explanations which were informed by their experiences of the divine. For example, in the Abaluyia creation story, it is told that:

God created man so that the sun would have someone for whom to shine. Then He created plants, animals and birds to provide food for him. The husband was made first and then the wife, so that the man would have someone with whom to talk (Mbiti 1989:91).

The Abaluyia (Kenya) did not imagine that the sun could be created to waste; it needed someone to shine on. They see God as caring, and as one who provides for man's well-being. Their concern for man as male shows a male chauvinistic nature in some African beliefs and practices.

Furthermore, Africans also believe that everything in the universe was put in place by God and that He presides over and maintains the universe. They equally hold that the universe manifests God's nature. This particular understanding is integral in the African worldview and living experience. Africans believe that God made it possible for them to understand, know and relate with Him. Hence, the possibility of a divine-human relationship becomes a reality. This is backed by sufficient evidence of the belief in a supreme God who is understood to be the source of all life and being among the African people (Vumisa 2012:60). The following creation myth from the Ashanti of Ghana may elucidate this belief and understanding:

God made first the sky, then the earth, rivers, waters, plants, and trees. Then he made man, and for man's use he made animals. In order to keep the animals alive, he ordered them to eat the plants, which men were also to eat in addition to eating the animals. Then God made the spirits of the waters, forests, and rocks, in order to protect man... (Mbiti 1970:49).

This story puts God at the centre of creation and mankind as a representative, care taker as affirmed by the Psalm, which reads:

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all creation.... When I consider your heavens the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly

beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet... (Psalm 8).

3.3 Missiological implications of the African worldview

Worthy of note is that fact that the African worldview has some missiological implications, which according to Vumisa (2012:61) calls for special attention. These implications are made manifest in four different ways as discussed below:

3.3.1 General Revelation as preparation for the Gospel

Vumisa (20012:61) holds that the general revelation the Africans received about God should be understood as God's preparation for people to receive the gospel. This view is supported by Richardson in the following words: "the God who prepared the gospel for the world also prepared the world for the gospel" (quoted in Vumisa 2012:61). The shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity to Africa, and the willingness of non-Christians in Africa to receive the gospel, proves that God prepared the Gentile world to receive the gospel. Mbiti is said to agree with this type of interpretation by attributing the massive statistical expansion of Christianity in Africa to the African religiosity (Vumisa 2012:61). This acceptance of the gospel by Africans further serves as a fulfilment of what is written in Psalm 68:31, in which God says: "Envoys will come out of Egypt; Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God." Hence, God's ultimate plan for Africa is that Africans will submit themselves to God (Vumisa 2012:61). In view of the shift of the centre of gravity of christianity to Africa, one could be right to say that Africans are already submitting to God.

3.3.2 Limitations of the general revelation

The limitations of African religiosity, stems from the fact that the general revelation seems to serve only as preparation for the gospel (Vumisa 2012:61). Preparation without reception does not lead to fulfilment. Same as knowledge in God alone does not lead to God's redemption plan of salvation. Hence, general revelation without the gospel is not sufficient. By implication, Africans need to believe in Jesus Christ who says: "I am the Way the Truth, and the Life for no one comes to the Father but by Me" (Jn. 14:6). This dogmatic claim is however challenged by Asian Religions that see half the world excluded from God's salvation. According to Vumisa (2012:61), apart from the gospel there is no other means offered by other religions that can lead to salvation. He draws further justification from the Acts of the Apostles: "And there is

salvation in no other One; for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Consequently, Vumisa concludes that:

Though African Traditional religious practices include sacrifices, offerings, mediation (the role of ancestors), and cleansing; elements that also formed part of the worship of Yahweh in the Old Testament, these cannot take away sins because animal sacrifices are insufficient.... Instead it is Christ’s death that fulfils God’s will (Heb.10:5-10) He is the Mediator of the new covenant, so that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, those who are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance (Vumisa 2012:62).

He adds that:

.... when presenting the gospel to Africans, it must be made clear to the new converts that God cannot accept worship that is offered in a syncretism form. Any new convert must be taught that God has chosen a new way of approaching Him and that way is explained in the Bible (Vumisa 2012:62).

About syncretism, Vunisa seems to be mistaken for if this has to do with adapting of elements from one religion to another, then even Christianity is not free. It has legacies from the Jewish religion. Besides the Roman Catholic has a practice of praying through saints as intercessors. Besides a litany of saints who are asked to pray for Christians, the Roman Catholic Church has recently permitted the incorporation of African ancestors in *The Roman Missel* (2011:348-349). Is this incorporation, inculturation or syncretistic or both? (see section 3.6 on syncretism below).

A report from the working Group of the Church of England’s Mission and Public Affairs Council on “Fresh Expressions of Church” indicates that all attempts at inculturation struggle with the danger of syncretism. Yet in any attempt to be ‘relevant’ one may fall into syncretism, and in the effort to avoid syncretism one may become ‘irrelevant’ (Mission-Shaped Church 2004:91). Hence, Paul’s strategy described in 1Corinthians 9: 20ff with the following approach: ‘to the Jew I became as a Jew...’ (Mission-Shaped Church 2004:92) could be of great use in inculturation.

One could be right to say that for inculturation to be relevant, it must start from where the people are, from “below” and not from where the missionary/evangeliser originates. As mentioned above the term syncretism is treated in section 3.6 below, and would recur when we come to the case study, Nso’. In the meantime, following Vumisa, it seems necessary to look at Paul’s approach to the Athenians as recorded in Acts 17, which could serve as a model for evangelisation.

In addition, it seems necessary to note that at the Melbourne (Australia) Conference for World Mission and Evangelism (May 12-24, 1980) it was observed that the Bible as the canon of the churches' proclamation must be read and acted upon by the people in the light of their local struggles. It was also stressed that the churches must live with the tensions between the gospel and the local cultures. Furthermore, it was stated that there is a risk of syncretism for all churches in relation to their context. Identifying and evaluating these tensions would be a way in which the churches could constructively struggle with the necessity of relating the local churches to the kingdom of God (Anderson (ed.) 1982:119).

3.3.3 Key to unlock an ethnic group people to the Gospel

Vumisa (2012:63) indicates that our work as Christians is to help people move from darkness to light, which is an aspect of evangelism though complicated and difficult. He however uses a model based on the analysis of Paul's experience at Athens in Acts 17, which shows that Paul took two main steps:

3.3.3.1 Paul walked around and observed

It was through his walking around, (his research) in Athens that Paul found an altar in the midst of the Greek culture bearing a conspicuous and curious inscription to "an unknown god". This inscription according to Vumisa (2012:63) became the key Paul used to unlock the Greeks to the gospel. Hence, we too, as he states, must look for the key that can unlock a people group to the gospel, which in the context of Africa becomes their knowledge of God prior to Christianity.

It seems necessary to note that in Paul's speech both the key and the conflict can be seen, therefore it is not an easy task to do the unlocking simply because one has seen the key (s). A further step, an engagement of the context is needed. In this case Paul, does it with a dialogue. In others one would have to get another suitable approach.

3.3.3.2 Paul engaged the Greek philosophers

Having got the information, Paul decided to engage the Greek philosophers with it. As far as this engagement is concerned, Luke writes that Paul stood in the midst of

the Areopagus¹⁰ and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” (Acts 17:22,23). Paul then announced to the “Aeropagusians” that “the one whom they worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you” (v.23). He thus, explained to the “Areopagusians” that this unknown God is the maker of the world and everything in it, and that He is Lord of heaven and earth and does not dwell in temples made with hands (v.24). The altar with the inscription to an unknown God thus, became the key that Paul used to bring the gospel to the Greek intellectuals and by extension to the rest of the community (Vumisa 2012:63). This implies that the spread of the gospel must always begin from somewhere before expanding to everywhere. A similar key from Acts 17:30-31 was used in 1902 in Bali, Cameroon by, Schuler, one of the first Basel missionaries to Cameroon (see chapter 5 section 5.2.2.1).

Following the approach of Paul, Vumisa (2012:63) then points out that with the same principle and strategy, the gospel can easily be explained to Africans using the key of their knowledge of the Supreme Being. The results of Paul’s approach were that some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius a member of the Areopagus, a woman named Damaris and others (v.34). It is even held that Dionysius became the first Bishop of Athens (Vumisa 2012:64). The conversion of Dionysius, Damaris, and others echoes the fact that God’s word does not go out and come back empty (Isaiah 55:11).

Every culture seems to have keys or sets of keys, which still need to be discovered and used to unlock them to the gospel. There might be big and small keys, which could be discovered when we come to Nso’ the case study (see chapters 5 and 6).

3.3.4 Understand the felt needs of church members

One of the biggest challenges for an African Christian is the temptation to mix African traditional religious practices with Christianity Vumisa (2012:64). This mixing of religious practices as Vumisa (2012:64) points out is theologically called syncretism. This challenge as he indicates was equally faced by the Israelites when

¹⁰ An Areopagus was the Mars Hill Society that comprised of a group of prominent Athenians who met on Mars Hill to discuss matters of history, philosophy and religion (Vumisa 2012: 63).

they left Egypt. They wanted often to serve the gods of Egypt and those of the Canaanites (2Kings 17:29-40).

According to Vumisa (2012:64) the following reasons may account for why African Christians fall back into ATR: The first of these is nominal Christianity, which could be seen in the lack of commitment to the new faith. Thus, indicating that no true conversion has taken place. The second is the lack of a sense of belonging, as a result of racism, tribalism and other divisions. The third reason for syncretism is the lack of service delivery, which implies that the needs of the people are not met. For example, healing and casting out of demons as found in Mark 3:13-15 is not taken serious or even believed by some churches. Consequently, they shun traditional healers where the African might have been getting help, and cling to what Khathide describes as ‘the rationalistic theological presuppositions’, which he says ‘make them to be unable to respond positively and biblically to the felt needs of indigenous communities. They instead respond psychologically and philosophically to otherwise spiritual problems’ (quoted in Vumisa 2102: 66).

It is clear that many African people yearn for concrete religious satisfaction in one way or the other. But it is also necessary to guard against the misuse of healing “powers”. It has recently been observed in Cameroon and the neighbouring countries, especially Nigeria that a number of healer-prophets and pastors have acquired healing powers from doubtful sources. Yet, the fact that a good number of Christians from mission churches in Africa go to these “healers” is a cause for concern. Perhaps their needs have not been met in these mission churches.

3.4 Missionary motives

Taylor (1963:5) points out that for more than four centuries the expansion of the Christian Church has coincided with the economic, political and cultural expansion of Western Europe. From the stand point of Asians and Africans, he goes on, this expansion has been an aggressive attack on their own way of life. Furthermore, he opines that quite inevitably the Christian Faith has for many in these lands been inextricably bound up with this Western aggression. In addition, he indicates that it has also to be admitted quite frankly that during these centuries the missionaries of the Christian Church have commonly assumed that Western civilisation and Christianity were two aspects of the same gift which they were commissioned to offer

to the rest of mankind (Taylor 1963:5-6). According to him, “the assumption was sometimes quite conscious and was explicitly stated. More often it was quite unconscious and would have been indignantly denied” (Taylor 1963:6).

According to Isichei (1995:92) the number of missionaries at work in Africa expanded dramatically during the heyday of imperialism – (1880-1920). Both mission and imperialism were thus intertwined and operated on one postulate, the superiority of the missionary culture over the other (Isichei 1995:92). Isichei (1995:92) opines that no one became a missionary with the conscious intention of furthering imperialism. She supports this view from the fact that often there were serious sources of friction between missionaries and colonial officials. For example, she indicates that:

Sometimes missionaries denounced various forms of oppression and injustice, and their representatives in the metropolis lobbied on humanitarian issues. An endemic source of friction between fundamentalist missionaries and white administrators, settlers and merchants lay in the former’s sabbatarianism, and hostility to drink, gambling, and racing – very often the major sources of solace for colonial Europeans in tropical Africa (Isichei 1995:92).

Although this sounds as if to say they have completely different motives, it was never easy to separate the missionary motives from the colonialist motives. The missionary was a colonialist and a colonist a missionary, either directly or indirectly. That notwithstanding, Verkuyl’s (1978:163-175) classification of missionary motives into “pure” and “impure” though general, seems to be more comprehensive.

3.4.1 Pure motives

Verkuyl (1978:163-8) identifies, six pure motives and four impure motives, which in his opinion are closely linked to the New Testament Epistles. According to this classification the pure motives are: (i) the motive of obedience, which sees mission as an obligation and not a voluntary affair. In 1Corinthians 9:16, Paul speaks of an inner necessity and in Romans 1:14 he speaks of “being under obligation” to all people. Hence, fulfilling the missionary task is obedience to the command of the Lord’ (ii) the motives of love, mercy and pity, which are strongly mentioned and discussed in the Bible, indicate the caring nature of God. Paul in his writings demonstrates the importance of love and what God is love meant for him and the depth of his mercy as the apostle of the Lord to God’s people (cf. 1Thes 2:8); (iii) the

motive of doxology, which lays emphasis on praise to God and this, is of course found throughout the New Testament.

Paul ends his three-chapter discussion (Rom.9-11), with the following doxology: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.... For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever” (Rom. 11:33, 36).

(iv) Eschatological motive, which focuses on the kingdom of God and is succinctly expressed in the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer, ‘Thy kingdom come’; (v) the motive of haste, which is closely linked to the eschatological motive, the motive expecting the kingdom. This stresses on the need to use our time for God’s work, since this time is limited. For example, Paul cautions: “Don’t be indifferent,” But do good to everyone while there is still time” (cf. Eph. 5:6-17; Col. 4:5; Gal. 6:10); (vi) the personal motive, which points to an established fact of human experience, namely, that “he who rouses others to belief strengthens his own faith as well.” It is based on Paul who states: I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor. 9:23).

3.4.2 Impure motives

Four impure motives as identified by Verkuyl (1978:168-175) are: (i) the imperialist motive, which is one of the most frequently criticised for it was aimed at turning natives into docile subjects of colonial authorities; (ii) the cultural motive, which viewed mission as the transfer of the missionary’s ‘superior’ culture into the receiver’s culture; (iii) the commercial motive, which was an accessory motive and a point in the ‘propaganda’ for mission. Yet, business people and missionaries never pulled well; (iv) the motive of ecclesiastical colonialism, which is said to be coined by the Christians in Africa and Asia, focuses on the exportation of one’s own confession and church order to other territories. For example, Verkuyl (1978:173) points out that during the nineteenth century the Anglican Church imposed its ecclesiastical structures on the churches of Africa and Asia, and the result was that these churches looked more like the national churches of England than like the congregations of the New Testament. This ecclesiastical colonialism is gradually being wiped out. To these motives, Bosch (1991:5) seems to have added one, “the romantic motive”, which he says is based on the desire to go far away to exotic countries and peoples.

This implies that some missionaries just went out for the sake of travelling, safari trips, one may say.

Commenting on these motives, David J. Bosch states:

An inadequate foundation for mission and ambiguous missionary motives and aims are bound to lead to an unsatisfactory missionary practice. The young churches 'planted' on the 'mission fields' were replicas of the churches of the mission agency's 'home front', 'blessed' with the paraphernalia of those churches, 'everything from harmoniums to archdeacons'.... Like the churches in Europe and North America, they were to adhere to confessions prepared centuries before in Europe, in circumstances and in response to challenges fundamentally different from those that faced the young churches of India or Africa. At the same time, they were regarded as remaining under the tutelage of the Western mission agencies, at least until the younger churches had proved that they were fully self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating (Bosch 199:5).

Furthermore, Bosch indicates that it was this ecclesiastical import trade that caused Schütz to cry out in protest:

The house of the church is on fire! In our missionary outreach, we resemble a lunatic who carries the harvest into his burning barn' Schütz located the problem not 'outside', on the mission field, but in the heart of the Western church itself. So he calls the church back from the mission field where it did not proclaim the gospel but individualism and the values of the West, back to become what it was not but should be: church of Jesus Christ in the midst of the peoples of the earth. '*Intra muros!*' he shouted, 'the outcome is determined by what happens inside the church, not outside, on the mission field (Bosch 1991:5-6).

Schütz was probably telling the missionaries that rather than preaching a false message, they should come back from the field, rethink, and re-define their approach. As Lingerfeller (1998) has observed, these missionaries might have been transferring their own culture instead of transforming the culture of the receptor of the gospel. That is how mission was carried on in the missionary days. It was both an imposition of Western culture and colonial ideas.

Other examples of the intertwined nature of mission and colonialism abound and perhaps three may suffice:

.... missionaries sometimes petitioned the government of their home country to extend its protectorate to areas where they, the missionaries, were working, often with the argument that unless this happened, a rival colonial power might annex the territory (Bosch 1991:305).

Some missionaries however, inadvertently mixed mission and colonialism in such proportions that one may think they were themselves politicians and not

missionaries. For example, John Philip, superintendent of the London Missionary Society at the Cape of Good Hope, is quoted to have written:

While our missionaries... are everywhere scattering the seeds of civilization, social order, happiness, they are, by the most unrespectable means, extending British influence, and the British Empire. Wherever the missionary places his standard among a savage tribe, their prejudices against the colonial government give way (quoted in Bosch 1991:305).

And John Philip went on:

Missionary stations are the most efficient agents which can be employed to promote the internal strength of our colonies, and the cheapest and best military posts that wise government can employ to defend its frontier against the predatory incursions of the savage tribes (quoted in Bosch 1991:305).

Furthermore, in affirming the intertwined nature of mission and colonialism, Carl Mirbt wrote in 1910: 'Mission and colonialism belong together, and we have reason to hope that something positive will develop for our colonies from this alliance' (quoted in Bosch 1991:306). And following the statement, 'To colonise is to missionise' by the German Colonial secretary, Dr. W.H. Solf, the Catholic missiologist, J. Schmidlin wrote in 1913:

It is the mission that subdues our colonies spiritually and assimilates them inwardly.... The state may indeed incorporate the protectorates outwardly; it is, however, the mission which must assist in securing the deeper aim of colonial policy, the inner colonisation. The state can enforce physical obedience with the aid of punishment and laws; but it is the mission which secures the inward servility and devotion of the natives. We may therefore turn Dr. Solf's... recent statement that 'to colonise is to missionise' and 'to missionise is to colonise' (quoted in Bosch 1991:306).

Indeed, these views were not just said and/or written, they were put into practice. Perhaps one such practical example may suffice: In Cameroon Alfred Saker, the English Baptist missionary, even named his settlement Victoria in order to attract the interest of the British monarch to colonise the area (Tajoche 2003:68). Following this history, the Cameroon government changed the name Victoria to Limbe in the mid-1980s.

3.5 A general view of missionary encounter with various cultures

Bosch (1991:291) identifies culture as one of the four "relationships" by which major compromises of the Christian mission across the centuries have occurred. The other three are: relationships with the state, with disunity in the church and with money. Our concern here is on culture wherein Bosch (1991:291) points out that the West's

feeling of superiority at the enlightenment did not distinguish between religious and cultural supremacy. For example, he indicates that in the early years of its existence, the American Board distinguished between darkness, blindness, superstition, and ignorance among pagan nations then light, vision, enlightenment, and knowledge in the West. Both religion and culture in the West were intertwined. Furthermore, mission was considered by the missionary as a 'civilising' process (Dickson 1991:124).

Consequently, just as the West's religion was predestined to be spread around the globe, the West's culture was to be victorious over all others. For example, Bosch (1991:292) cites the objectives of the American Board with respect to American Indians; which was described as making 'the whole tribe English in their language, civilised in their habits, and Christian in their religion.' Furthermore, he intimates that the effect of the gospel on a nation was to soften the manners, purify their social intercourse, and rapidly lead them into the habits of civilised life (Bosch 1991:293).

In addition, he states that the advocates of mission were blind to their own ethnocentrism as they confused their middle-class ideals and values with the tenets of Christianity (Bosch 1991:294).

In agreement with this observation, and as an example, Dickson (1991:124) indicates that it was Livingstone's expectation that missionaries would help make Africans 'gentlemen, civilised and Christian.' Yet Sundkler and Steed (2000:456) point out that at a time when foreigners were inclined to condemn African religions and culture, Livingstone showed a remarkable understanding of this dimension of African life. Furthermore, they indicate that Livingstone held that Christianity does not give any licence for assaulting the civil institutions of man', and this included such institutions that most often would bring the African convert under Church discipline. In addition, they also indicate that he held the conviction that 'Jesus came not to judge.' This conviction echoes Niebuhr's five typologies, especially the one which deals with 'Christ of culture' as found in his book *Christ and Culture*. Niebuhr's typology is discussed in chapter 7 where it combines with Kraft's approach and serves as a conclusion to the research.

Still on an overview of missionary encounter with various cultures, Bosch (1991:297) brings out three qualifications in respect to the intertwining of the gospel with

Western culture: (i) The gospel always comes to people in cultural robes, (ii) Western missionary culture had also had a positive contribution to other societies, and (iii) There were some who did their best not to impose Western cultural patterns on other people. Affirming this view, Isichei (1995:92) points out that no one became a missionary with the conscious intention of furthering imperialism, and often there were serious sources of friction between missionaries and colonial officials. Whether some joined imperialism inadvertently or advertently, the issue is that they were involved in it either totally or partially.

3.5.1 A brief historical background to missionary encounter with cultures

Over the past 200 years, missionary activities had usually looked like something imported-from the West to the rest of the world. In several parts of the world the church has been connected with colonialism. The western missionaries came to Africa with their culture and mission was often seen as getting rid of paganism and encouraging “civilisation.” Having this in mind, it is also necessary to note that, the very first Christians missionaries were the Jews. They brought along their culture and history with them, but much of our New Testament tells how they struggled in order to avoid imposing their culture on their converts, cf Acts 15:19-21 (Bowen 1996:76). Yet as the church expanded to the Gentile world, Christians remained a persecuted minority in a hostile world.

The faith of Christians attracted people, not their culture or social standing. But when Emperor Constantine was converted in A.D. 312 there was a four-fold change in Christian faith: (i) The Christian faith became fashionable and necessary for social advancement. (ii) The Emperor became the head of church and society (*no dichotomy*). (iii) The church lost its sense of mission. It was taken over by Christendom (all the nations which considered themselves Christians). (iv) The Church became the organisation of the state instead of an organism driven by the power and freedom of the Spirit (Bowen 1996:76). This implies that too close identity between the church and culture resulted to too much inculturation, even leading to cultural romanticism and thus the church became prophetically powerless.

Nevertheless, at the close of the 18th century, four new ideas emerged which made Christians think about mission in a new way: (a) Reconsidering the Great *Commission* and taking it serious and not leaving everything to the sovereign act of

God. This idea was propounded by William Carey in his famous book, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* (Bowen 1996:77). (b) *Colonialism* leading to evangelisation in East India (Bowen 1996:77). (c) *Compassion*. According to David Livingstone as cited in Bowen (1996:78) 'commerce and Christianity' was the only way to end 'the abominable traffic' of the slave trade, which stood in the way of both evangelism and civilisation. (d) *Civilisation*. Having met Livingstone and later King Mutesa of Buganda, H.M. Stanley wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper in London in 1875 that this 'enlightened and progressive ruler' relied upon Christianity to bring light and hope to his country and called for a 'pious and practical missionary' (quoted in Bowen 1996:78). It seems convincingly clear that 19th century missionary activity was based on the Great Commission, colonialism, compassion and civilisation – the four 'Cs.' Yet it was more or less colonialism in a way.

3.5.2 Missionary attitudes towards African cultures in general

Some specific attitudes to Cameroonian culture would be considered in the next chapter. But it seems necessary to first look at missionary attitudes toward African cultures in general. The first sets of examples below are based on Fiedler (1996:7-11). The first one comes from A.J. Temu, who studied British missionary work in Eastern and Central Kenya up to 1929, gives an essentially negative picture when he writes:

The missionaries failed miserably to adjust their religion to the African milieu but proudly believed, for example, that their own form of marriage and burial, their theological approach, their narrow concept of family and individualism, were the best for the Kikuyu, Akamba, Teita, Nyika, Pokomo and Moslem Swahili (quoted in Fiedler 1996:8).

The second example comes from Rotberg, one of the early missionaries in Zambia and is as follows:

Missionaries were not slow to condemn the habits, the customs and the beliefs of the indigenous people...they had after all gone to Central Africa to offer a backward people the benefits of a European Christian civilization... With the worthy obsession of the earlier Evangelicals, the first missionaries to Northern Rhodesia preached a straight forward doctrine of salvation and social change.... Yet, in addition to spiritual rebirth, they demanded of Africans some visible signs of change. In the first instance, the missionaries demanded that women should wrap skins or calico around their waists and drape something substantial across their breasts.... Men, already

accustomed to girding their loins, were encouraged to wear clothing of a Western kind (quoted in Fiedler 1996:8).

Rotberg continues:

All aspects of traditional African marriage were prohibited by the missionaries: polygyny, bride wealth, and a host of associate practices were roundly condemned.... All... tried to eliminate beer brewing and drinking.... Tribal dancing and singing, which generally offended missionaries and their wives, were prohibited.... In all... the missions advocated austerity, and expected the Africans ... to deport themselves in a manner befitting newly made Christians (quoted in Fiedler 1996:8).

The second sets of examples are based on *The Ghanaian Image of the Missionary*:

The first example, states that the missionaries and the Ghanaian Churchman failed to study the indigenous beliefs and thus continued to interpret Christianity in Western terms. Apart from the adoption of the name of God, which was reinterpreted, the other concepts associated with the indigenous religions was tabooed. For example, the reverence for the ancestors, which was the focal point of the religious beliefs was considered “pagan” (Mobley 1970:104). The next example comes from some critics, who point out that the introduction of Christianity into Ghana has suffered because the majority of missionaries came from cultures that did not have proper rites of passage (Mobley 1970:165). Consequently, any of such rites were considered incompatible to Christianity by missionaries and their collaborators.

Another example in White (2014:49) indicates that the Basel missionaries saw ATR as a disdainful custom that must be crushed. He alludes to the report, which states that the Basel Mission’s approach towards some traditional religion’s functionaries and institutions of the Gold Coast was the principle of ‘total war’ against heathenism and cultural un-enlightenment. The traditional priests and priestesses, he goes on, were viewed as ‘agents of darkness’ who must be fought at all costs, because their work was ‘demonic.’

Following these missionary attitudes, White (2014:49) observes that the missionaries used confrontation and inflexibility rather than consultation and dialogue in dealing with conflicts that arose between them and the indigenous authorities over matters that bordered on customs and tradition. These missionary attitudes certainly played negatively on the evangelistic task in Ghana. And as would be seen in the next

chapters, similar negative attitudes equally played negatively on the success of evangelisation in Nso’.

Though these examples somehow suffice to indicate the negative attitudes missionaries had towards the African cultures in general, it seems necessary to also point out their dilemma. According to Isichei (1995:95) the encounters of the host societies with Christianity were as complicated as African cultures themselves. African cultures varied with the political structure of the state and the position of the individual within it. Consequently, missionary teachings faced a world of cultural values and practices, of which religion was a part.

On Christianity and Culture, Isichei (1995:93) opines that one could not introduce Christianity without changing the host society but the crucial question, she goes on was, “by how much?” and if one may add, and how?

In an attempt to change the host society missionaries, were repeating in mission lands what they once suffered in their cultures during missionary eras in their own lands. The destruction of native worship places and supposedly heathen holy places, as can be seen in chapter 6, and as Dah (1989:4) points out was often part of the visible evidence that the gospel had conquered the kingdom of darkness in pagan lands. Was that practically realistic at all? Perhaps it was not since most African peoples have remained imbued in their cultural practices so much so that it is difficult to distinguish a real Christian from a real traditionalist as could be seen in what is called syncretism.

3.6 Syncretism

In 1Corinthians 9:22 the apostle Paul writes: ‘to the Jew I became as a Jew’ (quoted in Mission-Shaped Church 2004:92). Could Paul be a syncretist? Is this act religious or cultural syncretism? Or is it both? Syncretism as seen below seems to depend on who is defining it and the context as well as the motives behind such a definition.

In his article, “A Typology for African Religious Movements,” Turner (1967:14) uses the word “syncretist” to refer to the ‘neo-pagan’ groups incorporating selected elements from both traditional and intrusive religions in a new synthesis that remains pagan rather than Christian. The examples of such groups are The People of God

and the Cult of Ancestral Spirits in Kenya and “The Ancient Religious Societies of the African Descendants Association” in Nigeria (Turner 1967:7).

According to Turner (1967:14), if the word ‘syncretist’, is used in its strict sense for one of the forms of neo-paganism, where a new electric religion is derived from both Christian and pagan sources, and remain pagan rather than Christian, then it would be impossible to speak of a ‘syncretist’ church. This is because, the word church as he points out is a Christian category, and any syncretism at a fundamental religious level could produce only a new kind of paganism.

That notwithstanding, Turner (1967:14) indicates that there are other uses of the term syncretism to refer to a religion that has borrowed elements from another religion and culture, and has so transposed them in the process that its own basic features have remained intact and merely been given new modes of expression. He thus opines that this might be termed a cultural rather than truly religious syncretism, and will be found to have occurred very widely and above all in Christianity. In this sense as Turner (1967:15) intimates all Christian churches are syncretistic and the more indigenous an African church becomes the more syncretistic it will be.

If syncretism has to do with borrowing of religious and cultural element as Turner indicates, then he cannot talk of cultural syncretism only. But rather of religio-cultural syncretism since both the religious and cultural elements are involved in the process.

In his article “Economic, Culture and Syncretism”, Tesfai (1995:7) points out that at the 1990 Canberra WCC’s assembly, the discussion on syncretism reached a more reasonable step and ever since, a new stage in the history of the church has become a possibility. In this new possibility, he sees transition from a specific culture to world cultures, from a ‘western’ to ‘a world church.’ In this process, the whole gamut of the legacy of the Church, from its faith to the cultural expression from which it was wrapped as he observes, is subject to scrutiny.

Furthermore, Tesfai (1995:7) indicates that the issue of syncretism is as old as the inception of Christianity. He points out that Christianity as it developed throughout its history has been marked by syncretism. Even the Western Christian tradition, which has been propagated to the rest of the world as the normative expression of the faith, he goes on, has been shaped by syncretism. He further adds that from its

beginning, Christianity has been marked by religious elements that were taken from local cultures in which it found itself. This is evident as he points out, with regard to the relationship of Christianity to the Hellenistic cultures and philosophy.

According to Wolfhart Pannenberg, Christianity did not only link itself to Greek philosophy, but also inherited the entire religious tradition of the Mediterranean world – a process whose details have still not been sufficiently clarified, but which was probably decisive for the persuasive power of Christianity in the ancient world (cited in Tesfai 1995:7).

Ironically, when it comes to the use of cultural elements from Africa it becomes a problem. Tesfai (1995:7) points out that bread and wine comes from the Mediterranean culture. Interestingly, in Chad and Cameroon, probably due to the scarcity of imported mass wine some priests carried out an experiment and gave their congregations millet bread and millet beer for the Eucharist. The consequences were that these priests were divested from their offices because they were believed to have transgressed the Canon law.

Liturgically, Jean-Marc Ela has argued that

The rite we follow (i.e., the Roman rite) has not been of our own choosing; it bears the mark of a culture not ours; it has not developed in function of our own personality or the genius of our people. And so the eucharist in the life of the church has become the locus of our daily alienation (cited in Tesfai 1995:7).

Consequently, instead of the incarnation bringing people closer to Christ in their own cultures it is rather alienating them further away from Christ.

In his book *Communicating Christ Cross Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*, Hesselgrave (1991:182-187) identifies six types of responses common to the missionary situation: sincere acceptance, straightforward rejection, situational reformulation, syncretistic incorporation, studied protraction and symbiotic resignation. Since the focus of this section of the work is on syncretism, it is thus necessary to elaborate on it.

According to Hesselgrave, syncretism takes place “when respondents choose parts of the message that appeals to them and, rejecting other parts of the message, incorporate the accepted elements into non-Christian religious systems to make a

new whole” (1991:185). He adds that “syncretism, East and West, is perhaps best understood as a very natural desire on the part of many people to embrace the most appealing aspects of various religions” (1991:185). This is glaring in Christianity, especially when it comes to inculturation. Hesselgrave’s view seems to be one sided; more often syncretism is not initiated by the respondent but by the one who brings the gospel.

Still on syncretism Hesselgrave (1991:185) indicates that to respondents in polytheistic societies, it seems unwise if not inconceivable that with so many religious systems in the world one can be expected to opt for one deity, one holy book, and one standard belief and practice to the exclusion of all others. He thus, points out that, missionary communicators will be well advised to be aware of the appeal of the following response from an Oriental who had just heard the gospel for the first time:

... I am most grateful to you for coming to my village with this message. This has been a great day for me. I have always believed in our own gods. But tonight, when we heard your message we were much moved. We most certainly want to believe in the Christian God also (Hesselgrave 1991:185).

Given his/her polytheistic background, this respondent sees nothing wrong in accepting the Christian God and still believing in theirs. Hesselgrave (1991:185), thus admonishes missionary communicators that in such situations they should communicate patiently the uniqueness of Christ and Christian revelation. Furthermore, he points out that some of the most exclusive claims of all religions are found in the Old and New Testaments. Hence, syncretism, he concludes is but another form of Christ-rejection (1991:186).

This seems to be a type of view which, according to Shorter (1994:45) has led to the despising of traditional religion, and the labelling of its adherents as: ‘pagan’, ‘heathen’, ‘idolatrous’, ‘polytheist’, ‘primitive’, ‘primal’ and representing its beliefs as an amorphous collection of ‘customs’ and ‘rituals’, contrasting unfavourably with the so-called ‘higher’ religions’ or ‘world religions’ He further indicates that comparatively recently, ATR was pictured as ‘the empire of satan’, rather than Africa’s Old Testament’ or the ‘seed-ground of the eternal Logos’ (Shorter 1994:45).

Having said this, he suggests that:

Traditional religion must be seen as an autonomous religious system apart from and distinct from Christianity. Only then is it possible for the church to dialogue with it, and for Christians to make the necessary discernment of what it is, or is not, compatible with the Gospel. The refusal to take it seriously has bedevilled evangelization and has led to a form of split 'personality' among Christians – and unresolved syncretism which impoverishes both Christianity and tradition, instead of mutually enriching them (Shorter 1994:46).

In their book, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, Bevans and Schroeder (2004:60-61) indicate that theologians who begin their theologising with a reverence for culture would say that syncretism as a process is inevitable and that the risk involved is a risk well taken.

Luztebak (1989:360), seems to propose two distinctive meanings of syncretism which could help clarify the direction one needs to take. First, he points out that syncretism in anthropology is any synthesis of two or more culturally diverse beliefs or practices, especially of a religious character. According to him any synthesis of religious beliefs and practices to anthropologists is syncretistic. Furthermore, he indicates that in anthropological terms, Christianity itself can be said to be a syncretistic religion, an amalgam composed of Judaism, new ideas taught by Jesus and his followers, and the many later cultural accretions and theological developments and recombination's of beliefs and practices that have occurred over the centuries (Luzbetak 1989:360). Second, he posits that in missiology, the term syncretism involves Christian theology and accordingly being more narrowly defined as any theologically untenable amalgam. He indicates that to the missiologist, syncretism is not necessarily terminal and may be an intermediate stage or process.

The usage of the term syncretism in missiological anthropology refers to a combination of beliefs and practices that are theologically untenable (Luzbetak 1989:360). Luzbetak (1989:360-361), further points out three basic problems with theologically untenable amalgams: First, as far as their content is concerned, they are untenable, for they are forms of Christianity. Second, as a process, they are largely unavoidable and subliminal inasmuch as they reflect psychological 'laws' associated with all culture change. Third, they often reflect important, and sometimes central, values of a society that demand respect. Their existence thus produces an enormous missiological dilemma, which threatens the practice of inculturation.

This threat of the practice of inculturation echoes the fact that all attempts at inculturation struggle with the danger of syncretism because in an attempt to be 'relevant' one may fall into syncretism, and in the effort to avoid syncretism one may become 'irrelevant' (Mission-Shaped Church 2004:91).

There is a need to avoid any extremes by striking a balance when selecting what to incorporate into Christianity. This could be done by not refusing to relate everything from culture to Christianity and not taking everything from culture into Christianity without a critical look.

In an attempt to strike such a balance, the following insights and warnings from Bosch could be of great importance in this issue of inculturation and syncretism.

Writing on "the limits of inculturation", Bosch (1991:455), indicates that inculturation has a critical dimension. The faith and its cultural expression – even if it is neither possible nor prudent to dislodge the one from the other, he points out, are never completely coterminous. Inculturation does not mean that culture is to be completely destroyed and something new built on its ruins; neither however does it suggest that a particular culture is merely to be endorsed in its present form. Hence, he warns that the philosophy that 'anything goes' as long as it seems to make sense to people can be catastrophic.

Following all the views above, this researcher would like to define syncretism as indiscriminate incorporation of religious and cultural practices into Christianity in order to make it relevant to the receiving cultural context. Syncretism can arise either from uncritical inculturation (uncritical contextualisation).

This practice can be checked using translatability of Sanneh (1989) as contained in Tennent (2010) and critical contextualisation of Hiebert (1994).

3.7 Translatability and critical contextualisation as checks against syncretism

Translatability and critical contextualisation could serve to check uncritical inculturation. According to Lamin Sanneh (1989) the word translatability in its broader use includes not merely linguistics but also the entire process of the faithful transmission of the gospel across cultural frontiers (cited in Tennent 2010:352). The authors have used the concepts of translatability and critical contextualisation to explain how uncritical inculturation could be curbed.

Tennent (2010:352) points out that the word translatability reminds us that we must always remain faithful to both the apostolic message and the particularities of the target culture. Furthermore, he indicates that since the word translatability is an extension of the primary idea of Bible translation, the priority of the biblical message is guaranteed. He equally indicates that the language of translation serves as an ongoing reminder of the necessary boundaries to translatability. According to him Bible translators undertake their work with the greatest care because they must be constantly vigilant against the possibility of a mistranslation of a biblical text.

Tennent (2010:353) however decries the overwhelming pressure today to sacrifice the gospel at the altar of the 'market,' which treats the recipients of the gospel as consumers who must be satisfied by giving them what they want to hear rather than the unpopular message of repentance and a crucified Saviour. Yet, he holds that translatability is a valuable theological principle, which, alongside the careful use of contextualisation, can serve an important function in helping the church to be faithful to the gospel in various cultures.

In addition to translatability as discussed above, Hiebert's 'critical' contextualisation could also serve as a check to uncritical inculturation and syncretism.

Hiebert's model which he adopted from Jacob Loewen and John Geertz (Hiebert 1994:88) is in three stages:

The first step in critical contextualisation is "exegesis of the culture": In this step, one has to study the local culture phenomenologically. The purpose here is to understand the old ways, not to judge them. For example, the pastor or missionary may ask the Christians how they should bury the dead. Here the people would likely analyse their traditional rites, describing each song, dance, recitation etc. (Hiebert 1994:88-89).

The second step is "exegesis of Scripture and the Hermeneutical Bridge": in this step, the pastor or missionary leads the church in a study of the Scriptures related to the question at hand. Using the example of burial practices, the leader teaches the Christian beliefs about death and resurrection (Hiebert 1994:89).

The third step is "critical response": this step is for the people corporately to critically evaluate their own past customs in the light of their new biblical understandings and

to make decisions regarding their response to their new-found truths. Here note is taken that the gospel is not simply information to be communicated but a message to which people must respond (Hiebert 1994:89).

The results of the three-step approach will be “new contextualised practices”: the arranging of the new practices into a new ritual that expresses the Christian meaning of the event. Such a ritual as Hiebert (1994:90-91) points out will be Christian, for it explicitly seeks to express biblical teaching. It will equally be contextualised, because the church has created it, using forms the people understand within their own culture.

In this approach, Hiebert suggests the following checks against syncretism:

- Critical contextualisation takes the Bible seriously as the role of faith and life. So, contextualised practices, like contextualised theologies must be biblically based.
- Critical contextualisation recognises the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all believers open to God’s blessings.
- In critical contextualisation, the church acts as a hermeneutical community. The priesthood of all believers as Hiebert (1994:91) warns is not a licence for theological ‘Lone-Rangerism.’ “We need each other to see our personal biases, for we see the ways others misinterpret Scriptures before we see our own misinterpretations” (Hiebert 1994:91).
- There is a growing discussion among evangelical theologians from different cultures, which may lead to consensus on theological points.
- Critical contextualisation does not operate from a monocultural perspective. Nor is it premised upon the pluralism of incommensurable cultures. Rather, it seeks to find metacultural and metatheological frameworks that enable people in one culture to understand messages and ritual practices from another culture with a minimum of distortion.
- Critical contextualisation sees contextualisation as an ongoing process in which the church must constantly engage itself, a process that can lead people to a better understanding of what the lordship of Christ and the kingdom of God on earth are about.

3.8 Conclusion

Early Christian missionaries did not take the African worldviews seriously. They came with prejudiced minds and considered Africans blank slates. As a result, they seem to have been blind to build upon the culture of the evangelised. According to them, African cultures had to give way altogether. They thus attempted to transplant Christianity in Africa by uprooting African cultures. Indeed, it appears missionaries did not know that Africans are religious by nature, for they, as Mbiti (1989:227) points out, do not know how to exist without religion. The understanding of the African worldview would have served better for the planting of the gospel. For example, their concepts of God, their view of community living, their customs and belief systems would have been of great importance.

As far as knowledge of God is concerned, Africans know God as a Supreme Being. This is reflected in the names by which God is called. They see God as 'all powerful', 'all-knowing', and 'present everywhere' simultaneously. Generally, Africans believe that everything in the universe was put in place by God and He presides over and maintains the universe. Besides, they see the universe as the manifestation of God's nature, what some theologians call "Natural Revelation." If Africa is flourishing today as the centre of gravity of Christianity, it is no doubt that it is because of the religious nature of its peoples. This confirms that 'the gospel can only be proclaimed in a culture, not at a culture' (Mission-Shaped Church 2004:87).

Christian missions came intertwined with colonialism, so much so that in most cases one could not distinguish between a missionary and a colonialist. In other words, missionary endeavour in Cameroon like in most of Africa, Asia and Latin America was intrinsically linked to Western explorations and colonialism. The missionaries therefore had two motives in mind: pure and impure. It seems the missionaries entered Africa mostly with the second set of motives in mind. That is why they considered Africans as people without a culture as portrayed in their negative attitudes towards secret societies (traditional social associations). Their teachings against members of such societies led to the stigmatisation of its members, especially the ones who are Christians. And as we shall see in chapter six, the majority of those who belong to these associations in Nso' are Christians. And a

good number of them as we shall notice seem to see nothing wrong in being both a Christian and a member of any traditional social association.

As seen above, it seems necessary to note that syncretism depends on the starting point of one's theology. For instance, those who start with love for culture see no big problem while those who are more critical see it as compromising the gospel. There seems to have been no religion in the world void of syncretism and it seems there might never be one. However, there is a need to strike a balance when selecting aspects from one religion or culture to incorporate into Christianity.

The next chapters, especially five and six show how Christian missions in Nso' have wrestled with this reality over the years.

CHAPTER 4

MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: CAMEROON

4.1 Introduction

According to Kendall the Western missionary presence in Africa is a remarkable phenomenon when viewed historically and in terms of the whole continent (Fashole-Luke *et al* 1978:16). It seems truly remarkable when one follows the attempt of the West to carry the gospel to the entire Africa. Hence, before embarking on Cameroon, it would be necessary to briefly take a general overview of missionary enterprise in Africa; 1774-1974 (Fashole-Luke *et al.* 1978:16). As already pointed out in the introduction to this study, this chapter reiterates the fact that Cameroon is Africa in miniature. Hence, what is said about Cameroon is representative of Africa in general.

4.2 Missionary enterprise in Africa: A brief overview

Early Christian missions in Africa in General and North Africa in particular flourished between 30–1634 A.D. (Wedepohl in Vumisa 2012:19), before spreading to the rest of the continent. However, between the eighth and the fifteenth century, Christianity virtually disappeared from North Africa and Islam became and has remained (predominantly) the religion of the people (Groves 1954: 113). The missionary enterprise in Africa was nevertheless renewed from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century and was undertaken to Muslim lands in Africa by Franciscans and Dominicans (Groves 1954: 115). Groves (1954:116) points out that serious attempts to evangelise Africa in this period started with the Portuguese exploration and settlement on the coasts of Africa from the fifteenth century. In this respect, churches were established at the coast settlements and in extensive areas now covered by Zaire, Angola, East and Central Africa.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were “a period of pause” Groves (1954:147) in the missionary endeavour, which resulted from the sixteenth century Reformation in Europe. At the close of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century (1792 –1815) missionary activities for Africa was awakened, Groves (1954:147) with the formation of new missionary societies, such as the London Missionary Society (1795), The Church Missionary Society (1799, American Board of Missions (1810), Wesleyan Missionary Society (1813), and Paris

Evangelical Missionary Society (Wedepohl in Vumisa 2012:23-24). This then continued throughout the nineteenth century and even beyond.

4.3 Pre-missionary Cameroon

This section discusses the early knowledge of Cameroon to the outside world. It also shows how traditional religion functioned, followed by the political and social organisation as well as economic, educational and health systems before the missionary era.

4.3.1 The early knowledge of Cameroon

Cameroon as it is today like many other African countries was not so until after the Berlin Colonial Conference of 1884-85, when the boundaries of the country was arrived at. Before then, only the coastal and the northern parts of the country were known by the European traders and Arabs from North Africa respectively (Ngho 1996:1). The early history of Cameroon indicates that she was the first African country to derive her name from the wealth of her resources – *Rio dos Cameroes*, (*Cameroes*, the Portuguese name for prawns) found in River Wouri and means River of Prawns. In addition, Cameroon seems to have been the first African country whose discovery was made before the A. Ds, and its colonisation intended by an African, Hanno of Carthage (c 500 B.C.) (Keller 1968:1; Tajoche 2003:30; Walters 2005:41, Ayeah 2014: 39).

Affirming this historical fact Keller writes:

An inscription on a metal plate found in a Carthaginian temple gives us the first recorded account that the Carthaginian sailors passed Cameroon in about 500 B.C. According to that inscription, Hanno, the son of Hamilkar, visited Amba Bay on one of his journeys down the West coast of Africa. It is written that from a mountain, which the inhabitants called the Mountain of God, fiery floods came down which gave off tremendous heat and covered the country with thick haze. This shows that Cameroon Mountain was then much more volcanically active than it is now (Keller 1968:1).

In agreement with Keller, Tajoche (2003:31) indicates that what Hanno saw must have been Mount Cameroon in eruption. He adds that this mountain is known to have erupted more often in the past and in later years it has erupted in 1909, 1922, 1954, 1959, 1999 and 2000.

Keller (1968:1)) adds that apart from this discovery, nothing more is heard of Cameroon till the 15th century A.D. about 1471, though other writers mention 1472 and 1474, when the Portuguese navigator, Cao or Pao travelled along the West coast of Africa with the intention of reaching India. It is said that as this navigator moved on, he suddenly saw two mountains before him, namely, Cameroon Mountain and Calarence Park (Fernando Po). He then found an anchorage near Cameroon Mountain. He continued on his expedition and reached the mouth of the Congo but returned from there, perhaps disappointed by the coast in the south (Keller 1968:1). Next, the Portuguese sailors started to trade with the inhabitants along the west coast of Cameroon. As they moved along, they discovered that the mouth of the Wuri (Wouri) River was full of prawns, they named it *Rio dos Cameroes* (River of Prawns) (Keller 1968:1). Consequently, *Cameroes* became the first colonial name for this country. In subsequent years, the British and French changed the name *Cameroes* to 'Cameroons' and 'Cameroun' respectively while the Germans changed it to Kamerun (Keller 1968:1). Cameroon was therefore discovered by an African, Hanno of Carthage, thousand years before the arrival of the first European sailors, the Portuguese (Keller 1968:1).

4.3.2 Traditional religion

Following the fact that Africans from origin were and still are “notoriously religious” (Mbiti 1989:1), one would be right to affirm the existence of a traditional religion in Cameroon before Christianity. Cameroonians like other Africans generally believed in the existence of a divine or almighty creator of the universe. Besides, there was also a belief in the existence of numerous gods, good and evil spirits, and powers such as ghosts and ancestors, occupying the space between the divine creator and humanity. The divine creator was above other beings. There was equally a belief in life after death, in the existence and power of the forces of good and evil in each community (Fanso 1989:7).

Tajoche (2003:67) opines that generally less developed societies like Cameroon had little or no distinction between belief and practice in religion. Hence, the two were inextricably integrated. In the Cameroonian practice of religion, there was worship of God/gods, veneration of ancestors (which some people call worship) sacrifice, offering and thanksgiving (Tajoche 2003:67). Worship was either performed by a

waterfall, a tree, a road junction or at the foot of a hill or mountain. Even births, marriages and death ceremonies contained activities with religious components. Some Cameroonian villages even had what is commonly known today as “country Sundays”. These days were and are still used for traditional religious ceremonies and practices.

One important part of the traditional religion of each people was the ancestor-reverence. Indeed, it was strongly believed that ancestors were part and parcel of the living society and that they continued to maintain an interest in the welfare of their descendants. According to this belief, ancestors were always ready whenever they were called upon during prayer and sacrifice to intercede with the deities on behalf of the living (Fanso 1989:7).

On the other hand, religion was linked to morality (Fanso 1989:7). In agreement with this view, Paris (1995:51) indicates that the African community had a goal of a moral life. He points out that all African peoples agree that the tribal or ethnic community is the paramount social reality apart from which humanity cannot exist. In the same vein, all agree that the community is a sacred phenomenon created by the supreme God, protected by the divinities, and governed by the ancestral spirits. Hence, full participation in the community is a fundamental requirement of all humans. It comprises the nature of religious devotion, and Mbiti puts it thus:

To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involve participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of secularity, his kinships and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence. To be without one of these corporate elements is to be out of the whole picture. Therefore, to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion (Mbiti, quoted in Paris 1995:51).

Still on morality, Paris (1995:77) indicates that an African family was and is still the locus of moral development. He opines that despite the fact that there are many variations in African family life, there are features which are common to all of them. The most prevalent of these as he indicates is the family’s primacy in the spheres of social reality and personal identity. Unlike what is called a nuclear family in Western societies, the African family is a large, closely knit community of blood relatives that

is constitutive of the life and destiny of each of its members. Simply put, kinship constitutes the paramount social reality for all African peoples. As Mbiti expresses:

Kinship is reckoned through blood and betrothal (engagement and marriage). It is kinship which controls social relationships between people in a given community: it governs marital customs and regulations; it determines the behaviour of one individual towards another. Indeed, this sense of kinship binds together the entire life of the "tribe," and is even extended to cover animals, plants and non-living objects through the "totemic" system. Almost all the concepts connected with human relationship can be understood and interpreted through the kinship system. This it is which largely governs the behaviour, thinking and whole life of the individual in the society of which he is a member (Mbiti, quoted in Paris 1995:77).

In addition, Paris (1995:77) indicates that some scholars contend that kinship constitutes the whole of African tribal community, since all the people are believed to be descended from a common ancestor who long ago lived in their territory, married, produced children, and lives now in the spirit world. Furthermore, he points out that in traditional African villages almost everyone was blood related. As it was practised in the past and even today, all elderly men and women, including uncles and aunts, were called fathers and mothers; while those close to one's own age were called brothers and sisters.

Once kinship was established, all concerned were duty-bound to accept the corresponding behaviours as prescribed by tradition. In this way, the village functioned as one large family, a pattern that continues to the present day not only in villages but also among friends and associates in urban centres (Paris 1995:78).

As religion was linked to morality, a religious community or person has to be morally upright. Each community shunned evil. Crime was severely punished. Thieves and murderers were enemies of the community and if they were judged guilty, depending on the severity of the crime, they were punished by death. Furthermore, injustice was not tolerated and wrong was easily corrected and cordially restored (Fanso 1989:7).

Evil was harmful and was thought to be expressed in witchcraft by witches and wizards. The people believed that witches and wizards were the cause of unnatural deaths in the community. When such people were detected in the community, they were either punished by death or banishment. The unfortunate thing is that some

people were falsely accused to be witches or wizards and either killed or banished (Fanso 1989:7).

The traditional African community thus functioned in consonance with the sociological theory, functionalism. With the introduction of Christianity and Western ways of life, individualism cropped into the African commonality and solidarity but it has not succeeded to completely disintegrate it.

4.3.3 Political system and social organisation

It seems worthy to note that before both the missionary and the colonial era, the territory which constitutes the present Cameroon existed (Fanso 1989:1) and most Cameroonian communities had settled in well-defined areas, some with well-established traditions (Tajoche 2003:15) and political systems. What did not exist before both the missionary and colonial era as we now have them were defined demarcated national boundaries separating Cameroon from the neighbouring countries? Besides, there was also no Cameroon government in-charge of the national territory (Fanso 1989:1). That notwithstanding, Cameroon was not without order and civilisation, since each group either settled or still settling already had organised social and political institutions, some with strong centralised government, judicial and religious authority. Others were however organised in a decentralised system (Fanso: 1989:1). These political systems were never static, but dynamic and deferred in time and space. Affirming this assertion, Tajoche (2003:15), points out that initially, people lived in independent (isolated) settlements but as society developed, they were obliged to live in-groups in order to co-ordinate their activities. Some people practised a centralised political system, wherein power was concentrated in the hands of a single leader, who generally exercised considerable power. Succession to the throne was by royal descent and not election. A good number of these rulers constituted a hereditary dynasty. For example, the Bamums of the Western grassfields of Cameroon trace a very long dynasty (Ngoh 1996:20; Tajoche 2003:15). The supreme leader of the Bamuns was called the 'King', Sultan, Ardo, Paramount Chief or Fon and was the over-lord of the land (Tajoche 2003:15).

Apart from the Bamuns, other groups with centralised and institutionalised political system were the numerous Bamilike chiefdoms all of the Tikar- derived fondoms, in the Western Region of Cameroon, the Chamba-derived Bali sub-units of the North

West Region, the Fulbe units, the chiefdoms of the Kotoko and many other smaller states located all over central and northern Cameroon (Fanso 1989:1-2). It is said that these groups were divided into dialectal states or chiefdoms, varying in size generally distinguished themselves by reference to a particular sacred ruler, for example *Fon*, to whom its members gave allegiance (Fanso 1989:2). In addition, the social structure of these states or chiefdoms was of a hierarchical nature with considerable power exercised by the *Fon*. Furthermore, each state also possessed a system of ranked officials often with specified duties and a judicial system and provided security for its members. Besides, some of the large states which expanded through peaceful absorption and conquest contained sub-chiefdoms which recognised the paramountcy of the central ruler while at the same time retaining their hereditary dynasties. But other large states like the Bamun is said to have absorbed completely their conquered chiefdoms into the central dynasty.

Fanso (1989:2) indicates that in the large traditional state and the extensive region of Adamawa, existed well established centralised systems, excellently structured Islamic authority prior to the colonisation of Cameroon. The imperial administration was headed by the Emir or Lamido who was both a political and a religious leader. He was assisted by a council of notables and numerous officials in the capital. The empire was made up of more than forty districts, each headed by a governor known as Ardo or Lamido. Only the Emir had the power to appoint or confirm and invest leaders with the authority of a district governor. Besides, each governor had to pledge loyalty in person to the Emir in the imperial capital, which was Yola, in Nigeria.

Those who assisted the governor in the administration of the district were a district council of notables. The governor was in-charge of a variety of indigenous populations divided into chiefdoms and villages (Fanso 1989:2). The head of the village was a local traditional chief known as Ardo (which seems confusing since the governor was also known as Ardo). The local traditional chief was however appointed or confirmed by the governor and the governor as mentioned above was appointed and or confirmed by the Emir or Lamido. Below the village, were compounds of extended families led by family heads (Fanso 1989:2). Fanso (1989:2) indicates that at the beginning of the German occupation of Cameroon in 1884 the Emir of Adamawa was called Sanda, and when he died in 1890, he was

succeeded by his brother Zubieru, which confirmed that succession was by royal descent.

One significant system during this period in the Adamawa was the judicial, which we are told was precisely structured with courts at clearly defined levels of importance. Over and above all the court was the Emir's Court in Yola, and appeals to it could only be made as a last resort. In addition, to the Emir's Court was also the Alkali Court, which served both as a Court in the first instance and as a Court of Appeal for the districts. Furthermore, each district had a governor's or Lamido's Court and a district Alkali Court. Still on judicial matters, quarter heads, district and village councillors as well as family heads also performed clear judicial functions at their levels. Appeals could therefore be made from the lower court to the higher or highest court, which means beginning from the compound to the imperial capital (Fanso 1989:2).

On the other hand, the administrative situation in the so-called states or lineage-based communities of the coastal and forest zones of Cameroon where political leadership was neither centralised nor easy to identify was nevertheless not chaotic. Although it was difficult to find a definite national political structure existing among such groups, there however existed political and administrative relations in which persons at family or clan level exercised power and authority for the maintenance of social order in the community. Examples of such groups are the Beti, the Bassa-Bakoko. Based on the devotion of the members of these groups to their common linguistic, historical and cultural uniformity, Fanso (1989:3) argues that they certainly had internal political and administrative relations between the constituted elements which ensured cohesion and order within the group.

In some cases, the political and judicial control was in the hands of officers of clans, associations, secret societies, age-grades, age-sets and village councils. It is said that the relations between these organisations spread informally throughout the ethnic territory, linking every section as it were to a common political or judicial system. Through this links, extended families, clans and the clusters were brought together in order that cultural and territorial solidarity maintained. Furthermore, we are told that in some cases, kinship was used as a means of stating required behaviour (Fanso 1989:3).

As an example of a political organisation in an uncentralised community, Fanso (1989:3) uses the small Beti group of Mangisa, who are located at the loop of the Sanaga where its tributary, River Ndian, flows into it. The loop of the Sanaga, he says, forms the natural frontier of the group in the north, then the remaining frontier is shared with the Eton, another Beti group.

The traditional administration of the Mangisa was organised on clan basis. The head of each clan was known as *nkukuma* and was usually a descendant of the founder of the clan. Each *nkukuma* was selected and installed by the elders of the clan based on the following qualities: courage, intelligence, and respect from the majority of the clan (Fanso 1989:3). The *nkukuma* had two main responsibilities: to help the people of his clan to organise law and order therein. His opinion was never absolute, since he acted only when there was a consensus of opinion on an issue. Even clan members had the right to disagree with their *nkukuma* and some who so disagreed broke away and formed autonomous units of the same clan. This gave rise to the numerous Mangisa clans (Fanso 1989:3).

There were some advantages that this type of setting enjoyed. First, since each clan was self-governing and jealously guarded its autonomy, it was difficult for a national or supra-clan administration to be set up in Mangisaland. Second, whenever each clan or the group as a whole was threatened by a crisis or external enemy, all the clans easily united in a common national action (Fanso 1989:4). The planning meetings which involved all the clan heads to decipher on what to do in such situations were summoned by the eldest *nkukuma*. Inter-clan conflicts and issues of national security were also discussed and resolved in the same manner. In addition, the clan head was charged with the duty to organise the production, distribution and exchange of goods and wealth between his and other clans and/or neighbouring groups. Fanso (1989:4) indicates that at the time of German occupation of Mangisaland in 1894, the most noted *nkukuma* was Elugu Zoba of the Mbenenga clan.

4.3.4 Economic, educational and health systems

In the pre-colonial and pre-missionary era, Cameroonians either practised subsistence economy or trade by barter with people of other tribes. Subsistence farming gave Cameroonians enough food. They also produced some goods and

services needed for their survival. Some practised animal husbandry, rearing of fowls, goats, sheep, cows, pigs etc. Those who practised neither subsistence farming nor animal husbandry were involved in either fishing or hunting. Markets were created where they could meet for the exchange of goods and services, and trade was by barter, since there was no monetary economy at that time. The pre-colonial economy of Cameroon was relatively closed since it had very little external influence (Tajoche 2003:16-17).

Education in pre-colonial and the pre-missionary era was informal. Children were taught by their parents to do farming, hunting, fishing, and artistic work, like weaving and carving. The training took place practically since these children often accompanied their parents to work. The essence of education was to guide the young people to manhood or womanhood accordingly. It is said that youths usually attached themselves to gifted adults for some period of apprenticeship before graduating as hunters, fishermen, blacksmiths etc. Youths were generally educated in the arts (Tajoche 2003:18).

On health, it is obvious that in the pre-colonial and pre-missionary era, Cameroonians suffered from various types of ailments, such as malaria, diarrhoea, dysentery, smallpox, chickenpox, leprosy etc. Since there were no scientific medicines, Cameroonian traditional doctors used herbs to cure those who were attacked by these diseases (Tajoche 2003:18). These traditional doctors or medicine men have so often and wrongly been called by European-American writers as 'witch-doctors' (Mbiti 1989:162).

4.4 Missionary enterprise in Cameroon

Shenk (1999:153), locates the modern missionary movement from 1792 to 1992. In Cameroon, the missionary endeavour started in 1814, when the Baptist Christians of Jamaica had expressed their desire to bringing the gospel to Africa. However, the first missionaries of the Baptist Missionary Society arrived at Fernando Po in 1843 (Falk 1997:133). They were: The Rev. Joseph Merrick, a black West Indian Missionary, who laid the foundation in Bimbia in the then Victoria (now Limbe) of future missionary work in the interior of the country, Dr. Prince, Clark Alexander, Christian Fuller and Alfred Saker. (For Skaker's contributions to mission work in Cameroon see section 4.7 below).

4.4.1 Historical and political milieu

Cameroon seems to be unique among modern African states for a most remarkable variety of political experience (Kwast 1971:53). Cameroon has been influenced historically and politically by the following European countries: Portugal, Germany, Britain and France. As indicated below the name Cameroon has been variously spelled: Cameroes, by the Portuguese, Cameroon by the British, Cameroun by the French and Kamerun by the Germans (Dah 1983:113, Ngoh 1996:45).

4.4.1.1 Portuguese and British entrance: 1472-1884

It is most probable that the Portuguese were the first Europeans to make sustained visits to the coast of Cameroon, beginning in about 1472 (Keller 1968:1; Kwast 1971:53; Mbuangbaw 1987:42, Ngoh 1996:45, Dah:1983:113). It was in this same year that the Island of Fernando Po was discovered by the Portuguese and named after the Portuguese sailor Fernao do Pao. It is said that these Portuguese also sailed into the estuary of what is now known as the Wouri River and named it *Rio dos Camarões* (river of prawns) (Keller 1968:1; Kwast 1971:53, Dah 1983:113, Ngoh 1996:45). The Portuguese had only interest in trading in gold, ivory and slaves. Consequently, they remained on the coast and never established any permanent stations there. SaÔ Tomé was their base of operations for trading along the coast (Kwast 1971:54). Kwast (1971:54) points out that after 1530 slaves became the most important export commodity in Cameroon. Furthermore, he indicates that in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries Calabar, Bimbia and Douala on the banks of *Rio dos Camarões* and the area of *Rio del Rey* became famous centres for the selling and shipment of slaves to various parts of the world.

It seems important to note that between 1879 and 1884 the kings of Douala requested Britain to annex Cameroon. The first formal request from the kings, we are told was led by king Akwa in a letter dated 7 August 1879 and addressed to Queen Victoria. The first letter did not receive any positive response from the queen. In March 1881 King Bell wrote another letter through the Consul Edward Hyde Hewett reminding the British of the request of the Kings and Chiefs of the Cameroons. This letter yielded no fruit. Kings Akwa and Bell wrote a joint letter in 1881 and it still fell on deaf ears (Ngoh 1996:51-52). However, it is said that in March 1882 Prime Minister Gladstone informed the Cameroon kings and chiefs that Britain was not yet

in a position to shoulder the responsibility of annexing the country. And as most politicians would do he promised to look into the matter again (Ngho 1996:53).

Interestingly, before Britain realised the need for the annexation of Cameroon, it was already too late for them. Le Vine explains the incident which led to this lateness as follows:

The extent of the British influence along the Cameroon coast, at Douala, and in the Gulf of Guinea, coupled with repeated demands from various Cameroonian chiefdoms for British protectorate, made the annexation of the area by Britain seem a foregone conclusion.... In the meantime, a dilatory British government, having finally become aware of the possibility that the Cameroon coast might fall into other, particularly French, hands, authorized their itinerant 'floating Consul,' Edward Hyde Hewett, to conclude treaties of annexation with petty 'kings' at Douala. Hewett, to his eternal chagrin, arrived Douala a week too late. On July 12, 1884, Nactingal, who had arrived the day before, signed a treaty with the Douala kings establishing the German protectorate (Le Vine 1971:4, quoted in Nyuyki 2007:10).

From every indication, Britain had taken things for granted not knowing that the Germans were also interested in Cameroon. Ngho (1996:61) even indicates that the chiefs gave in when they were promised gifts and money, which implies that they were bribed. The result of this annexation was the introduction of the German culture, especially through her language.

4.4.1.2 The influence of the Berlin Conference

The Berlin Conference of 1884, which arbitrarily partitioned Africa, left Cameroon to be (scrambled) fought for by the Germans through the Basel Evangelical Mission, by the British through the Baptist Missionary Society and by France through a Catholic Jesuit Order (Walters 2005:42-43). Simply put, there were three active colonial powers in Cameroon before Germany was pushed out in the First World War (Walters 2005:43). When this happened, one-fifth of the country which was the concentrated German stronghold was transferred to Britain as a mandated territory. Then the rest of the country was under the colonial rule of France, but the South-Western part of the Cameroon which was a British trusteeship was annexed to Eastern Nigeria, for easy administration following its proximity (Walters 2005:43).

Cameroon then had two main sectors, which experienced what Walters calls "different un-reconciling, indoctrinations and cultural impact" (Walters 2005:43). Furthermore, he identifies the following as characteristic of British colonialism: "The

practice of divide and rule, dominance and governance through selected native stooges and the habit of perpetual erratic complaining and protesting, critical criticism without analytical assessment” (Walters 2005:43). And for French colonial rule he states the following as its distinctive features: “tactful rule through mutual assimilation, (*La France d’autre mer*), brain-washing attitude of superiority and limited provision of façade of French citizenship to Africans” (Walters 2005:43).

Furthermore, Walters (2005:43) points to an important historical fact, that even though the northern part of Cameroon was under the French colonial rule, it was for three reasons not Francophone *per se*. The first reason is that the life of northern Cameroonians, Akus, Fulani, and Foulbes being nomadic culturally and occupationally could not easily be settled down in large communities to imbibe French cultural indoctrination. Second, because these aborigines were Muslims, they resisted western influence lest they were converted to Christianity. Third, by geographical proximity, North Cameroonians were in more close contact with Northern Nigeria and Chad.

It is therefore clear that missionaries came to Cameroon mostly from nations that had political interest in Cameroon – the British, the Germans and the French. After having defeated the Germans in the First World War (1914-1918), they left Cameroon to the hands of Britain and France and they jointly controlled Cameroon until March 1916 when they agreed on a provisional partition of the territory into two, though unevenly as seen above. Then six years later (1922), the two Cameroons became the League of Nations mandated territories under the respective administrations of France and Britain. They thus controlled and influenced Cameroon from 1916 to 1960 (Le Vine 1971:7, Nyuyki 2007:7).

Those who took the first initiative to start mission in Cameroon were the British Christians amid the desire to stop the slave trade from the coast of Cameroon (Falk 1997:133). This endeavour began around 1827, when the British obtained permission from the Spanish Government to install themselves on the Island of Fernando Po, twenty-four miles off the Cameroon mainland (Kwast 1971: 54; Dah 1983:113; Falk 1997:133). Liberated slaves then settled on this island. It was the sense of obligation towards these slaves and the opportunity to minister to them that

prompted the beginning of the mission to Fernando Po and Cameroon (Falk 1997:133).

The first missionaries to settle on Cameroon soil were the Baptists. In 1844 the English Baptist Missionary Society secured land at Bambia where they established the first church and school under the leadership of Joseph Merrick, a freed Jamaican slave of West African parentage. In 1858, Alfred Saker another English Baptist missionary accompanied by some liberated slaves came to the shores of Ambas Bay at the foot of the Cameroon Mountain and established the Baptist mission station of Victoria (Kwast 1971:54).

4.5 Missionary motives for mission in Cameroon

In chapter three we discussed missionary motives for mission in general. This section now considers missionary motives, which seems more specific for mission in Cameroon. According to Tajoche (2003:68) there are six motives for which missionaries came to Cameroon: (i) the religious motive, in which Christian missionaries desired to convert the natives to Christianity. While evangelising they also aimed at checking the spread of Islam which was infiltrating from the north of Cameroon; (ii) civilisation motives, in which the missionaries wanted to spread European ways of life, methods and ideas in Cameroon. (iii) economic motives, which was geared toward the promotion of legitimate trade between Cameroon and European countries; (iv) humanitarian motive, which was focused on the abolition of the slave trade, and human sacrifices that was prevalent in some parts of the country at the time; (v) social motive, which was centred on the fight against ignorance and illiteracy by educating the people through schools. In addition, they also wanted to combat disease and improve the health of the people, and (vi) the political motive, which is the most controversial in that the missionaries wanted their home governments to annex and to own Cameroon.

In this wise, missionaries wrote letters and encouraged the chiefs to write as well. One of such letters from the chiefs of Douala addressed to Queen Victoria reads:

Dear Madam,

We your servants have join [joined] together and thought it better to write you a nice loving letter which will tell you all our wishes. We wish to have your laws in our towns. We want to have every fashion altered; also, we will do according to your Consul's word. Plenty wars here in our country. Plenty

murder and idol worshippers, perhaps these lines of our writing will look to you as idle tale. We have spoken to the English Consul plenty times about an English government here. We never have answer from you, so we wish to write you ourselves. When we heard about Calabar River that they have all English laws in their towns, and how they put away all their superstitions, oh, we shall be very glad to be like Calabar, now (Mbuangbaw 1987:47).

Other examples of the intertwined nature of mission and colonialism are cited in chapter three and there seems to be no need to emphasise them again. In the next sections on the historical overviews of the Roman Catholic and the Basel Missions in Cameroon more of the colonial tendencies are also discussed.

4.6 Roman Catholic Church: Historical overview

The first Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in Cameroon in 1890 when the Germans were in control (Ngoh 1996:92). These missionaries were French, and precisely the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and the Holy Heart of Mary (Fanso 1989:45). Bismarck, the German Chancellor at the time was opposed to the opening of the Catholic mission in Douala in 1885 (Kwast 1971:131, Ngoh 1996:92) and the French missionaries were not granted permission (Fanso 1989:45), simply because they were French and not German (Kwast 1971:131). Fortunately, a few Pallotine fathers of German origin came from their headquarters in Malimba-Bakoko to Victoria, now Limbe and chose Bonjongo as the site of the first Roman Catholic mission station (Kwast 1971:131). A second mission was opened at Sasse in 1907, where a school was established for training teachers and catechists. The next Catholic mission was opened at Bota in 1908 at the request of German planters on land given as freehold (Kwast 1971: 131). Kwast (1971:131), points out that Roman Catholic efforts met with much success, and by 1912 they had opened missions in three other places – Ikassa and Ossing in the then Mamfe and Kumba Divisions respectively, and Shisong in the then Bamenda Division.

At the outbreak of World War I, the German Roman Catholic missionaries were forced to leave Cameroon. Consequently, from 1915 to 1922 there were no resident priests in these missions. But during this time, the priests from Nigeria visited occasionally (Kwast 1971: 132). Since this part of the country was now controlled by the British, in 1922 four Mill Hill Fathers of British origin from London arrived in Victoria to reopen and staff the old German Catholic mission stations (Kwast 1971:

132). These missionaries acquired some old German government military barracks near Buea and opened their mission station at Small Soppo (Kwast 1971: 132).

Three years later, that is, in 1925, three Franciscan missionary sisters came to reopen the work at Bonjongo (Kwast 1971: 132). After the war, the Roman Catholic priests found the people very responsive to their work. Fathers Kelly and Moran, who had just returned to the mission at Bonjongo, both reported that most of the people living in Basel Mission territory were returning to the Catholic faith. Following Migeod, Kwast points out that there were no Protestant missionaries in the area and 'the natives were determined to be Christians of some kind, with the exception of a few older folk' (Kwast 1971: 132). Father Kelly is said to have reported that many Protestants came over to the Catholic faith (Kwast 1971:132). The Roman Catholic Church in the then West Cameroon experienced rapid growth (Kwast 1971:132) and has remained the most populated mission church in Cameroon to date.

4.7 The Basel Mission (Presbyterian Church in Cameroon)

The history of the Basel Mission in Cameroon is intrinsically linked with the English Baptist Missionary Society (Keller1968:2, Kwast 1971:133, Sanneh 1983:117, Dah 1983:113, Mbuagbaw1987:51, Fanso 1989:44, Ngoh 1996:88 and Tajoche 2003:76). The English Baptist missionaries were in Cameroon as far back as 1845. Under the leadership of Alfred Saker, the English Baptists at Victoria, Bell Town and Hickory Town made profound progress. Saker studied the Douala language and prepared a grammar book for use in primary schools, and by 1872 he had translated the Bible into Douala. In addition, he taught local boys the arts of painting, carpentry, and brick making. Furthermore, he provided medical skills, set up a sugar mill etc. He is quoted to have prayed for three things: First that, 'he may at last see the Bakweri brought to Christ'. Second that, 'the converted Bakweri shall be able to read the Bible (also in his own tongue)', and third 'that he should understand, without assistance from another, what he reads' (Mbuangbaw 1987:51).

Unfortunately, following the annexation of Cameroon in 1884 by the Germans, the Baptists found that they were unable to continue. Consequently, they decided to write to the Basel Mission, to take over the work they had started. In response to this request, the Basel Mission took over the work in 1886, while the Baptists moved into Congo (Mbuangbaw 1987:51). That is how Saker left the country, with his lofty plans

and vision. Yet he continued to be remembered by the Cameroonians, especially the Baptist, in that one of their schools bears his name: Saker Baptist College, Limbe, Cameroon. He is however not the only Baptist missionary who has been immortalised, there is Joseph Merrick Baptist College Ndu, Cameroon named after Joseph Merrick.

According to Sanneh (1983:117) consideration for the opportunity for missionary service in Cameroon was arrived at during the Bremen Conference of 1885. It was a conference of continental Protestant Missions (Tajoche 2003:76). When the decision was taken, the Basel Mission took over the work from the English Baptists in 1886 (Kwast 1971:133). It was in December 23rd 1886 that the first German missionaries arrived Douala, Cameroon. They were the Rev. Gottlieb Munz and his wife, the Rev. Christian Dilger, the Rev. Johannes Bizer and the Rev. Friederich Becher. Munz who had had some experience in the Mission field in Ghana, where he had worked from 1880 till 1883, was appointed the first Field Secretary of the Basel Mission in Cameroon (Keller 1968:13).

These missionaries had a tragic experience in that one of them, the Rev. Becher died of malaria four days after arrival. However, in his letter to the Home Board Dilger wrote: 'It is the Lord whom it has pleased to introduce our band in such a way. We ... will not withdraw' (Keller 1968:13). This was an expression of faith and courage and this kept them going. But one would wonder why the letter was written by Dilger and not Munz, the secretary. Perhaps he was assigned to do so.

That notwithstanding, a few days after the funeral the rest of the missionaries were officially introduced to the Christians in the Church at Bethel. In the first weeks of 1887, the missionaries visited various stations and found Christians seemingly very active. They then took over the congregations and schools. The handing over was however not very smooth, the question of the language to be used in schools and church arose in the congregation in Victoria (Keller 1971:13). Furthermore, the German presence there had caused resentment among some chiefs. Those who collaborated with the Germans were being threatened by the other chiefs (Sanneh 1983:117-118).

As if that were not enough, the congregations at Bethel and Victoria separated from the Basel Mission in 1888. The congregation at Bethel, which had been used to

independence started to oppose the rules of the Basel Mission. The Basel missionaries on the other hand could not tolerate the indiscipline that was cropping into the Church. Then the congregation at Victoria came up with the language problem, rejecting Douala and preferring English and German languages to be used in church and school for their international and economic benefits. The two congregations wrote separate letters to the headquarters of the Basel Mission and after due consideration their requests to separate from the Basel Mission were granted (Keller 1968:16-17).

The separation notwithstanding, the emphasis the Basel missionaries laid on the use of native vernaculars, such as Douala at the coast and Bali in the grassfields seemed a good strategy for evangelisation. Furthermore, one of the aims of the Basel Mission, as Kwast (1971:133) points out was to train as many Cameroonians as possible for the ministry, with the vision of building a strong indigenous church, the result of which is the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon.

In order to carry on her vision, the Basel Mission founded a Catechist Training Institute in 1889 in Douala, which was transferred to Buea in 1899 and after the First World War to Nyasoso and then moved back to Douala in 1966 (Kwast 1971:133), and later back to Nyasoso, where it was raised to the status of a Theological College, but is now in Kumba, since 1988 and known as the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, offering, Bachelor of Theology and Masters in Theology degrees.

The Basel Mission opened both vernacular schools and those for general education to help the natives. Interestingly, the natives complained that time was wasted in teaching Duala, which will not bring any material benefit (Keller 1968: 25). As with the other mission churches, the First World War robbed the Basel Mission of all her missionaries from 1917 until 1925. When this happened, work was left in the hands of the Christians and a few Cameroonian ministers. Interestingly, they seemed to have worked harder in the absence of the missionaries as can be seen from the figures below: In 1914 the number of Christians stood at 1768 and in 1925 the number rose to 8913 (Keller 1968:66).

However, in 1924, the Basel missionaries were allowed to return to the British portion of Cameroon, but not to their work in French territory. Consequently, though

reluctantly, they handed over their mission stations in French Cameroon to the *Mission Protestante de Paris*. At the outbreak of the Second World War all of the German missionaries were again interned. Despite this the church continued to grow and in November 1957 the Basel Mission granted autonomy to the Presbyterian Church in West Cameroon, now the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (Kwast 1970:133).

Despite the increase in the number of Christians, it seems necessary to note that a great number of converts had fallen back into 'paganism' (their cultural practices). In 1925, when missionaries returned, the secret societies (traditional social associations) launched some physical attacks on the Christians (Keller 1968:67). The attacks in the Mamfe Division were extremely strong so much that out of 593 Christians, 228 left the Church and reverted to what the missionaries and their collaborators called "paganism" (Keller 1968:67). This was a sign of a conflict of cultures or better still of worldviews.

The missionaries and/or Christianity held a different worldview from that of the Africans and perhaps different interests and/or motives for evangelisation as is seen section 4.5 above. The next section considers missionary attitudes towards Cameroonian culture.

4.8 Missionary attitudes towards Cameroonian cultures

In Cameroon, the major encounters missionaries had with culture in the early years of their arrival were not very different from the ones highlighted above. Yet the following issues seem necessary to consider in some detail in view of the fact that they are recurring: polygamy (polygyny), language, and secret societies (traditional social associations, as called in this study), which is discussed in chapter six of this study. The research focuses on traditional social associations that the missionaries had more conflict with. Something similar happened with polygamy and language which are discussed below. The conflict missionaries/missions had with traditional social associations is discussed in chapter 6.

4.8.1 Marriage (polygamy)

Regarding marriage, the issue of polygamy (polygyny) was outstanding. While having more than one wife was normal, a source of pride and enough labour for Africans, it was a crime according to the missionaries and their collaborators. Isichei (1995:268) points out that the rigid insistence of mission churches on monogamy led many to join African or prophetic churches, and kept others out of the formal structures of Christianity altogether. An Igbo fourth wife is said to have protested in 1924 with justifiable indignation, 'Why fourth wife no fit be good like first wife? Suppose God make that law, God no do good fashion' (Isichei 1995:268).

In his *Disciplining of West Cameroon*, Kwast (1971:32-37) treats the issue of polygamy under factors influencing church growth. In discussing the matter he seems to give a balanced view of the situation. He enumerates factors that account for polygamous marriage, the church's attitude towards polygamists, and draws some conclusions. According to him factors which accounted for polygamous marriages in traditional West Cameroon (now the North West and the South West Regions of Cameroon) included: first the availability of more women than men and the willingness of wealthy men to take more than one wife. Besides, there was no honourable place for the unmarried in traditional Cameroon society. Second, some people married more than one wife for economic reasons: agriculturalists needed multiple wives for more farm labour in the family, since by then women constituted a good work force in farming. Third, it was prestigious to have more than one wife. Fourth, it was prohibited for a man to have sex with his wife when she was suckling. So the husband took another wife in order to curb the taboo on marital intercourse while a wife was suckling. Finally, the love of Cameroonian men for children and the desire to have a large family was another reason for multiple wives.

The church's attitude towards polygamists was triggered by the early missionary policy, which began as far back as 1840s. This policy required polygamists to put away all wives except one before baptism. Kwast points out that in 1954, prior to the granting of Baptist Church independence, the official missionary position on polygamous marriages was stated as follows:

We will continue to discourage the granting of church membership to those living in a polygamous union and we encourage restitution and separation as pre-requisite for church membership as earlier (Kwast 1971:33).

Meanwhile in 1951, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Liberia, at its third Biennial Convention adopted the following recommendations concerning polygamous marriage:

- A. Christians who enter into polygamous marriage should be excommunicated.
- B. Where evidence of true faith is shown and upon approval of the District Church Council, parties to an established polygamous marriage may be baptized and confirmed. We affirm, however, that in accordance with St. Paul's teaching (1 Tim. 3:2, 12) no such person, man or woman, shall be permitted to hold office in the church or congregation or be engaged as Christian worker. Furthermore, no such baptized person shall enter into further polygamous marriage.
- C. No Christian shall be permitted to engage in the common practice of trial marriage and no candidate shall be baptized who is engage in trial marriage. However, when the marriage negotiations have progressed to the stage of exchange of marriage token, this marriage may be considered a complete one and the candidate shall be led to complete the giving of the dowry as rapidly as possible.
- D. In view of the fact that the families of either party often prevent the full payment of the dowry and thus prevent the completion of the marriage negotiations, if the man and woman are sincere in their desire in becoming man and wife, at the discretion of the Pastor and with the approval of the District Council, the union shall be recognized as valid and they may be baptized (Kwast 1971:36).

It was military rule; the commands were military-like. Hence, people seemed to have been coerced and they believed out of fear and not from free and sincere hearts. The decision did not bring any significant change in the church growth as only a few older men yielded to such rules and came up for baptism (Kwast 1971:36). Kwast (1971:37) further points out that if polygamous marriage has become unpopular, then it is not from biblical teaching and the high moral standards of the Church in Cameroon. Rather, it is as a result of a radically changing economy and social order. Affirming this point Dah observes that:

One is not quite convinced that the way polygamy was forbidden in Africa by various mission bodies had a proper biblical and theological foundation. With the exception of the Lutheran Church in Liberia and some African independent Churches, all mission established churches seem to uphold the missionary approach. Why this intolerance? Why can monogamy not be maintained as the norm while tolerating brothers with plural wives in the church, at least those who are new converts? Is marriage a pre- or post-Christian institution? Is the decline of polygamy due to Christian influence or to economic and social factors? How do churches deal with the problem of adultery among their Christian monogamists? How do Christian missions handle this subject in mission lands? What do women, and particularly those in polygamous unions think about the church's intolerant position against their husbands? (Dah 1989:26).

In the paragraphs that follows he analysis a number of steps the Basel missionaries in Cameroon, took, including the decision to baptise polygamists. For example, Fuller, the English Baptist missionary baptised polygamists in Victoria (Dah 1989:24). He points out that the Synod of 1st to 5th April 1979 voted against the admission of polygamists into full membership of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (Dah 1989:25).

Furthermore, he indicates that the issue was however not a test case for the Basel missionary ethics only but an issue for all European missionary bodies on the continent of Africa. He points out that at least six Protestant missionary solutions could be identified:

1. All the women and children may be baptised, but not the husband.
2. Only those who are not polygamously married may be baptised.
3. The husband may be baptised, if he retains his first wife, while divorcing the others.
4. The husband may be baptised, if he divorces all but the preferred wife.
5. All may be baptised with the understanding that any further plural marriages are forbidden.
6. On the testimony of their faith alone, any of them may be baptised with no further previous conditions (Dah 1989:25-26).

This shows that there was no clear-cut decision concerning the issue. Consequently, over the years these mission churches have from time to time revisited the matter. For example, in recent years the Synod of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon has revisited the issues and come up with the following decisions:

.... Polygamists in the congregation can participate in every aspect of Church life except the sacraments and voting. Polygamists shall not be eligible to hold Office of elder, congregational Chair-person, Treasurer, Congregational Secretary, choirmaster and leader of any of the recognized Christian groups (CMF, CWF). But they may be elected as Chair-persons or members of project, finance committee etc. Christian women in polygamous marriages shall be eligible for full membership in the church with all the rights and privileges. A Christian who had divorced his/her spouse can only be allowed to re-marry in the Church, after the legal separation has been duly established (PCC Book of Orders 1995:36-7).

Looking at the rules above, which seem to be legalistic, one could be correct in observing that the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon still holds tight on the teachings of the Basel Mission, even after close to sixty years of independence. On the other

hand, the Roman Catholic Church, as Dah states seems to have been more consistent on this issue. In order to support this view, he cites the following authorisations by the Pope:

the Pope authorized the dissolution of marriages previously recognized as valid; and this was done in favour of the faith of the would-be-Christian spouse, who was then free to marry again.... What is clearly permitted, under a variety of legal conditions, consecutive polygamy and consecutive polyandry – two practices that have always been concomitants of Western conception of monogamous marriage (quoted in Dah 1989:26).

There seems to be no thorough biblical backing against polygamous marriage. Hence, A.C Krass (1974:47) might be right to term it “A Big Problem”. It is a big problem because there are no explicit instructions about marriage in the New Testament. He points out that the reasons for this stems from the fact that polygamy in general was not practised in the Mediterranean world in the first two centuries. Consequently, Christians did not write letters to Paul or John for instructions about it.

According to E.G. Parrinder’s comments: ‘Both the Greeks and the Romans were monogamists by long tradition...’ (quoted in A.C Krass 1974:48). Hence, Christianity did not need to teach about polygamy.

In this matter of marriage, Isichei makes the following observations:

Marriages, which formerly, involved long-continued negotiations by two extended families, now often reflected the choices of two individuals. Christianity empowered many (young men, who would otherwise have had a long wait for a wife, and women unwillingly married to elderly polygamists) to choose a spouse freely (Isichei 1995: 269).

Then she continues:

However, this led to problems with existing obligations, notably those created by bride wealth payments. Some parents felt that, having made an investment in education, they could not contribute to bride wealth, so that a son married late freely (Isichei 1995: 269).

More often the one to pay the bride wealth is the male. It seems important to reconsider the whole situation so that each family can be asked to contribute its own quota when it comes to issues of marriage. If it is the matter of compensating for investment, both families have invested in the children in one way or the other.

Furthermore, Isichei (1995:269) points out that one old Christian spontaneously cried out: ‘Christian marriage is a prison.’ Some, she goes on; “paid lip services to Church

teachings, but evaded them in practice.” For example, she indicates that a view from within Freetown Christianity reveals a world where divorce is rare, but strict monogamy is unusual.

As far as Christian teaching on polygamy is concerned, one could observe that social and economic rather than biblical and theological bases for its denial seem to make some meaning.

4.8.2 Missionary encounter with language

One of the central identities of a culture is language. Cameroon has many tribes and they speak a variety of languages. In the former West Cameroon, which is now occupied by the North West and South West Regions, there are close to one hundred identifiable languages, making Cameroon one of the remarkable linguistic areas on earth (LeVine 1963:289). According to Richardson, Cameroon is ‘one of the most complicated and localised linguistic centres of the world’ (quoted in Kwast 1971:26). It seems no one has stated convincingly the exact number of ethnic groups and languages spoken in Cameroon. Writing as far back as the seventies, Le Vine (1971: xx-xxi), indicates that there are more than 136 ethnic groups in East Cameroon and at least 70 in West Cameroon. Mbaku (2004: 54) mentions that there are over 100 ethnic groups that speak 24 languages. Yet Dah (1996:7) talks of 120 tribes that speak 236 distinct languages. But Su (2001:274) talks of around 230 languages. Some have even described it in the light of the “Tower of Babel” (Wagenaar in Zimmermann 2002:149).

This great variety and diversity of Cameroon languages made it difficult to use any one vernacular in the preaching of the gospel. Even among the freed slaves, in particular, the first Baptist missionaries found a great variety of languages, and not a single African language was known by enough people to be used (Kwast 1971:26). That notwithstanding, Alfred Saker found favour with the Douala language, which was used in the Victoria (now Limbe) area of the coast, and later the Bali language used by the Basel Mission in the Bamenda area of the Grasslands.

Interestingly, the Victoria congregation of the Baptists who had joined the Basel Mission in Victoria did not agree to use the Douala language in church or in school, but preferred English and German. In addition, the whole congregation was not

prepared to have services with the Bakweri Christians the natives of Buea area. Seeing that the missionaries did not adhere to their request, the Baptists wrote the following letters to the Headquarters of the Basel Mission:

We your humble petitioners be respectfully to forward to you our complaint regarding the sort of teaching given to our Children in the Duala language. It is quite against reason that our children should be educated in a barbarous tongue instead of a civilized one either German or English. We have reasons for protesting against this and two of our principal reasons are that the children could never obtain employment under the German government or under any civilized person, or persons whatever when they are grown up, because they could never understand what to do. Also, the Duala language is not our native tongue. We have spoken to the mission out here about this matter, but an excuse has been made that it should not be altered without your committee's sanction. We now write begging you most earnestly to furnish us with a civilized teaching, and we shall be very thankful (Keller 1968:16).

The people, were already brainwashed, assimilated so much so that they saw their own native language as uncivilised. Indeed, to be civilised as they have been taught and as they understood it was to speak one of those European languages – English or French. Yet, it seems they were right, given the reality at the time to secure proper education for their children. However, a majority of those protesting were settlers.

The Home Board of the Basel Mission did not however grant their request. Consequently, on the 11th of June, 1889 the congregation of the English Baptists at Victoria handed another letter to the missionaries, which reads thus:

The church does not agree that anything is taken out of the hands of Mr. Wilson by whom the church will be conducted and continued exactly according to the laws and mood of the Baptist-Mission, from which the church will not move one inch (Keller 1968:16).

Then the Baptists and the Basel Mission parted company. And as the building belonged to the Baptists, the Basel Mission had to build a new one (Keller 1968:16).

In Nso' as we shall see in the next chapters, the Fon and his councillors acting on the influence of the Roman Catholic missionaries, decided in August 1938 to forbid the Basel Mission from preaching in the Bali language in Nso'land (Keller 1968:72). As far as this issue is concerned, oral tradition holds that Nso' people needed their own identity. Hence, they foresaw a type of assimilation and loss of identity if they accepted the Bali language.

Besides these two languages, Bali and Douala, Pidgin English was widely used across the country, especially in the then West Cameroon (Kwast 1971:27). Pidgin English indeed played a profound role and is still doing so in the communication of the gospel across tribal and linguistic barriers. In the missionary era pidgin thus became the *lingua franca*, used by both literate and illiterate alike. Pidgin was and is not easily understood by English-speaking people without some experience and study. The vocabulary of Pidgin-English is said to be made up of English, Portuguese, Dutch, French, German, Spanish, and West African languages. Today it is still widely used in trade, intertribal, religious and even official communication (Kwast 1971:27).

4.9 Conclusion

Christian missions met Africans in their traditional religion; they knew and had their ways of worshipping God. Hence, missionaries did not bring God to Africa. 'Instead God brought them' (Paris 1995:29). Africans had their own political systems and social organisations. Africans equally had their economic, educational and health system as was the case in Cameroon. Hence, Christian missions did not meet blank slates. Missionary enterprise in Cameroon, like elsewhere in the continent of Africa was greatly influenced by the political context at the time. It was even difficult to distinguish Christian missions from colonialism or better still missionaries from colonialists. There was a huge scramble for Africa by the Western countries like, Germany, France and Britain. The scramble for Cameroon, resulted in it being partitioned into two for France and Britain. These nations controlled and influenced Cameroon from 1916 – 1960. At the present it is only France that is domineering.

The first missionaries to enter into Cameroon were the English Baptist in 1840s. Missionaries came with a number of motives - religious, political and economic. These motives as we have seen were not necessarily for the well-being of Cameroonians but for the development of the nations concerned, especially politically. This can be seen in the two quotations below: 'To colonise is to missionise' by the German Colonial Secretary, Dr. W. H. Solf, and the Catholic missiologist, J. Schmidlin wrote in 1913:

It is the mission that subdues our colonies spiritually and assimilates them inwardly.... The state may indeed incorporate the protectorates outwardly; it is, however, the mission which must assist in securing the deeper aim of

colonial policy, the inner colonisation. The state can enforce physical obedience with the aid of punishment and laws; but it is the mission which secures the inward servility and devotion of the natives. We may therefore turn Dr. Solf's... recent statement that 'to colonise is to missionize' into 'to missionize is to colonize' (quoted in Bosch 1991:306).

Mission and colonialism was therefore intertwined. In Cameroon Alfred Saker, the English Baptist missionary, even named his settlement Victoria in order to attract the interest of the British monarch to colonise the area (Tajoche 2003:68).

In 1884 the Germans annexed Cameroon and when the Baptist missionaries could not continue, the Basel Mission took over their congregations and structures in 1886. The transition was not smooth as the problem of language cropped up. The congregations at Bethel and Victoria separated from the Basel Mission in 1888. The separation notwithstanding, the emphasis the Basel missionaries laid on the use of native vernaculars, such as Douala at the coast and Bali in the grassfields seemed a good strategy for evangelisation. Ironically, the congregation at Victoria rejected Douala and preferred English and German languages to be used in church and school for their international and economic benefits. It seems necessary to accept that the great variety and diversity of Cameroon languages made it difficult to use any one vernacular in the preaching of the gospel. The Basel Mission however, made an effort to use *Douala* and *Mungaka* for the forest zones and grassfields respectively. The importance of language in the spread of the gospel will continue in the next chapters.

CHAPTER 5

CHRISTIAN MISSIONS ENCOUNTER NSO' TRADITIONAL RELIGION

5.1 Introduction

Chapter four has discussed the missionary enterprise in Africa, with particular focus on Cameroon. The present chapter begins by tracing, though in brief the historical overviews of Christian missions in Nso'. The chapter discusses Christian missions, encounter with Nso' traditional religion, which includes Nso' worldview. The encounter involves missionaries and their collaborators, such as catechists, priests and other Christians. It equally treats the socio-political, economic educational and health systems that obtained in Nso' before the coming of Christianity. Though historical overviews of the coming of the two Christian missions to Nso' is considered first, some of the pertaining encounters are discussed concurrently.

Salient points from the interview, participant observation and focus groups' discussions are used to supplement written and available sources. The chapter is intended to show a picture of what occurred in the 20th century and to a greater extent what still goes on today in Nso' between the mission churches and Nso' traditional religion. The next two sections below tackle historical overviews of the Roman Catholic and the Basel Missions in Nso'. These two mission churches have been chosen, as earlier indicated for the **rich** history and their prominence in Nso' in general and Cameroon in particular. Their history is discussed following the order in which they came to Nso'.

5.2 Historical overview of the Roman Catholic Mission in Nso'

The historical overview of the Roman Catholic Mission in Nso' is presented following the order in which various missionaries came to Nso'.

5.2.1 The German Sacred Heart Fathers (1912 – 1915)

The first missionaries to reach Nso' were the German Sacred Heart Fathers in 1912. They were Father Lennartz and Father Johann Emonts who worked till 1915. It is

worth noting that these missionaries were led from Douala¹¹ to Nso' via Bamenda and Bubungo by Peter Wame¹² and his wife Elizabeth Yaadiy. They left Douala on the 16th of December 1912 and arrived Kumbo, the headquarters of Nso' on the 31st of December that same year. They covered altogether 400kms, 200 by train from Douala to Ngongsamba and the rest on foot (Lafon 1988:26, 75th Anniversary 1987:8).

The German missionaries left Nso' as early as 1915 because of the outbreak of the First World War during which the French and the English forces occupied Cameroon thereby sending the Germans out. Some of the German missionaries who were interned in Fernando Po (now Malabo), Equatorial Guinea before being repatriated instructed and baptised some men from Kumbo (Nso') who were serving in the German Armed Forces (75th Anniversary 1987:10). We are told that some of those who were baptised came back to Nso' to spread the faith. Notwithstanding, during the celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the [Roman] Catholic Church in Kumbo Diocese, it is observed that:

... the sudden departure of the German Sacred Heart Fathers was a tragic incident for the Church and a 'blessing' to the pagans since most of the catechumens were forced as soon as the missionaries left, to abandon the faith. The pagans repeatedly accused them of disrespecting the Fon. His nobles and *Ngwerong* society publicly accused Paul Tangwa¹³ of being the ring-leader who admits peoples' wives into the 'white man's Church' (75th Anniversary 1987:10).

This observation however did not come from the missionaries but from their collaborators. Following the teaching of the missionaries their then collaborators and even those of today still call members of the traditional social groups, like *ngwerong* 'pagans'. A Nso' man could not bear seeing women and men in one building in the name of praying to God. Hence, when Paul Tangwa is accused of taking peoples' wives to the white man's church it is connected to the mentality of the Nso' people in those early days of Christianity. By their mind-set women and men ought to be in different groups. This mentality influenced the sitting positions in congregations in the early days of Christianity in Nso' in that, men sat on one row of the church and

¹¹ Douala is the Economic Capital of Cameroon.

¹² Bamenda is the Headquarter of the North West Region of Cameroon. Peter Wame was a civil servant in the German Administration. He was a native of Bubungo but his wife Elizabeth Yaadiy came from Nso. They both received baptism on the 15th of December 1912 before leading the missionaries from Douala to Nso (Lafon 1988:25). Peter Wame and the wife served as guides and interpreters to the missionaries (75th Anniversary 1987:8).

¹³ Paul Tangwa was one of the first Nso' person to be baptized and he served as a catechist.

women on the other. Though most of the choirs are all inclusive, it is still common to see a section for men and one for women in some congregations in Nso' today.

5.2.2 The French Sacred Heart Fathers (1915 – 1923)

When the German missionaries left in 1915 because of the occupation of Cameroon by the French and English Armed Forces, the French missionaries took over the Kumbo area in 1920. It is said that since the German missionaries left there was no priest in the whole area which is now called the Diocese of Kumbo (75th Anniversary 1987: 11). The interesting thing here is the way that the gun and the Bible moved together.

The German missionaries came in when their soldiers had joined the Bamum in the war against Nso. The French came in when the French soldiers had occupied Cameroon. It is worth noting that the French missionaries first settled in Fouban and only came to Nso/ at the request of Christians from Shisong, Kumbo who sent a delegation led by Paul Tangwa (75th Anniversary 1987:12). The Mission in Kumbo was however controlled by Mgr. Plissoneau till 1923 when he handed it to the Mill Hill Fathers. We are told that when Mgr. Plissoneau took control of the Mission in Kumbo, it became a great relief and consolation to the little flock of Christians who were suffering much persecution from the “pagans” – the *ngwerong* society.

Furthermore, it is said that this persecution was incited and master-minded by the British administrator, Mr. Duncan. One of such persecutions resulted in the burning down of the church building and the house of a catechist in Kumbo in December 1920. Besides, Paul Tangwa – the catechist and some Christians were repeatedly arrested, brought before the pagan court (the traditional council), beaten and imprisoned (75th Anniversary 1987: 12). More is said about the persecution of the first Christians in Nso' in chapter six. Here we see how colonialism and mission were interwoven. The British were the ones controlling West Cameroon so they wanted the French out. It is said that when Mgr. Plissoneau visited Kumbo for the first time, he instructed and baptised nineteen catechumens on the 10th of October, 1920. These catechumens were prepared by Paul Tangwa, the catechist. After that Mgr. Plissoneau transferred from Fouban to Kumbo and remained there till the 14th of May, 1923, when he handed over to the Mill Hill Fathers (75th Anniversary 1987: 12).

5.2.3 The Mill Hill Fathers (1923 – 1970)

The Mill Hill Missionaries came from Britain. It is said that in 1922, the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples (*Propaganda Fide*) entrusted the evangelisation of the whole of the then Southern Cameroons (now the north west and the south west Regions) to St. Joseph's Society for Foreign Missions, also called the Mill Hill missionaries (75th Anniversary 1987: 13). However, it was not until 1923 that one of them, Father Michael Moran arrived at Shisong and took over from Mgr. Plissoneau in May that same year. This group of missionaries worked in Kumbo for quite a long time and yielded very positive results. For example, in 1949 the first Anglophone Cameroonian priest, Father Wankuy, a native of Nso' was ordained and this made a tremendous effect to the implantation of the Roman Catholic Church in this part of the country (75th Anniversary 1987: 13). In 1935, the Franciscan Tertiary Sisters of Britain arrived in Shisong at the invitation of the Mill Hill Missionaries, to carry out medical, educational and social apostolates. Today this Order has spread to other parts of the country but their headquarters and Novitiate are in Shisong (75th Anniversary 1987:14).

The growth of the Roman Catholic Church in Nso' is connected to the presence of sisters of various orders who carried and are still carrying out a number of social missions in the area. As far back as 1962 there were only seven parishes in the area now called Kumbo Diocese: Shisong, Tabenken, Nkar, Nkambe, Djottin, Tatum and Kumbo (75th Anniversary 1987: 15). Within the reign of Bishop Jules Peteers from August 1962 to 1970 two more parishes were created in the area: Mbiame and Meluf (75th Anniversary 1987: 15), making a total of nine in fifty-eight years (1912 -1970). With the rapid growth of the Church in the north-west area of the country the Diocese of Bamenda was created in 1970, from that of Buea and Father Paul Verdzekov, a native of Nso' became the first Bishop of this new Diocese. Seven years later, another priest, a native of Nao', Fr. Christian Tumi was appointed Bishop of Yagoua Diocese and later appointed Cardinal, the first from Cameroon (Lafon 1988:248).

Twelve years after the creation of Bamenda Diocese was the erection of the one of Kumbo in 1982 (75th Anniversary 1987: 16). We are told that at the time of erection of this new Diocese there were 71.663 baptised Roman Catholic Christians and 3.853 catechumens in the nine parishes served by twenty-seven priests and several

catechists (75th Anniversary 1987: 16). In 1987, five years after the creation of this Diocese came the celebration of 75years of the Roman Catholic Church in Kumbo Diocese. In 1912 it started with two Christians, four priests, and two Reverend Brothers. Commenting on the rapid growth of the Roman Catholic Church in Kumbo the organisers of the “Jubilee Year Celebration” writes: “This Church has grown from a missionary territory to a local Church” (75th Anniversary 1987:17).

Twenty-five years later, 100years of the [Roman] Catholic faith 1912-2012 in the Diocese of Kumbo, was celebrated on the theme: “We no longer believe because of what you told us...” (Jn. 4:42). Even though the theme comes from the context of the result of the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, it can be appropriated and interpreted in the sense that the Christ, the message that the western missionaries brought to Nso’ in particular and Kumbo Diocese in general has incarnated the lives of the people therein and they are no longer foreign to the gospel and it is no longer foreign to them. In other words, they have grasped it and by the working of the Holy Spirit it has become theirs. This is affirmed by the editorial: “We no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he indeed is the Saviour of the world” (Jn.4:42) (Celebrating 100yrs: 2012 1). In what way is this affirmation true to the Nso’ situation, when Christians who are members of the traditional social associations are still stigmatised, and the rest referred to as pagans? Second, why are traditional rites and rituals still seen as paganism and unchristian? What is it that has made the gospel theirs when it still looks so foreign so much so that what some Christians consider as “a wonderful Mass” is that performed in Latin?

5.3 Historical overview of the Basel Mission in Nso’

The coming of the Basel missionaries to Nso’land is very connected to Bali, the first Basel Mission station in the Grassland of Cameroon goes as far back as 1903 (Banboye 2001:64, Lafon 1988:258, Dah 2003:23, Keller 1968:). It is therefore necessary to mention how the missionaries arrived and worked in Bali before coming to Nso’land.

5.3.1 The Basel Mission in Bali

The contact of the Europeans with Bali goes back to 16th January, 1889 when the first German explorer to Cameroon, Dr. Eugen Zintgraff, advanced into the interior to explore the country for German trade. We are told that on arrival in Bali he was given a friendly welcome by Fon Galega I (Keller 1968:30; Banboye 2001:64). Zintgraff held Bali in high esteem so much so that in later years he built the famous Bali castle and called it 'Baliburg' (Keller 1968:30). He returned with some Germans to Bali in 1890 and within seven months they signed a treaty with Bali, geared at the protection of Gelega I. During this process, Bali was requested to support the Germans in the pacification of the Grassland. This eventually cost a lot of lives as evidenced by the Mankon – Bafut and the German /Bali war of 1891 (Dah 2003:19).

Interestingly, in August of that same year, Zintgraff equipped the Bali Nyonga army with 2000 rifles to strengthen the power of Bali. Furthermore, we are told that he was to return to Bali again in 1896 with a new plan of recruiting through Galega I, labour for the German plantations at the coast of Cameroon (Dah 2003:19). Hence, Zintgraff's task was commercially centred and therefore aligns to the impure motives European nations had for Africa as discussed in the preceding chapter.

Banbooyee (2001:64) indicates that as early as 1897, though some sources talk of 1896 (Dah 2003:19), Fon Galega I sent a petition to the colonial office in Berlin asking that the Basel Mission should be encouraged to start work in Bali. Though he died in 1900, his successor, Fon Fonyonga is said to have renewed the request of Galega I in 1901 (Dah 2003:19) and went to the headquarters of the Basel Mission several times with the same request (Banboye 2001:64).

Following series of requests, the Basel Mission sent a team of missionaries in 1902 to survey the area of Bali and report back. The team that came to Bali from Bombe in the coast of Cameroon comprised Schuler, Keller and Spellenburg and was well received by Fonyonga and his people. Their journey to Bali and back to Bombe is dated 31st October to 29th November, 1902 (Dah 2003:20). On the 17th of November one of the missionaries, Schuler preached the first sermon in Bali to an estimated crowd of 1500 – 2000 persons. It was Bali market day. It is said that the text was chosen from Acts 17:30-31. As we saw in chapter 3, this same text was used by Paul in Athens as a starting point for the evangelisation of the Greeks.

In Bali Schuler preached the sermon in Douala and translated it into Bafaw and interpreted to one of the Fon's attendants who further translated it into the Bali language. The population rejected the translator for his age and he had therefore to speak through an older person selected from the audience (Dah 2003:21).

The evidence that the Fon of Bali and his people were happy to receive the missionaries could be deduced from the fact that before leaving Bali for Bombe, each of the missionaries was dressed in a Bali costume. In addition, Schuler, the preacher was given an elephant tusk, a civet-cat-skin bag, some pipes and one son of the Fon for training (Dah 2003:21).

The missionaries then returned to Bombe, convinced that it was time for the Mission to break through into the Grassland. Consequently, in their report on the journey to their Home Board they supported their convictions with seven strong points. One of which reads: "The power and influence of the king (Fon) could easily be used by the Mission. He was ready with building materials for the school house since he thought that visitors had come to stay" (Dah 2003:22).

Following their report the Basel Mission opened the first mission station in the Grassland in Bali in April 1903. The first missionaries were Ernst, Leimbacher and Keller. One year later they wrote a report to the Home Board which according to Dah reveals how zealous they were about their work and how much they identified with oppressed Cameroonians. Here is an excerpt from what Keller wrote:

The mission is one year old. Brother Ernst and Leimbacher laid the groundwork in 1903. We live in the most populated province of the whole of Cameroon. Bali is in the midst of pagan tribes but is already in touch with Islam through the Hausas and Fulanis. The gospel will follow the caravan road. It will be a hard fight, but victory will be ours. There are signs to that effect. It seems that the victory is already decided in the spiritual realm. Paganism is bankrupt religiously and politically. The German government has become a rod for the people and crushes everywhere.... (Dah 2003:24).

Mission and colonialism was somehow intertwined. The government used force to let the people become Christians and this approach seems to be unfair to the gospel itself. The people therefore joined Christianity out of fear and not out of conviction and love. As mentioned in 5.2.1.2 above, the Bible and the gun, two incompatible things moved together. The missionaries were colonialists and colonialists were missionaries.

5.3.2 A call from the Fon of Nso'

In 1929 a call from Nso' reached Bali mission headquarters. This call was made by the then Fon of Nso, Nga' Bi'fon I, who is said to have shown a keen interest in education and thus asked the Basel Mission to open schools in Nso'land in addition to those of the Roman Catholic Mission (Banboye 2001:65) who had been in Nso' since 1912. From the request and actions of the Fon of Bali as seen above and the Fon of Nso' one could rightly observe that the Fons had more interest in education than in the gospel. Nevertheless, when the Fon of Nso' requested the Bali mission to start work in Nso' some villages, went as far as building small chapels beforehand hoping it would thus be easier to get resident catechists. However, in the course of time several vernacular schools were opened.

It seems important to note that before 1932 the Basel Mission had carried the gospel from Bali to the following areas in the Grassland of Cameroon: Fouban (1906), Bangwa (1910), Bagam (1911), Bana (1913), Bandzun (1913), Babungo (1913), and Besongabang (1913) (Dah 2003:55). After the First World War of 1914-1918 the Basel missionaries returned to Bali in 1925.

5.3.3 The Basel Mission in Nso'

In 1930 Evangelist John Mosi, was posted to Kishong in Nso' to supervise the mission work therein. Yet it was not until 1932 that the Basel missionaries started a regular mission station in Nso' precisely in a village called Kishong, when the Rev. and Mrs Leu were transferred from Bali to Kishong (Banbooyee 2001:65, Keller 1968:71). It is said that the first Nso' people were baptised by the Basel Mission on Christmas of 1932 (Banbooyee 2001:65). The Roman Catholic missionaries who had been in Nso' since 1912 influenced the Fon of Nso' and his councillors to forbid the Basel Mission from preaching in the Bali language in Nso'land (Banboye 2001:65).

Ironically, these Roman Catholic missionaries said the mass in Latin. The Roman Catholic Christians in Nso' preferred the foreign language, Latin to Bali from the nearby tribe. The Rev. Zurcher, a Basel missionary at Kishong strove hard for the use of Bali as the church language in Nso' but the Fon cancelled his decision. Kishong continued to serve as the headquarters of the Basel mission in Nso' until 1956 when it was transferred to Kimbo (Kumbo) by the Rev. Walters Zumbrenen,

who stayed in Nso' until 1962, (Banboye 2003:66) though the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon had gained autonomy from the Basel Mission in 1957.

5.4 The role of the Fons in the planting of Christianity in Nso'land

In their "Notes on: Nso History and Life" (Lantum, D & Wirnkar, B (n.p.n.year and place of publication) point out that the Nso' people believe that "*Fondze wong, a wonyi dze Fon. Fon Nso ndze Nso*" Literally translated: "the Fon is the world and the world is the Fon. The Fon of Nso' is all the people of Nso'" This means that the Fon is their embodiment. Hence, when he says no, no one can say yes and *vice-versa*. Like in Bali and most of Cameroon and/or Africa in general, the rulers of the people played important roles in the planting of Christianity. In Nso' the story was not different. The Fons of Nso' played very important roles in the planting of Christianity therein.

5.4.1 Nga' Bifon I (1910-1947)

He was the Fon who welcomed the very first missionaries to Nso'land. This was between 1912 and 1914, and these first missionaries were the Roman Catholics. The Fon of Nso' is the embodiment of the people of Nso. Hence, strangers, especially those of international standard like the missionaries could only be first welcomed by the Fon and his closest collaborators (*Afaay*, the lineage heads and *Vibaay*, the great councillors). The Fon welcomed the missionaries in his palace and by implication in Nso'land a day after their arrival. According to Lafon (1988:31) the Fon was well disposed towards the missionaries from the beginning contrary to what one sometimes hears nowadays. The missionaries indicated their mission to the Fon. With an open map of Nso', they showed the Fon various villages and promised to open a primary school which will make the Fon's town big since other tribes will send their children to study in Nso'land. Lafon (1988:31) opines that this promise of education seems to have been employed as a bait, a view held by other Cameroonian scholars, for example, (Dah (2003:127).

Furthermore, the missionaries following the rumours that they were disguised soldiers made it clear that they were not and would not ask for tax or collect tax money from the people (Lafon1988:31). These words were well placed and convincing to the Fon and his people. After discussion with the missionaries, the Fon provided some palm wine and the missionaries drank it. In addition, the Fon

provided a temporary residence for them, gave them chickens, bananas, eggs and baskets of corn flour (Lafon1988:31). In those days, Nso' people attributed the freshness of the white man to the eating of eggs. Hence, the provision of eggs to the missionaries was connected to this view. After the discussions were completed the Fon indicated the readiness of the Nso' people to send their children to school. Later the Fon provided the land for the building of the school and the church. Within a few days, the Fon instructed his people and they constructed a church house, a school, and a boarding house for the school children in an area called Shisong (Lafon 1988:31).

Miriam Goheen (1988:2), an anthropologist, compares the authority of the national government and Nso' local authority as indicated in her conversation with one prominent local leader – a *shey* ('modern big man'):

Just who is running the show here, the national government or the Fon (Chief)? The Shey replied 'of course the national government is in control [of Nso]. But I will tell you one thing: if the [national] government asked me to do something I did not want [to do] I would take them to court. But if ngwerong (the regulatory society) or the Fon asked, I would not hesitate; I would do it tomorrow (Gohen 1988:2).

The Fon has such authority that when he speaks he does so for his people. It is said that Nga'Bifon I bridged the German and the British colonial administration. He encouraged the missionaries to build churches and schools. Nevertheless, when the First World War broke out the German missionaries left Cameroon. A violent persecution of Christians broke out in Nso' and Christians were tortured and church houses burnt down. However, in 1922, the British Mill Hill Fathers came to Shisong in Nso' to continue the work the German priests had started (Banboye 2001:50).

Furthermore, in 1929 the Fon of Nso' as we have seen above sent words to the Basel Mission headquarters asking them to come and open schools in Nso' to add to those the Roman Catholic missionaries had opened (Banbooyee 2001:50). Nga'Bifon in 1938, forbade the use of the Bali language as a medium of instruction in Nso' schools and churches (Banbooyee 2001:50), perhaps for fear of assimilation and hegemony by the Balis. This is similar to the refusal of Douala language by the congregation in Victoria as indicated in chapter 4 above.

5.4.2 Seem *Ataar* or Sehm III (Mbinkar Mbinglo) (1947-1972)

Like other Fons we have seen in this study interested in schools, Fon Seem *Ataar* (Sehm III) is said to have encouraged Christian missionaries to open more schools and colleges in Nso'. Furthermore, he advised the Nso' people to send children to school and set an example by sending his own children to school, and making donations to build the Cameroon Baptist Convention school in Kimbo (Kumbo) (Banbooyee 2001:52). His advice and example certainly yielded fruits so much so that up to the present day, Nso' is known for having very intelligent and highly educated persons in Cameroon. One of the celebrated Cameroonian genius, the late Prof Bernard Fonlon came from Nso' and was related to the royal family. He is said to have translated the Cameroon national anthem from French to English. He was the author of *Genuine Intellectual* and many other books. In order to immortalise him –Bernard Fonlon Memorial Library has even been named after him.

It is said that Fon Seem *Ataar* was converted to Islam in the early sixties and later started the construction of a mosque in Nso' palace amidst a peaceful protest march by the Nso' Christians, who argued that Nso' palace (*Nto' Nso'*) belongs to everyone and should remain neutral. In his article "The Fon's Hajj: Legacy of Sehm III" in The Ngonso Magazine, Godfrey B. Tangwa, points out that he was an eye and ear witness to the protest from Nso' Christians. He indicates that the Christians told the Fon in clear unequivocal terms:

We have no problem regarding your majesty's conversion and Islamic baptism that is your majesty's personal prerogative. However, we strongly object to the construction of a mosque in the Nso' palace; the palace does not belong to your majesty; it is the palace of all Nso' people (The Ngonso Magazine 2014:17).

Yet, they had no power to stop the work for in response to this argument Fon Seem *Ataar* told them that he was prepared to give a building plot around the palace, to any of the Christian churches that may so desire (Banbooyee 2001:52)..This closed the matter and the mosque has remained conspicuous in the palace since then. Nevertheless, Fon Seem *Ataar* died in 1972 as a baptised Christian by Rev, Fr., Aloysius Wankuy (Banbooyee 2001:52).

This action of the Fon seems to have fostered religious tolerance in Nso' so much so that if one goes to Nso; on Friday afternoon when the Muslims have closed for their prayer session one may think that everyone in Nso' is a Muslim. If one stays again to

see what happens on Sundays, he/she will be surprised on Sunday morning to see the number of people going to various churches. Let, that person come again to the palace during Ngonso festival, he/she will feel that every Nso' person belongs to one traditional social association or the other.

5.4.3 Nga' Bifon II – Denis Dine (1972-1983)

He was the son of Nga'Bifon I. Though a Christian Nga'Bifon II became a Muslim during his reign and even went on a pilgrimage to Mecca (Banboye 2001:52). At this time, Christianity, had taken roots in Nso' and his conversion to Islam was no big issue.

5.4.4 Nga' Bifon III – Fanka Lawrence (1983 -1993)

He was a baptised Christian. Like his predecessor, Denise Dine, he was converted to Islam in 1987 and went on a pilgrimage to Mecca. He died six years later (Banboye 2001:53), though by Nso' tradition a Fon never dies, he either “disappears” or “gets missing”. The philosophy behind such a tradition is that in a short while he will be found, meaning that he will be replaced.

5.4.5 Seem Mbinglo I (1993 to date)

He is son of Seem III – Mbinkar Mbinglo, who died in 1972. He has recently, been converted to Islam and went on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 2015. His conversion sounded unheard of to some Nso' and none Nso' people. Yet some saw nothing wrong and this researcher personally thought that everyone is free to choose a religion which he/she feels leads him/her to God. His conversion to Islam is however traced to that of his father, Sehm III and observed that “the attitudes of Nso' Fons, especially those of the Sehm lineage, towards the proselytising dogmatic religions has been boldly pragmatic and utilitarian” (Tangwa in The Ngonso Magazine 2014:17).

His conversion notwithstanding, it seems important to note that on Sunday the 12th of April 2015 at the dedication of the national executive of the CMF in the Presbyterian Church Kumbo, Nso' the Fon of Nso' was present. This affirms that Nso' practice religious tolerance as re-echoed in the speech of the Vice Chairperson of the congregation that Sunday. The Saturday before the occasion, he welcomed the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, the Rt. Rev. Fonki Samuel Forba and is encouraged in his palace with great joy. Four years ago the then

Moderator of the same church, the Very Rev. Dr. Festus A. Asana visited Bui Presbytery to induct the Presbyterian secretary for Bui, the Rev. Shu Lawrence. The Fon was present at the church service and during the reception the Fon of Nso' gave the Moderator the title *wo ngay cu*, meaning "the leader of the house of prayer".

Yet there seems to be something more in Islam for this is the third Fon of Nso' switching to Islam. Is Islam more accommodative to the whole culture? More research is needed to ascertain what is so attractive in Islam that these sacral rulers of the people of Nso' have been easily pulled into. Is it their tolerance to marry more than one wife?

The power of the Fons as seen above is consonance with the conflict theory, especially when one refers to it from one of its central assumptions on people's basic interests. It would be understood that the Fons as individuals have their own personal interests which the society might not deny.

5.5 Christian missions encounter Nso' worldview and traditional religion

This section concentrates on the Nso' worldview and traditional religion. Here the researcher argues that an understanding of the receptor's worldview and his/her primal religion is primordial to the incarnation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

5.5.1 Encounter with Nso' worldview

The definition and the five characteristics of African worldviews in section 3.2.1 of chapter three above are applicable to the Nso'. Hence, discussing it here again will be an unnecessary repetition. Nevertheless, it seems necessary to consider some aspects of Nso' worldview including Nso' traditional religion which could demonstrate the encounter with Christian missions. According to Yele (2008:27), as far as the Nso' worldview is concerned, the self and the phenomenological world are inseparable because Nso' people experience life in harmony with nature. Following Harding, she indicates that the universe, for the Nso' is not static, inanimate or dead. Rather it is dynamic, animate, alive and powerful. The worldview of a people and their ways of worship tell how they see and conceive the cosmos and interpret the things and events around them. That of Nso' people like most of Africa is imbedded in music and dancing, fellowship, corporate living, their traditional religion and socio-economic and political organisation. These aspects are discussed below, beginning with music and dancing.

5.5.1.1 Music and dancing

Music, is expressed in singing and dancing, and it is one of the most important literary arts of the Nso' people. They use every occasion which has to do with singing and dancing to express their sorrow or joy accordingly. Their music is characterised by monotony masterminded by a repetition of often seemingly 'meaningless notes improvised now and then with a regular refrain'. For example, when one listens to the music from traditional social groups, such as *mfuh*, *samba* and *jwim* especially one would get such monotony (Wirkuu 1994:2-4). Their songs may appear undeveloped but they are full of meaning since they are composed following the occasion and circumstances surrounding the events. In the course of singing, the leader or conductor recounts the history behind the celebration so much so that at times sentiments are expressed as one could see some people crying and/or shaking the head in disapproval.

On the other hand, when occasions are those that bring joy or those carried out in the atmosphere of joy, one would appreciate the joyous nature of the Nso' people. In fact, when they hear the sound of a drum and a song they respond almost in a reflex manner, in shaking of the head or shrugging of shoulders, leading one eventually to dancing (Wirkuu 1994:2). Christian mission churches in Nso'land have adapted the music of the Nso' people and allowed them to express in the *Lamnsó'* choir. *Lamnsó'* as earlier mentioned in the introduction is the language of the Nso' people. Hence, *Lamnsó'* choir sings mostly in that language and uses musical instruments from Nso'. Interestingly, some of the musical instruments are adapted to *ngwerong/ngiri*.

In the early days of missionary work in Nso' the instruments that are used now in music during church services and masses were considered 'pagan'. For example, in his presentation of the dramatic though fictional picture of the encounter of Christianity with Nso' culture, Kenjo Jumbam (1980) in his novel, *The White Man of God* show that drumming in church in the early days of Christianity in Nso' was not easily accepted by all denominations. In an argument that cropped up among school children from the Roman Catholic, Baptist and Basel missions, the Roman Catholic school children addressed those of the other denominations as follows: 'You senseless Baptists and Basel's! What kind of God is worshipped with beating drums? Heathen drums. Shame' (Jumbam 1980:100).

This negative attitude towards drumming in church took another dimension in Ghana: "...the standing order No. 548, Section 2, of the Methodist Conference of Ghana (1st edition, 1964) has the following line: There shall be no drumming at a Member's wake-keeping" (Pobee 1979:66). In 1972 disciplinary action was taken by individual clergy against the families of a deceased at whose funeral there had been drumming (Pobee 1979:66).

It seems necessary to note that in traditional African society drums were used to convey messages within a society or to another community, such as announcing a royal procession or the declaration of war. Since drumming accompanied most, if not all, religious occasions in traditional society, the earliest missionaries assumed that drumming *per se* had pagan associations, and therefore was unchristian *per se* (Pobee 1979:66). Pobee (1979:66) observes that no serious student of the subject of drumming can maintain that drumming *per se* is evil or pagan. Similarly, the missionaries assumed that traditional social associations in Nso' were evil and unchristian.

The dramatic argument of school children in Nso' concerning drumming in church as seen the the previous page indicates that the Roman Catholic Church was less inculturated at the time of the missionaries. The Protestants adapted the drums much earlier than the Roman Catholics. In the Roman Catholic Church in Nso' today they do not only play drums but xylophones as well. In addition, their vestments are now full of traditional symbols from Nso', such as the double gong, cowries and the "peace plant" (*dracaena*). These aspects of inculturation certainly resulted from Vatican II and the subsequent Synods of the Bishops for Africa, 1994 and 2009 coupled with Post- Synod letters from the Popes, encouraging inculturation.

In his article "African Traditional Religion and the Catholic Church in the Light of the Synods for Africa: 1994 and 2009" Sourou (2014:142) affirms the view above. He points out that following Vatican II, which marked an official change of Roman Catholic Church attitudes to non-Christian religions, the two Synods of Bishops for Africa, 1994 and 2009 had given serious consideration to the relationship of the Roman Catholic Church with ATR.

It is worth noting that some of the musical instruments, like the drums and the double gong used in church today were and are still used by the *ngwerong* society. This

traditional social association, forbade the church from using drums in Nso' land on days that were considered *ngwerong* days and Sundays that coincided with such days since Nso' like most Grassfield tribes has eight week days. It was not until about 1990s that *ngwerong* allowed the use of drums on such Sundays. It is worth mentioning that in some areas in the Grassfields of Cameroon the playing of drums is still not allowed on certain days. For example, days set aside for offerings and sacrifices to the ancestors. According to the beliefs the drumming disturbs the gods and the ancestors. These days are commonly called "Country Sundays" In some areas these days are used for church work and services because the natives are not allowed to go to the farms.

There are many traditional social groups which could be termed dance groups, such as *laalir*, *kor*, and *cong*, which are female royal dance groups. *Cong* dance is performed mostly by females and at death celebrations. Mission churches have adopted some of the *cong* songs and have given them scriptural meaning (Wirkuu 1994:6). Everyone we interviewed was unanimous that one of the things that Christianity has adopted from Nso' culture for the enhancement of Christian worship is traditional music. When a song is accompanied by the playing of traditional musical instruments as this researcher observed, many Christians responded with joy. Following this positive response, most of the churches prefer to ask Lamnso' choir to sing during offerings, for it spurs people as they dance towards the Sanctuary and /or the Alter to make their offerings.

Another dance group is *manjong*, which is a general name for men's traditional military group, and has branches like *mfuh*, *fwim* (youth wing of the *manjong*) and *samba* (one of the major branches of *manjong*), which because of its simple nature was adopted by the Roman Catholic missionaries as the men's dance group in the church (Wirkuu 1994:4).

During the interview conducted for this study, one of the informants said that recently the Roman Catholic Church in Nso' has started conferring traditional titles, like *lav samba* to some of the *samba* members just as it is done in other groups, like *mfuh* and *fwim*. According to this informant, the conferring of titles to members of *samba* by the clergy is inappropriate and may bring conflict between the Church and the Fon, since such titles are supposed to be conferred by him.

5.5.1.2 Fellowship (sharing) and corporate living

The word *koinonia* in Greek, translated fellowship in English has its cognate in Nso' *koinin*, which means to share in bits and with one another, so much so that everyone should have a taste of it. In times of joy and sorrow everyone joins the people concerned in celebration and consolation accordingly. One informant made it clear that one of the things she cherishes in Nso' culture among others is this practice of fellowship, which shows concern for one another. This echoes one of the central teachings of the Bible – “Carry each other's burdens...” (Gal. 6:2). Nso' people are not self-centred. They are known for their generosity and hospitality towards strangers. For example, we are told that during tribal wars they welcomed and offered refugees land to settle. It seems necessary to note that the philosophy of Nso' people concerning land and development was that Nso' can only be great if the indigenes welcome strangers. Thus, the Fon of Nso' – Seem Mbinglo III, we are told, when refugees from neighbouring villages arrived Nso'land, he invited *ataangven* (landlords) and requested them to settle the refugees (Mzeka 1990:16). In some parts of Nso', land was never sold. It was given out. Today, the market economy seems to be overtaking the generosity of the Nso' people in this domain. Yet they remain relatively steadfast in communal life.

Sharing is part and parcel of the Nso' people, as demonstrated in *kimbun Fon* (*obeisance*), which involved carrying gifts to the Fon. These gifts, which could be firewood, salt, wine, fowls, goats and *kibam ke Fon* (literary the Fon's bag), which normally contains some money are carried in a solemn procession to the palace for the Fon. This practice thus serves as a basis for the Nso' people to give generously for the work of God in the Church (Wirkuu 1994:7). The Fon gave the first missionaries land generously and even promised that his people would assist in building houses for them and they did (Lafon 1988:32).

Pre-Christian Nso' community had a strong spirit of cooperate living. It was exemplified in assisting to construct a house for individuals. Usually, an individual could not be seen constructing his own house alone. It was a community affair and entailed division of labour. While some were preparing the site by clearing and cleaning, some went for bamboos and sticks and some, especially women prepared food while some men brought palm wine. This was done until the house was

completed and ready for habitation (Wirkuu 1994:7). Generally, individualism was never the practice of Africans let alone the Nso' people. Mbiti expresses the African community spirit in these words: "I am because, we are and since we are; therefore, I am" (Mbiti 1989:106). By this, Mbiti (1989:106) implies that an individual does not exist except corporately. This means that an individual owes his or her existence to other people, including those of the past generations and his or her contemporaries; an individual is simply part of the whole.

Consequently, when one suffers, he/she does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when one rejoices, one does not rejoice alone but with one's relatives and neighbours. Peter J. Paris (1995:111) affirms that Africans have no conception of person apart from the community. He points out that this means more than a symbiotic relation between the individual and the community. He further indicates that the two are related as the opposite sides of the same coin, since one implies the other. Finally, he reiterates that this communal view of personhood does not imply the devaluation of individuality. It rather implies that the value Africans bestow on individuals is not the primary good. The primary good in order of importance, is the community. In African traditional religions, the place of the community is equally of central importance. This affirms that Africans as we shall see in some aspects of Nso' traditional religion below are "notoriously religious"

5.5.2 Christian missions encounter with Nso' traditional religion

In his book *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence Amid African Religion*, Taylor states:

Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival. We have, then, to ask what is the authentic religious content in the experience of the Muslim, the Hindu, the Buddhist, or whoever he may be. We may, if we have asked humbly and respectfully, still reach the conclusion that our brothers have started from a false premise and reached a faulty conclusion. But we must not arrive at our judgment from outside their religious situation. We have to try to sit where they sit, to enter systematically into the pains and griefs and joys of their history and see how those pains and griefs and joys have determined the premises of their argument. We have, in a word, to be 'present' with them. This is what is meant by the title of this series – The Christian Presence amid Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism... this will not be any easy approach. But then the love of God is not easy (Taylor 1963:10-11).

If the Western missionaries to Africa observed Taylor's suggestion and plea, tremendous success would have been the outcome. But many were so full of themselves and their culture that they thought that the people they came to evangelise were empty vessels to be filled.

Before the coming of Christianity to Nso' the Nso' people had their traditional religion. Like other African peoples, the Nso' people responded to their spiritual world of which they are sharply aware. Their act of worship is carried out using elements common to most African peoples: sacrifices, offerings, prayers, invocations, blessings and salutations (Mbiti 1970: 178-208; Mbiti 1989:61-67). Mbiti (1970:178; 1989:58) points out and rightly so that sacrifice and offerings constitute one of the commonest acts of worship among African peoples. In Nso' the priests included and still include *afaay* (family or village heads), *ayewong* (the High Priestesses), *atawong* (the High Priests). They offered prayers, sacrifices and offerings to various gods and ancestors and to the supreme God, the creator (*Nyuy Mbom*) pleading for help and blessings (Banbooyee 2001:56).

Mbiti (1970:178; 1989:58) makes a succinct distinction between 'sacrifices' and 'offerings'. According to him 'sacrifice' is used where animal life is destroyed in order to present the animal or part of it, to God, supernatural beings, spirits, or the departed. 'Offerings' he says, is used to refer to other cases in which animals are not killed, and in which items like foodstuffs, utensils, etc., are used for presenting to God or other recipients.

Nso' people like other African peoples show their loyalty to God, their ancestors, spirits etc., by offering sacrifices and offerings. Four examples of religious ceremonies below were and are still generally practised in Nso' (Banbooyee 2001:56):

5.5.2.1 *Cu* – (*Cu Nyuy*) – was the sacrifice destined to God the creator (*Nyuy Mbom*). Each clan had a special place, shrines, altars, groves, and waterfalls, other sacred places, generally known in Lamnso' as *kire'ke Nyuy*, literally a place reserved for God the creator. In performing such sacrifices, fowls or goats are used. Sometimes sacrifices and offerings are generally known in Nso' as *Cu*. Christians from Nso' call the money or material things they offer in church *Cu*. They refer to

clergy as *Tah-Cu* (literary the one who offers sacrifices, offerings). They do not have trouble using the words sacrifice and offerings interchangeably, for them it is *Cu*.

5.5.2.2 *Ntangri* (which involves a sacrifice) or *kinka* (invocation) was the religious ceremony destined to the ancestors, invoking them for help when things were not moving well with the people. The ceremony was usually carried out on the graves of the ancestors, somewhere in the compound or at the entrance (*metani*) that is at the road junction. The matter used in the sacrifice included a goat, a chicken, palm wine and maize. The goat or the chicken is slaughtered on the site consecrated to God. The blood is poured on a stone brought for the purpose or found there, where it is surrounded by chicken feathers or tiny twigs from the bark and rubbed with palm oil or cam-wood or palm wine to consecrate it as a stone for sacrifice. While the sacrifice is performed, those who are present stand round a ring, still and devout. The ceremony usually ends with a sacrificial meal in which all present partake.

5.5.2.3 *Menkan* (act of Benediction) known in Lamnso' as *kwa menken*, was performed to bless someone and wish him/her well. It was mainly performed to drive away all evil spirits that may want to disturb the person(s) for whom it was performed. The matter is a piece of special wood. The person performing it pickles the substance gently to obtain its powder. As he scrapes it he calls upon his ancestors: "eh! Wirba eh! Wiikom, here are your sons and daughters, bless them and open their ways to progress." Then he blows the powder into the air saying: *a tin ki wou beem tiy*, which means, when you knock your foot against a stone, let the stone be destroyed. In other words, let there be no obstacles on your way. Usually not every title holder or family head has the power to perform this rite. Those who perform this rite are appointed and given the right to do so by the Fon. According to one of my informants this *menkan*, could either be called Nso' traditional Bible or Nso' traditional liturgy.

5.5.2.4 *Kidiv* is a ceremony of reconciliation. The act of performing it is known in Lamnso' as *sov kidiv*. It was usually performed when there was serious disagreement in the family or when it was realised that someone in the family was having great difficulties because he or she has offended the ancestors. The rite was thus performed to ask the ancestor for forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. This rite was usually performed either at the family, village or tribe's level. At the level of

the tribe (the Fondom) the rite was destined to the gods and the ancestors. Apart from asking for forgiveness, peace and reconciliation, the rite was also performed to ask for good health and prosperity for the whole Nso'. Such was performed at the beginning of the rainy season, mid-march. The priests who perform this rite included: the Fon, *Taawong* and *Yeewong*. They were accompanied by *vibay ve duy*, the *won jemer* and *nshiyavse faay*, whose essential role was to assist in carrying various instruments for the sacrifice and clearing the ritual site. The instruments so carried consisted of *kibam ke wong* (literally, the bag of the country) *sho wong* (a calabash for the sacrificial wine) *ngem wong* (the gong of the country) and others.

The following items are used for this rite of reconciliation: a calabash, sticks from bamboo, palm wine and a fowl. In the process, a calabash is filled with palm wine mixed with *kidiv* medicine and set over a fire-pit. Two sticks are placed in the calabash, one to the right and another to the left. The priest then begins with an invocation of the deceased Faay, who did not resolve the dispute and/or the problem before his death as follows:

Njodzeka, nothing remains bad forever. This is the reconciliation the Fon has asked for to pacify you. Nobody thinks that a bad thing should remain bad. Open your heart to everyone, let the storm flow out and let calm settle in and let this *kidiv* foam to the left to show your acceptance (Faay Woo Lii Wong 1999:70).

The left signifies acceptance and the right refusal. As the priest speaks, the medicated palm wine may foam up and spill over on the left side, in which case there is happiness and laughter. After a while the priest continues:

A bad thing is a bad thing. Any such bad thing has a beginning and also has an end. Here is your fowl (Faay Woo Lii Wong 1999:70).

Everyone present is asked to turn his/her back on the evil while the fowl is being sacrificed. After which the priest takes out the heart and buries it in the fire-pit with the calabash. If the priest is from a different family, he may take the rest of the fowl home and sometimes the remaining palm wine. The cam wood (*bii*) is used to mark the doorposts and/or stones which have been spotted with the blood of the sacrifice. When this is done, the priest then shares out a *kikeng* (peace plant, *Dracaena*) to take home with them as a sign of peace and blessing (Faay Woo Lii Wong 1999:70).

Another ritual of reconciliation includes: *kiman*, which is performed to close up the long-standing conflict between people, especially family members. When this is

performed, the parties concerned are given a cup of palm wine, and to show that the matter is over, they must drink from that one cup. This signifies that they are now together with “one mouth” and “one heart” (Mzeka 1996:4).

5.6 Rituals of cleansing

Rituals of cleansing, which are performed in cases of incest, (*nshilah*) (*virim vee shuy*), meaning “day time witchcraft” (Mzeka 1996:3), what Kaberry literary translates “Witchcraft of the Sun” (Man in Africa 1968:175), murder, suicide by hanging, anomalous swelling up as in dropsy and death in child birth (Mzeka 1996:4). It seems necessary to note that in the case of incest those concerned are compelled to repeat the act in the presence of people in broad day light. This act is known in Lamnso as *nshilah*. In the process a he goat is being beaten while those concerned are repeating the act.

The he goat signifies that these persons acted as goats since they are allowed to cross within their own kind and same family. According to one of my informants, the fact that the victims are made to repeat the act in public is not fair. Hence, it is one of those elements in Nso’ culture which he does not cherish. He added that it is one of those “very less attractive cultural elements”. Perhaps, such needs to be checked. Nevertheless, some traditionalists hold that this helps to instil order and discipline and elevate the moral standard of the community.

5.7 Rituals of naming

In his article “Names as Cultural Identity: The *Problematique* of Naming in Nso” in The Ngonnso Magazine, 2014:19-22, Bulami Fonyuy writes:

... names are a cultural heritage of a people and capture their cosmic views and beliefs. In short names are an identity of a people, in a given society.... In Nso’land, the naming culture had been well established and had been well carried out until the arrival of the Western civilization and religion. Before this time the people had a naming culture which was linked to their traditional, cultural and social practices. For a brief understanding, the first male child into a Nso family was named Lukong (Taakong), while the second was named Taatah and the third Ngong and the fourth Tukov and so on. It went the same with the female children as the first was named Yeekong, the second Biy and the third

Ntang and the fourth Shee (Fonyuy in the Ngonso Magazine 2014:19-20).

There is no doubt that a name serves as the identity of most if not all peoples in the world. Just call a name having the word Nyuy, in Cameroon, any informed person will automatically say it is either from Nso' or is related to Nso' in one way or the other. Chinese names are also conspicuous. As soon as one mentions for example, *Chung Yung*, the next person automatically knows that it is a Chinese name.

In Nso' naming is done either informally or formerly. While in the informal manner names can be given as the families so desire, in the latter some children have to go through a certain ritual of naming. These are usually children identified as children of the gods (*won a nyuy*, pl.). Such children were believed to have some spirits that could control them negatively if not checked. The spirit of each child was believed to come from one of the Fondoms of the Bamenda Grasslands with which the Nso' people either entertained cordially or had a confrontational relationship. At the birth of the child, divination had to be carried out by the family priest (Taawonle) at the family shrine called *Shoh Kfee* or *Anyuy* to determine the origin of the child.

On the other hand, if for example, the child's spirit or prowess came from Baba Fondom, then the male was named Wirba (a man from Baba) and the female Wiiba (a woman from Baba); if the spirit or powers came from Kom Fondom, the male was named Wirkom (a man from Kom), and the female was named wiikom (a woman from Kom). These names were and are still known as *yir se anyuy* (names of the gods) (Fonyuy in the Ngonso Magazine 2014:20). In other words, the origin of such a child might be traced to their ancestors who are believed to have lived in Baba or Kom. In addition to this one informant told this researcher that sometimes these names are given after it has been surveyed and found out that if the bearer grows and settles in such a place he/she would find favour. He added that from his own name he has actually found favour where he has settled.

It seems necessary to note that this ritual was and is still accompanied by a special bag (*kibam ke wan*), literary the child's bag. It serves as a bank but it seems to have attracted the attention of Christianity because some clergy are quoted to have burnt some, terming the practice of keeping such bags 'unchristian'. One wonders what is 'unchristian' in having a bag that serves as a bank. Following the teachings of

missionaries some are still condemning these bags as ‘pagan’ without having studied or even known the content, which is simply incense, palm oil, salt, money, seeds etc.

According to one informant the seeds are a symbol of procreation and fruitfulness while the money stands for economic prosperity. The bag also serves as a bank for the child. When such a child, is named he or she is given either a she goat or a hen. When these animals increase, some are sold and money kept in the bag. Another informant pointed out that the child’s bag is better than the “empty card” that is given when one is baptised in the church. Still another indicated that the ritual of naming is worth maintaining because it prevents the child who has such powers from interacting negatively with the spiritual world.

Musa D.K as cited in Mzeka (1996:3) vehemently states that the empire of traditional children’s rituals is so wide and powerful that it will be difficult to put an end to it. Rather, he continues, greater impetus is being laid on it more than was the case in the early days of Christianity in Nso’. Yet there are still some clergy who consider this ritual as “unchristian”. For example, one pastor is quoted to have said recently that the present of these bags in the homes of Nso’ people indicates that they are “pagans”. This could be ignorance on the side of the pastor. Hence, this research may be helpful to him.

It seems important to note that there are names in Nso’ which are believed to have impacted negatively on individuals and many examples abound: Lon (bad omen, bad luck), Fonlon (one full of bad luck, bad omen), Awiyley (literally, you will go missing, but could be interpreted that one will suffer from some sort of loss, in business or otherwise). Nowadays, Nso’ people are avoiding such names for their negative impact. Some of these names are known to have affected people psychologically in a negative manner and otherwise. For example, one informant said that Tantan (the wanderer) wandered and got drawn in a covert. Still another said that the name Ngeh, which means suffering, has affected the bearers negatively.

Fonyuy in (The Ngonnso Magazine 2014: 21) decries the naming of children without any trace of identity. For example, as a teacher in Islamic High School Kumbo, he came face-to-face with Nso’ children whom in his opinion have lost their identity to

the Islamic culture for there is no trace of Nso' identity in the names they bear such as: Fatimatu Sherifatu Oumaru, Aliyu Halimatu, Abubaka Sidi Muktaru and so on.

Elsewhere, for example in Bali Nyonga, the cradle of Christianity for the Grassland of Cameroon, are the following examples of names and their meanings: Babila – which means “father has come back”. This name is given to a male child born after the death of his father. Bidbila – which means “the house is normal again”, is given after a family reconciliation; Akandawo – which means “no house lacks trouble” is given as a sort of consolation (Drumcall No. 88, 1998:4-5).

On the other hand, names like *Rem* (a Nso' name, meaning an evil person) and/or *Shong* (a Nso' name, meaning a thief) will play negatively on the bearer. Naming whether in Europe or Africa therefore, needs to be accomplished with precaution. Normally, people like to be named after icons, those who have contributed positively to the well-being of their communities and even beyond.

All the religious rites as seen above are performed to bring peace among God's people. Hence, there seems to be nothing wrong with them. Perhaps, they need a little modification and explanation so that more people can come to understand their function rather than call them pagan practices as did the missionaries and their collaborators.

Another study, may discuss how some of these rites could be Christianised in order to bridge the gap between traditional religion and Christianity. Though the rites above are discussed as if to say they were performed all in the past, it seems necessary to note that most if not all of these traditional rites are still performed today, “even by Christians and Muslims” as Banbooyee (2001:58) indicates and as the researcher has observed. Even in the next chapter it will be seen that a greater percentage of members in the core culture of Nso' – *ngwerong* and *ngiri* are Christians.

5.8 God as Nso' people know Him

In section 3.2.1.1 of chapter three above, we described “God as Africans know Him” in general with examples from other African tribes. It is not actually different from how Nso' people know him. Nevertheless, in this section 5.8 we intend to specifically describe how Nso' people know God, the Supreme Being (*Nyuy Mbom*, meaning

God the creator). Most of the Nso' names as seen below are proof of their knowledge of God. A number of them have to do with the presence of God in situations and/or circumstances. Some however describes God as all-knowing, all-powerful and present everywhere, though some specify that God is in heaven and earth. Here are some examples:

5.8.1 All-powerful (omnipotent): Nyuytav, Nyuydzetavin, Nyuyngaha, Ghakanyuy, Dzelamonyuy, Shalanyuy, Fanyuy, Limnyuy, Kiigha-adzemo.

5.8.2 All-knowing (omniscience): Nyuyki (God knows, mostly for males), Kinyuy (God knows), mostly for females; Nyuymenka (What does God not know?) Nyuykivenyovizem (God knows everything), Wiykenyuy (God will know about it, meaning He will pass judgement himself), Yufenyuy, Yuntirnyuy, and Nyuykighan

5.8.3 Present everywhere (omnipresence): Nyuydzewongndzem (God is everywhere, in the whole universe), Nyuydzeyuf, Fondzenyuy, Nyuydzewong.

5.8.4 Present in heaven and on earth: Nyuydzeyuf and Nyuydzensai respectively. This is synonymous to all-seeing and all-knowing because if He is in heaven and on earth nothing can be hidden from Him. Generally speaking, names with Nyuy either at the beginning, in the middle or at the end indicates the knowledge of God. For example, Nyuydinkong (God shows love), Ntumnyuywon (one sends by God); Ntumnyuy (God sent); Fomunyuy (God's Gift) Siysinyuy (God arranges, or puts in order). Other names appear in a question form. For example, Adzenyuya (Are your God?), Nyuydzengoah (Is God yours?).

The examples above are by no means exhaustive. During baptism in the early days of Christian missions in Nso' people were given names from the West called Christian names. Nowadays, mission churches select names from Nso' which are meaningful and give to children at their baptism without necessarily attaching the so-called Christian names from the West.

5.9 Nso' socio-political system

In section 4.3.3 of chapter four above this study described the political systems and social organisations that were in place in Cameroon before the coming of colonialism and Christianity. That section indicates that a good number of Cameroonian tribes already had organised social and political institutions, some with strong centralised

government, judicial and religious authority. This section now looks at the socio-political system that was present in Nso' before the colonial and missionary era.

Nso' operated a centralised system of government in which much power was vested on the Fon, the sacral ruler, the overload of all Nso'land. He presided over councils of state and made final decisions in matters of war and peace (Fanso 1989:2). (For an example of such matters, please, see the bloc quotation on page 191 below. The welfare of the fondom depended on him, though he was also responsible for and accountable to the people. The *ngwerong* and *manjong* as we shall see in chapter six acted as the regulatory society and military association respectively. They could check the misuse of power by the Fon. Hence, Nso' system of government, like most centralised systems, was one of checks and balances (Fanso 1989:2).

The Fon of Nso' did not rule alone. He was assisted in the administration of the fondom by councillors or officers of state who were the great lords of the country. These councillors were heads of their lineages but their primary duties were those connected with state affairs (Fanso 1989:3). Their main work was to be near the Fon, to advise him and to judge cases. These councillors, the palace stewards, the queen mothers and the commoner lords assisted the Fon in making the laws of the country. In addition, all the important palace officers were administrators of the lineages and villages scattered over the fondom.

There were also local but autonomous Fons in some villages, who advised the paramount Fon on national matters but were the final authority over their people in purely local matters (Fanso 1989:27).

The British anthropologist Kaberry seems to have carried out an extensive and comprehensive study of this system. She states that the Fon is assisted in the government of the country and in judging of cases by the queen mothers (*Aya*, sing. *Ya*), the High Priest (*Tawong*), the High Priestess (*Yewong*), and the councillors (*Vibai*, sing. *Kibai*) (Kaberry in *Focus on Africa*, 1950:308 and in Douglas, 1969:175). The *Vibai* are themselves heads of patricians or sub-clans, and like all lineage heads in the past and present day Nso' they bear the title *Fai* or *Shufai*.

Hence, all through, from the family and lineage to the village and district, from the lowest to the highest position in the fondom, law and order prevailed. Thus, when the

Germans, first reached Nso' in 1902, they found a well organised state under Sem II, who in 1906 waged a major resistance war against German colonialism (Fanso 1989:3). A German report in 1905 even claimed that the paramount Fon of Nso' had refused to accept a public act of submission to the German government (Fanso 1989:27). This led to a three-month war between Nso' and the Germans in which Nso' was defeated.

Fanso describes the battle as follows:

Aided by the Bali Nyonga who acted as scout, the Babungo who were carriers, and the more than 200 Bamum auxiliary troops, the German force of 11 Europeans and some 200 Vai soldiers under Captain Hans Glauning mounted a war against Nso from April to June 1906.... The Germans used machine-guns and modern rifles and revolvers and the Nso fought with flintlocks, spears and cutlasses. In the battle at Verkovi the Germans massacred over 300 Nso and sustained only a few casualties. At Nkar, a strategy to beat the Germans by decoy led to the slaughter of scores of German troops. In the neighbourhood of the capital kimbo and in Djottin and Dzeng, fierce battles led to heavy casualties on both sides. The Germans continued to be unrelenting and powerful. In the end, in order to save his people from total annihilation, the Fon Sembum II, surrendered to his white enemies. He was now forced to perform a public act of submission to German Kaiser, pay a ransom of seventy ivories for the release of his men in German custody, and supply free labour for the road linking Bamenda and Banyo, and 150 men for work in the south (Fanso 1989:27).

That was the context in which Christianity entered Nso' as already seen above. The irony in the whole issue is that some Cameroonians joined the Germans to fight against their own brothers. Interestingly, that was the context in which, the German Sacred Heart Fathers who were the first Roman Catholic missionaries to come to Nso' faced.

5.10 Economic, educational and health systems

In section 4.3.4 of chapter four this study discussed the economic, educational and health systems that existed in Cameroon before the colonial and missionary era. The systems so discussed are applicable to Nso'. Hence, we need not discuss that here again. However, there is need to mention that the economy is mostly based on subsistence agriculture, which in the past was carried out principally by women (Kaberry in Focus on Africa Vol. 20, 1950:307) but the fall in price of Arabica coffee in the mid-80s, which used to be the pride of men seems to have sent everyone to subsistence agriculture in Nso'land. Christian missions in a bid to assist created some agricultural facilities, like that of the Basel Mission at Kishong, which though

defunct however served its purpose at the time. Fortunately, that of the Roman Catholic Church, which stated in 1999, called Agricultural Training Project (ATP) with the aim of contributing to the lives of young farmers from resource-limited households in rural areas of Kumbo Diocese (Celebrating 100years 2012:36) is operational.

Furthermore, it seems necessary to mention modes of cooperation in Nso' as brilliantly described by Bongfen Chem-Langheein in his paper "The Political Economy of Cameroon: Historical Perspective" with focus on "Traditional and Modern Modes of Cooperation in Nso'." In this paper, he describes the following traditional modes of cooperation that were and perhaps are still practised in Nso: The ngwa' (pl. *angwa'*). This was and is still a rotary credit and savings drinking club or clubs in which members contribute money weekly, biweekly, or monthly and hands it on a rotary basis to one member who then applies it to solve his financial problems (1989: 284). Other traditional modes of cooperation which were mainly labour-centred include: house-building, fishing, hunting and farming (1989:285-87). He identifies the following as modern modes of cooperation: Nso' Area cooperative union and Nso' Women cooperative (1989:289).

It is worth noting that the Nso' Area cooperative came with the introduction of Arabica coffee in the 1940s by the missionaries. The spread of the cultivation of this coffee in Nso' and beyond is said to have been fostered by the adherents of the missionaries – the Reverend Fathers (Chem-Langhee 1989:289). With the fall in coffee prices in the mid-80s Nso' Area cooperative union lost its customers as most people cut down their coffee and planted subsistence crops.

That notwithstanding, cooperation among Nso' people is deeply rooted in their tradition and has persisted. One can find them going on with this practice even in cities where they are working as the bonds of tradition have been expanded to include religious affiliation, occupation, ethnic identity, village and regional origin as the basis of the cooperation (Chem-Langhee 1989:301). It seems necessary to add that in recent years, credit unions, what one may term postmodern modes of cooperation, have penetrated Nso' and beyond. These credit unions are affiliated to Cameroon Credit Union Limited (CAMCULL) and there are a number of them in Nso'. Nso' people are members and some are outstanding managers in these credit

unions, yet, the traditional modes of cooperation, *angwa* is still a force to reckon with as far as Nso' people are concerned.

The educational and health systems discussed in 4.3.4 of chapter four for Cameroon, which equally apply to Nso' have been improved upon by the presence of Christian missions. Outstanding are the numerous primary and post primary schools and renowned hospitals. These have been social achievements of Christian missions in Nso'land. Yet, there is a need to regrettably note that traditional medicine which used to be very effective is gradually vanishing because the medicine men are not valued any more. During the interview, one informant indicated that it was misunderstanding from the missionaries that led to the condemnation of traditional medicine by the church and its gradual disappearance is regrettable.

5.11 Conclusion

Christian missions in Nso' like in the entire country and Africa at large was intertwined with colonialism. Take the case of the coming of various Roman Catholic missionaries to Nso'. The German Sacred Heart Fathers came within the German administration, 1912 – 1915, the French Sacred Heart Fathers within the French rule, 1915 – 1923 and the British Mill Hill Missionaries during the British reign, 1923–1970.

Like in all African countries and ethnic groups, missionaries did not meet Nso' people as blank slates. Nso' people knew God and had ways of expressing themselves in worship. One could say with confidence that Nso' people like most Africans did not know Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit if we consider the Trinity. They however knew about spirits, good and bad ones. They also knew and still know and believe in the power of their ancestors. Some missionaries and their collaborators condemned some beliefs of the Nso' people without proper study for example, some clergy and Christians consider the “child's bag” given after the naming ceremony as ‘unchristian’. A number of aspects of worship and even naming as seen above if properly studied would have enhanced worship life. Yet, it was not until after Vatican II that one may say that it started dawning on especially the Roman Catholic Church that culture was invaluable. Imagine that even drumming in church that was seen as incompatible to the gospel, has become the centre of attraction especially when Lamnso' choir sings and plays them.

Nso' people equally had ways of governance. They also had their social, economic, educational and health systems. Christianity seems not to have given proper satisfaction to most Nso' people, they still turn to their traditional religion especially in times of trouble. Perhaps, the fellowship, and the corporate nature of the Nso' traditional religion is lacking in Christianity. The next chapter on Christian missions and traditional social associations, with a focus on "the core culture" of Nso' still indicate that Nso' people, even those who are Christians still cling to their culture.

CHAPTER 6

CHRISTIAN MISSIONS ENCOUNTER NSO' TRADITIONAL SOCIAL ASSOCIATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In chapter five we discussed the encounter of Christian missions and Nso' traditional religion. Chapter six now tackles the encounter of Christian missions with Nso' traditional social associations. Emphasis is laid on those which the missionaries and their collaborators fondly called 'secret societies'. In this light, particular attention is paid to *ngwerong* and *ngiri* with a focus on their origin, membership and functions. Comments are made where appropriate to indicate their social nature.

The main resource book is a private publication: *The Core Culture of Nso'* (Mzeka 1978). The strength and weaknesses of these associations are also examined in respect to what is considered to be compatible and incompatible to Christian teaching. Reference is made to informants as per the interview and focused groups' discussions carried out for this study. On Christian missions encounter with Nso' culture, the example of the catechist – Matthew in Kenjo Jumbam (1980) is considered. Although this story is fiction, it seems to show a vivid picture of what occurred in the early years of Christianity in Nso' and even what still goes on today. Other experiences from people through interviews are also taken into consideration. Further examples are drawn from history, to elucidate the tension that existed between Christian missions and traditional social associations, especially the *ngwerong*. Before we turn to Nso' it seems necessary to have a brief overview of missionary attitudes towards 'secret societies', what this study calls traditional social associations. The word juju(s) as used in this chapter in particular and the whole study in general stands for the masquerade(s) while *mimbo* stands for palm wine or drinks in general.

6.2 Missionary attitudes towards 'secret societies': A brief overview

What was fondly referred to by the missionaries and their collaborators as secret societies, is what this research calls traditional social associations. Gwilym Iwan Jones defines secret societies as follows:

... any of a large range of membership organizations or associations having secret initiations or other rituals, oaths, grips...or other signs of recognition. Elements of secrecy may vary from a mere password to elaborate rituals with a private language and peculiar ceremonials, costumes and symbols (quoted in Dah 1989:28-9).

Commenting on this definition Dah (1989:29) points out that membership in such societies comprises of people who have the same aims which must remain secret. Their secrecy, he goes on may be ensured by an elaborate initiation ceremony, repeated rites or the supply of guardians in case of children. Dah (1989:45) however, observes that what is termed 'secret society' is often not clear in every case. For example, while some people classify juju dance associations under secret societies, others do not. Hence, he suggests that each case has to be studied according to its own merit.

Kwast (1971:29) however indicates that these 'secret societies' or 'associations' were also known as 'closed associations' or 'juju societies'. Following Schneider, he makes the following classifications of these societies, especially as it pertains to the then West Cameroon:

- Those based on age and sex;
- Those connected with initiation into social life;
- Those concerned with political aims;
- Those based on economic functions.

Missionaries and their collaborators called these societies 'secret', and considered them bad because they did not take time to study their activities. Generally, missionaries often adopted a negative attitude towards all practices they did not fully understand and termed them pagan (Dah 1989:27). Two examples may suffice to elucidate some of the missionary views of the African cultures, especially about 'secret societies': First, one missionary is quoted to have categorically said: 'The gospel has a prodigious task before it in Africa. It finds nothing in the heathen systems into which to engraft itself.... To subvert and supplement is its mission' (Dah 1989:2). Second, 1892 a Basel missionary wrote the following in his annual report: 'We celebrated at the beginning of December in the area of Wouri a conquest and triumph because Chief Ngale from Bodiman gave up his attachments to the Losango and Jengu Secret Societies' (Dah 1989:2).

This was a celebration of victory in uprooting someone, a custodian from his cultural roots and replacement with some strange culture to him. One would wonder if the missionaries understood the damage that this type of approach caused in the lives of Africans.

Against these haughty approaches, Placid Tempels came up with a humble confession:

Perhaps the time has come to make our confession; at any rate, it is time at least to open our eyes. All of us, missionaries, magistrates and administrators, all in directive posts or posts which ought to be directive have failed to reach their "souls" By having failed to explore the ontology of the Bantu, we lack the power to offer them either a spiritual body of teaching that they are capable of assimilating, or an intellectual synthesis that they can understand... (Tempels 1959:28).

According to (Dah 1989:2), the position of Tempels marked a turning point in attitudes. It serves as a warning not to condemn before one had really understood the African situation. Yet this warning seems to have come at a time when western civilisation has destroyed genuine African elements. For example, the rejection of both African religiosity and vernaculars by some Christian missions. Their preference to Latin, English and French kept Africans away from their rich cultural languages.

Furthermore, missionaries considered masks and other precious works of art as clear symbols of idolatry and typical of heathenism. Thus, in 1934 and 36, we have reports of the following incidents that took place in Cameroon:

On October 26th, 1934, an extraordinary thing happened at Nyasoso. Under the influence of the Gospel, the Etung people brought all their juju objects to Nyasoso for "exhibition" Afterwards a large crowd walked to the Mongo River into which they threw all their masks, magic wands, drums, skulls, etc. while saying prayers and singing hymns (Keller 1968:69).

The second incident took place in December 1936:

On December 23rd 1936, when the Basel Mission Church in the Cameroons celebrated its 55 years' Jubilee, the Mpako people also burnt their juju objects. The ashes were collected and buried in the grave. On the tomb, they placed a cross on which was written: "The grave of the secret societies. Submit yourself therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you (James 4:7). This is the end of secret societies. Everything passes away, the word of God only remains, 23rd December, 1936" (Keller 1968:69-70).

Commenting on these destructive approaches, Dah (1989:4) indicates that missionaries were repeating in mission lands what they once suffered in their cultures during missionary eras in their own lands. The destruction of native worship

places and supposedly heathen holy places, he goes on was often part of the visible evidence that the gospel had conquered the kingdom of darkness in pagan lands. It seems important to note that some of the objects were however carried to Europe and today one can see them in Museums in Europe. For example, this researcher saw a juju mask from Nigeria in the Museum at Liverpool, in the United Kingdom (2007).

6.3 Traditional social associations in Nso'

Generally, Nso' people fall into three main social groups: *duiy* or *dui* – the royal family and its extensions; *m'taar* – the free commoners and *nyshiyLav* –the royal retainers (Kaberry 1950: 309; Kaberry 1969:180; Mzeka 1996:1). In 1969, the British anthropologist Phyllis Kaberry identified four of such social groups though as she indicates, they were formally five, when there were slaves and when *wonto* (literally children of the palace) were considered differently from *duiy* - the royals. But in the present dispensation there are three main social groupings as stated above. We will come back to it somehow when we are looking at membership of the *ngwerong* and the *ngiri*.

6.3.1 Classification of traditional social associations in Nso'

In Nso' like in most of Cameroon, there are a number of traditional social associations whose membership is exclusively for males and only in rare cases does one find those which are exclusively for women. This study classifies them following the period of time they are performed.

6.3.1.1 Those performed during the day

They include *mfuh*, *samba*, *nchuro*, *ngwem*, *kikum*, *chong* etc. Some of these are performed only at the death of a member or noble. Members however meet weekly and when a member(s) supplying the drinks that day satisfy the rest a dance may be performed as an appreciation and encouragement to him or to them. Apart from *chong*, *lalir*, *ntooh* and other dances which are solely controlled by women, when any of the groups above is staging a dance, women usually dance in a separate line about two to three metres from the men who are at the centre.

6.3.1.2 Those performed in the night

They include *rum*, *mfuhbam*, *asang*, *kikum kee vetse*, *ngiri*, *ngwerong*. Only the masquerades (*jujus*) from *ngiri* and *ngwerong* display during the day. This display takes place at the celebration of the death of a noble or member. During the cultural manifestations in the palace their display is the focus. Many people come to the palace to watch the display. These people include Christians. And those who sometimes wear the masks as seen in the introduction and the statement of the problem are Christians.

The majority of those who even process and/or parade with the masquerades (*jujus*) are Christians. In each *yengiri* (which literally means the mother of *ngiri*) or *Yengwerong* (which literally means the mother of *ngwerong*) procession one would find that more than sixty percent of the members are Christians. Some of the informants even put the number of Christians at seventy-five percent at such processions. Ironically the mother of *ngiri* and the mother of *ngwerong* are feminine in gender but the mask is worn by males and not females. Furthermore, women are not even members. Interestingly, when these masquerades (*jujus*) are performing one is marvelled at the number of women who cheer them on, singing and even clearing dirt from the path as they walk through.

6.4 The main traditional social associations: *Ngwerong* and *ngiri*.

The main traditional social associations of the Nso' people are *ngwerong* and *ngiri*. Hence, they form what has been termed "the core culture of Nso'" (Mzeka 1978) for they seem to be at the centre of every cultural activity. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, this, section 6.4 focuses on the origin and the duties (functions) of *ngwerong* and *ngiri* and recruitment therein. Social aspects of these groups are indicated where appropriate to elucidate their social nature. Examples are stated to show their encounter with Christian missions. An attempt is also made to indicate their strengths and weaknesses *vis á vis* what is considered to be compatible and incompatible to Christianity.

6.4.1 *Ngwerong*

As already mentioned above, the discussion on *ngwerong* is centred on: its origin, duties, and recruitment into membership. When *ngiri* is discussed, then the strength

and weaknesses of both are considered in reference to what is considered compatible and in compatible to Christianity respectively.

6.4.1.1 Origin of *ngwerong*

It is held that *ngwerong* was introduced into Nso' by the Tankum lineage. Tankum lineage amalgamated with Nso' at Kovifem (the last settlement of the Nso' people before the present one, Kimbo or Kumbo). Since Takaum amalgamated with Nso' as a tributary clan, the consequences were that their leader had to surrender all his chieftaincy titles, rights and prerogatives to the Fon of Nso'. Along with these was *ngwerong* (Mzeka1978:76). Nevertheless, Mzeka (1978:76) indicates that Fai Tsenla' Mbam had once laid claim to the introduction of *ngwerong* in Nso'. According to him, it is explained that Fai Tankum was equivalent to Fai Tawong in, the plains of ntumbo'. He further points out that because of the frequent raids from the Banyo area, Fai Tawong left with some of his followers to seek protection from Fai Tsenla' Mbam who was then a small chief in what is now called Mbo' Nso' (Mzeka1978:76).

From every indication, therefore, Fai Tsenla had *ngwerong* and he incorporated Fai Tankum and his male followers into it. Then because of continued harassment from the Banyo slave raiders, Tsenla and Tankum decided to seek protection from Nso' then at Kovifem (Mzeka1978:76). Furthermore, Tsenla being a longer resident in the place where Tankum met him was reluctant to leave. Hence, Tankum went ahead taking away *ngwerong*, and without waiting for his former protector and mentor to arrive, he surrendered *ngwerong* to the Fon of Nso'. When Tsenla arrived later, he found to his dismay that Tankum had already presented *ngwerong* to the Fon of Nso' as his own (Mzeka 1978:76). That is how *ngwerong* became the property of Nso'. The information has some conflicting views as it is largely based on oral history.

6.4.1.2 Duties (functions) of *ngwerong*

Though the origin or the conception of *ngwerong* at the time of introduction to Nso', seems unclear, it however emerged in Nso' state as a strong executive arm of the state government. For effective execution of state government policies, policing was necessary. The hooded *ngwerong* thus evolved and executed the state policies in an impersonal manner. On state service, the hooded *ngwerong* represents the

institution and cannot be held responsible as an individual for any of its acts (Mzeka 1978:76).

During the reign of Nga' Bifon (c.1910-1947), the then Fon of Nso' who relied very heavily on *ngwerong* both for his decision making and execution, *ngwerong* became so influential and strong that the Nso' people viewed the state as jointly ruled by the Fon and *ngwerong*. This view gave rise to the saying: *wong fon win ngwerong*, which means, the realm of the Fon and *ngwerong*. But modern government has robbed *ngwerong* of its many functions and responsibilities (Mzeka 1978:76).

Mzeka (1978:76) however points out that politically, *ngwerong* now exists as a pressure group within the traditional government and socially as an institution with much entertainment. The latter, he says would appear both for now and the future to be the greater function of *nwerong*. Hence, this study calls it one of the traditional social associations which strengthens social identity. Its varied masquerades (*jujus*) are a source of much entertainment and excitement when they have occasion to display. Everyone who has attended the Nso' cultural festival called "Ngonnso Festival", named after the founder of Nso' seems to have been marvelled because of the great multitude of people present. For example, in 2014, this researcher overheard someone saying: "This people, (implying people from Nso') like their culture, see the population, it is beyond my imagination."

6.4.1.2.1 Executive and ceremonial functions of the *ngwerong*

Mzeka (1978:77) indicates that most of the functions and responsibilities and even the institutions of *ngwerong* have either lapsed or have been greatly modified. That notwithstanding, it is worth noting that in the traditional government a number of functions were relegated to *ngwerong*. Namely:

- To carry out (execute) the Fon's orders including the carrying out of the death sentence. But *ngwerong* did not actually carry out the sentence. It was the *wonjemeer* Fon (grandsons or granddaughters of the Fon. They were from the *mtaar* and belonged to neither *ngwerong* nor *ngiri*) and acting as agents of *ngwerong* executed the criminal.
- To mobilize the people to build or repair the palace and to fetch grass for thatching the palace.
- When wine was scarce in the palace or when the Fon was fined by *ngwerong*, they collected 'things of *ngwerong*' and dispatched the hooded *ngwerong* to hasten the tappers and to seize raffia wine from

anyone who happened to be carrying wine at the time, except those calabashes of wine corked with fig tree leaf.

- To ceremonially mourn for *wir* Fon, literally people of the Fon in case of death. These include the princes and princesses, former palace pages of rank, and vikiy to' - [the Fon's wives].
- To forestall fire accidents by preventing fires at wrong places and times. For this, a hooded *ngwerong* accompanied by a number of *ngwerong* pages visited individual houses in the town.
- To police the town and its environs in order to keep the peace and prevent crimes.
- To prevent trespassing on the Fon's property such as kola trees, palm bushes, wood crops. Such protection was shown by placing the *ngwerong* pole - an injunction on or by the property... (Mzeka 1978:77).

6.4.1.2.2 *Ngwerong* compliments and checks on the powers of the Fon

Apart from these executive and ceremonial functions above, *ngwerong* also acted as a check on the powers of the Fon. Thus, one could say that *ngwerong* seems to have been aware of the historical dictum which states that 'power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.'

Hence, if the Fon had been autocratic, negligent in state affairs or behaving in a manner considered to be incompatible with the Fonship, *ngwerong* could *kur* him. This literary means 'tie him' but in practice it amounted to house arrest. When this was done, no person could enter or leave the palace. Everyone in the capital remained in the house and only *ngwerong* pages, (*nshiyselav*) present and past could venture out. There could be no singing or playing of any music or making any loud noise in the palace or town. *Ngwerong* alone played its mournful music and this situation continues until the Fon paid a fine and promised to be of good behaviour (Mzeka 1978: 80).

Since 'the Fon is the people and the people is the Fon' when this situation arose it affected the whole community. Thus, the fine was contributed by the community. Yet, it was a great warning to the Fon. This act of *kur* Fon is indicative of the fact that no citizen is above the law of his or her country. Mzeka (1978:80) points out that it is not only *ngwerong* which may demonstrate against the Fon. All lineage heads of the *mtaar* clan, could express their dissatisfaction with the way the state was being ruled by invading the palace, early in the morning, armless but carrying each a leaf. They stood silently, leaf in hand, at *mandze ngai* (the main courtyard of the palace), until

the Fon got out to answer their grievances and would normally take such a protest very seriously for the *mtaar* people are the 'earth people' that is, owners of the land and could therefore plead with the earth to punish the Fon if he persisted in doing what they did not approve of. This was indeed a necessary check on the Fon's power.

6.4.1.2.3 Recruitment and membership into *ngwerong*

Phyllis Kabbery as cited in Mzeka (1978:81) noted six sources from which *ngwerong* conscripted its pages: as follows:

- From among boys who had remote maternal links with the royal clan. These are called *dui*.
- First sons of marriages between a commoner (*mtaar*) and a daughter of a *nshiyilav*.
- From among sons of men of *nshiyilav* status except where the wife is a princess.
- Sons surrendered to *ngwerong* or to the Fon by persons of rank in mitigation of a penal offence.
- Sons of refugees.
- Boys presented to the Fon or *ngwerong* by tributary chiefs.

In addition to these six sources are the following three:

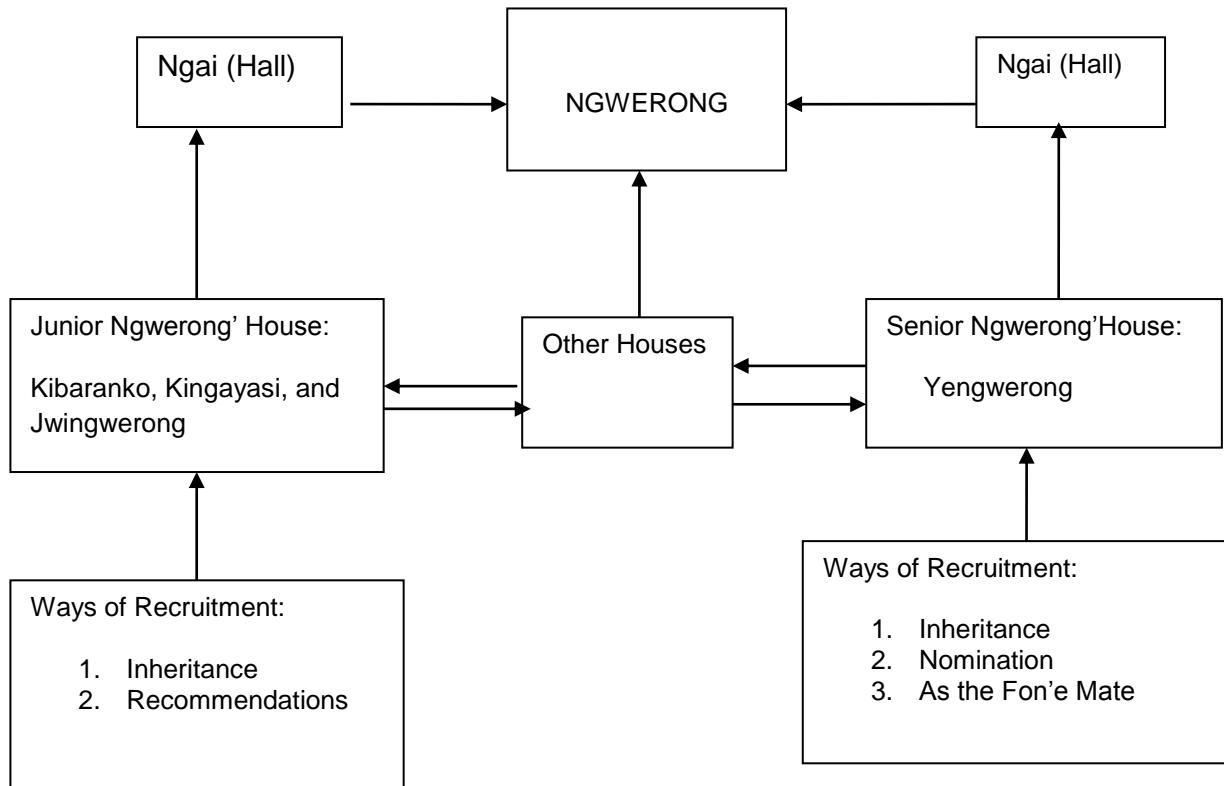
- Sons of slaves.
- Boys given as part of the Fon's bag during the ceremony of *tang ngwerong* which is the final stage for the recruitment into *ngwerong*.
- People who otherwise could not be recruited but who knowingly or unknowingly entered into *ngwerong la'* which is the *ngwerong* quarter of the palace. Such will literally speaking be eaten (*yi*) by *ngwerong* and were transferred to as *kintan ke ngwerong*, which literary means *ngwerong's* grass-hopper (Mzeka 1978:81).

It seems necessary to note that the *ngwerong's* police, which is the hooded *ngwerong* speaks only by signs and gestures which are interpreted by a page (Mzeka 1978:77).

As observed earlier, *ngwerong* is reserved for males only and membership is limited to two clans namely the *nshiyilav* and the *dui*. However, not any *dui* can be recruited, that is to say, those *dui* who are a product of intermarriages between a *dui* woman and *nshiyilav* or *mtaar*. Those qualified to be recruited into *ngwerong* whether they are *nshiyilavse kiba'* (that is actually recruited as pages) or not, can seek admission

into any of the four juju houses, which in order of importance are: *lav yengwerong*, *lav kibaranklo'*, *lav jwingwerong* and *lav kingayasi*.

A mind map below is provided to aid the understanding of various structures in the *ngwerong*, particularly recruitment, various houses and halls. In order to understand the sections that discuss issues concerning *ngwerong*, especially in this chapter one would need to refer to it.



Mind Map B: Membership and Recruitment into Ngwerong

6.4.1.2.4 Junior and senior *ngwerong*

This division of *ngwerong* into junior (*ngwerong wo teri* - small or junior *ngwerong*) and senior (*ngwerong wok u-un* - big or senior *ngwerong*) is based on various houses. The houses of *kibaranko*, *jwingwerong*, and *kingayasi* belong to the junior *ngwerong*. Each of the houses in the junior group is controlled by an elder, invariably styled a *shey*. In this junior group, each house has its own special juju after which the house is named and a special day in the week when its members meet to drink and possibly to eat. This portrays its social nature. Membership of each of the junior houses can be secured by one of the following:

Inheritance: if one's father is a member of a juju house, when he is either incapacitated or dead, one could replace him.

Recommendation: the leader or senior member of a house could recommend the admission of some one. But such a person must be of the *nshiyLav* clan (Mzeka 1978:84).

When one becomes a member of a particular house, he enjoys the privilege of drinking with the other members in that house on a day set aside for it, of escorting the juju of their house whenever it goes out to display, and of being exposed to the mysteries and medicines of that house. But the privilege most coveted is the one to have the juju on display when a member dies (Mzeka 1978:85). This portrays a sense of social identity, and a sense of belonging.

This privilege that the *ngwerong* members enjoy is similar to what obtains in most denominations in Cameroon. Members of each Christian group for example, the Christian Men Fellowship (CMF) of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and those of the Christian Men Association (CMA) of the Roman Catholic Church would attend the funeral of their member. In addition, there are Christians who enrol into such groups in anticipation of their funerals.

As far as membership into any of the houses of the junior *ngwerong* is concerned, a qualified candidate may be refused admission into these houses by its members if the majority of them believe the character of the candidate is questionable. A candidate's character is determined not only from what he does within the *ngwerong* institution but chiefly from his relationship with the public at large. The often quoted examples of actions that could disqualify one from membership of a juju house are adultery and backbiting (Mzeka 1978:85). Many informants attested to these examples.

6.4.1.2.5 *Ngwerong* wok u-un or the senior *ngwerong*

The senior *ngwerong* comprises of two parts. Namely: the *ngai* (literally assembly hall) and *yengwerong*, which must not be confused with the hooded *ngwerong* or the association itself. There are two *ngaisi*, (plural), meaning assembly halls, one for members of the junior *ngwerong* and the other for those of the senior *ngwerong* (Mzeka 1978:85).

Membership of the senior *ngwerong* with the accompanying title *ngang ngwerong* and of they for non-title holders may be secured in one of the following three ways:

Inheritance: Members of this group pass on the right of membership to their successors. There are only eight persons in this group: the Fon, Fai Ndendzev, Fai Tankum and Fai Lun. These last three are Vibai. The other four are *atanto'* and include: Mamo, Nseni, Mbingiy and Kuinto Nshelav. Among the eight, the Fon and Fai Ndendzev are initiated on the day of their installation (Mzeka 1978:87).

Nomination: Only the Fon has the right to nominate. His nomination is an absolute prerogative which once made cannot be challenged. But before his official nomination, the Fon sends the name of his nominee to a committee of three under the headship of *shey won gang*. They screen the character and the family background of the prospective member thoroughly (Mzeka 1978:87). When satisfied that the nominee is qualified, the Fon is informed and he accordingly invites and presents his nominee the senior *ngwerong* on a *kiloveey* (a traditional week day). The Fon may present him himself or may delegate *shey won gang* who is head of the senior *ngwerong* to do it. The bulk of the total membership which currently is more than a hundred is made up of those who got admission in this way.

As the Fon's Mate: As soon as the Fon is installed at *Ndzendzev*, he is led to see the junior *ngwerong* the same day. Later that day, or on any convenient evening, he sees *yengwerong*, that is to say, the aspect that moves only in the night called *ngwerong vitse'*. The Fon on this occasion, has it as a right to select two males be they *dui, mtaar, nshiyLav or wanto'*, to accompany him when he goes to see *ngwerong* for the first time. For the first time because as a prince *ngwerong* is tabooed on him. Whoever is so selected is *ipso facto*, a *ngang ngwerong*. This is how Fai Mbisha, who by Nso' genealogy is still classified as *wanto'*, that is to say, prince, became a *ngang ngwerong*. Fon Mbinkar Mbinglo took him as one of his mates during his first appearance before *ngwerong* (Mzeka 1978:87).

Apart from the Fon, all *ngang se ngwerong* are escorted to their compound in a solemn procession. Of the *ngang se ngwerong* in the inheritance group, Fai Ndendzev is escorted by *yengwerong* from the palace where he is installed to his compound in such a procession. For the rest of the *vibai* and *atanto'*, initiation is in the following manner: Shortly after the death celebrations of the predecessor of a

kibai or tanto’ who was a *ngang ngwerong*, the successor is visited by a delegation of *ngang se ngwerong* (Mzeka 1978:87).

These *ngang se ngwerong* are fed and given drinks and a goat. This is another aspect of socials. Gifts of money are made to them. The gifts are said to be *sho’ki wuu* which literally means ‘presents for the feet’. On leaving, they collect all the *ngwerong* insignia back to the palace. After this, it is left to the successor to make up his mind whether he would like to become a *ngang ngwerong*. If he decides to be, he prepares the Fon’s ‘bag’ and gives it at the palace expressing his intention to be recruited as *ngang ngwerong*.

While dressed in traditional attire he waits for the *yengwerong* at the entrance to his inner courtyard. This entrance is called *shu kishem* (Mzeka 1978:88). When the juju of the senior *ngwerong* called *yengwerong* arrives being escorted by a number of *ngangsi*, the waiting *fai*, is held on the arm by the juju and led to the family *ngai*. Before the arrival of *yengwerong*, a new chair should have been placed in *ngai* for him and with a cock by it. This is another example of their social aspect, which is food centred. When *yengwerong* enters, he sits on the chair and takes the cock, as a sign of welcome. After the welcome, feasting follows. The entourage is given mimbo (palm wine) and food along with a goat killed and cooked for the occasion. This is eating and drinking, another sign of their social nature.

After the feast, *yengwerong* rubs camwood on the feet of the initiate and all the *ngangsi* present may rub their feet from the left overs (Mzeka 1978:88). The new member is led to the palace where he is presented to the Fon and then to *ngai ngwerong*. The Fon sends drinks (mimbo) to *ngai (the hall)*. This is still another aspect of the social nature of this association. When the drinking is terminated, the new *ngang* is led back to his compound without the accompaniment of the *yengwerong* juju. Back in the compound, there is more feasting and more presents “for the feet” (Mzeka 1978:88). This is another means of sharing, an aspect of social again. Though a mark of solidarity, it can really be expensive for the member and by extension the family. And when a member dies instead of solidarity with the bereaved the group comes in to mourn and to eat and drink.

This aspect seems to be penetrating the church in Cameroon. It has been observed that some congregations and sessions of the PCC have asked for goats and pigs

and drinks at the funeral of their Christians. A thing to discourage, else they will become like *ngwerong in Nso' and nkwefon in* or *ekwe* in other villages.

For those of the nomination group, a suitable *kilovey* (a traditional week day)¹⁴ is chosen for the escorting of the nominee to his compound. On that *kilovey* the new member is escorted in a procession to his compound but *yengwerong* does not accompany him. On arrival in the compound of the new member, refreshments are served and presents 'for their feet' made. This is another opportunity for eating and drinking again. After this, if the new member is *nshiyilav* he could perform the ceremony of *ko' kitavke ngwerong* that is to say, climb into the store of *ngwerong*. Formerly after the provision of the feast which consisted of two bags of salt, two calabashes of mimbo, two fowls, and two *djuy se kiban* (two grass trays full of loaves of corn fufu), the new member was actually led into a store and shown the secret sacraria of the institution.

These secret sacraria, form what is called *ngwerong vitse'* which means the night *ngwerong*. Nowadays, for a number of reasons, the actual leading of the recruit into the store has become impracticable. Thus, the provision of the feast and the revelation of the secret sacraria of the institution are separated. When an opportunity arises when *ngwerong vitse'* is assembled, any member who had earlier *ko kitav* or *tang ngwerong*, but had not yet seen these secret things is then allowed to see them (Mzeka 1978:88). These secret sacraria are not known to outsiders and not even to all *ngwerong* members. And according to one informant when one sees it he has to take an oath with the following cautions: "what you see here remains here, what you say here remains here, what you hear here remains here and what you do here remains here." He added that the oath prevent gossip, backbiting and adultery. "We do not have any gods there", he insisted. This seems to be action taken to maintain moral rectitude and discipline among its members.

6.4.1.2.6 Admission into *yengwerong* (literally the mother of *ngwerong*)

Through the ceremony of *ko kitav*, a *ngang* of the *nshiyilav* clan, is admitted into the innermost core of *yengwerong*. Those of the non-*nshiyilav* group can get admission only when they perform two costly ceremonies: *tee shishur* that is provide the

¹⁴ Nso' people have eight days in a week: Ntangrin, Kavei, Revey, Kilovey, Nsteri, Ngyge, Ngoilum, and Wailun.

rudiments of a meal for *ngwerong*; and *tang ngwerong* which implies initiation into the innermost organ of the *ngwerong* institution (Mzeka 1978:89). To *tee shishur* and to *tang ngwerong* gives another opportunity for one to provide food and drinks for members, thereby portraying another social aspect of the association.

Literally, *yengwerong* means the mother of *ngwerong*. It is the core, the innermost organ of the association. Membership is limited to members of the senior *ngwerong* called *ngang se ngwerong*. For *ngang se ngwerong* of the *nshiyilav* status, membership could be secured in one stage called *ko' kitav ke ngwerong* which, as noted earlier, means to climb into the store of *ngwerong* in order to be shown the mysterious sacraria of *yengwerong* collectively called *ngwerong vitse*. The ceremony of *ko' kitav* is now symbolic and as it has always been, a comparatively cheaper process of initiation into *yengwerong* the process is reserved solely for *ngang se ngwerong* who are of the *nshiyilav* clan. Members of the other clans qualified for admission must do so in two stages: First, they must *tee shishur*. To *tee shishur she ngwerong* implies the provision of a rudimentary meal for *ngwerong*. But in practice, the meal is anything but rudimentary. The contrast is with the second stage which is much more elaborate and expensive. To *tee shishur* has always been regarded in Nso' as a very expensive venture. The member seeking admission supplies a fixed number of goats, fowls, mimbo, little baskets of corn fufu and the 'Fon's bag' consisting of an appreciable sum of money (Mzeka 1978:89).

Yengwerong has a committee to make sure that the correct number of each item is provided before the day of the feast. The members of the said committee are representative of the *ngwerong* in the person of *shey won gang*, a representative of the *atanto'* in the person of *fai mamu*, a representative of the Fon who must be a *ngang ngwerong*. On *revey*, the day before *kiloveey*, which is the week day kept for *yengwerong*, the three members visit the home of the person to be initiated to inspect the provisions. They are fed and given drinks and presents both for themselves and the Fon. (Mzeka 1978:89). Provision of food and drinks are seen here again and they portray once more the social nature of this group.

The Fon must be sent a fully developed and castrated he goat, a *kikayi ke ahili'* which is a calabash of mimbo secured on a bamboo board, and white traditional bag. This last item would be returned to the person being initiated. After the feast when

the new member is to be seen off, the Fon takes the bag and pins on it *ntumw* which is a spike of a porcupine. This gives the new member the authority to own and to use all *ngwerong* caps and bags. After the ceremony in the palace, the new member who has *tee shishur* is led to his compound in another grand procession. All *ngansi* moves slowly in their full membership regalia, their slow paces punctuated by exclamatory praises of the group (Mzeka 1978:90). In this procession, Christians make up between 60 and 75 percent of members.

In his compound, he is presented to the members of his family already assembled there to wait his arrival. A short address made by an elderly *ngang* to the assembled family members and neighbours. He advises them on how to treat the *ngang* and how the new *ngang* should in turn act towards them and the public at large. After the short address follows the ceremony of *kani kibam ke ngwerong* which literally means to compensate for the *ngwerong*'s bag (Mzeka 1978:90).

The father and the mother of the new *ngang* must give one fowl and one calabash of mimbo everyone present must 'put something in the bag'. Those who have nothing at all put a little quantity of soil into it. When the ceremony is terminated, whatever has been 'put in the bag' is distributed among the *ngansi* present. Some food and drinks are given to the *ngansi* who escorted the initiated *ngang*. Presents in the form of cash are again made 'for their feet' before they finally depart. We see again an aspect of feasting, which indicates the social nature of the group.

The second stage is called *tang ngwerong*. Initiation into this final stage is based on the following considerations. The candidate must be a member of the senior *ngwerong* already and must have completed the ceremony of *tee shishur*. His character must be considered good by members of the *yengwerong* cult. The aspirant must be a title holder. This proviso is easily met as all titleless persons who reach the first stage of *tee shishur* are accorded the title of *shey* (Mzeka 1978:91).

The ceremony of *tang ngwerong* is reserved for those *ngang se ngwerong*, who are of *dui* (royal) or *mntar* (commoner) clans. It is a very expensive venture. This is revealed by the fact that very few persons get into *yengwerong* by this process (Mzeka 1978:91).

The two-stage admission and its very costly nature is definitely discriminatory. Whereas members of the *nshiyilav* clan can get into the terminal stage with a less expensive ceremony of *ko' kitav*, members of other clans must *tee shishur* after which they *tang ngwerong*. In the latter case, the candidate treats the *ngwerong* establishment to a grand feast which extends to over three consecutive *vilovey* (plural of *kilovey*, a Nso' week day). He must provide the Fon's bag comprising two persons, one a girl as the Fon's wife and the other a boy as his attendant or as a page of *ngwerong*. This discriminatory aspect of *yengwerong* appears to be *ngwerong's* own method of discouraging royals and *mntar* members of the senior *ngwerong* from seeking admission into what the institution considers its mystical core (Mzeka 1978:91).

The Fon's admission is slightly different. He and his two mates are shown *yengwerong* shortly after his installation. But sometimes after, they must perform the ceremonial aspects of the society. Any Fon's mate who is of the *nshiyilav* clan must perform the ceremony of *ko' kitav* before he is fully admitted. Non-*nshiyilav* and the Fon must *tee shishur* and *tang ngwerong* to be considered as full members. The only difference between the Fon and his non-*nshiyilav* mates is that he may perform the two ceremonies of *tee shishur* and *tang ngwerong* concurrently (Mzeka 1978:91).

These demands of *tee shishur*, *ko' kitav* or *tang ngwerong* when they were scrupulously followed limited the membership of *yengwerong*, that is to say those who were qualified to see the night *ngwerong*, the most ambitious, well to do and well behaved members. In a society where all offices were hereditary, *ngwerong* provided a rare but restricted opportunity for title and non-title holders alike, to reach the top of society. Even where the title *ngang ngwerong* was titular, the social prestige and position that went along with it was enough motivation. Bearing in mind that *ngwerong* is a closed association, it becomes obvious that membership of *yengwerong* was very limited (Mzeka 1978:92).

Membership of the senior *ngwerong* confers on one the association's title of *ngang ngwerong* and honour to escort the group's day time juju called *yengwerong*. To non-title holders it also confers the state title of *shey*. It gives those who have *tee shishur* the right to wear the cult's caps and to carry its bags. And when they die, the filling of their graves is completed only by the day time juju of *yengwerong* (Mzeka 1978:92).

This aspect has been picked up by some church movements in Cameroon such that in some congregations, members are the ones to bury their deceased members.

If by the process of *tang ngwerong* one reaches the final stage, it confers on him, first the right of personally using the authority of *ngwerong*. This consists of a bamboo pole whose upper half has been marked with alternating rings of black and white. When placed by or on something, anyone who dares to temper with the thing, incurs the wrath of *ngwerong* and is liable to heavy fines. Second, he is given *vifa'-ve-ngwerong*, that is to say, things of *ngwerong*. This is the right to use the net tunics that are worn to conceal the identity of the *ngwerong* 'police'.

The person who owns such property never uses it as personal belongings, but always in the name of *ngwerong* or the Fon. Such rights and privileges are not hereditary. The bag, the caps, the cups, and the pole are all withdrawn as soon as the member dies, and with them, all the rights and privileges (Mzeka 1978:93).

This is similar to what happens when a member of the Christian Women Fellowship of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon dies. Yet the difference is that the one is buried with her CWF uniform, membership cards, and the badge. Membership is not hereditary.

With *ngwerong*, when such a member dies, *ngwerong* goes to his compound in the evening and does not return until about the same time the following day. During the day when it is encamped there periodically, its *jujus* come out from the temporary residence constructed by the pages of *ngwerong*, to display as part of the death celebrations. The death celebration of such a member is closed by a grand display of *mankang mangven* (concourse of jesters) which do not come up to the market as in the case of the Fon, but remain in the compound of the deceased member. The overnight death celebrations are also extended to *shey won gang* when he dies (Mzeka 1978:83). All this needs food and drink and this again shows its social aspect.

A *ngang ngwerong* who had *tee shishur* could *tang mbang ngwerong*. This means that by a ceremonial feast he could be initiated into the group that had the authority to use the *ngwerong* emblem. If he did he would build a *kitav ke ngwerong* in his compound. Only he alone could get into such store of *ngwerong*. A *ngwerong*

emblem consisting of its marked bamboo pole was put at the entrance of such a store thus, prohibiting any other person to enter. If someone in the neighbourhood had some property which he wanted to stop anyone from tampering with, he would give the *ngang* two fowls and two calabashes of mimbo as an invitation for the *ngang* to put the *ngwerong* prohibitive emblem by his property. When this was done, the property was protected (Mzeka 1978:93). The supply of these food items and drinks again portray the social nature of the association.

Some members of the hereditary group also have 'things of *ngwerong*' in their compounds permanently. These are the Fon, Ndzendzev and Tankum. For the Fon, the bags containing the tunics were looked after by *kfem se Fon* and were washed and sunned by them. When there was an issue for which the Fon would send *ngwerong*, one or two of the bags were handed over to *tanshiylav*, the head of the attendants, to detail some attendants to go on the Fon's errand. The *ngwerong* police from the Fon's own sector of the palace was usually neater and generally there was greater courtesy and respect from the public than towards those of *ngwerong la'*, that is to say, from the *ngwerong* sector of the palace (Mzeka 1978"94).

The two *atanto'* called *vibanri* which means 'the hurriers' also kept things of *ngwerong* in their compounds. Theirs was meant to be used to hurry the Fon's tappers whenever there was a shortage of mimbo in the palace like when the Fon was fined by *ngwerong*. But *ngwerong*, nor matter its source, when on duty, nor matter the nature of the duty, is the Fon's *ngwerong* on the Fon's duty. An attack on it physically or symbolically is an affront to the Fon as an institution and that is tantamount to an attack on the whole state. Everyone tries to avoid such involvement. Moreover, punishment for infringement was very severe ranging from heavy fines to banishment or even execution (Mzeka 1978:94).

It is worth noting that the authority of *ngwerong* and its execution of the Fon's orders were impersonal, the Fon taking final responsibility not of course as a person but as an institution. This made it again impersonal so that in the final analysis, no one could be held responsible for the wrong act of *ngwerong*. This was a situation not only to avoid but to abhor. Like the French '*droit administratif*,' such powers were easily abused and there was no means of redress (Mzeka 1978:94).

The Germans did imprison Fon Nga' Bifon and Toombu' who was the Fai Ndzendzev at the time for the execution of Fai Tankum Tsen. When the Fon was squeezed, he pleaded that it was *ngwerong* that did it. *Ngwerong* argued that they only carry out the orders of the Fon and Fai Ndzendzev. Toombu's reaction was that whatever order was given by the Fon, he could not disassociate himself from it. For that the two of them were taken to Bamenda and imprisoned. To the Nso' mind, it was the state that was imprisoned. Collections were made and the two redeemed (Mzeka 1978:94). Here the three-value system came into play, Nso' Christian, and Western. In such a situation, there is bound to be some conflict.

Apart from the functions, *ngwerong* is largely a social group, when one judges from the aspects of eating and drinking and the demonstration of wealth and prowess. It could be established from the ceremonies that they are food and drink centred as indicated by the comments made in the appropriate places above. This justifies the name traditional social association as this study calls it.

The next section deals with *ngiri*, whose social aspects are not any different from those of *ngwerong*, but which may not be as elaborate as in the *ngwerong* association.

6.4.2 Ngiri

Like it is done for *ngwerong* above, here the origin, functions and recruitment into *ngiri* and its various houses are considered. As done for *ngwerong* above, comments are made where appropriate to indicate its social nature.

6.4.2.1 Origin of *ngiri*

The origin of *ngiri* in Nso' is controversial. In their article "Nto' Nso' and its Occupants: Privileged Access and Internal Organisation in the Old and New Palaces", B. Chem-Langhee, Verkijika G. Fanso & E.M. Chilver in *Paideuma: Mitteilungen Zur Kultukunde*, No, 31, 1985:171-172 point out that the origins of *ngiri* were a matter of lively dispute in 1958. Yet, they indicate that according to some versions collected by Kaberry, *ngiri* was acquired from the refugee Fon Kiluun who had derived it from Tikari and 'gave' it to Fon Nso' at Kovifem. They further, indicate that this version is not clear since Fon Kiluun joined Nso' during the Kumbo period.

Besides according to Nso' custom, if Fon Kiluun 'gave' it to Fon Nso' and still remain under his jurisdiction, he would no longer be allowed to retain it as he does.

According to Chilver and Kaberry as cited in Mzeka (1978:106) and affirmed by oral tradition *ngiri*, like its sister institution *ngwerong*, is one of "the things of Rifem." Both, we are told, reached Nso' a long time after Ngonnso' and her followers migrated from there. While *ngwerong* was brought to Nso' sometime in the 18th Century, *ngiri's* arrival is about the early part of the 19th Century when the people of Nso' were already fully settled in Kimbo' and its neighbourhood.

Oral tradition holds that *ngiri* was learned from the Bamums either during the close of Tamanjong's reign or in the early part of the reign of Sembum II. *Ngiri's* arrival on the Nso' scene is therefore within living memory (Mzeka 1978: 106). *Ngiri* is therefore considered 'the thing of yesterday' acquired in the time of Sembum II (c.1875-1907). This echoes the claim of the Fumekuy Smith lineage to have introduced *ngiri* masks from Bamum. Furthermore, the fact that the head of this lineage, though of *nshiyLav* status, is a permanent *ngiri* and *yengiri* member is quoted in support of its nineteenth century introduction (Paideuma Mitteilungen Zur Kultukunde, No. 31 1985:172). From the interviews for this study, some informants held this very view.

Some of the jujus of *ngwerong* notably *kingayasi* and *jwingwerong* it is claimed, were studied and copied from the Bamums at the same time. Although *ngwerong* and *ngiri* were institutions at Rifem, the Nso' did not take along the 'medicines' and the mysteries of the institutions with them when they left Rifem (Mzeka 1978:106).

According to Mzeka (1978:116) this view lends support to the fact that the Nso' leader from Rifem was a woman. Otherwise, that possible explanation could be given for the fact that the Bamum who left Rifem under Nchare at exactly the same time took along *ngwerong* and *ngiri* and the Nso' did not. It also contradicts Dr. Kaberry's findings that "The (Nso') dynasty brought with it the things of Rifem – the regulatory society (*ngwerong*) the princes' society (*ngiri*) and the model of seven royal councillors and seven palace stewards" (Traditional Bamenda, 23, see Mzeka 1978:116).

Ngiri's comparatively new arrival in Nso' is underscored by the fact that most early writings about Nso' made little or no reference to it. It appears to have had a vigorous push from Fon Mapri (c.1907-1910), who preferred it rather than *ngwerong* for the executive functions of the state. If the allegation is true, it marks the beginning of the strain that has continued to plague *ngwerong* and *ngiri* institutions right up to the present. For example, on the 26th December 1976, *ngwerong* and *ngiri* once more clashed openly and a number of persons were admitted to the hospital (Mzeka 1978: 106).

By the time of Nga' Bifon (1910 – 1947) *ngiri* was strong enough to face *ngwerong* in an open fight. It started with a minor incident in Kii' Kingomen and led to a serious clash in the palace a week after, resulting in the destruction of the *ngiri* sector of the palace (Mzeka 1978: 106). This continuous fight could be seen as a struggle for social identity. Hence, the relevance of social identity theory for this study cannot be overemphasised.

6.4.2.2 Functions of *ngiri*

Mzeka (1978:108) indicates that despite its royal character and sometimes royal patron *ngiri vis-à-vis ngwerong* has always, in the Nso' mind, been regarded as holding an inferior position in the Nso' traditional administration. Whether favoured by the Fon as Mapri (1907-1910) did, or ignored and disliked as Nga' Bifon (1910-1947) did, *ngiri* to a majority of the Nso' people has, up to the present, been looked upon as a princes fraternity with little administrative responsibilities. It has got this minor role in traditional administration for the following reasons:

- As noted earlier, its arrival on the Nso' scene is of recent. *Ngiri* is not more than one hundred years old as an institution in the Nso' society.
- Because it is an institution for the royal's *ngiri* cannot *kur* the Fon, that is, cannot put the Fon under house arrest as *ngwerong* can (Mzeka 1990:107).
- *Ngiri* as an institution does not have its leading members in the state's decision-making body. It will be recalled that Ndzendzev and Tankum, the two top *vibai* are also members of the senior *ngwerong* which is the governing body of the *ngwerong* institution. And although Ndzendzev and Tankum may attend *ngiri* executive meetings, they are not technically part of the official executive.
- Being an institution associated with royalty, it never got involved in notorious such as capital punishment and the examination and trial of wizards and witches affecting the Fon or important lineage heads.

Thus, *ngiri's* role in traditional administration, no matter the degree of royal favour, was relatively subdued.

- *Ngiri* was never as elaborately organised as *ngwerong*. It had only two jujus compared to five of *ngwerong* which had a huge and notorious gang of pages noted for witticism, ruthlessness, hardiness and thieving. Of recent *ngiri* has tried to catch up with *ngwerong*. It has created five new jujus and modified the existing ones as recently as 1967.
- The Fon did not have his own *ngiri* as he had his own *ngwerong*. Thus, if the Fon wanted to dispatch *ngiri* on an errand, he had to send a message to *ngiri* officials or went in person (as it is claimed Mapri did) to order *ngiri* out (Mzeka 1978:107-108).

As a consequence of all these, *ngiri's* role in Nso' traditional administration was therefore less conspicuous. It was more so if the Fon sided with *ngwerong* against *ngiri* for one reason or the other. For one thing, the Fon could easily be antagonised against *ngiri* because it was made up of royals among whom were possible successors who were often accused for bewitching the Fon in order to destroy and succeed him (Mzeka 1978:108). Following this less conspicuous and less active position *ngiri* has always been striving to reach parity with (and even to surpass) *ngwerong*. *Ngwerong* on its part strove to combat what it considered the emulative and competitive tendencies of *ngiri*. The destruction of *ngiri's* sector of the palace in about 1935 must not be considered as resulting from the minor incident that took place a week before, but as a product of strained and sometimes bitter relations that had existed between the two institutions long before the clash. (Mzeka 1978:108-109). In order to prove that this was a result of a long-standing tension Mzeka cites the following explanations:

One dry season afternoon on Ngoilum one of the days of the Nso' week, in the year 1935, the *ngiri* inmates felt dry and thirsty. They therefore sent two pages to visit a drinking society in the compound of Kii' in the village of Kigomen to collect some mimbo. When the pages got there, their calabashes were seized and broken by the *ngwerong* members of the society, and the messengers of *ngiri* driven off. The following Ngoilum *ngiri* went to the drinking society in full force. *Ngwerong* members knew *ngiri* would attack and prepared for it. So, when *ngiri* arrived and seized five calabashes of mimbo from the society, *ngwerong* attacked them. There was a fight which continued right back in the capital (Chilver and Kaberry quoted in Mzeka 1978:109).

Mzeka (1978:108), indicates that Fon Nga' Bifon's tacit support for *ngwerong*, emboldened it to attack and destroy *ngiri's* sector after midnight on the day of the clash. *Ngiri's* recent creation of new jujus and modification of the existing ones

should be viewed as an achievement, a goal for which *ngiri* had always been striving. Failure or notions of inability to achieve it in the past had often produced complexes in the *ngiri* institution and thus complicating and adversely affecting its links with *ngwerong*. According to Mzeka (1978:108), it was no accident that *ngiri* created five new jujus thereby surpassing *ngwerong*'s number by two and their nomenclature portrays a relish for arrogance and intimidation:

Taa Mandze also called Moo means owner or elder of the compound. In this case the compound is the palace. In Nso' "Moo" is the praise title for a prince. In Bamum, it means child. *Moo Fon* (child of the Fon); *Moo nganji* (child of the owner of the compound).

Nshiy Kiba': This is the short form for *nshiyav ye kiba*, that is to say, the page who does not only carry the title of page but who actually served in the palace as a page. The message is this; not only you alone (*ngwerong*) serves and guards the Fon. *Momvem*: as in Bamum. The implication is that in Bamum princes are advisers to the Sultan and the second in command is a prince. The others are *shingwar ndze* and *Rifem*: The former means "that which appears suddenly" and the latter is named after the Nso' town of origin (Mzeka 1978:109).

Sometimes challenges are good as they are a source of chances for creativity. Apart from these innovations, there were several renovations. *Yengiri* which existed only in the mystical and musical, now has a displaying juju like that of *ngwerong*. A college of *ngang se ngiri* with the title of *shey* for its non-title members has been created with a system of admission little different from that of *ngwerong*. Although this mask of *shigwala' she ngiri* was *mbumi*, that is, present or gift from the Fon of Oku, the permission to wear and display it had to be given by the Fon of Nso'. And Fon Mbinkar Mbinglo did (Mzeka 1978:110).

Mzeka (1978:110) indicates that some persons expressed surprise that Fon Mbinkar Mbinglo allowed the creation and modification of so many jujus by *ngiri* at one and the same time. Yet to others he was a shrewd and pragmatic administrator who took a bold step to minimise the tension that has always existed between the two institutions. But his critics view his move with suspicion. They claim he did what he did to balance up his scores with *ngwerong* which had tried to execute him when he was young.

6.4.2.3 Recruitment and membership into ngiri

As far as membership is concerned, *ngiri* in Nso' is an association for the royal males only. Thus, in principle only princes or *wonto'* (*wonto'*, plural meaning princes, and *wanto'* singular, meaning prince) in Nso' who extends to the fourth generation belong to *ngiri*. The fifth generation becomes *dui*, and boys recruited from the *dui* which is the extended royal clan were members. Whereas princes got admission as a right, *dui* members were recruited as *ngiri* pages to serve as the *shey wo ngiri la'* who is head of the *ngiri* internees for a period of seven to nine years.

Though all *dui* males were qualified for admission not all were recruited. Mzeka (1978:111), points out that *Yaa wo faa* (circa: 1876 – 1976), the queen-mother and daughter of Fon sembum II, could recall shortly before she died in September 1976, that at the time of her father and his successor Mapri, only two persons were recruited into *ngiri* from each of the following compounds: Ndzendzev, Tankum, Yuwar and Ndzendzetsen. From other *dui* lineages, only one person was recruited from each lineage. This contrasts with what is happening nowadays. Any *dui* person is admitted into *ngiri*. The explanation is that after *ngwerong* ransacked *ngiri's* sector in 1935, its officers decided to admit any *dui* to swell their numbers because there was the belief among *ngiri* members that if they had been as numerous as *ngwerong* members their very number would have been a sufficient deterrent to *ngwerong's* aggression (Mzeka 1978:111).

Ngiri's interned pages, comprised immigrant princes and those exclusively recruited from the *dui* clan, were not as harshly treated as their counterparts of *ngwerong* though they equally slept on bamboo boards and did a stint of seven to nine years. The recruits like those of *ngwerong* stayed in two halls. One group was headed by a *shey* and the other by *tafu'*. Princes did not stay in these halls but in one of the *afai* situated in the Fon's residential sector. They were also said to *shiy nto'*, literally meaning, guarding the palace because they stayed and served there (Mzeka 1978:111).

Before the time of Nga' Bifon, it had become customary for a Nso' Fon to choose from among the young princes, one whom he liked and trusted to be his personal attendant. Such princes were never princes of the first degree and were therefore disqualified from succession. Sembum had Yonka who later was converted and

baptised as Frederick and Mapri had Mbulai the then *Fai Tankum kui* (Mzeka 1978:111).

Shey wo ngiri la' (lordling of *ngiri* home) is nominated by the Fon on the advice of *atangiri* (elders of *ngiri*) and installed by *tawong*. Fai Njomo' of Meluf plays a significant part in the installation ceremonies (Mzeka 1978:111). The title of *Tafu'* has been discontinued. *Tafu'* was a junior mate of *shey*. When the title existed, the holder was selected from among the interned *dui* and installed by the *atangiri*. *Shey* went out hooded. The hood was attached to a loose sleeveless vest reddened with camwood and decorated with cowries. On the hood *shey* wore a feather cap called *kinsii*. As noted elsewhere, this has been replaced with a cowry's mask. A *shey* was either a prince or son of a prince but never that of a princess. For the ordinary interneers who served the *shey* and *tafu'*, the graduation ceremony after seven to nine years of interment was not as hectic and heavy as that of *ngwerong* graduations. The group graduating like their counterparts of *ngwerong* had to '*tang nto'* (be initiated as a person of the palace) before leaving. They brought fowls, large bundles of cooked egusi, cooked food and mimbo. All these were supplied by the families of those graduating (Mzeka 1978:112).

During the years of internment or thereafter, a *shiylav ngiri* could seek admission into any of the two juju houses that *ngiri* had, namely: *yengiri* and *wan mabu'* (Mzeka 1990:112).

6.4.2.4 Yengiri

Yengiri means mother of *ngiri*. Like *yengwerong* it is the innermost organ of the *ngiri* society. As the most senior cult, it keeps and guards the secret totem of *ngiri* which is taken about only in the night. This totem, which makes a rumbling sound when it is taken about, was the only aspect of the *yengiri* cult that existed prior to 1967. In that year, a displaying juju named *yengiri* after the cult and little different from the juju called *yengwerong*, was created. (Mzeka 1990:112).

At the head of *yengiri* procession, is the eldest ex-*shey* of *ngiri*. The various ex-*ashey*, *tawong* and *fai Fanjang* form the executive of the *yengiri* cult. Though the Fon may attend *yengiri* meetings in person, *tawong* is in fact his representative. Information from the Fon to *yengiri* is relayed to members through *tawong* and

decisions of the cult which the Fon should be informed of are transmitted through *tawong* (Mzeka 1990:112).

Fanjang is a *tanto*' and thus a member of the senior *ngwerong*. That he is a member of the *ngiri* executive and at the same time attends it as an attendant of the Fon, shows how in the past the Nso' Fons tried to protect their interest in *ngiri* by having someone on its highest organ who could give them reports from *ngiri*'s executive organ as seen from the opposite angle. *Tawong*, though the "Fon's eys" in *yengiri*, is nonetheless a prince. Sometimes the Fon deliberately took a *nshiyav fai* to *ngiri* just by inviting him to carry his seat to *yengiri*. Such, like *shey laisin* who was Nga's attendant, were thus members of both *ngwerong* and *ngiri* institutions (Mzeka 1990:112).

Mzeka (1990:113) points out that the presence of non-royals in a purely royal institution brought in by the Fon himself appears to have been a well calculated political strategy and does show that the Nso' Fons were well aware that an organisation formed of royals only could be a threat to the occupant of the throne.

Membership of *yengiri* is open only to all *kibai ke dui*, that is to say the great lords of the *dui* clan, elder princes as *dui*. Whereas the *vibai ve dui* and princes are qualified to apply for admission, ordinary *dui* have to apply with a calabash of wine to *yengiri* for character clearance. If *yengiri* members think that his character is good he is then invited and advised to seek admission. Princes are admitted into *yengiri* in one stage. They can only *tee shishur she ngiri*, that is to say, stir or grind pepper for *ngiri*. The notion is that at this first stage the prospective member provides only the rudiments of a meal for *ngiri*. The real meal is to be provided at the second stage. Those seeking membership who are not princes are admitted in two stages of *tee shishur she ngiri* and *tang ngiri* (Mzeka 1978:113).

To *tee shishur* one provides at least twelve goats, seven fowls and twelve calabashes of mimbo and baskets of corn fufu. To *tang ngiri* one provides all the items for the first stage plus the 'Fon's bag' which comprises of two persons, one his wife and the other his attendant. Possibly the princes are saved from this second stage because as children of the Fon, they cannot provide him with wives and servants (Mzeka 1990:114). Like *yengwerong*, *yengiri* is the governing body of the institution.

Thus, one of the advantages of belonging to *yengiri* is to share in the policy formation and direction of the association. Members of the association can also own and use *ngiri* bags and own 'things of *ngiri*' in their compounds. But this privilege is not limited to members of *yengiri* only. Any mature prince with a large family can keep 'things of *ngiri*' in his compound in a special *kitav* (store) with a *range* made out of raffia shoots which is a prohibitive sign to enter. Such a *kitav* could never be entered into by a woman. Like a member of *yengiri*, he could also use *ngiri*'s insignia made up of a bamboo pole with short bamboo into *yengiri*, like that of *yengwerong*, has become less selective and the quality of members has greatly dropped. This could be so because people seem to yearn for food, drink and recognition more than ever before.

6.4.2.5 Wan mabu' group

Wan mabu' used to be the only other juju group in the *ngiri* institution. *Wan mabu'* literally means the child of *mabu'* and *mabu'* is the name of a juju that wears a huge feather gown, carries a wooden mask, two spears and a club. Both *ngwron* and *ngiri* have *mabu'* also called *shingwala* (Mzeka 1978:114). Formerly that of *ngiri* covered its skull with the leaf of a certain plant. Now, like that of *ngwerong*, it wears a mask. The *ngiri* association has its own juju also called *wan mabu'* its own meeting hall and of all Nso' jujus, *wan mabu'* is the most agile. It carries two spears, a shield and a club (Mzeka 1978: 115).

Membership into *wan mabu'* group is open to any *wanto'* (prince) or *dui* whose character is considered good by the *atangiri*. Before being considered for admission, a prospective member must first demonstrate his interest to be admitted. He does this by providing two calabashes of mimbo for the group. It is after such demonstration of interest that his character is examined by members of the group (Mzeka 1978:115). After such examination, the applicant may be invited to provide an admission feast or he may not be invited, in which case he never becomes a member. The admission feast consists of at least two goats, two fowls, two bundles of cooked groundnuts paste called *mboo*, two calabashes of mimbo and cooked fufu corn. As a member of the group, one is exposed to its 'medicines' drinks and feasts in the company of its members when the occasion warrants it. Once a week, on a day called *kilovey*, the members assemble in their own house to drink and to discuss

things affecting *ngiri* and their group (Mzeka 1978:115). This is another aspect of the social nature of these associations.

As previously pointed out, *ngiri*, was less elaborate in its organisation (Mzeka 1978:116). Like her sister association *ngwerong*, it is largely social as we have seen in the many avenues for food and drink.

6.5 Christian missions encounter Nso' traditional social association: *ngwerong*

In this section, some examples are used to elucidate the tension that existed between Christianity and *ngwerong* in the early days. It also portrays to a certain extent what is still going on. The section however indicates how things have changed over the years giving greater opportunities for evangelisation.

6.5.1 Big *fadda* (parish priest) and the *kibaranko*

As mentioned in section 6.4.1.2.4 above, *kibaranko* belongs to the junior *ngwerong*. In his novel, *The White Man of God*, Kenjo Jumbam (1980:141-143), dramatises how one priest confronted the *kibaranko*, a juju from the *ngwerong* traditional social association. The results were that when the juju was unmasked, the one inside was his catechist, and this surprised the Big Father (the parish priest) and he collapsed probably from the shock. However, onlookers held that it was the power of the *kibaranko* that made him to collapse. The incident unfolds as follows: Father Cosmas who assists "Big Fadda", the parish priest is reported dead. Before his death, the Fon of Nso' had conferred him the title *Fai Mission* (meaning lineage head of mission). In 2012, the present Fon of Nso' conferred a similar title to the then Moderator of the PCC, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Festus A. Asana. His was *Fai Ngai Cu* (meaning a lineage head of the house of prayer). This title was given together with Nso' traditional regalia, the *ngwerong* cap and a bag.

Father Cosmas related well with the Nso' people and his death was a shock to them. Two days after his death was the market day and the Fon sent three *Fais* to announce it to the people in the market. The announcement was made and his death celebration was scheduled for Sunday *Gege*. When it was Sunday *Gege*, the long-awaited day for the celebration of the death of *Fai Mission* many people gathered in the Fon's palace. That Sunday afternoon Christians and non-Christians filled the palace, drinking palm wine and firing guns. Some jujus started displaying in the

palace. And at about five o'clock the bell rang for Rosary and Benediction but nobody budged from his/her place to go to church. Big Father then put on his cassock and moved towards the church but it was the assistant catechist who had rung the bell and not Pa Matiu (Matthew). People were still waiting to watch the *kibaranko*, the juju that closes mourning ceremonies, so they could not go to church. Pa Matiu himself the member of the *ngwerong* society was right in the *ngwerong* compound.

Then came the time and the *kibaranko* came out and headed directly to the mission compound. There Big Father confronted it. Jumbam (1980:143) dramatises this part as follows:

Big Father kicked and kicked the *kibaranko* and when it turned round to him he pushed off its big mask and then got the shock of his life. Face to face with the juju he could not believe his eyes.

'Matthew!'

'Father'

'Matthew!'

'Father'

Then he collapsed on the spot. The juju put on his mask and ran back to the palace wilder than ever (Jumbam 1980:143).

This seems to paint the picture of what happened not just in Nso' but in most of Africa and the rest of the two Third World. Everything might not have been "Big Fadda" and *Kibiranko*, but missionaries and cultural aspects that they might not have taken time to study but considered evil just from the first sight. Hence, the need to understand the culture of a people before attempting to transform it with the gospel is necessary and will continue to be so since culture too is dynamic.

6.5.2 The persecution of Christians in Nso' by *nwerong* in the 20th century

The major persecution of Christians in Nso' is dated 1920 after the baptism of nineteen catechumens. It began with the burning down of the church by the "pagans", which in most cases refer to members of the *ngwerong* traditional social association. The burning down of the church house was triggered by the festivities of the Christians after their baptism. When the church building was burnt down, the houses around also got burnt. This included the property Monsignor Plissonneau left

behind after having conducted a baptism. (Lafon 1988:60). Lafon (1988:60) points out that the Fon of Nso' was informed at midnight about the fire incident by Paul Tangwa and Felix Chaiyi. He indicates that the Fon was very surprised and thus exclaimed: "Wir vee ve sevti ji a ton, a ton ne rua!" This means, "those who boasted that they would burn it have actually done it" (Lafon 1988:60).

It is indicated that Christians passed the whole night in vigil around the ashes of the burnt church. The following morning, they said prayers and sang many songs in praise of the Lord, the echoes of which, were heard far and wide. This bold and faithful commitment on the part of the Christians, notwithstanding, the pagans mocking them from a cliff overlooking the burnt church, since they believed that the burning of the church was the end of the movement in the town (Lafon 1988:63).

It seems important to note that the Fon of Nso' and the Christians did not take the incident lightly. He dispatched a messenger to the Divisional Officer in Bamenda, Mr. Duncan, while the Christians sent Aloysius Mukong to Buea to contact the resident, Mr. Ruxton. Following their complaints, an inquiry was conducted and the Christians named twelve persons as those responsible for the fire disaster (Lafon 1988:63).

After the inquiry, these twelve persons were imprisoned for two months and had to pay damages. The Fon requested his people to rebuild the church and the houses that were burnt down and they did. Following the faith of the Christians some twenty pagans gave their names as catechumens (Lafon 1988:63).

Migeod as cited in Lafon (1988:64) points out that the persecution of Christians was supported by the British administrator at the time:

Persecution of the Christians instigated by Ngwerong Society was stepped up. At that time the Divisional Officer in Bamenda was Duncan, an English atheist, who strove with all his might to abolish the catholic religion. All Christians and catechumens were quarantined in Shisong. The Christians waged a civil disobedience campaign to traditional authority. Nothing, they believed, was forbidden them. No pagan could enter a Christian village. These Christian villages soon were everywhere Djottin, Tabenken, Shisong, Njinilom etc. (Lafon 1988:64).

It seems that the more intense the persecution the firmer the Christians stood and the more Christian villages were created.

Again Migeod, further states:

The old pagan element in the population was actively hostile, and the Nigerian Government rather sympathized with them. This made them harr the Christians all the more and many bear marks of beatings which they received. When this failed, they turned to poisoning children and this in secret - the last act to which paganism could resort (Lafon 1988:65).

This was indeed a terrible act. Interestingly pagans found refuge from Duncan, the Divisional Officer, accusing Christians of admitting their wives, without their consent into the church (Lafon 1988:65). In order to reinforce the persecution, the District Officer, Mr. Duncan decreed that all Christian leaders be arrested. This arrest was carried out by the soldiers who were bewildered at the courage of the Christians because they took the chains from them and threw them around their own necks with joy (Lafon 1988:69). Later on the arrest extended to the neighbouring villages such as Sov, from where John Maimo was arrested and Joseph Tar from Mbiame, who was accompanied by Peter Nsame, the catechist, who later suffered the same fate of being tortured by *ngwerong* in Mbiame (Lafon 1988:71).

Lafon (1988:71) points out that when all the Christians had assembled in Kimbo, generally called Kumbo, the headquarter of Nso' Divisional Officer Duncan, told the pagans that religion, that Christianity was nothing and that in Europe not all go to church. In order to demonstrate the strength in unity, he took a bunch of match sticks and told the pagans that if they were united they would crush the Christians in no time. He further advised them not to be frightened by the trousers and shirts the Christians are wearing.

While some of the catechists and Christians were imprisoned, catechist Paul Tangwa was banished on the 8th of March and was also asked never to set foot on Nso'land. Yet he was soon back, in the meantime Joseph Tar was released after two months when another District Officer had replaced Mr. Duncan. Still things did not change. Non-Christians waged war against Christians. In order to prevent Christians from escaping, the members of the *ngwerong* society lit fires all over the town. A fierce fight ensued between Christians and non-Christians, especially those of the *ngwerong* society. The situation was however diffused by four smart Christians of the royal lineage (Lafon 1988:73). Of all the Christians who suffered persecution in Nso' Paul Tangwa and Peter Nsame seems to have suffered the most.

While Paul Tangwa was exiled as we have seen, it is reported that Peter Nsame remained with a permanent mark, the loss of four front teeth as a result of beatings

from the hooded *ngwerong* (Lafon 1988:71; 100 Anniversary 2012:45). In addition, other two Christians – Pa John Ngo and Mama Rosina Kibong are mentioned to have received permanent scars from twelve beatings each from *ngwerong* (Lafon 1988:67). One informant said that recently one other person died with permanent scars on her back. The situation of the first Christians in Nso;’ was so pathetic that the writer of the article: “Tribute to the Ambassadors of the Catholic Faith in Kumbo” in “Celebrating 100years of the Catholic Faith 1912-2012 Diocese of Kumbo” concludes with these challenging questions to the present Christians in Nso’: What is our own contribution to the growth of this faith? Should comfort and lack of self-sacrifice overtake us?” (Celebrating 100 Years: 2012:46).

6.6 Activities of *ngwerong* and *ngiri* considered compatible to Christianity

This section is based largely on various views from the interviews and focus groups’ discussions. It is now seen that these associations contributed financially to support both social issues and development projects in the land. They now say prayers before beginning their meetings and when they have outdoor activities to perform on Sundays, most of it is done after church services. Members of these associations give respect to clergy, and even other Christians who are their members. Recently *ngwerong* permitted some Reverend Fathers from the Roman Catholic Church to come into their courtyard and offered prayers over their drinks before the beginning of their deliberations and consumption. The degree of discipline and strict observance of the laws binding the members is held in high esteem by onlookers. For example, one informant cited their discussion with persons such as Cardinal Christian Tumi and Bernard Fonlon of blessed memory on the issue of the differences between *ngwerong* and Christianity. According to this informant, one of them stated that as far as the respect and keeping of the law is concerned, *ngwerong* is better than Christianity in that *ngwerong* re-enforces its laws but Christianity does not. For example, if a member of the *ngwerong* society commits adultery, he is brought in front of other members, whipped and warned never to repeat it, but Christianity only keeps on praying for the victim.

Members of these associations have respect for seniority. They also help to maintain order and peace in the community. Their masquerades are a source of entertainment to many people, especially during cultural manifestations. Their social

aspects of sharing eating and drinking with one another is synonymous to the communion the church shares. Members of the *wan mambu* group and *kibaranko* have some advantages, for instance that they have to run when in the convoy of their masquerades and so they exercise themselves. Even though some of the informants felt that it is tedious, enslaving, and time consuming some saw something positive in it. For example, being in the palace and running after these masquerades could serve as a type of job for some of the members. Through it they have their livelihood. Some get food for themselves and the family through such activities, since under normal circumstances the masquerades cannot go out and come back without fowls and sometimes goats. *Ngwerong* had been instrumental in fostering church work. In some places *ngwerong* has settled disputes on church land and has even requested the villagers to participate in church Harvest Thanksgiving and some fundraising.

6.7 Activities of *ngwerong* and *ngiri* considered incompatible with Christianity

From both the focused groups' discussions and various interviews conducted for this study the following activities of *ngwerong* and *ngiri* could be considered incompatible with Christianity. Expensive nature of initiation into the *yengwerong* and/or the *yengiri* group, unhealthy competition among members, and the fact that some even borrow money to spend for such occasions is considered incompatible with Christianity. The taking of an oath and the legalistic nature of their rules is also seen to be incompatible with Christianity. The lack of the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation, the hidden secret and selfishness is considered incompatible with Christianity. Though some people pointed out that nowadays things are changing and one is allowed to bring such food home and share it with others. The impersonal nature of the hooded *ngwerong* and *ngiri*, could lead them to act harshly towards the people they consider their enemies. The rash nature of some masquerades is also considered incompatible with Christianity. More often when they lost a member, they seem to have no concern for the bereaved, rather they focus on their food and drink.

One has to give the number of items as agreed during his initiation not more not less. Sometimes it is the family of the dead member who suffers the consequences and not the dead person for he is gone. The discriminatory nature, not admitting women into these groups is considered incompatible with Christianity even though

one may say that it is like in the Roman Catholic Church where the priests are only males. The demand to provide wives and boys for the Fon and society respectively as part of the fulfilment for initiation into certain groups is considered incompatible with Christianity. Also, the seizing of palm wine from people for occasions in the palace is considered to be unfair for this deprives the owners.

Sometimes members use injunctions indiscriminately and place them in areas that perhaps belong to people they hate. Inequality in the distribution of food unlike in communion, where the size is the same for all is considered incompatible with Christianity. The display with spears and clubs is dangerous; sometimes people sustain injuries, from the throwing of these implements which is sometimes done at random. Some of the medicines they have affect even non-members and in order to be cleansed one has to pay a fine. Members especially those in the *yengiri* and *yengwerong* groups are believed to be paying double allegiance because their initiations are considered incompatible with Christianity. There appear to be an abuse of power by some of the members. This can however be a general issue for it happens in many groups even in the church that some people go against the tenets not as a corporate body but as individuals.

Generally, there are a few groups, for example terrorists whose focus is either to kill or destroy. Traditional social associations teach good virtues but individuals sometimes misbehave and impersonate on behalf of the association.

It seems that some people join the *yengiri* or *yengwerong* in order to display wealth and prowess. This behaviour is incompatible with Christianity. Other members also concentrate on food and drink. But the Bible teaches that: "...the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking..." (Rom. 14:17), and that 'man does not live by bread alone...' (Luke 4:4). Hence, the focus of these members is incompatible with Christianity.

6.8 Conclusion

Mankind from creation is social, and likes to identify with his/her kind. The affirmation of Adam: 'This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh...' (Gen. 2:23), confirms this view. Africans in particular have never learned to live in isolation. They are a communal people. As we have seen, Christians are members in the *ngwerong* and

ngiri traditional social associations. Some of these Christians, like Matthew are catechists and elders in the church. And if all the jujus were to be unmasked, who knows, one may see a prominent Christian like Matthew, the catechist. Hence, there is a need to de-stigmatise those members who are Christians and instead use them to evangelise those who are non-Christians in *ngwerong* and *ngiri*.

These traditional social associations need to be preserved. If some of their activities have to be transformed care should be taken that they are not destroyed, for the Nso' people could completely lose their identity. In order to allow this rich cultural heritage to blossom, there is a need to de-stigmatise Christians who are members of these groups so that they can perform the task of evangelisation. This would let them be authentically Nso' and authentically Christians in their setting. We shall attempt to explain how this could be achieved in the next chapter.

Following the compatible and the incompatible activities of both the *ngwerong* and the *ngiri vis á vis* the tenets of Christianity, the following solutions were proposed as a way forward by the interviewees and the focus groups:

- The construction of a chapel in the palace for prayers and Bible studies. The chaplains could come from various denominations and be allowed to enter the *ngiri* and *ngwerong* associations so as to pray with them and remind them of what God expects of his people.
- If Jesus were present today physically and happens to come to Nso' he will certainly visit these associations.
- It is necessary to identify with the members of these associations for this will provide opportunities for evangelisation as Christian virtues could be brought to those practices considered incompatible with Christianity.
- The identification with these people should echo that of Paul in Athens and it should be aimed at winning them for Christ. In this venture care needs to be taken not to destroy but to transform culture.
- Christianity from history has no culture. Hence, some good practices could be identified and Christianised.
- Dialogue with the leaders of various groups in these associations is necessary.

The next chapter would suggest ways by which some of these proposals could be realised.

CHAPTER 7

RESEARCH FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Research findings: A summary

A good number of Christian missions and culture related issues that were noticed in this research, featured in North Africa and Cameroon in Sub-Saharan Africa as well as in the case study, Nso'. These issues include: language, syncretism, mission and colonialism, the neglect of the African worldview, Christian missions and conflicts. These five issues are discussed below.

At the end of chapter 6, some proposals were made from the interviews and focus groups as approaches to the situation in Nso', the case study. The said proposals are discussed under 7.1.6 below.

Meanwhile the seventh issue – the place of culture in Christian missions, crowns the findings and emphasises the general significance of culture in Christian mission. It is discussed in section 7.1.7 of this chapter.

7.1.1 Language: A cultural identity issue

In chapter 2 where Christian missions in North Africa: Egypt, Ethiopia and Nubia are treated, it was realised that one conspicuous area of cultural identity issue was that of language. Particularly it was seen that the use of indigenous languages was necessary for the transmission of the gospel. It was only through this means that the gospel of Christ could truly incarnate the masses, especially the indigenous population.

Concretely, in section 2.7.1 of chapter 2 it was noticed that one of the factors that facilitated the spread of Christianity among the original Egyptian population of the Nile valley was the use of the Egyptian language. It was realised that, at first, given the Hellenic culture that prevailed at the time in Alexandria, Greek was the general medium of communication for Christians. Some translation of the New Testament books was made when the Christian message spread beyond the cultivated Greek-speaking population to the original Egyptian inhabitants, three of the native Egyptian dialects - the *Sahidic*, the *Bohairic* and the *Bashmuric* in use became the media for

the new versions of the Scriptures. The *Bohairic* version later became the official dialect for the Coptic Church.

In addition to the canonical books, there was an apocryphal Egyptian literature that witnessed to the appetite it sought to satisfy because of its emotional, uncritical quality and its free handling of incidents without concern for historical accuracy. In other words, the local needs shaped the church. In Egypt, the Coptic Church was Coptic, in and through its very own language, proudly possessed, and its means of expression in personal prayer and common worship.

In section 2.9.1 of chapter 2 that concerned the church in Axum in Ethiopia, it was noticed that according to an Abyssinian legend, nine saints, who probably came from Syria towards the end of the fifth century helped to build up the Christian Church in the country. These missionaries (the nine saints), translated the Bible into Ge'ez from a version of the Septuagint in use in the Patriarchate of Antioch. This lofty endeavour as we saw did not however remain intact, rivalry cropped up between the abbots and the king, which greatly affected Axum.

The consequence was that the power of Axum declined and the centre of Ethiopia shifted south from the Tigre. Yet some positive contributions were realised. For example, inculturation of the gospel within the vernacular and liturgical innovations utilised ingredients of traditional culture. Furthermore, in section 2.9.1.2.2 of chapter 2 it was noticed that, a Jesuit priest, Pedro Paez, who came to Abyssinia in 1603 with his remarkable linguistic ability, learned to read, write and speak the vernacular Ge'ez within twelve months of arrival and was soon recognised as an eloquent speaker. Having accomplished the linguistic task, he opened a school at Fremona in Axum for both the Portuguese and Abyssinian pupils. As we noticed in chapter two, 'he was the most capable and successful missionary that ever entered Abyssinia.'

As far the the language situation in Nubia is concerned, in section 2.9.2.1.2 of chapter 2 it was noticed that three languages were used in the Nubian Church in different ways: Greek for the liturgy: prayers; songs and chants; and Scripture recitation. Coptic was used for communication with the patriarchate, the mother-church of Alexandria. Nubian languages were used to recite Psalms and prayers. As time went on, the Scriptures which were only in Greek were being translated into the Nubian language. Though at one point the Nubian Church developed its own

lectionary, it did not divert from the practice of the church in Egypt. This shows that the translation of the Bible into indigenous languages did not necessarily detach Nubia from the global link with others. And this research holds that it is something to emulate.

In Cameroon, given the great number of languages it was an odious task for the missionaries to choose any for the transmission of the gospel. In section 4.6.3.2 of chapter 4 it is mentioned that Cameroon has many tribes and they speak a variety of languages. Despite that, Alfred Saker found favour with the Douala language, which was used in the Victoria (now Limbe) area of the coast, and later the Bali language used by the Basel Mission in the Bamenda area of the Grasslands.

Interestingly, the Victoria congregation of the Baptists who had joined the Basel Mission in Victoria did not agree to use the Douala language in church or in school, but preferred English and German. In addition, the whole congregation was not prepared to have services with the Bakweri Christians, the natives of the Buea area.

Ironically, those who argued against the use of the Cameroonian native language preferred German, English or French. Indeed, to be civilised as they have been taught and as they understood it was to speak one of those European languages – German, English or French.

In Nso' as was seen in chapter 5, the Fon and his councillors acting on the influence of the Roman Catholic missionaries, decided in August 1938 to forbid the Basel Mission from preaching in the Bali language in Nso'land (Keller 1968:72). As far as this issue is concerned, oral tradition holds that Nso' people needed their own linguistic identity.

Today the Nso' people are happy to read the Bible in Lamnso. In most if not all the congregations in Nso, one of the lessons on Sundays is read in Lamnso. In rural congregations where there are no strangers the sermon is preached in Lamnso. Meanwhile, in town congregations where there are some people who do not understand Lamnso the sermon is preached in English and translated in Lamnso for the Nso' people, especially the ones who are not literate.

Generally, the translation of Scriptures into indigenous languages was a condescending endeavour and a mark of cultural identity for the African people.

7.1.2 Syncretism: A dilemma

The research confirmed the fact that in an attempt to make the gospel relevant to the people in their context, there is that tendency to be syncretistic and any struggle to avoid syncretism runs the risk that the gospel becomes irrelevant to the context. In fact it became difficult to decipher what syncretism in essence is. If it is just a mixing of religious aspects of one religion with another religion, then Christianity can never be free from it. It was also realised that the use of the word syncretism depends from where one starts his/her theologising.

For example, in section 3.6 of chapter 3, Bevans and Schroeder (2004:60-61) indicate that theologians who begin their theologising with a reverence for culture would say that syncretism as a process is inevitable and that the risk involved is a risk well taken. Hence, *Mission-Shaped Church* (2004:91), points out that all attempts at inculturation struggles with the danger of syncretism and indicates that in the attempt to be 'relevant' one may fall into syncretism, and in the effort to avoid syncretism one may become 'irrelevant' (Mission-Shaped Church 2004:91).

Aspects of syncretism in Egypt as was seen section 2.6.2 of chapter 2 were deduced from the popular Egyptian religion, which was much concerned with magical mysteries, demonstrated by the famous cult of Osiris. The natives believed in a future life and held that such could be secured through Osiris who, though slain by evil, had triumphed in a resurrection. The ambition of the Egyptian devotee was to carry out successfully the magical rites by which Osiris had overcome the enemy.

In this practice, a moral demand was not wanting since there was a weighing of good and evil before passing to the enjoyment of future happiness. This belief and practice could serve as fertile ground for the seed of the gospel. Hence, Christianity, with its proclamation of a Saviour who conquered death was expected to find a sympathetic hearing, but not without syncretism. In Egypt, other examples of syncretistic practices abound. One more might suffice: The Copts were tireless in producing embroideries regarding the biblical stories, and perhaps in rewriting older documents to suit their own taste. As mentioned in chapter 2, one of the characteristics of this reshaping according to M.R James was 'the reckless identification of the Virgin Mary and other Mary's of the Gospels' (Groves 1948:40). This was inculturation, which at

the same time was not free from syncretism as they were doing the things to suit their taste rather than to enhance the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In Axum (Ethiopia) it was noticed that some positive contributions were realised in the area of inculturation of the gospel within the vernacular: liturgical innovations that utilised ingredients of traditional culture. This could not happen without syncretism. It seems important to recall Bosch's warning mentioned in section 2.9.1.2.2 of chapter 2, that culture has been one of the four "relationships" by which major compromises of the Christian mission across the centuries have occurred (Bosch 1991:291). For example, when Frumentius was consecrated Bishop and returned to Ethiopia about 341 A.D., the king accepted the Christian faith and made Christianity a national religion. Soon some changes followed: the early coins that bore the symbol of a crescent and disc were gradually replaced by the one that bore the cross. This was not far from syncretism. Yet, it was a desirable example of inculturation.

In Nubia, as was noticed in 2.9.2.1.5 of chapter 2, saints appeared frequently on the walls of cathedrals and must have occupied a large place in the believers' lives and devotions. While some of these saints were monks, some were Christians of all sorts. For example St. George was a warrior, and remembered for that, while St. Menas was remembered for a prayer addressed to him by a barren woman owing to the fact that she conceived (Kalu 2005:94). We also saw that biblical saints, for example, the Virgin Mary were addressed in people's prayers. The Nubian Christians held her as a 'continuation of the goddess Isis' in Egypt, and very similar to Kandaka among the Nubians. This was syncretism in its totality.

As far as angels are concerned, it was realised that the Nubian Church had a particular fascination with archangels so much so that the attachment to them became one of their obsessions. According to their belief, the angel in the fiery furnace is Michael. Other spiritual beings, especially the "four living creatures" in Ezekiel 1:5 ff and Revelation 4:6 ff, held endless fascination for the common Nubian (Kalu 2005:95). There could not be pure inculturation without syncretism.

In Cameroon, Christian missions adapted a good number of elements from traditional religion and culture. These elements include, musical instruments, some of which were originally used by traditional social associations considered pagan by early missionaries to the Nso'. They also adapted the "peace plant" (*kekeng*) -

dracaenea, ngiri and/ngwerong bags, *sho* (a special calabash used in Nso' traditional religion). Two popular dances, the *chong* and *nsamba* now operate in the Roman Catholic Church premises in almost all congregations in Nso'.

These are aspects of religion and cultural syncretism, but they are all considered inculturation. The excitement of this inculturation was triggered after the Vatican II.

7.1.3 Mission and colonialism

Glimpses of mission and colonialism were seen in North Africa, especially in the area of language as the predominant means of transmitting the gospel was Latin. As was mentioned in chapter 2 the North African Church Fathers were even great promoters of Latin. Indeed, the creation of what is known as ecclesiastical Latin as we noticed took place in North Africa, in and through Tertullian's writings (Sundkler & Steed 2000:22). Consequently, in North Africa they used Latin and bible translations were in Latin, a language appropriated for the Church's elite by Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine, but never fully assimilated by the labouring masses on the inland estates (Sundkler & Steed 2000:28). It was nevertheless noticed that the Coptic Church used the Coptic language as a mark of protest and identity. The Christians of Axum and Nubia also loved their indigenous languages. Most of Egypt was however suppressed by Rome.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the situation was even more alarming as Western missionaries deliberately, ignorantly and inevitably linked the gospel with colonialism. In section 3.4 of chapter 3, it was noticed that for more than four centuries the expansion of the Christian Church has coincided with the economic, political and cultural expansion of Western Europe. From the stand point of Asians and Africans, as Taylor (1963:6) points out this expansion has been an aggressive attack on their own way of life.

Furthermore, it was noticed that quite inevitably the Christian Faith has for many in these lands been inextricably bound up with this Western aggression. In addition, it was indicated that, it has also to be admitted quite frankly that during these centuries the missionaries of the Christian Church have commonly assumed that Western civilisation and Christianity were two aspects of the same gift which they were commissioned to offer to the rest of mankind (Taylor 1963:5-6). According to Taylor

“the assumption was sometimes quite conscious and was explicitly stated. More often it was quite unconscious and would have been indignantly denied” (Taylor 1963:6).

According to Isichei (1995:92), the number of missionaries at work in Africa expanded dramatically during the heyday of imperialism – (1880-1920). Both mission and imperialism were thus intertwined and operated on one postulate, the superiority of the missionary culture over the other (Isichei 1995:92). Isichei (1995:92) opines that no one became a missionary with the conscious intention of furthering imperialism. Yet, it was never easy to separate the missionary motive from the colonialist motives. The missionary was a colonialist some colonialists were missionaries, either directly or indirectly.

Christian missions in Nso’ like in the entire country and Africa at large was intertwined with colonialism. Take the case of the coming of various Roman Catholic missionaries to Nso’. The German Sacred Heart Fathers came within the German administration, 1912 – 1915, the French Sacred Heart Fathers within the French rule, 1915 – 1923 and the British Mill Hill Missionaries during the British reign, 1923–1970.

Generally, it is worth noting that while some of the missionary motives for bringing the gospel to Africa were pure, there were a host of other motives that were impure. While we regret the mistakes, missionaries made in their attempt to spread the gospel, we also realised that some of the things they did were of great help to Africans. For example, the institution of mission schools and hospitals greatly relieved people of some ignorance and restored them mentally and physically, while the gospel gave them spiritual enrichment.

7.1.4 The African worldview was despised

The missionaries as the research generally established neglected the African worldview. Consequently, they never made proper use of the riches of its cultural heritage. A good number of them saw nothing good in Africans people. Some of the missionaries considered Africans as blank slates *tabula raza* to be filled. By so doing they missed a lot of key issues of beliefs and customs that would have been used to enhance the gospel message. Where they realised their mistakes, and

started using such symbols and customs, the understanding of the gospel flourished. For example, when they used musical instruments in Nso', the creation of the Lamnso' and the singing of songs in Lamnso has greatly enriched Christian worship in Nso' and even beyond.

That notwithstanding, the damage the early missionaries caused to African culture may never be recovered. As we noticed, they often adopted a negative attitude towards all practices they did not fully understand and termed them pagan. In chapter 6, we noticed how they destroyed masks and other precious works of art because they considered them as clear symbols of idolatry and typical of heathenism. It was observed that these missionaries were repeating in mission lands what they once suffered in their cultures during missionary eras in their own lands. According to the missionaries, the destruction of native worship places and supposedly heathen holy places, was often part of the visible evidence that the gospel had conquered the kingdom of darkness in pagan lands. It was however noticed that some of the objects were carried to Europe and today one can see them in Museums in Europe. For example, this researcher saw a juju mask from Nigeria in the Museum at Liverpool, in the United Kingdom (2007).

7.1.5 Christian missions and conflicts

It was noticed that Christianity had not had it easy. Its spread has been full of conflicts. The causes of these conflicts have been both from internal and external sources. For example, the theological controversies in North Africa, came from within and the invasion of Islam from without.

In 2.9.1.2 where the influence of the Gospel in Ethiopia, is discussed, it was noticed that the relationship between the church and the state has over the years been that of suspicion and even romanticism in that major decisions of the church were influenced by secular authorities.

In Ethiopia, the fortunes of the church were always tied to the fortunes of the throne and bound with legal cords (Kalu 2005:109). The crown practically funded the clergy, founded most of the monastic houses and supported them by donating revenues from parts of the kingdom or the payments from Egypt for using the waters of the Blue Nile.

One outstanding example of such a relationship is that Emperors provided diplomatic cover in the negotiations for the *abuna* (chief Bishop of the Ethiopian church) (Falk 1997:55) from Egypt and promoted the struggle to have indigenous archbishops (Kalu 2005:109). This type of relationship indicates that the church could not have the power to be prophetic since under normal circumstances, it could not challenge the ones who supplied her needs.

Nevertheless, we saw an instance when a clergy rebuked the king when he was derailed. For example, when Emperor Made Zion (1314 – 1344) became sexually promiscuous, Abba Anorewos, confronted him. Yet, the king had him whipped in public and persecuted many houses until he was stunned by an incredible fire outbreak that consumed his palace. The result was that the king repented and became one of the most generous patrons of the church (Kalu 2005:110).

In Nso' it was mentioned in chapter 6, Duncan, from Britain, the Divisional Officer at the time in Bamenda, supported the persecution of Christians by *ngwerong*. Christians stood their ground. They were all quarantined in Shisong and waged a civil disobedience campaign to traditional authority.

The example of the animosity of school children from three denominations in Nso' that was shown towards each other because of doctrinal differences in baptism is one among many. We noticed how they hurled insults against one another and even fought with one another because of one doctrinal issue.

An understanding of social identity theory would relate well with these issues of one group against the other in that each group sees itself as better than the other.

7.1.6 The situation in Nso': Issues from the field

The peculiar issue in Nso' concerned what the missionaries called "secret societies." It was confirmed that the missionaries derogatorily and prejudicially called traditional social associations "secret societies". First, they did not know their origin and second, they did not take time to study their roles in communities where they served. This research discovered that, traditional social associations – *ngwerong and ngiri* are simply custodians and preservers of Nso' culture. Most of the activities of these groups as the research has proven are based on social matters. For example, most of them are centred around food and drink, or to put simply, on feasting.

That notwithstanding the research has also realised that some of the activities of *ngwerong* and *ngiri* are incompatible with the gospel. The last section of chapter 6 mentioned such activities and made some suggestions that are to be discussed in this section as earlier indicated. Considering that the suggestions are many, the researcher has chosen to briefly comment on all but discuss two in greater detail. One concerns Christian mission and culture in general and the other concerns the attitude of Christ towards culture. These two issues are discussed in 7.1.7 and 7.2 respectively. Meanwhile sections 7.1.6.1 – 7.1.6.6 are general comments on issues raised concerning the core culture of Nso' and suggestions made for a way forward at the end of chapter 6.

7.1.6.1 From the interviews and focus groups' discussions, it was suggested that a chapel be constructed in the palace for prayers and Bible studies. The chaplains could come from various denominations and be allowed to enter the *ngiri* and *ngwerong* associations to pray with them and remind them of what God expects of his people.

This suggestion came out of interviews and focus group discussions. It seems a bright idea but one has to consider the realities of the time. Many Christian denominations are developing in Nso'. Hence, if the Roman Catholics and the Presbyterians for example, agree to build a chapel in the palace and the next day the Baptists and the Apostolics' agreed to build theirs and so on, there will be no space.

In Nso' there are many opportunities through which one can come in close contact with members of these associations. The first opportunity is that a good number of them are Christians. The second is that they all meet in one *ngwa* (traditional mode of saving) group or the other. The third opportunity is that each extended family in Nso' is made up of people from almost all social groups. Therefore, such opportunities could be used to discuss amicably ways by which to curb activities which are not acceptable for the growth of the community

Christians and priests who are members of such associations, especially by birth could be encouraged to visit these members on the *ngwerong* and *ngiri* meeting days and share with them and pray with them. It was already mentioned in the research the positive presence and impact such visits had had especially from clergy.

7.1.6.2 It was observed that if Jesus was “present today physically and happens to come to Nso’ he will certainly visit these associations.” There is a lot of evidence in the New Testament concerning Jesus and his visit to places and people considered “unchristian”. In fact, Jesus’ attitude towards the neglected and the despised is indicative that if he were in Nso’ he would visit these traditional social associations. That is accepted but since this issue seems more important it is discussed in 7.2 below in greater detail where it serves for the conclusion.

7.1.6.3 “It is necessary to identify with the members of these associations for this will provide opportunities for evangelisation. This is because Christian virtues could be brought to those practices considered incompatible with Christianity”. This suggestion is similar to the one in 7.1.6.1 above. Hence the ways of identifying with the members of such associations is as proposed therein.

7.1.6.4 “The identification with these people should echo that of Paul in Athens and it should be aimed at winning them for Christ”. In this venture care needs to be taken not to destroy but to transform culture. It would be necessary to identify with these people. And as the suggestions goes, Paul’s approach in Acts 17:32ff could be used. In it Paul identified the key issues and then engaged the discussion. Similarly, some of the key issues concerning these traditional social associations have been identified. One of them is that their meetings are highly social, food and drink-centred. Hence, one could share with them what the Bible says about food and drink. In doing that, note needs to be taken of the fact that Jesus himself provided food and drink for people on several occasions as can be found in the four Gospels. For example, the feeding of five thousand people is recorded in all the four Gospels (Matt.14:13-21; Mk.6:30-44; Lk. 9:10-17; Jn. 6:1-15).

7.1.6.5 “Christianity from history has no culture. Hence, some good practices could be identified and Christianised.” In view of the place of culture in Christian mission, this point is discussed in 7.1.7. Some of the elements from Nso’ culture, like musical instruments, Nso’ language, symbols, dance, etc. are already being used in the Christian denominations in Nso’.

7.1.6.6 “Dialogue with the leaders of various groups in these associations is necessary.” One of the focuses on Christian mission in recent years has been

dialogue with ATR, and other faiths, especially Islam. Traditional social associations are not religious groups. But they have over the years been misrepresented.

In his post Synodal apostolic exhortation *Africae munus* the Pope mentioned the need to research deeper into such associations which in other areas are called cults. In that exhortation, *Africae munus*, Pope Benedict XVI emphasised the elements of the preceding synods, such as inculturation, dialogue and scientific research to come to terms as well with ‘the vital distinction between culture and cult and to discard those magical elements which cause division and ruin for families and societies’ (Sourou 2014:148).

This research has touched on this assignment in the context of Nso’. Yet it cannot claim that all is now very clear and sure. More research could therefore be conducted and perhaps use what Schroeder and Bevans have termed “Prophetic Dialogue” (2011:115-154).

7.1.7 The place of culture in Christian missions

Out of the concerns raised at the end of chapter 6, the issue of culture and Christian missions needed more clarification. This section is thus set to tackle it.

The researcher agrees with Bosch (1991:291) that culture has been one of the four “relationships” by which major compromises of the Christian mission across the centuries have occurred. Generally, this research has discovered that over the centuries culture has remained the main vehicle for Christian missions. In no given era has Christianity ever operated without a link to culture. The transmission of the gospel and the debates about the right or proper way of doing mission went on and is still going on within culture. Just a cursory look at the vast literature on mission indicates the place of culture in it because most of it says something about mission and culture. For example, Bevans and Schroeder’s *Constants in Context* as used below proves the prominent place of culture in Christian mission over the years.

In their different Types of Theology; A, B and C one finds culture discussed among other constant elements, like Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, soteriology and anthropology. There was no era in Christian mission where culture was not useful. Even in the pietistic period where the focus was on soul-winning, culture had its place. Tertullian the classicist who was somehow against culture could not do

without it. He had to use the language and other cultural realities of the time, to put forth his arguments concerning the message of Christ (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:48).

In this section the researcher engages with the view of Bevans and Schroeder (2004:33-34) in relation to three Types of Theology: A, B and C. The discussion illustrates and clarifies the place of culture in mission.

7.1.7.1 Culture and type A theology:

According to Bevans and Schroeder (2004:47) the gospel never encounters a people in a vacuum. According to them, human beings are meaning-making animals and work out and express that meaning through human culture. Although Robert Schreier as they point out acknowledges that culture is a notoriously slippery concept, he however, following Jens Loenhoff, proposes a definition that includes three aspects or dimensions: First, culture is 'ideational,' providing a grid by which the world can be interpreted and according to which life can be lived. Such a grid as they indicate includes: beliefs, values and codes of conduct; it provides the culture's basic worldview. Second, culture is 'performances,' every culture has ritual ways by which its basic worldview can be expressed and through which members of the culture are bound together. Such performances might be cultural celebrations like Independence Days, or 'embodied behaviour' like forms of greetings etc. Third, culture has a 'material' dimension; every people has a distinctive language, food, clothing, music and so on.

They also indicate that culture can be conceived in the famous distinction of Bernard Lonergan, as either classicist or empiricist. From the first perspective, culture is normative, universal and permanent. According to this view, there is only one culture, and that is the culture of the West. The empiricist perspective defines culture as a set of meanings and values that informs a way of life. In this way, therefore, culture is neither normative nor universal, nor is it seen as a permanent achievement. "Culture is simply the way people have sought and continue to seek to make sense out of their lives in particular situations. It may not be perfect; it may be seriously flawed. But it is basically something healthy and good. From this perspective, no culture can be considered better than another" (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:47).

Stephen B. Bevans, points out a proposed six models that emerge – according to particular contexts and/or persons’ theological orientations – in the encounter of Christian faith with human culture: for example, the translation model regards culture somewhat positively but focuses more on the faithful transmission, rather than something good and revelatory in itself. The anthropological model starts with a basic trust of culture’s goodness and revelatory possibilities, and proposes that the wealth often hidden in a culture might offer new riches to the Christian self-understanding (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:48). Type A theology they say would most likely regard culture from the classicist perspective. The key figure in this Type A theology is Tertullian, who is remembered for his fierce antipathy for culture: ‘What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem.’ Yet he could not escape culture since he had to express himself using Stoic philosophy and Roman legal categories (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:48).

Consequently, Type A thinking caused Christianity, to be spread by means of a *tabula rasa* approach, that is, local culture was to be swept aside, so that people would be able to practice Christianity in a ‘pure’ manner. In nineteenth century Britain, missionary activity was caught up with ‘the white man’s burden’ – to bring ‘civilisation’ to benighted peoples. Since other cultures were basically despised, there was no question of employing the performance or material aspects of culture in Christian expression, and no possibility of seeing Christianity from the perspective of African or Asian worldviews (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:49).

Clearly, Type A theology adopts a counter-cultural approach, in which some Christians even today see no value in culture. For them the valuation of anything human is a serious mistake, and the gospel is meant to confront and judge culture, not to be enriched by it (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:49).

Type A theology thus develops around the insight that true humanity is achieved in submission to an order that is beyond human making but accessible to humanity through God’s gracious revelation. Mission within the context of Type A theology, therefore, might be characterised as the effort to save souls and extend the church. Without the saving knowledge of Christ, offered by the church, human beings cannot

be saved; without the structures of the church, the reign of God on earth, men and women cannot avail themselves of the means of salvation. Salvation is found not in the transformation of the world or the enhancement of the human, but in the recognition of the worlds transitoriness and the value of eternal life (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:49).

Culture, although it has no religious significance *per se*, might be used to make Christianity clearer, to better communicate the gospel or help Christians better express their faith. But it might also be regarded as something to be exorcised, even eliminated altogether, so that Christ might establish 'his new creation' (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:49). This view of culture in Type A theology as Bevans and Schroeder (2004:49) indicate, has motivated millions of Christians in the two-thousand-year span of Christianity to suffer incredible hardships and to risk their lives so that the world might believe and be saved.

While today its influence may be on the wane in Roman Catholicism, many perspectives of Type A theology, they say, are flowering in some evangelical circles, particularly like A.D. 2000 and Joshua Project (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:49).

Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopaedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joshua_Project indicates that "The Joshua Project" (formerly part of A.D. 2000) is an organisation seeking to highlight the ethnic groups of the world with the least followers of evangelical Christians. Accordingly, this project maintains ethnologic data to support Christian missions and is based in Colorado Springs, United States of America (also see Tennent 2010:364-365).

7.1.7.2 Culture in type B theology: "Mission as discovery of truth"

Type B theology aims to show the compatibility of human culture with Christianity. In this respect, culture might even serve as a hermeneutical tool to understand Christianity even more profoundly, as Christianity moves into new cultural contexts. The work of Christians according to Origen, 'is to take the materials of the heathen world and fashion from them objects for the worship and glorification of God' (quoted in Bevans & Schroeder 2004:60).

Type B theology would interact with culture, probably through the use of the anthropological model of contextual theology. It would begin by listening attentively to the culture in an attempt to discern the presence of God, who, it is convinced, has been in the culture even before Christianity's arrival. In so doing, it would try to excavate the hidden treasure of Christ that is buried in the warp and woof of cultural patterns and values. Its effort would be to call the culture to its deepest identity by means of the illuminating and ultimately purifying message of the gospel. Its method of evangelisation would begin with a thorough 'mission in reverse' - it would only dare preach the word of the gospel after it had itself been evangelised by the God who is already there (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:60). They point out that the danger of this approach would be to fall into a pattern that Richard R. Niebuhr characterised as 'the Christ of culture,' an uncritical acceptance of culture that ultimately distorts the gospel which is being preached (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:60).

Another danger as they indicate is that of syncretism born of compromise and infidelity to the gospel. But theologians who begin their theologising with a reverence for culture as they point out would say that syncretism as a process is inevitable and that the risk involved is a risk well taken. Type B theology, they say, is consistent in its conviction that the best of what is human is, in the last analysis, compatible with the dynamics of God's revelation in the word and flesh. Type B theology is thus characterised by a search for truth, truth accessible to humanity through attention to human experience and human reason (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:61).

As far as its implications for mission is concerned, mission in Type B theology is carried out as a search for God's grace that is hidden within a people's cultural, religious and historical context; it is a call to people to fulfil their deepest human desires. Mission in this respect, is an invitation to discover the truth. In that truth lies human salvation, already realised and present in human experience and human culture. The church in mission is the great sacrament of what being human is about; it is a community in which one has access to the mystery and community of God. Contemporary concerns with the inculturation of theology in various contexts find their roots in the confidence in human experience to which Type B theology witnesses (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:61).

7.1.7.3 Culture in type C theology: “Mission as commitment to liberation and transformation”

Type C theology is rooted in the conviction that history is neither detrimental nor accidental to God’s saving action but essential to it. Accordingly, history is the stage on which the drama of salvation is played out (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:70). Consequently, human culture in the perspective of Type C theology is regarded as basically good. However, because of human sin and enslavement to overwhelming powers that sin involves, culture needs to be purified, perfected and healed (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:71).

Following this reason, Bevans and Schroeder (2004:71) point out that Christian faith might best interact with culture, from the point of view represented by Type C theology, in terms of ‘praxis model’ of contextual theology, or in terms of the more positive versions of the ‘counter-cultural model.’ In the praxis model as they indicate, culture is conceived much more from the perspective of the dynamics of social change, and humanity responds to the call to have the gospel interact with culture by recognising that it is involved in culture’s very construction. In this respect, they posit that action, therefore, done out of commitment to gospel values is the beginning and end of such cultural engagement. Liberation theology as they point out is the legacy of Type C theology. In it as they say, focus would be on discerning and working for the fullness of salvation within a particular cultural context, and calling that context to greater growth and greater sensitivity to God’s saving action in history (2004:71).

Employment of the counter-cultural model as they say, would always be based not only on the recognition of the importance of the cultural values and behaviours in shaping attitudes and actions, but also on the recognition of the enslaving and dehumanising aspects that culture can foster. The task of mission in such a situation is thus to first to unmask these unsavoury aspects of culture and to confront them with the saving reality of the gospel. According to Bevans and Schroeder (2004:71) Type C theology recognises the importance of culture as a factor that shapes human life and human attitudes, but it is also suspicious of culture as a human creation. Since all that is human is under the captivity of evil, culture too needs to be liberated by the saving action of Christ. This does not however mean that culture is seen as evil; it is just that the thoroughly ambiguous nature of culture needs to be recognised

as such. When culture is judged in the light of the gospel, and healed where healing is necessary, it can be celebrated as a powerful way by which men and women can express and deepen their understanding of God (2004:71).

The focus of Type C theology to reiterate is on history. History in this case is good and at the same time it is a situation enslaved by sin, thus a situation in which growth without God's grace is impossible. Mission from the perspective of Type C is therefore the commitment of Christians toward the liberation and transformation of humanity, indeed of the world. In this way, Christians proclaim Christ as the true liberator and 'transformer of culture.' And the church is the community of the liberated humanity that finds its identity in its commitment to a liberated world; it is a community-in-mission (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:72). The salvation the church proclaims is a salvation already inaugurated in the saving work of Christ, yet one fully established as the church works with God in confronting the evil of systems and structures, purifying and perfecting human culture, and working for the reconciliation of the entire creation. The fulfilment it looks for, therefore, does not take humanity out of the world; the liberation and transformation that comes from Christ – often by sharing in Christ's suffering – are a liberation and transformation of this world. Missionaries as they point out, see themselves as agents of God's liberating and transforming work (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:72). The church only become the church as it responds to God's call to mission and to be in mission means to change continually as the gospel encounters new and diverse contexts (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:72).

7.2 Conclusion

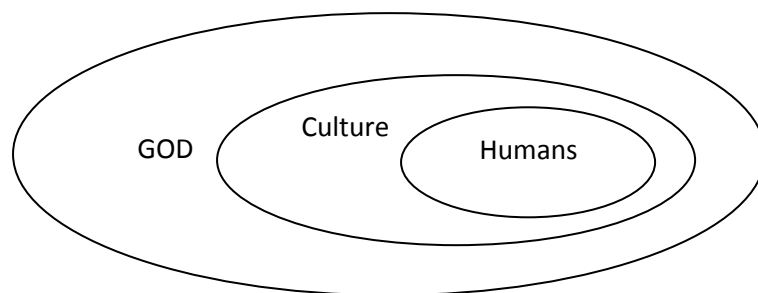
In view of the issues so far discussed and in cognisance of the analysis from Bevans and Schroder above, which could be considered the summary of the argument; this researcher draws the following conclusions:

Christian missions will always operate in culture (s). There is no perfect culture on earth and there will never be any. Each culture has positive and negative aspects. What Christianity needs to do is to make maximum use of the positive aspects of any culture she meets while trying to seek ways by which the negative, especially dehumanising aspects could be transformed.

In so doing Christians need to know that they are just agents and not ultimate possessors of the transforming power. Whenever they claim ultimate possession of the transforming power, they will instead be transferring their own culture and not transforming the receptor's culture. That is what happened in the 19th century missionary era in Africa.

Christians therefore need to know that the mission they undertake is not theirs. The mission is the mission of God (*missio Dei*). Christians are privileged participants in the one mission of God. They thus need to carry it on with awe, treating the people of God they are asked by their churches to look after as if it were God who has assigned them directly to join in God's mission. In this respect, they will follow what this research would like to call an 'integrated missional approach.' This approach follows from that of the anthropologist Charles H. Kraft, which he terms "an integrated approach" in which he talks of God, culture and Humans (Kraft 1996:91).

In developing his approach, Kraft as an anthropologist indicates that their aim as anthropologists is to seek an informed approach to God, human beings, and the culture within which they interact. They reject, he says, either a God-and-human-beings-minus-culture approach or a human-beings-and-culture-minus-God approach. According to him, anthropologists advocate rather, a comprehensive approach involving the study of God, culture, and human beings as necessary for any adequate understanding of any of these three elements and their relationships (Kraft 1996:91). Kraft's approach is represented by the diagram below:



"God in relation to culture and humans within culture" (Kraft 1996:91)

In developing "an integrated approach" Kraft modifies Niebuhr's typology and puts it as follows: An integrated approach: God's attitude toward culture (1996:92). In analysing his own approach, Kraft makes it clear that many people have debated this topic – the relationship between God and culture, what the Christian sociologist H.

Richard Niebuhr calls “Christ and Culture” (1951). Kraft (1996:62) points out that Niebuhr has discussed the largely unconscious positions of quite a number of theologians. According to him, Niebuhr’s work was a long step in the direction in which they the anthropologists are heading. Consequently, he largely incorporates with modification Niebuhr’s presentation into the broader framework toward which they are moving.

In this conclusion, the researcher has largely used Kraft’s modified presentation, but has tailored it towards a slightly newer dimension and calls it an “integrated missional approach” to culture. Below is the explanation to this approach as it unfolds from that of Kraft.

The first view that Kraft (1996:92) tackles, concerns secularists, who see God as “the product of culture”. These secularists, he says, do not regard God as anything more than the product of human imagination. According to them peoples of each society have a different perception of God (or gods) and conclude that the only God/gods there are, are the ones people create. Though this is the position of many anthropologists, Kraft opines that we cannot accept it as our own, since it denies a basic tenet of our Christian position. We must, however, he indicates, accept the very valuable truth that this position points out (though it carries that truth so far) – the recognition that the people of each society see even the true God in slightly different ways (Kraft 1996:92).

On the other hand, he points out that we must equally accept that people do create false gods and bow down to evil spirits, and he indicates that the Bible makes it abundantly clear. But the helpful thing as he puts it, is to recognise both the importance of cultural differences at the perceptual level and the fact that recognising such differences is no threat to our belief in a single God. Furthermore, Kraft (1996:92) states that the true God exists as He is, outside of culture. Accepting this cultural conditioning of perception as he points out enables us to explain both the differences in perceptions of God described in Scripture and God’s patience with these differences.

Mission is God’s (*missio Dei*), Christians as participants must emulate God’s patience with the differences in perceptions of God by humanity.

Kraft indicates that the second view is held by Christians who assume that God is “against culture.” According to him these Christians point to verses such as 1John 2:15, ‘love not the world...’, and assume that what God means by ‘world’ is what we mean by ‘culture.’ (1996:92). But that point of view as he says can be challenged, since the same term for world (*cosmos*) is in John 3:16, ‘God so loved the world’. He points out that the term world is used in two ways: one to designate the people for whom God gave himself in love, the other apparently to designate a system governed by satan (Kraft 1996:92). But the opposition to the latter, as well as the communication of the message of God’s love takes place within human culture and language. World in Kraft’s opinion is something that occurs in culture not all of culture itself. In other words, God is opposed to satan, not to the cultural structures that both God and satan use to interact with human beings (1996:92).

It seems necessary to point out that the term world is used in the Bible in at least five distinct senses: First, it is used to refer to the physical world described in the creation account on Genesis 1-2; second, the Bible speaks of the human inhabitants of the earth as the world. For example, Psalm 9:8 says God “judges the world with righteousness”; third, world refers to the scene of human activity, both for good and evil (2Cor. 7:10; Matt.16:26); fourth, world signifies the forces arrayed against God and God’s purposes. This usage encompasses fallen and unrepentant people as well as spiritual forces (Eph. 3:10). Finally, the term world is the object of Messiah’s mission (John 3:16) (Shenk ed. 1993:156-157).

The truth of God against a culture position as Kraft (1996:92) indicates is, of course, in the fact that there is much within culture that Christians need to oppose. But it ignores the fact that there is also much cultural behaviour that is approvable by Christians. Kraft (1996:93) thus points out that it is a form of overkill to oppose all of culture. Indeed not every aspect of culture is bad and some of the aspects can equally be challenging to Christianity.

Gelder & Zscheile (2011:152) points out that the New Testament contains numerous moments of reciprocity in which disciples of Jesus are transformed by the encounters with previously shunned strangers. For example, they indicate the

Samaritan villagers in Luke 10 or Cornelius in Acts 10. Discernment, they indicate, must be grounded in the word of God, in attentive prayer and listening to the Holy Spirit, in community and especially in relationship with the neighbour. Accordingly, this is missional discernment and it must take seriously the participation of those outside the church (Gelder & Zscheile 2011:152). Therefore, in an “integrated missional approach”, Christians must endeavour to test the spirit, or better still pray for the spirit of discernment. This spirit will assist them in knowing the good aspects and the bad aspects of culture to avoid considering every cultural thing to be bad.

The third position as, Kraft (1996:93) points out is upheld by those who see God as “endorsing a culture or subculture.” According to him this has been the position of many missionaries, always looking for the ‘Christian’ way of doing things. Some of them he says believed that there is only one Christian way to bury or marry or do any such thing. Some he goes on, believed that American culture is always Christian but seemed to feel that they are pretty close and simply need a bit of shaping up to finish the job. He thus indicates that Christians fall into that kind of mentality especially when they have power over others as they tend to idealise their culture, as if it were a special Christian culture, often America as if it were a Christian nation (Kraft 1996:93).

Furthermore, Kraft (1996:93) posits that this is the mistake the Hebrews made; they felt that since God was willing to use their culture, He must be endorsing it as the proper way for everyone. Paul, as he points out fights such an idea in Acts 15, in Galatians, and elsewhere in the New Testament, maintaining that God is willing to use Gentile culture to reach Gentiles (1 Cor 9:19-22). On this basis, Kraft (1996:93) claims that God endorses no culture but willingly uses any culture. He also contends that there is no such thing as a ‘Christian culture,’ even though Christians are to strive to change their cultural structures in ways that will facilitate rather than hinder the work of God. Hence, in an integrated missional approach, Christians need to note that God can use any culture for the transmission of God’s message. What they need to do is to discern without prejudicing the cultural elements before they consider them fit for use in the worship of God. For example, the musical instruments that the missionaries termed pagan has become the backbone of music for worship in Christian denominations in Nso’ and beyond.

The fourth position as Kraft (1996:93) points out is upheld by people who view God as “above culture and unconcerned.” He explains that those who take this stance typically assert that God created the universe got it going and then virtually left it. Many tribal groups, for example, African peoples, Kraft says, believe in God but largely ignore Him, because they feel He is too far away to be concerned about them and their problems. Likewise, those within Western societies called Deists as he indicates sometimes speak of the universe as similar to a clock that God created and wound up. These types of people see the universe as operating according to natural laws, with no interference by God until such a time as the ‘clock’ runs down and the whole thing is destroyed. Such groups as Kraft (1996:93) says, see God’s transcendence but not God’s immanence.

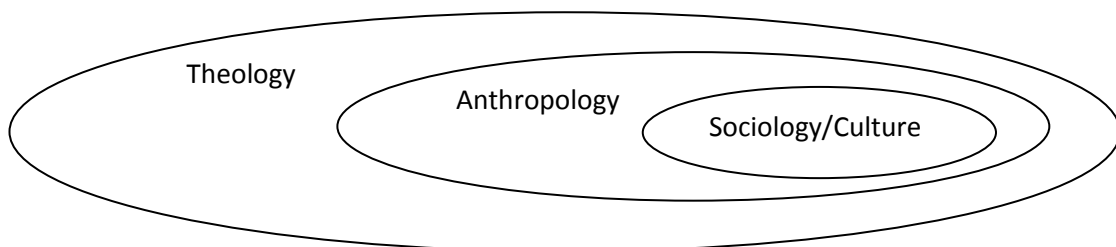
Hence, one of the issues that an integrated missional approach has to wrestle with is the differences in the perception of God. And to do that, participants in mission must as we indicated in the first position above, emulate God’s patience with the differences in perceptions of God by humanity.

The fifth view as Kraft (1996:93) explains is held by those who see God as “above culture and working through it.” He indicates that in this view, culture is seen as a vehicle usable by God, Satan or human beings. According to him, there is no dichotomy in this case between so-called Christian forms and cultural forms. The forms God use, he goes on, are cultural forms; none is sacred in and of themselves. What we want as he rightly points out is to be able to use cultural forms with Christian meanings. Furthermore, he opines that we see God wanting to reach each people group today in terms of their own culture, just as He sought in biblical times to reach the Hebrews via Hebrew culture and Greeks via Greek culture. These were the cultures that were available to God in biblical times, so He used them. Each of them could have been called pagan when God first started using them (Kraft1996:93).

Kraft (1996:94) therefore indicates that if God could use pagan Hebrew or Greek cultures, He can use even pagan American culture or pagan African or Latin American cultures. “Was there ever a pagan more pagan than the Greek society? Yet God was able to use even the cultural structures of that society for His purposes”

(Kraft 1996:94). According to him there is no culture that is unusable. Conversion as he indicates happens within culture. The church, he says, happens within culture. Hence, positive changes which come about within culture because of Christianity need to be seen as transformation of the culture from within, especially at the level of the worldview (1996:94).

Following the five positions discussed above, practitioners of an integrated missional approach that this research is proposing needs, first to engage culture, following the contextual realities therein and wait for God’s transforming spirit to finalise the work. Second, Christians following an integrated missional approach need to bear in mind that mission can only take place within a culture or cultures. Third, they need to note that mission is for the sake of humanity and not for that of the Church. Fourth, various positions and or views need to be seen as complementary to each other and not as straightjacket rules that must be followed independently. Fifth, they need to understand that the approach is termed “integrated” because its takes all the views into consideration. Finally, they need to know that this approach is called integrated missional approach because it is theologically centred, anthropologically reflected and socio-culturally anchored. This approach gives a more prominent place to theology than that Kraft as seen above. The researcher has represented his proposed approach in the diagram below:



An Integrated Missional Approach: Theology-Anthropology-Sociology & Culture

Generally, most of the issues were connected to cultural identity struggles, ranging from the need to use indigenous languages for the spread of the gospel message, to various artistic works, in relation to signs and symbols. In the case study, Nso’, we noticed that the main issue was still that of cultural identity. It was glaring with the conflicts between the traditional social associations – *ngwerong*. Two examples of conflicts were given: first, the removal of the masquerade’s (*kibaranko*) head by Big

Father (the parish priest) and his shock that the person putting it on was Mathew, the catechist. The second example was the conflict between the first Christians and the *ngwerong* that even led to the death of some Christians.

Following the sociological nature of the conflicts, sociological theories, such as functionalism, conflict, phenomenology, and social identity theories were used in discussing how such issues could be curbed. In order to handle such issues of conflicts from the missiological perspective, an integrated missional approach is suggested. This approach as the researcher states needs to be theologically centred, anthropologically reflected and socio-culturally anchored within the contextual realities.

7.3 Recommendations

The recommendations are in two sets. The first set is for the Christian churches in Africa with a focus on Nso' while the second is for further research.

7.3.1 Recommendations for Christian Churches in Nso'

Christian churches need to avoid repeating the mistakes of the missionaries, such as prejudices against culture without proper study. They should take culture seriously; approach it critically but with consideration and love.

There is a need too for the Christian churches to use dialogue as a means of solving problems, especially when it comes to conflicts with culture in their context of operation. They should avoid any physical confrontations which sometimes happen.

There is a need for the Christian churches to take the spiritual life of the inhabitants seriously. Praying not only for the Christians but for the entire land, including the traditional leaders like the *Fons*, *the Fais* (lineage heads) and the government officials like the Senior Divisional Officers, the Majors etc. for the smooth execution of their functions.

There is a need to take *diakonia* ministry seriously. This can be a means through which non-Christians can be reached. For example, chaplaincy work in hospitals and in schools needs to be intensified.

There is a need for Christian churches in Nso' to recognise the three social groupings of the Nso': *m'taar*, *dui (ngiri)*, and *shiyslav (ngwerong)* and involve them

in church activities. This could be done by setting Sundays aside for thanksgiving prayers based on these groups. Following the cultural practice of giving, they would like to come up in church with these names and give thanks to God. From this the clergy and other committed Christians can start meeting them informally and discussing some of the activities they deem incompatible with Christianity.

Most importantly, there is a need for Christian denominations in Nso' to officially allow clergy and Christians who are members of the traditional social associations especially (*ngiri and ngwerong*) to attend their meetings. Their presence has been seen to have a positive effect. Transformation has to start from within. Consider yeast, if just thrown on the dough and not mixed in a way, it will have very little effect. If it has to cause the dough to rise, it must be mixed thoroughly with the dough. So too the presence and participation of clergy in these associations will effectually destigmatise Christians who are members and eventually lead to the transformation of those incompatible activities of these associations that were discovered in the course of this study.

7.3.2 Recommendations for further research

From the study the researcher would like to propose that further research be carried out in the following areas:

- Some Fons of Nso' who were already baptised Christians switched from Christianity to Islam during their reigns. Is it that Islam is more accommodating than Christianity? Or what is in Islam that has attracted the Fons of Nso' over the years?
- Given the presence of Islam in Nso' and the rate of intermarriage, between Christians and Muslims, what is the future of both religions in the area?
- What has been the impact of Christianity in terms of the *diakonia* in Nso'?
- Given the unprecedented changes taking place in the world today. What is the future of *ngwerong* and *ngiri* in Nso'?
- "We no longer believe because of what you told us." How true is this statement in the context of Nso'?
- How has the animosity of Christians towards one another because of doctrinal differences, for example in Baptism and the Lord's Supper affected Christian unity and ecumenism in Nso'?

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Interviews

Thaddeus Ndze: Retired Nurse, date of interview, 28/12/2014

Henry Dubila: Teacher by profession, traditional title holder, date of interview 12/2/2015,

Fai Mbarang: An ordained pastor of PCC, date of interview 10/4/2015

Ntumnyuy D.D: An ordained pastor of PCC, date of interview 10/4/2015

Fai Verkahkuiy: Lineage head retired teacher Basel Mission, date of interview 11/4/2015

Thomas T. Bame: Retired Teacher, Principal of Colleges, date of interview, 12/4/2015

Mary Bame: A retired teacher, date of interview, 12/4/2015

Nsai Godlove Tardzenyuy: An ordained Pastor PCC and Lecturer, PTS, Kumba, date of interview, 20/5/2015, (*Mtaar*)

Bah Geoffrey Banla: An ordained pastor PCC, date of interview, 20/5/2015, (*Mtaar*)

Ntem Godlove Sevidzem: An ordained Pastor PCC and Lecturer, PTS, Kumba date of interview, 20/5/2015, (*Mtaar*)

Lukong Roman Ayori: An ordained pastor, date of interview 17/6/2015, (*Ngwerong* member)

Patrick Ngwan: Reporter Radio Evangelium, Kumbo, date of interview, 2/4/2016, (*Ngwerong* member)

Fai Banka: Lineage head, retired teacher Basel Mission, date of interview 3/4/2016, (*Ngwerong* member)

Lawong Bih Helen: Former Member of Parliament, Cameroon, date of interview, 3/4/2016

Fai Fumekuy: Lineage head, date of interview 3/4/2016 (*Ngiri/Ngwerong* member)

Victor Yuyor: Reverend Father, Roman Catholic Church, date of interview 3/4/2016

Romanus Kisi: Reverend Father, Roman Catholic Church, date of interview 3/4/2016

Wirngo Genesis (Manager Police Credit Union, Kimbo and Chairperson Ndzengvuf Congregation of the PCC, date of interview, 3/4/2016, (*Ngiri* member)

Asah Mbekum William: Divisional Delegate of Secondary Education, Bui and CMF National President, date of interview 3/4/2016, (*Ngwerong* member)

Sypla Anna Jishu Nsaikila: Pastor PCC, date of interview 7/4/2016

Leonard Kiawuni Lukong: Teacher, Roman Catholic Christian, date of interview 20/4/2016, (*Ngwerong* member)

Wiyanyuy Christopher: Retired law officer, Roman Catholic Christian, date of interview 20/4/2016, (*Mtaar*)

Focus Groups' Discussions

Group 1, 28/12/2015, sampling with the following persons:

Fai A.K: PCC, CMF, (*Ngiri* member)

Kongnyuy Vincent: PCC, CMF, TCK, NSODA Executive member, (*Ngwerong* member)

Nyuyki Samuel: PCC, TCK, (*Ngwerong* member)

Nformi Dickson Kwanyuy: PCC, PECA President Bui, (*Ngiri* member)

Wiyilaka Peter: PCC.TCK, (*Ngiri* member)

Patrick Ngwan, RCC, (*Ngwerong* member)

Group 2, 20/4/2016, discussion with the following persons:

Verdze Primus Lainjo, Teacher, Roman Catholic, (Mtaar)

Mbuhkika Vernansius B. Builder, Leader Nso' Culture Committee in Kumba, Roman Catholic, (*Ngwerong member*)

Bankui Kidze F. Lecturer CCUI, Roman Catholic, Ngwerong member (*Ngwerong member*)

Nsai Godlove Tardzenyuy: An ordained Pastor PCC and Lecturer, PTS, Kumba (*Mtaar*)
Ntem God love Sevidzem: An ordained Pastor PCC and Lecturer, PTS, Kumba (*Mtaar*)

Lukong Roman Ayori: An ordained Pastor PCC (*Ngwerong member*)

Jaff Godlove: An ordained Pastor PCC (*Mtaar*)

Yele Marceline: An ordained pastor PCC

Mfumbam Marie Joelle: An ordained nun PCC

Participant Observation

Witnessed Mfuh Nso' Palace, 3/4/2016

Ngwa Nso' (ngwa Kibu) Palace 27/12/2014

Ngononso Cultural Festival, Kumbo, 27 to 29/12/2014

Mass at the Roman Catholic Church Cathedral Kumbo, 28/12/2014

Cultural Week, Mbiame Palace, 12/2/2015

Funeral Mass at the Roman Catholic Church, Rifem Mbiame, 10/4/2015

PC Kumbo, Church Service and induction of the National President CMF, 12/4/2015

PC Tobin, Church service, and Mass at Roman Catholic Church Tobin, 3/4/2016

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Faculty of Theology

Department of Science of Religion and Missiology

Name: Peter Siysi Nyuyki

Position: PhD in Missiology student

Contact Details: 00237 77 97 81 32. nyuykisiysi@yahoo.com

Title of the study: 'A missional approach to the Traditional Social Associations of tthe Nso' people of Cameroon.'

Purpose of the study: To understand the place of African cultures in Christian missions by studying traditional social associations with particular reference to Nso'. This understanding will lead to proper approaches in mission, an example of which could be de-stigmatisation of Christians who are members of such associations as a way of sustaining Christianity in Africa. The wish is that Christians who are members of these associations could stand a better chance of contextualising the gospel of Christ.

I wish to interview you about Nso' culture from the perspective of these traditional social associations in Nso', in a one on one interview and the interviews will take about one hour each. I will schedule an appointment with you so that interviews can be conducted at convenient and agreed upon times.

I wish to invite you for a focus group discussion on my research. The discussion will take place at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Kumba. It will be based on the questions attached. I will tell you the exact day and time by telephone when I have contacted the other participants. The discussion will take about two hours.

There is no risk or discomfort associated with this research that can affect you as participant. The involvement in this research is voluntary; hence you may withdraw from participation in the study at any time and without negative consequences. Their participation in this study does not provide any financial gain either.

All information provided by the participants will be treated as confidential; Anonymity is assured and the data would be destroyed should the participant withdraw. The persons who will have access to this research data are: myself as the researcher, the participants and my study supervisor.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. _____
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. _____
3. I agree to take part in the above study. _____
4. I agree to the interview. _____

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

APPENDIX 1

A framework of questions for various interviews and a guide to participant observation

Interview questions for group A: Christians, Muslims, and others (5 each)

1. What are the things in Nso' culture that Christianity has adapted to enhance worship?
2. Which practices in *ngwerong* /*ngiri* traditional social associations are compatible to Christianity and which are incompatible?
3. Which are the things you generally cherish in Nso' culture and which are the ones you dislike?
4. Are there areas of conflict between Christianity and Nso' culture?
5. How do you identify yourself as both a Nso' person and a Christian?
6. Is there anything wrong for a Christian to belong to the *ngwerong* and *ngiri*?

Interview questions for group B: (5 Traditional rulers from Nso')

1. Are you a Christian? Why/ why not?
2. What are the things you cherish in Nso' culture/church?
3. What are the things that you do not cherish in your culture/church?
4. What are the things that identify you as a traditional ruler?
5. Are there areas of conflict between Nso' culture and Christianity?
6. How do you as a traditional ruler relate to Christianity?
7. Are there practices in Nso' traditional social associations that are incompatible to Christianity and vice versa? For example, rites and rituals.
8. What is the significance of the *ngwerong* and *ngiri* societies in Nso' and where do you belong and why?

Interview questions group C: 5 Clergy from Kumbo, Nso'

1. Please, name any practices that you do not cherish in Nso' culture.
2. Please, name practices that you cherish in Nso' traditional social associations.
3. Please, name the things your church has adapted from Nso' culture for the enhancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
4. How do you treat traditional leaders, when they are in church?

5. Are there Christians in your denomination who are members of the *ngwerong* and/*ngiri* traditional social associations?
6. In what way, can the church help in the transformation of dehumanising cultural practices in Nso' culture?

Questions for focus group discussions with some of the persons already interviewed

1. What is in Nso' traditional social associations that attract people?
2. Have you found such attractions in Christianity?
3. Which are practices in *ngwerong/ngiri* that are compatible with Christianity and which are incompatible?
4. What approach do you think Christianity should take for the transformation of incompatible activities of these associations?
5. What impact does your presence make in this group? (Christians who are members)
6. Please, name some of the things Christianity has adapted from your the *ngwerong/ngiri* traditional social associations?

NB: Reasons for the research are made clear to the respondents and anonymity guaranteed. The names are not included in the body of the work. They are rather referred to as informants. But all their names are listed in the bibliography.

A Guide to participant observation

Mission Churches (6 congregations of the two mission churches (3 each)

To listen to the language used and note the types of signs, symbols and practices adopted from Nso culture.

Traditional festivals/death celebrations especially when *ngwerong* and *ngiri* are involved

To note the reasons for which some Christians and other people are so attached to cultural practices. To take note of the number of Christians that participate in the *yengwerong* and *yengiri* processions.



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APPENDIX 2

A transcript of examples of three interview questions for the study

(a) Questions

- (i) What are the things that Christianity has adapted from Nso' culture to enhance worship?
- (ii) Which practices in *ngwerong/ngiri* traditional social associations are compatible to Christianity and which are incompatible?
- (iii) Which are the things you generally cherish in Nso' culture and which are the ones you dislike?

(b) Transcript of an interview

The interviewer is represented by **P** and the interviewee by **T**

Participant	Transcript	Own reflective notes
P	Good morning Mr. T.	
T	Good morning Rev. and welcome to my small home.	
P	Thank you, Mr. T, for accepting to contribute to this research. As the letter of consent, I sent to you two weeks ago, indicates, my research is centred on Christian missions and African cultures with focus on Nso'. Before we start, I wish to let you know that confidentiality will be strictly kept. I will not write your name, but use a letter to represent it when I am transcribing. In the main work, you will be known among others as an informant. I hope it is clear to you?	
T	Yes, I am used to such research, let's go on.	
P	What are the things that Christianity has adapted from Nso' culture to enhance worship?	
T	<i>Eemm...</i> they are many. Let me name the ones I can remember: drums, songs, sounds, and rhymes. In short singing and dancing, arts, Lamnso (Nso' language), many musical instruments – gongs, rattles, xylophones etc. Some of these instruments, for example, the drums and the gongs were considered by the early missionaries to be evil because they were being used by <i>ngwerong</i> .	The missionaries prejudicially and derogatorily termed <i>ngwerong</i> a "secret society"
P	Mr. T. This leads us to the second question: Which are the activities of <i>ngwerong/ngiri</i> that are considered by Christians to be incompatible with Christianity and which are considered compatible.	
T	Let me start with the positive ones: <i>ngwerong</i> is becoming more and more social and prayerful. In	The presence of Christians here

	<p>the social domain <i>ngwerong</i> members assist their members even financially when they are in trouble. For example, when one member is reported sick, the other members during their meeting cut a leaf of plantain, place it on the ground in the <i>ngwerong</i> house and ask for a free will donation. The contributions have been very encouraging and helpful. As far as prayers are concerned, <i>ngwerong</i> now opens most of its meetings with prayer. Some clergy men have been there and offered prayers. In <i>ngwerong</i> we look up to God, the supreme ruler over all. These are the things I know are also observed in the church... (<i>laughter</i>). I am sure the very thing is happening in the <i>ngiri</i> section.</p>	<p>could bring about some positive results. This looks like an opportunity for evangelisation.</p>
P	<p>Thanks very much. The second part of the question: Are there activities of <i>ngwerong/ngiri</i> that are incompatible to Christianity?</p>	
T	<p>Yes, Christianity does not like animal sacrifices, sanctions that <i>ngwerong</i> usually give to its members when they go wrong. Sometimes there is unhealthy competition among <i>ngwerong</i> and <i>ngiri</i> members. But I think this is common to every human group.</p>	<p>Competition for recognition and identification as a “strong” man, a man of wealth.</p>
P	<p>The third question: What are the things you generally cherish in Nso’ culture and what are the ones you dislike?</p>	
T	<p>My brother, the first is solidarity; I mean concern for one another. For example, when one is either in trouble or in joy one is not alone. He/she is with friends, with family. I think... with the whole community. The other things I like in the Nso’ person is hospitality, fellowship and the moral values of some of the cultural tenets. The practice of reconciliation (<i>kima, kidiv</i>). The discipline of those caught in incest has kept high moral standards among the Nso’.</p> <p>Another thing I like in Nso’ culture is respect a Nso’ person gives to those in authority and the elderly.</p>	<p>The spirit of sharing, solidarity and fellowship among Africans in general is very glaring in Nso’</p> <p>When one commits incest, cleansing is done in public.</p>
P	<p>The second part of that question: What are the things you dislike in Nso’ culture?</p>	
T	<p>Let me see if I can remember any: some, eeh. sometimes families confiscate a widow’s property, some herbs used to protect property from being stolen sometimes do not only affect the thieves but even the innocent people. <i>Kibame</i> (a long period about a month during which people are not allowed to work in their farms is not good.) It sometimes leads to hunger.</p>	<p>These are some of the issues that need to be identified, examined, look for alternatives or declare as not necessary.</p>

APPENDIX 3

A transcript of an example of a focus group discussion for the study

(a) Question

Which are practices in *ngwerong/ngiri* that are compatible with Christianity and which are incompatible?

(b) Transcript of a focus group discussion based on the question above

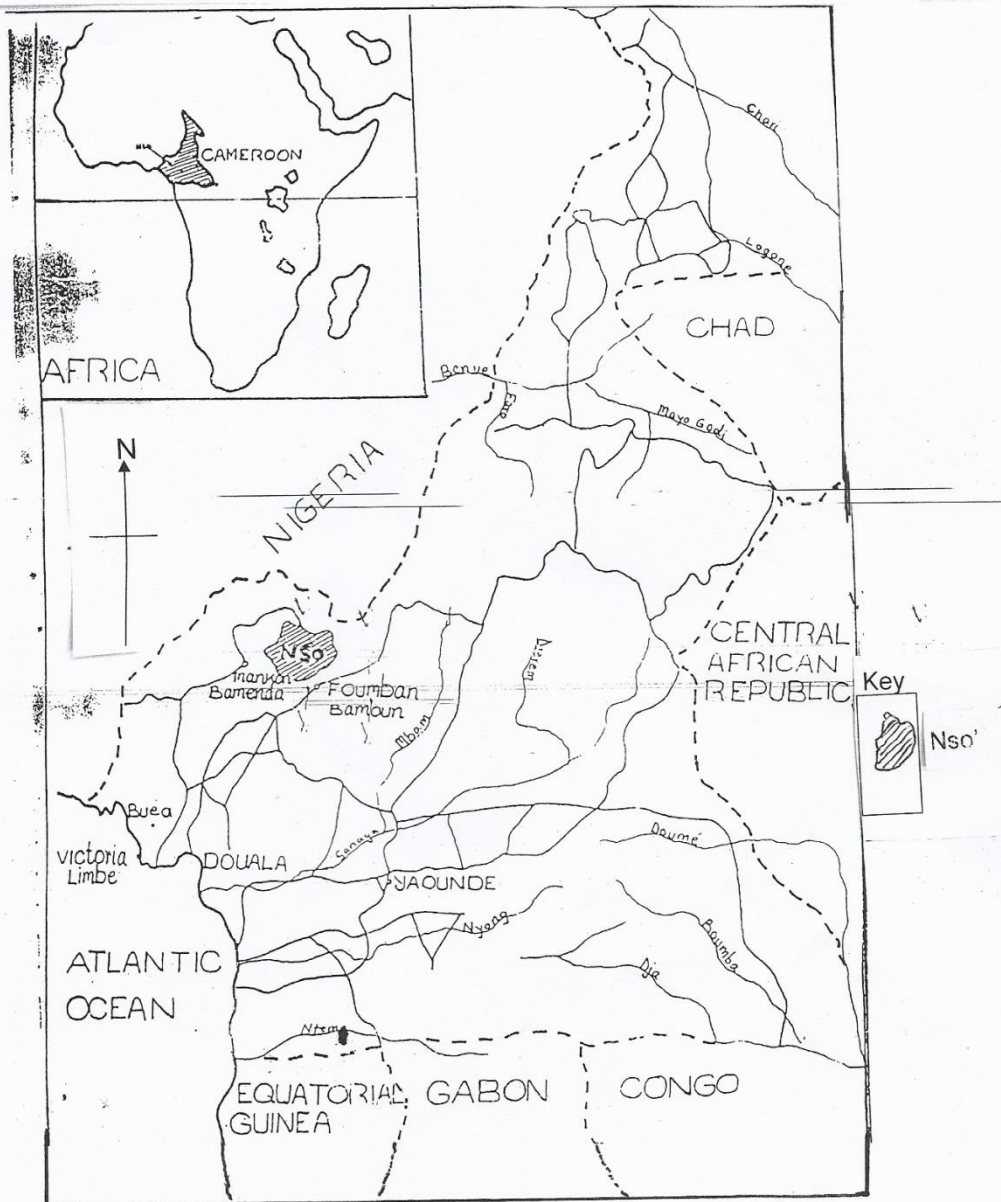
The moderator, the researcher is represented by R and the five participants are represented by the following letters: N, B, Y, G, and L. When one speaks for the first time he/she is marked N1 or L1 and if the very person speaks for the second time he/she is marked N2 or L2 and so on.

Participant	Transcript	Own reflective notes
R	Dear brothers and sisters, thank you very much for taking time off your tight schedule to contribute to this research. As mentioned in the letter that all of you received, the research is on Christian missions and African cultures. The focus is Nso' and that is why I have invited you. Please, there is provision for some breakfast, after this one hour exercise we can go for it. (a sign of happiness from the participants). Let us pray.... (a prayer was said by one of the participants). Let us follow as per the sheets you have: Question 1: Which are practices in <i>ngwerong/ngiri</i> that are compatible with Christianity and which are incompatible?	
N1	Some of their laws and rules are difficult to keep. Worst still some are accompanied by curses. And some members have the spirit of unforgiveness. In short in these associations there is no ignorance before the law.	Legalism!
B1	I think you do not understand how these groups operate. If you do you will not say they lack the spirit of forgiveness. The point is that one who goes against the laws has to be fined. He has to pay a penalty (<i>kishov</i>) depending on the magnitude of the crime.	They have a way of discipline that makes members walk with care. Every group has a way of discipline.
Y1	Some people become too committed and even enslaved by the activities of <i>ngwerong/ngiri</i> . For example, some go	Anything that enslaves and dehumanises one is not considered Christian.

	long distances on foot with the <i>kibarankoh</i> and <i>wanmabu</i> (masquarades) just for food and drink.	
B 2	Point of order...(angry).	
R	Please, let us be orderly and allow each person to make his or her point.	
Y2	I was saying that these activities can become a sort of enslavement	
B3	It depends on how you interpret it. For some it is a time for sports, for some it is the means of livelihood. They get food and drink from the activity. So, for some it is a job.	One' mindset matters.
L1	Some of their activities are compatible with Christianity. For example, solidarity, fellowship. At the death of their member you see how active they are., showing concern and care	The social practices of the groups are mentioned. Some Christian tenets, fellowship and solidarity.
Y3	They are looking for their food and drink. They are not active aimlessly.	The social nature of the groups is mentioned
G1	Some of the funerals can be very expensive, in some cases the family members of the deceased are the ones to pay the cost.	There is need to check such activities.
L2	That is true, I know of one family that has to borrow money to run a funeral because of being a member.	
G2	These traditional social associations are not the only groups facing this type of situation. It is even found in some denominations. For example, I have witnessed a case where a family has to borrow money for a funeral of its member who belongs to a church group. This was connected to the fact that these members will need their food and drink.	A warning to churches!
R	Anyone with one last word!?! (pause for a while).	
N2	Yes, I think the exercise is very enriching. Thank you for thinking that we can contribute to this research.	
R	Brothers and sisters thank you very much. (all the participants moved to the next room for some breakfast).	

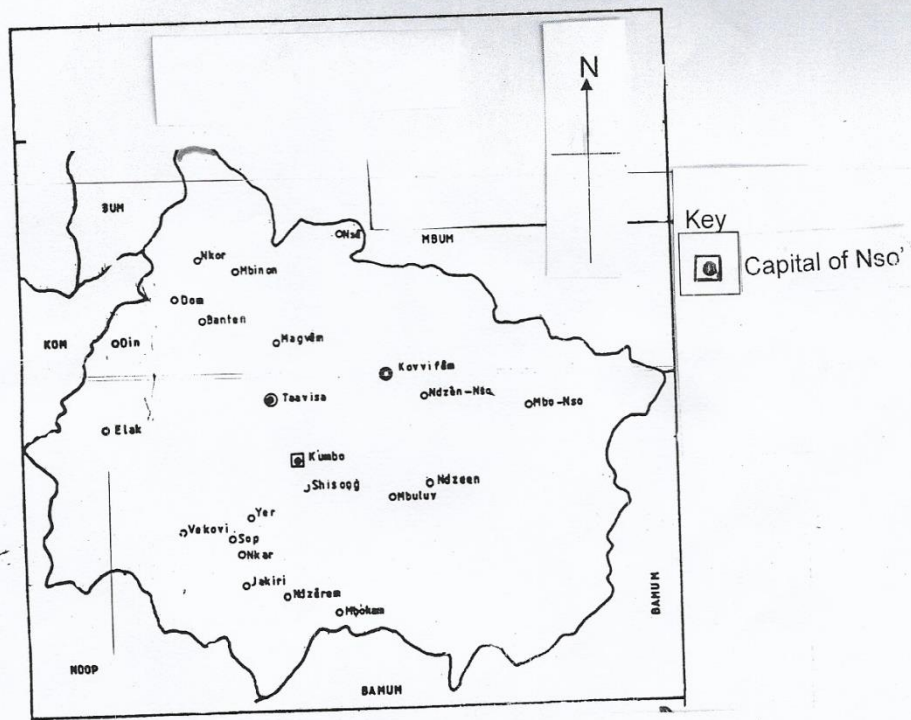
APPENDIX 4 Maps

MAP 1: THE LOCATION OF NSO' IN CAMEROON



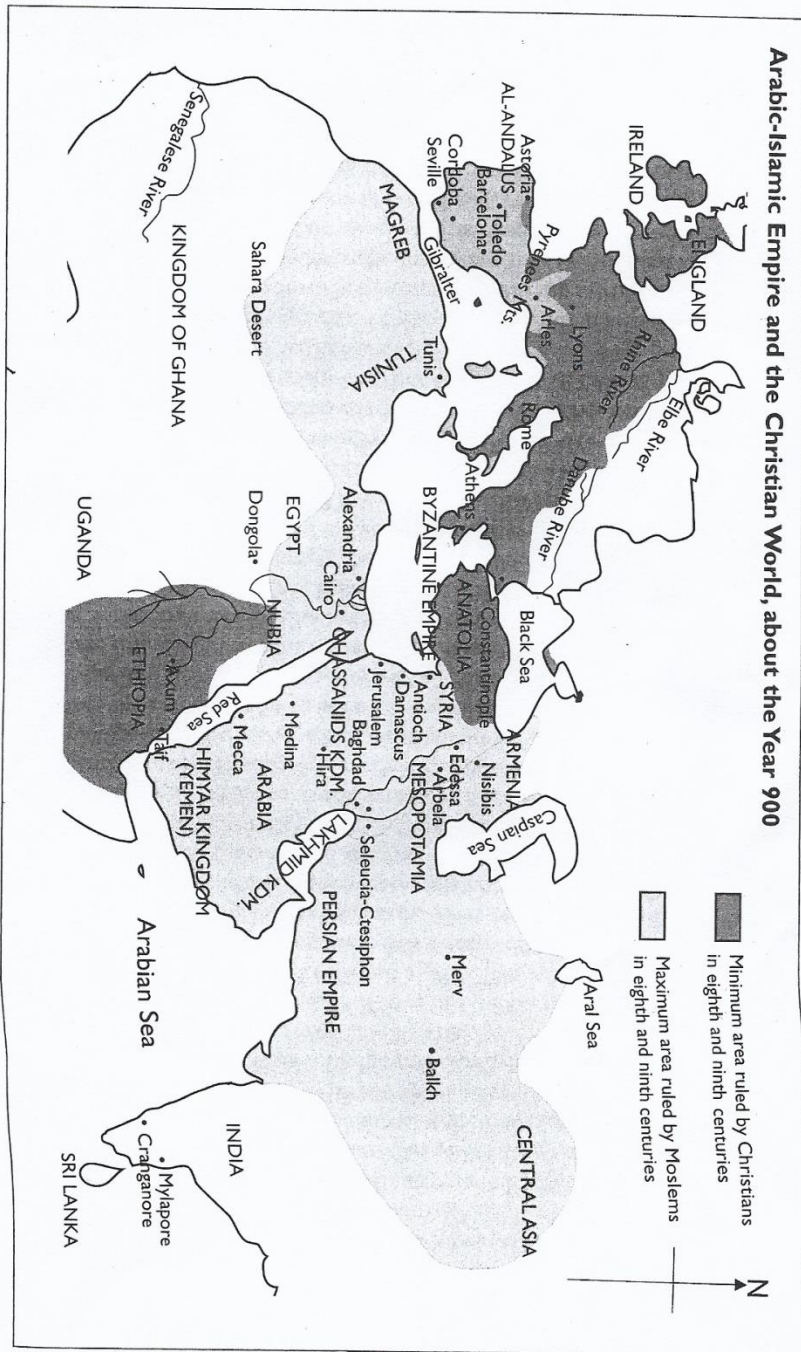
Adapted from Yele (2008:viii).

MAP 2: NSO'LAND



Adapted from Mzeka (1990:5).

MAP 3: THE LOCATION OF EGYPT, AXUM & NUBIA



Adapted from Bevens & Schroeder (2004:112).