

**An Exploration of the Conception of God among the
Bali Nyonga and its Impact upon their
contemporary Christian practice with particular
reference to Hymnody and Prayer.**

By

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Abstract

Through the invitation of the then traditional ruler of Bali Nyonga, the missionaries of the Basel Mission arrived there in 1903. They embarked on evangelisation especially through the opening of schools. They studied the *mungaka* language, translated the Bible into it and made several other publications. However in the process of translation they concluded in strong terms that the Bali had no notion of a Supreme Being who created heaven and earth.

Professors, Bolaji Idowu, Kwame Bediako and others argue contrary to such missionary assertion above, that continuity from the old religion is what gives meaning to the understanding of the new.

It is in this light that in this work we seek to explore the Bali Nyonga conception of the Supreme Being.

We will also investigate Christian understanding of the God of Israel; whether he is understood only in the light of previous understanding or they consider him to be somebody whom they had never known in their worldview. The researcher begins however with the basic assumption that the new can be understood only in the light of the past. This is because the people have a few sayings, which clearly indicate that their past is so much, cherished. They say for example that *Bo ma ni ntun mandzi mfi kui tsed I nden beh* [one cannot dig a new road without cutting across the existing road], *ntan 'wo' ka gha bun nden ma mi be mbe I ti' la' be nto nkwedkwed* [the hawk said it is not good for old people to all die, lest one day people would take them for meat]¹. There is also the name *Dayebga* [one cannot forget his homeland or their compound].

¹ The hawk is not eaten. By this proverb it is considered that if there are no old people to pass on old values the next generation may do things that are digressions from esteemed values. This saying emphasizes continuity. Babila Fochang, *Wisdom of the Ancients - Some African Proverbs, Witty Sayings and their interpretations drawn mostly from Bali Nyonga in the North West province of Cameroon*, Dschang: Dschang University Press, 2001, p.43.

After introducing the work in chapter one, the next chapter presents a historical overview of the context of research. Chapter three explores the conception of God among the Bali Nyonga. The findings of Europeans are first presented followed by the understanding of indigenes.

Chapter four considers the encounter between two conflicting worldviews and its consequences as the Gospel and missionaries [two different worldviews] came into contact with the Bali worldview. The next chapter investigates Christian practice and their understanding of God. We have done this by analysing some Church hymns and prayers.

Chapter six is a summary of the findings and a theological reflection on the results of the findings.

Mother tongue abstract

Ba Muson ka ye nu mbonked ndze bo ka yu' ntum yi ba Fonyonga yi I tse iba a ka tum mbo bo nga bo to mbi'ni nu Nyikob ma ngon Nyonga a. Ba Fonyonga ka bati be ni mbobnku ba I Ba Galega I kusui yi I ka bi'ni mbad ntum mbo Fombolingon nga I ye ba Muson to ma ngon Ba'ni a.

Ale a ka be ni lum 1903 Ba Muson I ted tse ma Ba'ni mbi'ni fa Nyikob. Bo ka be ba Ba Yakob Keller, Leimbacher, mbe Ferdinand Ernst. Kenti ka bi sa' Adolf Vielhauer bati yab. Ba lin nga dzama mwa'ni bo ka bud ni tsu mungaka a ka be bo fa'i. Bo ka nyhaa nda mwa'ni. Ba Fonyonga ka tod yo nu nwa'ni le ti. I ka dzun tafeli mbo ghan mwa'ni. Ni kueli ba tabon nga bo nuen bon bab ma nda nwa'ni.

Nu a tsa bo ni yo nu fa' le yi nta' ma kiti ma dzi yo mwa'ni le a be nga ni ndib yi Ba Muson ka bi ta' ma bud mwa'ni Nyikob ni tsu mungaka a, bo gha Ba'ni ma ndzi mo mun yi I ka nebti nindeng bo nsi yi bo fun I ni Nyikob a be. Bo ka gha Bani dzi mo' nyikob yi I be mo' koko ni ntsi ma kob bon bo' I bo' a. Ale bon ni keti koko le mbi bo' nga bo ti ma ndze bub be I nuen ndon boa dzan ndu bon.

Bo ka ku nsun nga Ba'ni kue ndzi be nu ma ked tu fom bo a lob, ni ngomti ba kusi ndze yab Nyikob. Yo nu nya ntob'ni a titi. Ale nta' ma ta'ti nga yo nu bo ka sun a beh nuenuen e. Lo bub ma dzi gha' le ba to ta'ti ma dzi mbom mandzi yi Ba'ni ka lin Nyiokb a. Ba ni ndze yo ta'ti le mbi' mandzi yi ba Muson ka tsu nga Ba'ni ma ndin Nyikob be a nna'ti nga bo ka lo' nga nu Nyikob yi bo ka to mue a ka be nu mfi yi Ba'ni ma nted mbi lin a be.

Bui ni ntani yo nu le ma dzi yo bu' mwa'ni mbi' nga a tsani mbo mun ma mbim mo' yum mfi ndzeh i ti ma mbe ni mo' mfi' nden ma lobti nu le mue a be. Ale bue ye ta'ti ma nku'mu bun-Kristo ma Ntanfoang, Ntaiton, Mantum mbe Gungong. Yo ta'ti le ta' ma lin mandzi yi bun-Kristo ma ngon Ba'ni lin Nyikob le yi mwa'ni ntumbon ni nsun a. Bui bi'ni yo ta'ti le mbe ni bim ntum nga a tsani ma tung mandzi mfi kue tsed i nden beh. Ba'ni bim beh nga fa nu nden ti la' mi me' beh.

Dedication.

**This thesis is dedicated to my ancestors, whose past assured
my present, thus enabling me build for posterity, to ensure
perpetuity and continuity.**

Who they were make us who we are; for ever may we remain.

Acknowledgments

The Bali says *Ta' bo nyin ma ni nkud bu' be* –one hand cannot tie a bundle. This proverb emphasises 'collective survival'. Togetherness is the secret of success because *Ta' tui nyin ma ni ma' kob be a* –one tree does not make a forest. It is in the spirit of the above wisdom and conviction that this work has been realised. A work such as this has a cumulative history to its realisation. My parents by whose agency God brought me to this world and who contributed largely to this work through my upbringing are part of the achievements. It pleased the Almighty that none of them should see the days of my pastoral ministry. May their souls rest in peace as they commune with the rest of my ancestors.

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Lastly and utmost: To *Nyikob* and *Nyikob ba me* be the Glory now and for all times.

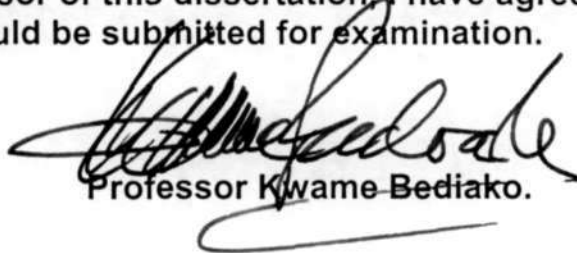
Declaration.

This dissertation is original, written by me and has not been submitted to any other University. Other sources have been duly acknowledged.



Babila George Fochang.

As the supervisor of this dissertation, I have agreed that it should be submitted for examination.



Professor Kwame Bediako.

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Abbreviations.

A-CMC	Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology.
BMA	Basel Mission Archives.
CCAST	Cameroon College of Arts Science and Technology.
CPC	Cameroon Protestant College.
EEC	Eglise Evangelique du Cameroun.
NWP	North West Province.
PCC	Presbyterian Church in Cameroon.
PCCAL	Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, Archive and Library.
PSS	Presbyterian Secondary School.
SWP	South West Province
SWPA	South West Provincial Archive.

Glossary of *mungaka* words.

<i>Andin</i>	Who knows!
<i>Ajimbom</i>	Only the moulder knows.
<i>Bammundzi</i>	The bag of someone else.
<i>Bamnyikob</i>	God's bag.
<i>Ba nyikob</i>	the gods and the spirits of ancestors.
<i>Ba Nwana</i>	Priests of the <i>Voma</i> fertility cult, <i>Nwana</i> [singular].
<i>Dze'ni</i>	Breath, <i>dze'ni</i> - breathe, soul, spirit.
<i>Dze'ni Nyikob</i>	Holy Spirit
<i>Fon</i>	title of traditional rulers of the North West Province
<i>Fonte</i>	Sub chiefs of Bali <i>mfonte</i> [singular].
<i>Kahfonmungwi</i> [<i>Kahfongwi</i>]	lady <i>Fon</i>
<i>Kahmamfon</i>	The mother of the <i>Fon</i>
<i>Koen vu</i>	Death celebration.
<i>Kom tu vu</i>	to shave the hair after death.
<i>Lela</i>	Annual Festival and national ancestral cult.
<i>Ma'mvi</i>	Thrower of the world
<i>Ma'sanvu</i>	the day to scatter and confuse death.
<i>Mbommvi</i>	Builder [moulder] of the world
<i>Mbu'timvi</i>	Ruler of the world
<i>Mfon</i>	<i>mungaka</i> pronunciation of <i>Fon</i>
<i>Munnimbom</i>	a person is according to how the one is moulded.
<i>Ndu nku'</i>	husband of a widow.
<i>Nguen</i>	Corn fufu.
<i>Nguen lun</i>	Corn fufu of [Bread] of life.
<i>Ngumba</i>	Traditional Executive arm of Bali Administration.
<i>Ngwad Nyikob</i>	God's tattoo [stretch] marks.
<i>Nkom</i>	The Bali equivalent of minister of state <i>ba Kom</i> [plural]
<i>Nkondon Nyikob</i>	God's plantain.
<i>Ntan Nyikob</i>	God's plaza

<i>Ntsa mvi</i>	One who surpasses the world.
<i>Nsun</i>	Friend.
<i>Nyikob</i>	Supreme Being.
<i>Nyo nindeng</i>	snake of heaven [two headed earth worm].
<i>Sama</i>	a priest of the <i>Lela</i> , also shortened form for male twins.
<i>Samngwa'a</i>	first male of twin <i>Nagwa'a</i> for first female twin.
<i>Samjela</i>	second male twin <i>Nahjela</i> female for second twin
<i>Taabon</i>	father of children.
<i>Ta bon ntsi</i>	father of orphans.
<i>Tad vu</i>	feeding of death.
<i>Tam Nyikob</i>	God's climbing yam.
<i>Tanyi</i>	father of twins, <i>Manyi</i> mother of twins.
<i>Teun Nyikob</i>	God's palm tree [date palm].
<i>Tita</i>	A prince, also a title to some people who are appointed by the <i>Fon</i> to special duties
<i>Tito</i>	frog.
<i>Tshed tu vu</i>	final death celebration, usually after one year of demise.
<i>tshe'ni vu</i>	sending death to the farm – one week after burial.
<i>Tutuwan</i>	The Bali war standard; also the name of those who carry it.
<i>Vu</i>	death.
<i>Vuked</i>	elderly person.

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Chapter One: Introduction.

1.1. Background and Motivation for the Research.

1.1.1. Background Study.

Bali Nyonga resides in a sub-division situated in the Northwest province¹ of the Republic of Cameroon.² Their first encounter with missionaries was at the invitation of their *Fon*³, in 1902 when the first team of two missionaries arrived in Bali for feasibility studies with the possibility of opening a mission station. In 1889 they had their first encounter with a German colonialist who must have impressed upon the *Fon* the advantages of Christianity. When Zintgraff was returning to Germany the *Fon* petitioned the German Foreign Office to encourage the Basel Missionaries to come to his land.⁴

Like other Cameroonian traditional rulers of the period, *Fon* Galega I was not interested in Christianity as a religion. His interest was the introduction of western school education in his land. Education at that time was solely the prerogative of the missionaries.

The missionaries who arrived in Bali on Sunday 17th March 1903 were Rev. Ferdinand Ernst and Leimbacher who was a builder and craftsman. Rev and Mrs Jakob Keller with their child later joined these on January 22nd the following year. Within a month of their arrival a temporary church house was constructed through the tireless assistance of the *Fon* who mobilized his subjects for the work. By December of the same year a school was opened with sixty boys on the roll. By 1905 the school already had three classes. Regular Sunday service began on 6th August 1905. In June the following year the *Fon* declared Sunday a day of rest even though the traditional day of rest was maintained.

¹ See map 1, appendix I, for the North West and South West provinces where the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon concentrates her work.

² See Map 2, appendix I, for political and administrative map of Cameroon.

³ *Fon* is the honorific title by which traditional rulers of the North West Province of Cameroon are addressed.

⁴ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, Victoria: Presbook, 1969, pp.26-28.

Bali soon became a central station from where the Gospel was to spread throughout the entire Grassfield region.⁵

On Sunday 20th November 1908, Rev. Ernst baptized 32 scholars. These were the first Christians in Bali Nyonga. Before 1914 stations were opened in Fouban, Bangwa, Bandjoun, Bana and Babungo with Bali as the main station.

The missionaries continued with work up till when the First World War broke out. On the 21st of October 1915 the British troops reached Bali. Vielhauer sent a messenger to carry a white flag of truce. The missionaries were interned on the following day.⁶

Cameroon was now occupied by French and British troops, and was divided unequally between them. The larger part went under French trusteeship while the smaller part was put under British protection. With the partition of Cameroon to France and Britain as trust territories by the League of Nations at the treaty of Versailles on June 28th, 1919, the now Northwest and Southwest provinces became British Cameroons, while the now Western and Littoral provinces became French Cameroon.⁷ The Basel Mission Churches in Francophone Cameroon were taken over by the Paris Mission in 1918. The Churches in Anglophone Cameroon were like orphans, for they were left without a shepherd. Major losses at this time were the *Douala* and *mungaka* manuscripts that were destroyed during the war.

The period of trial came for the Christians when the missionaries left in 1915 because according to Werner

The enemies of Christ proclaimed that with the departure of the missionaries the religion of the whites had also to disappear from the country. The severest oppression was felt at Bali... Chief Fonyonga gave orders to lock up the church. The keys were kept at the Government station at Bamenda. Whoever dared to continue preaching was beaten and imprisoned.⁸

⁵ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, pp.27-29, Adolf Vielhauer, *Nu a ka Ndze Nku'mu bun-Kristo kumvi a [History of the Christian Church in the Bali language]*, Basel: Basel Evangelical Mission, 1944, pp.307-308.

⁶ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, pp.27-28, Adolf Vielhauer, *Nu a ka Ndze Nku'mu bun-Kristo kumvi a [History of the Christian Church in the Bali language]*, Basel: Basel Evangelical Mission, 1944, pp.307-309.

⁷ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, p.49.

⁸ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, p.49.

Werner also reports that during the war years when the English Grassfields was without missionaries the Gospel continued to spread through indigenous agents but that “at Bali the circumstances were entirely different...Teacher Fokum, when witnessing for Christ was beaten and imprisoned. For a number of years therefore nobody dared to do any mission work.”⁹

Shortly after their arrival Jakob Keller gave his time to the study of *Mungaka* the Bali language. He reduced the language into writing since the schools were taught in the vernacular. He soon started translations into *mungaka*. Before their departure in 1915 the following works had been published into *mungaka*. *Tsu Nana* [Proverbs] was published in 1909/1910; *Tsu Mutin* [Sermon Outlines] came out in 1911, while *Nu Nyikob ma Ndan Kan ni Kan Mfi* [Stories from the Old Testament and New Testament] was published in 1915. Adolf Vielhauer who had been sent from Germany to Bali in 1906 did most of the translations.¹⁰

The sermon outlines and the Bible stories were the only available literature the indigenous agents used for evangelization during the period when there was no missionary. Though some of them may have had some knowledge of the German language it may not have been enough to be able to read it fluently.

During the process of translation both Keller and Vielhauer found it difficult to agree on the right *mungaka* word that could adequately translate the biblical God such that the Bali would not be able to link him to their “pagan gods”.

For Keller the conception of God among the Bali was pantheistic, and that the cult of *Nyikob ba mu* [God of my fathers] ruled the religious thoughts of all Bali. Christ was over-identified with *Nyikob ba mu* that, it was said had fulfilled long ago what the missionaries said Christ came to fulfill.

On his part, Vielhauer contended that *Nyikob* was attributed to the supernatural forces that lived in the forests or underground. Creation was however attributed to an unknown God whose dwelling was unknown. He argued that unless a clear demarcation was made

⁹ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, p.53.

¹⁰ Jonas N. Dah, *Missionary Motivations and Methods- An Examination of the Basel Mission in Cameroon 1886-1914*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Basel, Switzerland, 1983,

from the onset between the heathen religiosity and the gospel as preached by the missionaries then the worst kind of syncretism had to be expected. To this effect he suggested that the name *Mbu'mvi* [Ruler of the world] be used instead since it is an honorific title for *Fons* of the Grassfield regions.¹¹

In 1938 there was an outbreak of an epidemic. Traditional medicine was placed at the entrances to the village. People were asked to drink the medicine and to splash some on their bodies. The missionaries had placed an injunction that Christians should not drink such medicines branding it demonic. From the records available to us more than a hundred Christians were suspended for taking the medicine. This must have precipitated the material contained in the revised edition of the *No'u Nku'mu bun-Krsto ba-Evangelisi bi Mission ba-Basel ma-Kamerun* [*The Church Constitution of the Evangelical Mission of Basel in Cameroon*]. This material is an appendix to the Constitution, which actually was a statement of faith supposed to be declared by Basel Mission Christians in Bali denouncing their participation in certain traditional practices and making certain affirmations on what they have vowed to do.¹²

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Andrew F. Walls has said that the fact that in Christ a person becomes a new creation does not mean that he begins or continues his life in a vacuum. The person has been formed by his culture and history and if God has accepted him as he is, then his Christian mind will surely continue to be influenced by its previous content.¹³ If this were so one would love to find out the truth of the missionaries' assertion from an African perspective whether the people knew God. At the same time it would be necessary to find out what the religious itinerary of the Bali people was prior to the presence of mission Christianity among them. It would also be necessary –still from an African point

¹¹ Heinrich Balz, *Where the Faith has to Live- Studies in Bakossi Society and Religion, Part II: The Living, the dead and God*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1995, pp.642-643, Jonas N. Dah, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, pp.211ff.

¹² Adolf Vielhauer [ed.], *No'u nku'mu bun Krsto ba Evangelisi bi Mission ba Basel ma Kamerun* [*Church Constitution of the Basel Evangelical Mission in Cameroon*, Basel, Basel Evangelical Mission, 1939, appendix, pp.72-75.

¹³ Andrew F. Walls, "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture", in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History- Studies in the Transmission of the Faith*, New York/Edinburgh: Orbis Books/ T & T Clark, 1996, p.8.

of view- to investigate what the Bali primal world view was such that they did not consider missionary preaching as of any significance. Above all what actually is conversion to them?

In the light of the above the Problem statement of this thesis is: **What is Bali Nyonga indigenous conception of God and how is it expressed in their Christian practice?**

Sub problems: How did the Bali perceive the God that was presented to them?

How well were the missionaries informed of the Bali Worldview?

What informed the theology of the missionaries?

How does the traditional conception of God impact on Christian practice in Bali today?

Conversely has Christianity made any impact upon traditional religion?

1.3. Hypothesis

The Bali says, "When you dig a new road, you must cut across the old one." This proverb is a strong affirmation that it is impossible to introduce anything new that will not be understood in the light of the old. Change does not mean completely doing away with the past. The old enables us to establish a better future; the past is a sound working premise of the present.¹⁴ In the light of this, the researcher's basic assumption is that something exists in the Bali World-view or traditional religion that reveals a Supreme Deity to them since God did not leave Himself without a witness even to the Bali Nyonga. Whatever the Bali Nyonga conception of God is, it has an impact upon their contemporary Christian practice.

1.4. Intellectual Framework.

We have mentioned earlier that this work falls within the framework of continuity.

Bediako, a contemporary advocate of the theological paradigm of continuity states:

The seeming ease with which the God of the African religious past has found access through African Christian Scriptures into African Christian consciousness becomes a significant factor. In contradistinction to the earlier missionary history of Europe, in Africa there was not the likelihood

¹⁴ Babila Fochang, *Wisdom of the Ancients-Some African Proverbs, Witty Sayings and their Interpretations drawn mostly from Bali Nyonga in the North West Province of Cameroon*, Dschang: Dschang University Press, 2001, p.12.

of the true God doing battle with a false God. The God of the Africans turned out, after all, to be the God of Israel whom the Christian worship.¹⁵

Bediako's advocacy of continuity must not be understood as meaning a radical discontinuity with western theology. This is because one of the fundamental elements of Christian theology is that

No Christian theology in any age is ever simply a repetition of the inherited Christian tradition; that all Christian theology is a synthesis, an "adaptation" of the inherited Christian tradition in the service of new formulations of the problem of "the life of the universe and the life of man considered in relation to the will and purpose of the creator"-which is the subject matter of theology.¹⁶

If this is true then a theology that stresses the continuity of African pre-Christian religion into Christian theology must have to consider the cross-cultural factor in mission, because it is by cross-cultural diffusion that the Christian faith becomes a progressively richer entity.¹⁷ This work falls within the framework of Christian literature and academics that seeks to recover and redeem the distorted and somewhat lost African heritage so that African Christianity like African theology would arise out of the people. The work therefore is Africanist, which from a theological standpoint argues that there is continuity of some elements of African primal religion in African Christianity and that African Christianity is not or should not be a complete continuity of missionary Christianity, though it cannot survive without it because the legacy they bequeathed to us has become our past too. We shall employ the social sciences of history, anthropology, philosophy, literature, sociology, and psychology in so far as these branches of knowledge would enable us to arrive at our objectives.

Whether there is continuity or discontinuity, the final result of the work is the implication of conversion where the faith lives. There is the need therefore to find out whether the result of our findings enhances conversion or it is a deterrent to conversion. To achieve

¹⁵ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa-The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, Edinburgh University Press: Orbis Books, 1995, p.213.

¹⁶ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity-The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*, Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992, p.432.

¹⁷ Andrew F. Walls, "A history of the expansion of Christianity reconsidered", *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, New York/Edinburgh: Orbis Books/ T&T Clark, 2002, p.10.

this we shall use Donald Jacobs as our interpretive key.¹⁸ Jacobs explains what ought to take place when conversion occurs. Highlights of Donalds' focus will be given fully in chapter six.

1.5. Objectives.

Conversion, according to Walls, is turning towards Christ which presupposes turning what is already there. The whole conversion process would imply however that there must be a felt need that necessitates turning away from what already is to what is new.¹⁹ Howell interprets the claims of the Evangelical theologians at Lausanne concerning conversion as

A process in which the gospel interacts with intimate questions, problems, and needs of the hearer and in the long term enables the person to cope more adequately with their problems and gives them answers, although not always those which they anticipated.²⁰

As such Howell's argument for the Kasena people of Northern Ghana stands true for the Bali that

If the gospel does not address theologically the issues and problems which Kasena meet in daily life nor answer the questions they are asking, it will not be seen as either belonging or appropriate to their world, and the transforming power of the gospel will not therefore be appropriated to every area of their lives.²¹

To this effect Bediako and Idowu, Setiloane and Kibicho have laid claim that there is no way that we can understand the new if the old is not continued in the new. This study is an attempt at finding out what the old of the Bali was, and whether continuity is what gives relevance to the new. We have to find out how this continuity is expressed through the study of Christian songs and prayers of the Bali people. We chose songs and prayers

¹⁸ Donald Jacobs, "Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion-Reflections in an East African setting," in *Gospel in Context*, Vol. I, No. 3., July 1978.

¹⁹ Andrew F. Walls, "The Translation Principle in Christian history" *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, p.24.

²⁰ Allison Howell, *The Religious Itinerary of the Ghanaian People-The Kasena People and the Christian Gospel*, Achimota: African Christian Press, 2001, p.2.

²¹ Allison Howell, *The Religious Itinerary of the Ghanaian People*, p.2.

because they have common features through which the past can be passed on since they play a vital part in oral transmission.

As earlier mentioned we have to understand the past in order to search for its continuity in the present. A source for understanding is through archival materials of the colonial period and those of the missionaries. A second source would be reliance upon orality. Oral sources would enable us to check the biases of the archival sources whose authors already had a dogmatic stance concerning Bali religion like all of African religion. A third source would be theses that have been written based on the Basel Mission and their activities in Cameroon and those that are based on Bali.

The work will in the final analysis make a contribution to knowledge as it offers some insight in the academic field as it brings to the theological discussion the religious itinerary of another African people hitherto not fully known. More so, it would also make a contribution in the area of continuity as it makes a concrete contribution on how continuity is actually taking place in an African community.²² By this it is also contributing to the knowledge of some aspects of African Christianity and African Church history. Walls sum this up when he states, “we need more studies ...to help us understand the continuing story of African religion in its continuities and its new departures.”²³

Gaba²⁴ says that an important reason why a traditional concept has to be studied is to discourage the rather facile generalizations without evidence on behalf of Africa. Thus he seeks to encourage African students of African culture “to opt for the moment of studies that aim at investigating aspects of African traditional life and thought in particular societies.” He maintains that such studies “will eventually lead to more

²² Wagenaar has criticized Bediako that ‘his actual reflection on continuity and discontinuity remains rather abstract and does not come down to earth. There are not many examples of concrete issues in real-life situations of Christians to be found...’ Hinne Wagenaar, “Theology, Identity and the Pre-Christian Past” in *International Review of Missions*, Vol. LXXXVIII No. 351, p.367.

²³ Andrew F. Walls in a foreword to Allison M. Howell, *The Religious Itinerary of a Ghanaian People*, p.v.

²⁴ Christian R. Gaba, “Man’s Salvation: Its nature and meaning in African traditional religion”. In Edward Fashole-Luke, Richard Gray, Adrian Hastings and Godwin Tasie [eds.], *Christianity in Independent Africa*, London: Rex Collins, 1978, p.389.

authentically and representative generalizations for traditional Africa than is being done at present.”

This is true because although there may be some identifiable continental cultural universals, we should nonetheless recognize the geographical, cultural, linguistic and religious distinctions that make it difficult to define Africa.²⁵

Idowu puts it more succinctly: “any study of African traditional religion that is to be thorough and academically effective and profitable should be regional or one that covers only a limited area. The more limited the area covered the more effective and honest the study will be.”²⁶ Idowu further states that such studies must go on until enough scholars have been produced all over Africa so that each of them can be able to tackle the subject each in his/her own language because any such study “done in such areas where the native tongue is not that of the scholar must be regarded as tentative.”²⁷

The work will also serve as a test case for the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and other Protestant denominations that are still reluctant to culturize Christianity. The Churches in Cameroon seem still to operate on the model of the missionary Church even though there is an unconscious move towards appropriation within the congregations. This of course is the official policy. An example is the current Catechism of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, which was prepared by Hermann Herzog in the 1950s. Herzog was twenty-four years old when he was sent to become Principal of the Theological Training Centre in Nyassoso. In 1982 this is what Herzog said concerning the Catechism:

When I read the catechism of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, which we produced at the time I feel that we did not take the Cameroonian cultural and religious context sufficiently serious. In fact, I hope that Cameroonian theologians will soon review this catechism and write a new one out of their understanding and experience of the gospel.²⁸

²⁵ Cf Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “The Bible among African Christians: A Missiological Perspective”, in Theresa Okure [ed.], *To Cast Fire Upon the Earth: Bible and Mission in today's multi-cultural global context*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2000, pp.89-90.

²⁶ E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion-A Definition*, London: SCM Press, 1973, p.106.

²⁷ E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, p.106.

²⁸ Hermann Herzog, “Reflections: My Work and Stay.” In Nyansako-ni-Nku [ed.], *Journey in Faith- The Story of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, Yaounde: Buma Kor & Co., 1982, pp.169-173.

Contrary to Herzog's wish, the PCC readopted this catechism in 1995 un-revised. This catechism teaches a radical discontinuity of any pre-Christian God of Cameroon with the God of the Bible. Question two of the catechism asks, "Who is God and how do we know him?" Answer:

People worship many gods in this world. In some areas it is the sun or the moon or the earth, which are worshipped. Besides these and other gods people believe that there is one supreme god. But this god is not really worshipped since he is very far away from people. When seeking help, people in our country go to the ancestors, the spirits of the departed...But God is not like these gods for which man gropes and which he makes for himself. The true God makes himself known in Jesus Christ.²⁹

1.6. Delimitations.

Bali Nyonga is a conglomeration of ethnic communities that either voluntarily or through cohesion came together to become one people. This alone creates a limitation for studying their conception of God in detail considering the time frame that was allocated for this research.

Another factor that sets a limitation to this work is that a lot of archival material concerning Bali exists in the Basel Mission Archives in Basel; it was impossible to have access to them, considering the time limit. Perhaps a later work will draw on those other sources.

As a pastor, even though an indigene, there is the possibility that people may not be ready to disclose information, which they believe, would contradict the researcher's expectations. Above all a major limitation is that investigating one's own people is like handling dynamite. There are certain limits beyond which non-members of certain cults cannot go. Certain traditional values defy revelation defiance of which attracts severe sanctions. All these set limits to this research.

Although *mungaka* was adopted as the language of evangelization for the area, it appears that there are many religious views of the Bali, which do not reflect the province as a

²⁹ *I am the Lord your God-Catechism of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, 1965, p.5. This revised edition was modified and polished by a joint team of Tutors from the Theological College of the PCC and those of the EEC to serve the two Churches.

whole. This work cannot therefore make assumptions that may be considered for the whole Grassfield regions, but this means that each *fondom* due to its uniqueness has to be studied as an entity entirely by itself. Besides, because Bali itself is an agglomeration of many ethnic communities, religious convictions that hold true for some Bali people may not necessarily be so for other Bali people.

Due to time constraints the research was limited to just four congregations of the PCC out of a total of eighteen which may not give quite a representative view of the whole Christian community.

1.7.Literature Review.

Theology is 'God-talk', but humanity is at the center of that 'God-talk' since humanity is the one involved in the 'God-talk'. To understand what necessitates a particular kind of 'God-talk', the researcher has to consider the people's environment and history.

It is therefore expedient for the researcher of a people's religion to employ methods used in the social sciences, psychology, geography, environmental studies, ecology, history, philosophy of religion and the theology of religion.³⁰ However, Howell states Turner's emphasis that the phenomenology and the history of religion must provide the most critical method for studying religion because these "take the religious dimension seriously thus lessening the danger of the researcher falling into a reductionism or unscientific distortion of data."³¹

The review of literature shall be in two parts. Firstly we shall review literature that provides us with Basel Mission activities in Bali and Cameroon. We shall also consider literature that furnishes us with general information concerning Bali within the context of Cameroon history both secular and sacred. In the next part we shall review theological literature that engages us in the discussion on continuity and discontinuity.

³⁰ Cf. Allison Howell, *The Religious Itinerary of a Ghanaian People*, p.7, in which she cites Harold Turner,

³¹ Allison Howell, *The Religious Itinerary of a Ghanaian People*, p.7.

1.7.1. Literature Review on the Context of Research.

The first known documented writing on Bali is that of the German explorer, Dr. Eugen Zintgraff who made an exploration of Bamenda, Adamawa and the Benue lands of Cameroon from 1889-1892. Although this work is a narration of his journeys, the work covers more of Bali than the other tribes, which he visited. Unfortunately this work is available to us only through extracts. Thanks to E. M. Chilver who found it necessary to publish that part of Zintgraff's book, which she felt, would be of great use to Cameroonians. Chilver often presents the work in summary form but when she finds the material of relevance she makes an extract. We have mostly made use of these extracts.

Zintgraff's work gives us a picture of Bali daily life, their history of origin, social activities, agricultural life and their religion. As concerns religion, Zintgraff seems not to notice much but he has unconsciously given us a vivid description of it.³² Chilver considers Zintgraff's work to be of importance "for the light it throws on local history."³³

The missionary period begins with a Basel Mission archive report by the first missionaries who were sent to do feasibility studies on the possibility of beginning missionary work in the Grassfield region. In this document an account is given of their journey to Bali, arrival and the preaching of the first sermon. They also give their reasons why it is necessary and urgent that work should begin in Bali.

Max Moisel a German cartographer in an archival document gives a detailed description of his visit to Bali in 1907.

For the annexation of Cameroon and the beginning of missionary enterprise in Cameroon, an illuminating work is by Ardener,³⁴ which also has been provided only in extracts. As we have earlier mentioned concerning the other source the majority of

³² Chilver has remarked that in reading Zintgraff the reader must consider the fact that Zintgraff did not have any ethnographical knowledge but that "he was a good observer, and his descriptions of tools...can be regarded as fairly reliable." E.M. Chilver *Zintgraff's Explorations in Bamenda, Adamawa and the Benue lands 1889-1892*. Buea, 1966, p.vii. The extracts are from Eugen Zintgraff, *Nord-Kamerun*, Berlin, 1895.

³³ E.M. Chilver *Zintgraff's Explorations in Bamenda, Adamawa and the Benue lands 1889-1892*. Buea, 1966, p.xii.

³⁴ Shirley G. Ardener, *Eye-witnesses to the Annexation of Cameroon 1883-1887*, Buea, 1968.

documents relating to Cameroon during the period under review are mostly in German and, unless a researcher travels to Europe he may not be able to have direct access to those archival materials.

E.M.Chilver and P.M. Kaberry have done considerable research on Bali in various domains. Their works at our disposal are invaluable contributions. In 1968 they conducted research on the traditional political system of Bali Nyonga. In this work the authors give the background history of the Bali and a vivid description of the traditional political set-up.³⁵

Other works by Chilver that were available to this researcher include an unpublished history of Bali which she submitted to the Bali history committee in 1960, and a paper on ethno-medicine which she submitted at a conference in Leiden in 1989. Besides, she has also made available her notes on Bali that she collected in 1960 and 1963. She has also made available to the South West Provincial Archives and to some friends extracts of some archival material of interest concerning Bali that are in archives in Europe.

From the Cameroonian perspective, Maxwell Fohitung in his autobiography gives us insight into the early missionary encounter in Bali. His polygamous life gives us a concrete documentation regarding the BM/PCC policy concerning polygamy. Fohitung also supplies us with life stories of Africans who use objects of power that cannot be doubted as he concludes. This work is invaluable considering that Fohitung was one of the first pupils of the first batch of 1903, and as he has stated he has seen the reign of three *Fons* in Bali. He was also houseboy to Adolf Vielhauer.

In line with the work of Fohitung is the unpublished manuscript of his contemporary Elisa Ndifon who was the first Bali to become a pastor and who was the co-translator of the *Mungaka* Bible. Ndifon helps us to access from an African perspective how the Bali received or understood the missionaries and their message.

³⁵ P.M.Kaberry and E.M. Chilver, "An Outline of the Traditional Political System of Bali-Nyonga, Southern Cameroons," *Africa*, XXXI [4] 1961.

Werner Keller's work remains the most up-to-date history of the PCC since its inception. It gives a vivid description of missionary activity in Bali, although his interpretation seems to be biased towards western perception. The work is the most quoted on PCC history. A noticeable absence in this work however is the silence on Vielhauer who played an important role in the BM translation work in Cameroon

The catechism of the BM in Cameroon is a reliable document which lays emphasis on doctrine as regards African traditional religions and cultural values. The same spirit is traditionally carried on in the PCC catechism of 1973. Both catechisms call for radical discontinuity.

The Bali primer published in 1906, though a beginner's reader has interesting messages and stories that the pupils were supposed to teach to their parents. Besides it contains collections of folktales, proverbs and riddles. *Ke'fun Ntsudab-Ndu'ti Nwa'ni Mungaka* is another valuable reader.

Reverend Stöckle served as a missionary in Cameroon from 1938. In 1993 he published a Bali dictionary. Another missionary Rev. Tischhauser had compiled the work earlier. The manuscript is found in the BM archives where Stöckle copied it for publication. The work makes an in-depth survey of the usage of *Mungaka* language, idioms and figures of speech, which at least give a Bali method for interpreting figurative expressions that reveal an otherwise different meaning from its literal sense. This helps the researcher also in his collection and interpretation of data. As his royal Highness Dr. D. Ganyonga III has expressed in the foreword, the book's function "goes beyond that of a dictionary, gives the cultural and traditional background of several expressions and is intended to serve as a reference work."³⁶ Stöckle himself remarks

Many words were more precisely integrated, especially with regard to their cultural background. These words express partly the culture and tradition of Bali-Nyonga and help to understand their thoughts and their way of dealing

³⁶ Dr. D. Ganyonga III, Foreword to Johannes Stöckle, *Mungaka [Bali] Dictionary*, Köln:Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 1993, p.vii.

with social and religious problems, to secure life and prosperity, the present and the future.³⁷

In his words, Stöckle seemed to have fallen in love with the Bali language and philosophy as he later researched on the traditions of Bali, which included a collection of proverbs and riddles. The researcher however has to read through with a critical mind because his informants were modern Bali people whose information may have been based on interpretation rather than being factual. The work however, implies that former missionaries did not document much otherwise it would have been available in the Basel Mission archives just like the dictionary manuscript.

On the other hand if such documentation existed perhaps it may have been prejudicial to his liking. For he asserts that like other missionaries he had earlier on adopted an attitude of seclusion and undervalue of the African. He soon became

Aware of the necessity of openness from my contact with the Africans and had to refuse to categorize them or imprison them in a once for all judgment fixed and forever. I had to step out of this very restricted view and face African reality. It became very clear from the beginning that I was not to write on a 'tabula rasa'. An empty blackboard or impose on them my own culture or German-tinged Christianity with a different cultural and historical background.³⁸

The only available literature that deals with traditional religion is the thesis of Fomuso Buma-Foncham in which he gives a comprehensive descriptive analysis of sacrifice in Bali Nyonga.³⁹

1.7.2. Review of Theological Literature on Continuity.

Donald R. Jacobs states that "how to get converted and how to witness about the experience are largely culturally controlled."⁴⁰ Kibicho, argues that at conversion or non-conversion to Christianity the Kikuyu knew that "the God they continued to worship in

³⁷ Johannes Stöckle, *Mungaka [Bali] Dictionary*, 1993, p.x.

³⁸ Johannes Stockle, *Traditions, Tales, and Proverbs of the Bali-Nyonga*, 1994, pp.13.

³⁹ Fomuso Buma-Foncham Henri, *Sacrifices among Bali Nyonga in the Mezam Division, North West Province of Cameroon [A Descriptive Analysis]*, Dissertation for the Degree "Licence en Theologie", Faculty of Protestant Theology, Yaounde, 1976.

⁴⁰ Donald R. Jacobs, "Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion." in *Gospel in Context*, Vol. I, No.3, July 1978.

either the new or the old religion was the One *Ngai* who was well known and worshipped in the new religion of the educated.”⁴¹ For Setiloane “Traditional world-view persists in the Christianity of the Sotho-Tswana.”⁴² Both Setiloane and Kibicho are building on the pioneering theology of Bolaji Idowu who holds that “faith” has never been seen or touched. Besides,

Faith only becomes known as it realizes itself or actualizes itself in expressions. And expressions of faith by persons must reduce themselves into forms, which can be described in categories. One category may be changed for another, depending on a current outlook or a state of development; but categories we must employ.⁴³

As such any investigation concerning faith cannot afford to ignore the past since ‘faith does not hang in the air: it is in the hearts of persons for whom it gives meaning to the past, informs the present, and establishes hope in regard to eternity.’⁴⁴ Idowu’s central paradigm comes out in his conviction that Yoruba religion was a “primitive monotheism” with the certainty that such monotheism is “the revelation of the living God himself who has never left Himself without witness in any age or generation.”⁴⁵ Bediako has aptly summarized Idowu’s central paradigm:

Idowu...represents most distinctly the affirmation of the continuity of God in African experience from pre-Christian heritage into Christian confession...Idowu’s greatest achievement is in his vindication of an internal monotheism underlying African pre-Christian religious tradition.⁴⁶

What I think the above authors are saying is as an attempt, aimed at righting the wrongs of missionary Christianity-which was informed by the enlightenment- that forced a sharp

⁴¹Samuel Kibicho, “The continuity of the African conception of God into and through Christianity: A Kikuyu Case Study” in Edward Fashole-Luke, Richard Gray, Adrian Hastings & Godwin Tasie [eds.], *Christianity in Independent Africa*, pp.370-388.

⁴² Gabriel Setiloane, “How the traditional World-view persists in the Christianity of the Sotho- Tswana.” Edward Fashole-Luke et al. [eds.], *Christianity in Independent Africa*, pp.402-412.

⁴³ E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion-A Definition*, London: Oxford University Press, 1965, p.27.

⁴⁴ E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion-A Definition*, London: Oxford University Press, 1965, p.105.

⁴⁵ E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olódùmaré-God in Yoruba Belief*, London: Longman, 1962, p.202.

⁴⁶ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity-The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*, Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992, p.xvii.

dichotomy between the primal religions of Africa and the Christian faith, thus emphasizing that Christianity has no affinity with African primal religion. As such, to become a Christian the African was supposed to do away with anything that relates to his/her primal religion.

Walls probably shares the same views when he says, "traditional religion has not died out, nor has it been reduced to atavistic or 'pre-modern' enclave...what is happening to African Christianity is intelligible only in the light of what has gone before in African religions."⁴⁷

Harold Turner in his interest in exploring the affinities through features of primal religions states: "There seem to be affinities between the Christian and the primal traditions, an affinity that perhaps appears in the common reactions when Christian missions first arrive ['this is what we have been waiting for']".⁴⁸

The same views were shared by members of the Willowbank consultation who in their report felt that a fact has been acknowledged in recent years by Bible Societies, whose policy has changed from publishing translations by missionaries [with help from local people] to training mother-tongue specialists to do the translation. Only local Christians can answer the questions, "God, how would you say this in our language?" and "God, what will obedience to you mean in our culture?"⁴⁹ There seems to be unanimous agreement amongst the above theologians that contrary to missionary emphasis on discontinuity, there is continuity of the old religion in the new. This work is not aimed at repeating what has been said but rather to demonstrate how this continuity has [un]consciously been practicalized by Presbyterian Christians in Bali Nyonga through hymns and prayers.

⁴⁷ Andrew F. Walls, "African Christianity in the History of Religions" *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, pp.119-120.

⁴⁸ Harold Turner, "The Primal Religions of the World and their Study." In Victor Hayes [ed.], *Australian Essays in World Religions*, Bedford Park: Australian Association for the Study of Primal Religions, 1977, p.27.

⁴⁹ Lausanne Occasional Papers, The Willowbank Report- Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture held at Willowbank from 6th-13th January 1978, p.17.

1.8. Research Design and Methodology.

The research is qualitative. There are four major areas that have been covered in the work. These include an exploration of the Bali worldview - that is their conception of God - and their history, the history and theology of the Basel Mission, the encounter of the two worldviews and the transactions that ensued between the two worldviews especially concerning translation and lastly how the Bali conception of God influences their Christian practice. The focus shall be on hymnody and prayer.

This research centers on the Christians of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon [PCC] because she is the offspring of the Basel Mission Church in Cameroon. The Basel Mission on November 11th 1957 handed over the Church to Cameroonian Christians and the Church became known as the Presbyterian Church in West Cameroon. When Cameroon became the United Republic of Cameroon in 1972 the Church changed its name to Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. We have conducted the research in the following congregations: Ntanfoang, Ntaiton, Gungong and Mantum. There are four PCC parishes in Bali and the above congregations are representative of the parishes. The parishes are Ntanfoang, Njenka, Mbufung and Bawock respectively. Ntanfoang and Ntaiton are mission-founded congregations, while Gungong and Mantum represent post-missionary congregations.

1.9. Nature of Data Collection.

Our primary sources have been documentations and archival materials. In this regard we have researched in the South West Provincial Archive [SWPA], Buea, Republic of Cameroon. We also researched in the archives of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon Archive and Library [PCCAL], Buea that was organized by an expert from the Basel Mission archives in Basel. We encountered some handicaps in these places. The Government archive did not have file names for some documents that were just recently sent in. This makes it difficult for us to cite either shelf or file number. Although the PCCAL is quite modern and well equipped, it lacks the materials that the missionaries documented and which are in Basel. Archival materials from some Archives in Europe were made available to me by some academia who had gathered such materials during their Doctoral theses research. They shall be named in the acknowledgement.

Considering that the Centenary of the gospel in Bali and the Grassfields was celebrated only in 2003, the researcher was able to collect documents and correspondences from indigenes, who either lived during the missionary period or the documents had been preserved by their progenies. Contact was also made with researchers who have researched on the Bali. These were able to furnish me with material of some of their primary sources. This was of inestimable help since some of them collected these materials from the Basel Mission Archives. The literature that the missionaries published in the mother-tongue - *mungaka* - have been of inestimable help in this research. However, it remains a major handicap that I would have done a better job if I had access to the Basel Mission archives.

Since the object of our research is to understand the pre-Christian religion of the Bali, I found it necessary to be a participant observer during the research period. This is a process, which according to H. Russell Bernard

Involves establishing rapport... learning to act so that people go about their business as usual when you show up; and removing yourself everyday from cultural immersion so you can intellectualize what you have learned, put it into perspective, and write about it convincingly.⁵⁰

Although our discipline is theology we cannot dismiss the ethnographers since even the missionaries on whose documents we rely were not all theologians nor anthropologists.

The *Lela* festival is the state religion of the Bali people. I attended the 2003 edition that took place in December. I was present during the four days of manifestations. Besides, the whole festivity was videotaped and audio recorded. Photographs and notes were also taken on the events. I also attended the veneration of ancestors in some family compounds where I participated and observed; making notes on all that was witnessed. A case of suicide occurred during this period and its cleansing entailed a lot of religious rituals. I was fortunate to be related to the deceased so I was present and recorded all religious rites that were involved.

⁵⁰H.Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, Newbury Park: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1988, p.148.

Conversation was a major factor in the collection of data, especially when rites were performed. After having witnessed religious events interviews were scheduled with the priests concerned. Sometimes I had to go to the homes of these priests several times. I always tried to find out the religious interpretation behind every religious action that was witnessed.

I also had the added advantage of being an indigene who is already interested in the collection and publication of cultural issues. This past *naïve* research material enabled me to have points that could be raised up during interviews and conversations.

To find out the persistence of traditional religion in contemporary Christianity, songs were recorded during worship services. I also attended group meetings in the various congregations where the research was based. Besides these, three types of questionnaires were prepared. The first category was for ordinary Christians; the second one was for Christians who are title-holders since their offices require them to perform traditional religious rites. The two categories of questionnaires above may be considered as haphazard sampling since they were randomly distributed.⁵¹ The last category was for the clergy who had served in Bali and those who are indigenes still in active service or on retirement. Persistent appeals were made to Christians, relatives and friends who were kind enough to furnish me with information, or directed me to *informed informers*.

A total of one hundred and forty questionnaires were given out and one hundred was collected. There were twelve titleholders who responded to the questionnaires.⁵² There was a follow-up interview with eight of them. Six titleholders who are not professing Christians were also interviewed. I used two methods of interviewing: informal interviewing and unstructured interviewing.⁵³

⁵¹ According to Bernard haphazard sampling "is useful for exploratory research, to feel what's going on out there" and for pretesting to make sure that the items are unambiguous..." He adds further that it can also be dangerous since "it involves nothing more than grabbing whoever will stand still long enough to answer your questions" Bernard, *Research Methods*, p.97.

⁵² The *mungaka* language can be read by only a selected few. This can be considered a handicap since those who took questionnaires but who cannot write depended on what was translated to them. However, the case studies that we have used in chapter five are based on those who are literate.

⁵³ Bernard states that the informal interview "is the method of choice during the first phase of participation observation, when you are just settling in and getting to know the lay of the land."; while "unstructured

His Royal Highness Dr. Dohsang Ganyonga III traditional ruler of Bali Nyonga was kind enough to give me authority to witness certain cultic practices that are otherwise out of bounds to non-members. In spite of this, there are still institutions, which His Highness would not allow any researcher to dare. This is important since it reveals to us that the missionaries were bound to interpret what they had not been allowed to observe.

Rich sources of oral materials are myths, legends and songs - both traditional and Christian. Many myths, and legends have been documented. The folksongs were gathered mostly during funerals since this is the occasion when songs are sung, especially dirges for they reveal the peoples' notion of God and His role in human life.

Christian songs were collected during worship services, prayer meetings, Christian funerals and from the various versions of the *mungaka* hymnbooks.

Interviews were conducted with four retired pastors [non-indigenes] who have served in Bali from the four parishes respectively, the pastors who are currently working in the four parishes, and retired senior pastors who are indigenes.

Available literature published by the missionaries were critically studied and analyzed. The families of Ba Gwandingbe and Rev. Elisa Ndifon made available to the researcher the personal documents and correspondences of the above mentioned. These two were on the panel of those who assisted in the work of translation of the Bible into *mungaka*. These documents were of inestimable help to the researcher.

For other secondary sources the Herman Herzog Library of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary Library, Kumba, the Teachers' Resource Centre, Bamenda and the British Council Library in Bamenda were consulted.

General reading focused on literature concerning Bali and her neighbors, Cameroon and the history of missions in Cameroon and Africa with specific reference to the area of this study. Relevant documents of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon were perused, and

interviews are based on a clear plan that you keep constantly in mind... characterized by a maximum of control over the informant's responses." Bernard, *Research Methods*, p. 204.

also literature on the issues of Gospel and Culture. Focus was also made on the period of enlightenment to see how it influenced the Christianity and theology of the Basel missionaries in Cameroon.

1.11 Outline of Chapters

This research consists of six chapters. Chapter one introduces the work. This includes the background of the study, the statement of the problem, hypothesis, the intellectual framework, objectives of the study, delimitations, literature review, research design and nature of data collection. Chapter two presents a historical overview of the context of this research. The chapter considers the migratory history of the Bali people and settlement in the Grassfield region. The next section presents the community organization, the concept of life and death; and finally it considers the language of the Bali.

Chapter three explores the conception of God among the Bali. The findings of Europeans are first presented followed by the understanding of the indigenes. The conception of God considers the Supreme Being, the ancestors, spirits and other divinities. Chapter four deals with the inter-face between two worldviews and its consequences as the Gospel and missionaries [two different worldviews] came into contact with the Bali worldview. The chapter seeks to know how the missionaries understood the Bali worldview and their attitude towards the said worldview. This is followed by the reaction and response of the Bali.

In chapter five we have explored the present understanding of the concept of God. We have done this through an analysis of songs and prayers. The chapter also presents the way Christian practice has incorporated traditional religious practices; while traditional religion has been influenced by Christianity which indicate that the borrowings has not been one sided but has rather been a transaction.

Finally chapter six is a summary of our findings and its implication for theological discussion.

Chapter Two: The Bali Nyonga People.

Introduction.

When the Basel missionaries first ventured into the then Grassfield region of Cameroon¹ in 1903 they chose Bali Nyonga for their headquarters. They also chose the *mungaka* [Bali] language for the evangelization of the Grassfield region. The missionaries made Bali the seat of learning. The first primary school, catechist school, girls' school and boys' college for the entire region all started in Bali. The Bible was translated into *mungaka*; the Bali culture was researched and documented. Bali was like an experimental ground and missionary understanding was that since Bali was a dominant empire in the region whatever could be found worthy in the culture would be applicable to all Grassfield people. Who was this Bali? This is the question we shall be attempting to answer in this chapter. We shall consider the geographical location, the history, the language, the traditional political system and their philosophy of life.

2.1. Geographical Location.

Bali Nyonga² is one of the sub-Divisions found in Mezam Division of the North West province in the Republic of Cameroon. Bamenda Central Sub-Division bound Bali Nyonga to the north and east, in the south by Batibo Sub-division and in the west Mbengwi Sub-division bound it. Presidential decree No. 66/DF/433 of 26th August 1966 made Bali an administrative district within Mezam Division. Bali is a low-lying basin that receives rivers from the rest of the highland areas.³

2.2. Migratory History.

Tita Nji has given an outline of the traditional political institutions of Bali Nyonga. Ndifontah's political history of Bali Nyonga is an invaluable piece of academic work that

¹ See map 3, appendix I for a map of the then Grassfield region.

² See map 4, appendix I for a map of Bali Nyonga.

³ M.B.Gwanfogbe, "Geographical and Historical Introduction of Bali Nyonga" in Tita Nji et al, *An introduction to the study of Bali Nyonga*, Yaounde: Stardust Printers, 1988, p.9.

has aided this section of the research. The researcher however had access to most of their sources through the South West Provincial Archive, Buea.

The people designated, as Bali Nyonga is constituted of an agglomeration of diverse ethnic groups who either through accommodation or coercion by their attackers or out of a free mind chose to join the raiding Chambas.⁴ According to Gwanfogbe "Bali Nyonga belongs to the Chamba Lecko group that migrated from Chamba around the River Faro on the Cameroon-Nigeria border."⁵ Meek intimates that this group of Chamba raiders who are distinguished on linguistic grounds [and whom he classes as group A] includes the Chamba-Donga, Chamba-Lekon, Wom, Mumbake, and Kolbila.⁶

This group 'A' Chamba has been associated with a hero leader Gawolbe who in Bali tradition remains obscure. A conflict with the Fulani that occurred in the neighborhood of Koncha, sent them on flight.⁷ On their way they conquered and assimilated a group called Kefad and around Banyo area they conquered and assimilated the Buti, Tikali and Ti Gawolbe groups. The Chamba, Kefad, Buti, Tikali and Ti-Gawolbe came to be called Ba'ni sometimes called 'original Ba'ni' when a distinction has to be made between Gawolbe's adherents and those other groups who later joined one of his successors, Nyongpasi to form the settlement of Bali Nyonga.⁸

Fulani supremacy over the Chamba Leko it can be argued was not the only cause that precipitated the departure of the Chamba Leko from their homeland. Historians have distinguished five groups of the migrating Chamba Leko. As earlier mentioned this Chamba group raided their way southwards through Koncha, Tibati, Banyo and Foumban, before

⁴ See map 5, appendix I for the migratory route of the Chamba and the original locations of the other ethnic groups that constitute Bali Nyonga.

⁵ M.B.Gwanfogbe, "Geographical and Historical Introduction of Bali Nyonga" in Tita Nji et al, *An introduction to the study of Bali Nyonga*, p.12.

⁶ C.K.Meek, *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria*, London: n.p., 1931, p.329, in P.M.Kaberry and E.M.Chilver, "An outline of the Traditional Political System of Bali-Nyonga, Southern Cameroons", in *African Studies* XXXI[4], 1961, p.358.

⁷ Ndifontah B. Nyamndi, *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon-A Political History*, Yaounde: Edition Cape, 1987, p10.

⁸ P.M.Kaberry and E.M.Chilver, "An outline of the Traditional Political System of Bali-Nyonga, Southern Cameroons", in *African Studies* XXXI [4], 1961, p.358.

settling in the Bamenda grassfields. Here they founded the *fondoms* of Bali Kumbat, Bali Nyonga, Bali Gangsin, Bali Gham and Bali Gasho. Together with those other ethnic groups who were absorbed they became identified as Bali Chamba or Bali. Two dates have been suggested as to the time Gawolbe left the Chamba homeland.⁹

Gawolbe raided his way into Fumban but met an equal opponent in the Bamuns under the leadership of King Mboumbuo. The Bamuns defeated him. Upon his arrival he had entered into alliances with small tribes who suffered oppression from the formidable Bamuns. His humiliation by Fumban scared his allies who feared retribution in the hands of Fumban.¹⁰ This could not have been otherwise since king Mboumbuo would not have spared vassals who chose to ally with an invader to attack a Lord of the area.

Gawolbe left the scene of defeat stronger than he came. The new allies who now accompanied him in small and large contingents included Sangam, Sang, Ndiyang, Lap, Ngod, Munyam, Kundem, Fuleng, Set and Dip. They did not all abandon their villages, but a subsequent persecution by Mboumbuo soon caused those who stayed behind to follow the Balis. The date of their departure has been situated about the 1820s.¹¹

The accompanying allies increased the size of Gawolbe's army so that internal distinctions could be seen. Soon two broad groups that survived to this day emerged. These are the *Ba'ni* [singular] *Yangni* [plural] and the Banten or Lo'lo. The former refers to the pre-Fumban group, and the latter to the allies from around Fumban.¹²

Gawolbe left the scene of defeat with the hope of vengeance on an adversary who proved more powerful than him. Smarting under the defeat he moved towards the Bamenda plains.

⁹ Ndifontah places the two dates according to some historians to be as early as the 1770s while some go as late as the 1830s. He says the dating is further complicated because the evacuation was a gradual process that took several years to complete. Ndifontah B. Nyamndi, *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon-A Political History*, 1987, p15.

¹⁰ Ndifontah B. Nyamndi, *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon-A Political History*, 1987, pp.19-20.

¹¹ Ndifontah B. Nyamndi, *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon-A Political History*, 1987, pp.19-20.

¹² P.M.Kaberry and E.M.Chilver, "An outline of the Traditional Political System of Bali-Nyonga, Southern Cameroons", in *African Studies XXXI* [4], 1961, p.358. See also Ndifontah B. Nyamndi, *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon-A Political History*, 1987, p.20.

The Bamenda *fondoms* were generally small. Besides, Gawolbe's fame had spread among the Bamenda *fondoms*. This is more so since they were Cavalry fighters, something that was new to these *fondoms*.¹³ The first people to taste the ruthlessness of the Chamba were Bafreng. After pillaging Bafreng Gawolbe pushed down to Fontem, scrambled up the precipitous slopes and launched an attack on Bafu-fondong. His attack on Bafu-fundong was a miscalculation. Historians place this battle where he died between 1830 and 1835.¹⁴ Gawolbe's death created a big vacuum of leadership. Considering himself to be invincible he had not groomed any of his sons for leadership.

It would appear that at his death there were two princes contesting the succession, Samsu, and Galanga. Rather than reconcile the feuding brothers, other contestants joined in the contests. A princess dared to succeed her father and surprisingly with remarkable success. This contest led to the emergence of six *fondoms* in place of Gawolbe's vast empire. His eldest son Samsu took on the rulin name Gavabe, and founded the *fondom* of Bali Gangsin. Galanga, his junior brother founded the *fondom* of Bali Bagam or Bali Gham near Bagam. Another prince named Galabe founded Bali Kumbat, while Ganyam founded what was to be later known as Bali Gasho named after his successor. A seventh Bali is the Bali Kontan believed to have broken from Muti under the leadership of Nyemangan. Kahnyonga or Nahnyonga shortened to Nyonga created the *fondom* of Bali Nyonga. From this point our focus shall be on what happened to Bali Nyonga.¹⁵

2.3.Settlement in the Grassfield Region of Bamenda.

Two surprises of the breakup were that a princess had joined in the contest and she also attracted a larger following than the other Balis put together. Chamba society was hitherto a male dominated society and the women acknowledged that fact. Women had nothing to do with public office, nor anything to do with politics. Nyamndi has argued that had it not been for the cracks already existent within the Chamba Empire, the men would have risen with

¹³ The Bali introduced the horse in Cameroon.

¹⁴ Ndifontah B. Nyamndi, *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon - A Political History*, 1987, pp.14-27.

¹⁵ M.B.Gwanfogbe, "Geographical and Historical Introduction of Bali Nyonga" in Tita Nji et al., *An introduction to the study of Bali Nyonga*, pp.15-16, P.M.Kaberry and E.M.Chilver, "An outline of the Traditional Political System of Bali-Nyonga, Southern Cameroons", in *African Studies XXXI*[4], 1961, pp.358-359, Ndifontah B. Nyamndi, *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon - A Political History*, 1987, pp.29-30.

one voice to challenge Nahnyonga's claim.¹⁶ As it were nobody cared. However, in her modesty she did not make any claim to the throne of Bali Nyonga. She rather gave it to her son, Nyongpasi who took the title of Fonyonga, later to be known as Fonyonga I. Under his leadership Bali Nyonga went on a northeasterly course through Bamilekeland, crossed the River Nun into Bamum territory.

Here the Ti people warmly welcomed them and this induced them to settle there and expand. Sometime around 1855 Fonyonga launched an attack on Fumban in which he scored an initial victory on Mbuombuo. The victory must have surprised Fonyonga himself since he had witnessed his grandfather's humiliation at the hands of the same Mbuombuo. Instead of pursuing the fleeing Bamums, he rather retreated to glory in his victory. The Bamum's took advantage and launched a surprise attack. Taken by surprise, the Bali Nyonga soldiers were incapacitated. The better choice was to flee. Fonyonga's attack on Bamum aroused the interest of small tribes who allied with him against Mbuombuo. Some of these people were those who stayed behind when their kinsmen joined Gawolbe. The Lap, Munyam, Fuleng, joined Fonyonga in the battle against Mbuombuo. Kundem and Banden had joined them later. Meanwhile the Dip, Ndiyang, Set, Sangam Won, Nggod and Kwen supported Fonyonga morally rather than physically. They too saw his defeat as their own.

With the shameful defeat and flight of Fonyonga, and for fear of reprisals from the Bamum these people had no option than to accompany the fleeing Bali Nyonga. The Bali Nyonga roving kingdom was now a conglomeration of several tribes under their various chiefs. For the second time a Chamba military had attacked Fumban, and were defeated. Ironically, for the second time they fled the battle scene stronger than they came.

They journeyed into the Bamenda grassfields, stopped at Bambui and performed the *Lela* ritual and observed its purifying rites. They fought their way into Bafreng, moved to Kufom from where they launched an attack on their kinsmen the Bali Kontan who were already a

¹⁶ Ndifontah B. Nyamndi, *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon*, pp.49-50.

terror to their Metta neighbours. Fonyonga took over the Meta villages that had been conquered by Kontan. This took place around 1855 and the Bali Nyonga entered on a settled life. Not long after, Fonyonga died in 1856 and was succeeded by his son who took the throne name of Galega I. Galega continued with the expansionist spirit of his father. He moved from Kufom and settled at Ntanka, the present Bali settlement.

Galega's decision to move to Ntanka was at the detriment of the Widikum ethnic groups, who became vassals. While some fled away from the terror of the Bali, others remained behind. Among the meta tribes that stayed behind are: Mbufung, Mbelu and Munjong. The Ntanka chieflets include Kunyang, Mudum, Baku and Mbelu. At the northern periphery is another group called Bossa, and also Bawock a Bamilikee group that came in the early 20th century. These two groups have maintained their ethnic identities.

2.4. Community Life.

2.4.1. Birth, Marriage and Death.

It is necessary for us to look at how the Bali view life. Life includes the concept of death as well. Three things characterize the Bali philosophy of life: birth, marriage, death and the hereafter. These three are inseparable because when one talks of death, the issue at stake is life. Conversely when one contemplates about the fullness of life, it is a reflection of how the end shall look like. Marriage and procreation are what connect the two together. Great emphasis is laid in the continuity of the family line. That is why if one is regarded to be past the age of marriage and without children the one is mocked with expressions like: *u la' ku bo nun wo ni bo u* [when you die a stone shall be placed in your palm]. The stone is put in your palm so that you should not look back and expect any filial obligation from the living. Since you did not leave behind any progeny, do not expect the full rites that the departed deserve. Besides, it is said that *mun beh nkwin len* [a child is the firewood of old age], it is also said that *ma mbi ni mbi len nyon bun mun* [when mother goat is getting old, it tends to suck the breast of its young].¹⁷ That is why polygamy is essential because *kob ngui ma ni*

¹⁷ Babila Fochang, *Wisdom of the Ancients*, p.19.

mbun nden bang beh [a big bamboo forest cannot lack dry bamboo]. A father laments over a wayward child that: *mu la' ku nda a ve* [my family line shall become extinct after my death]. In the case of the death of all one's children, one laments: *mu la' ku mvi kwed* [I shall be eaten by dogs when I die].

The dead must have a decent burial and must be properly mourned for, because they can bring misfortune upon the family. After burial of a dead parent, all grown up children are expected to bring dance groups to manifest at the *koen vu* [death celebration].¹⁸ To this end most libation prayers include the request for prosperity and posterity: *Nyikob fa fu' mfa ndzui* [*Nyikob* give us wealth, give us the consumers of the wealth].

Although it is considered abnormal to die without a child, it is equally acknowledged that a child is God's gift. If *Nyikob* does not give you, you cannot manufacture one. This is better expressed in the proverb: *mun ti ma mbe' ma boma be nti vi ntoma be'* [if I do not have a child in my womb, I will not give birth to my intestines].¹⁹ In the same way human effort alone does not give sound moral training to a child because *munnim bom* [a man is according to how he has been moulded], so the person with good children may not necessarily boast because *u beh ma' dzob bun bim bo fung u ni ngan dzob* [if you tune a song and people answer well you may be acclaimed as a good singer].²⁰ This does not necessarily mean that you know how to sing well or better than others. *A beh ndze Nyikob bim a* [it is according to the wish of *Nyikob*].

¹⁸ For a detailed treatment of death and issues relating to death see, Sema Paul Fomuso, *Dirges of the Bali Nyonga People [Ntsi Vu Ba'ni] A Study in Folk Literature*, unpublished Dissertation for Post Graduate Diploma [D.I.P.L.E.G.] in Language Studies, Yaounde, 1985, Also Patrick Foncham, *Death, Burial and Celebration [Consensus and Conflict] between Tradition and Christianity in Bali Nyonga*, Diploma Thesis, Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Kumba, 1993.

¹⁹ Babila Fochang, *Wisdom of the Ancients*, p.10.

²⁰ Babila Fochang, *Wisdom of the Ancients*, p.37.

The importance of having children is displayed in names like Wadinga and Dinga both meaning “my spears are now many.”²¹ The spear symbolizes a warrior; to have a son is to have another spear, the more your sons the more spears you possess. There is also Bangmia - I have now put a nail to my compound, meaning that the person feels quite assured that even if he dies the family line must continue, because *ta' tui nyin ma ma' kob beh* [one tree does not make a forest].²²

2.4.2.Traditional Political System.

The period of history under consideration determines the type of political system. It is necessary that we look at the period prior to the missionary encounter and the first European contact with Bali. Kaberry and Chilver say that by the time Zintgraff arrived Bali in 1889, Galega had already consolidated his position. According to their source this occurred some twenty years earlier. Galega extended his sphere of influence south towards Bammessong and in the north towards the Bamileke chiefdoms and westward towards the Widikum villages.

In a purely military organization, power was centered on the *Fon*. He was the symbol of Bali Nyonga unity. Closely associated to him in terms of rank were the *Fonte Ba'ni* and the *Fonte BaNten*. They represented the identity of their various groups. They were also symbols of chieftancy as an institution. However, the *Fon* was first and foremost a military ruler and not a divine king as would be found in some Grassfield *fondoms* of the time. They do not have any major political function apart from the fact that at the enthronement of a new *Fon* the *Fonte BaNten* come with their medicine bags and hit the *Fon* with them.²³ The significance of this is that the *Fon* should be extraordinary and have all the powers of the *fonte*. The *fonte Ba'ni* played a special role in *Lela*. As an honor to these *Fonte*, the *Fon*

²¹ Babila Fochang, unpublished manuscript circulated among friends for corrections with the title: “A dictionary of Mubako and Mungaka names”

²² Babila Fochang, *Wisdom of the Ancients*, p.35. For a full treatment of customs and rites concerning birth, childhood, marriage and death see Johannes Stöckle, *Traditions, Tales and Proverbs of Bali Nyonga*, pp.20-47.

²³ P.M.Kaberry et al, “Traditional Political Systems of Bali-Nyonga” p.366. For a detailed analysis of the Bali political system past and present see Vincent TitaNji “Economic and social setting of the reign of Galega II [1940-1985]” in TitaNji et al., *An introduction to the study of Bali-Nyonga*, pp.77-110.

started public pronouncements by saying “I and my *Fonte*”²⁴ The *Fon*’s supreme authority was exercised through the power to appoint political offices. He could make appointments as well as withdraw them as he pleased. Succession to the *Fonte* like many ranks in Bali is hereditary. There are nine *fonte BaNten* and five *fonte Ba’ni*.

There are two traditional institutions concerned with the installation of a new *Fon*. They are *Lela* and *Voma*.²⁵ It is doubtful whether they are religious cults that eventually assumed political functions or they are political institutions that assumed religious roles and now combine both. However the claim that these institutions came from the Chamba homeland presupposes that they are religious since they had to stop on the way to perform the purification rituals of *Lela*. However, when they first settled, the *Voma* was absent.²⁶

Lela and *Voma* are described as the most ancient of institutions brought by the Bali from Koncha. The *Fon* was and is still the head of these institutions and is the one who appoints senior officers. Traditionally *Voma* members were only seven or nine in number. They are called *Ba Nwana* who are responsible “for the burial, installation and initiation of the *Fon* into the secrets of Bali society and educating him in the art of government.”²⁷ These are non-royals *Ba’ni* and their titles are now hereditary. They have defined functions within the cult. They are in charge of performing annual sacrifices from September to October at the *Voma* festival. This is to promote the growth of guinea corn which was a traditional staple food crop but which today is planted only by the *Ba Nwana* in their compounds for sacral purposes. Another sacrifice is performed in January, this time, for the first fruits. They are in charge of the *Fon*’s burial and together with the *Ba Sama* they enthrone a new *Fon*. Three

²⁴ P.M.Kaberry et al, “Traditional Political Systems of Bali-Nyonga” p.366.

²⁵ We shall examine the religious aspects of these cults under religion.

²⁶ Interview by researcher on 21-12-2003. See also Vincent Tita Nji, “The Traditional Political Institution of Bali Nyonga” in Tita Nji et al., *An Introduction to Bali Nyonga*, pp.80-81, Tita Nji explains that the period of the absence of *Voma* was when Nanyonga was in power and since *Voma* is a male cult it had to be abandoned. See also Ndifontah, *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon*, p.64.

²⁷ Vincent Tita Nji, “The Traditional Political Institution of Bali Nyonga” in Tita Nji et al., *An Introduction to Bali Nyonga*, p.80.

seniors among them are said to date back to the time of Nyongpasi. Some also happen to be members of *Lela*.

Lela like *Voma* has two festivals - the major one in late November or December. This one is simply called *Lela* festival. The minor festival in May/June marks the beginning of the planting season. This one is called *kati Nyikob* [offering sacrifice to God]. The major *Lela* is a national festival that promotes the unity of the Bali people. Even though it dates back to the time of their departure from Koncha, it has by the time of Kaberry's research come to symbolize the period in which the loyalty of all the *Fon*'s subjects - Ba'ni, Banten and Niwombe was renewed.²⁸

Possibly because a woman founded Bali Nyonga there is Kahfonmungwi [lady *Fon*] who has her palace near that of the *Fon*. She is usually the sister of a reigning *Fon*. Her position however is only titular since she does not have any major governing role. Besides the Kahfonmungwi, there is also the Kahmamfon [*Fon*'s mother] who has a palace of her own. As the *Fon*'s mother, she has an advisory role in relation to the *Fon*. Accordingly, she sometimes act as mediator between the people and the *Fon*.

The other political group worth mentioning is the *Kom* [plural] *Nkom* [singular]. Kaberry and Chilver report that they are the creation of Nyongpasi.²⁹ They fall into two categories. *Kom Ba'ni* and *Kom ngong*. *Kom ngong* are hereditary as they date back to Nyongpasi. They are seven in number. The other group is *Kom ngong*. These are titleholders appointed by personal merit.³⁰ By 1985 they were fifty-seven of them.³¹ While succession to *Kom Ba'ni* is hereditary, that of the *Kom ngong* may or may not be inherited by their descendants

²⁸ P.M. Kaberry et al, "An outline of the Traditional Political Systems of Bali-Nyonga", p.364.

²⁹ P.M. Kaberry et al, "An outline of the Traditional Political Systems of Bali-Nyonga", p.361, n.1.

³⁰ Vincent TitaNji "Economic and social setting of the reign of Galega II [1940-1985]" in TitaNji et al., *An introduction to the study of Bali-Nyonga*, p.92.

³¹ Since they are appointed always during the *Lela* festival and considering that *Lela* is staged almost every year the number must have increased considerably.

depending on the qualities of the successor. It must be observed that all succession in Bali is patrilineal and only when there is no patrilineal heir can the sister's son succeed.

There is the *Ngumba* that is said to have "its roots in the suppressed *Kwifon* societies of the Banten allies"³² According to Kaberry and Chilver: "the role of *Nggumba* [sic] was confined to apprehending evil-doers and administering the sasswood in cases of witchcraft."³³ This was done at the orders of the *Fon*. Zintgraff reportedly saved a lot of deaths when he visited Bali in 1892. There was an epidemic outbreak, which led to witch hunting through the administration of sasswood poisoning. This increased the death toll until he asked the *Fon* to stop. He then introduced sanitation measures, which the *Fon* accepted and asked his subjects to follow. The deaths stopped.³⁴

Besides, all the *Fonte* that have been named above, each of them has their own *fonte*. The insignia for all dignitaries are the copper bangle, caps with cowries sewn on, a bangle made out of elephant tusk and a red feather [from the Banaman Turaco bird] affixed to the cap. There are the *Gweis* who now act as palace clowns, but played the role of scouts in time of war. The *tsinted* are the palace attendants who run errands for the palace, and there are other office holders who carry out special religious rite. These institutions and lesser ones are important for our study, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter.

2.4.3. Language.

Aloysius Pieris states that language is the experience of reality.³⁵ This holds true for the Bali who adopted and adapted to language that reflected the reality they were experiencing at a given time. The language of the Chamba is *Mubako*. As we had earlier mentioned these people have been distinguished by Meek on linguistic grounds. M.D.W. Jeffreys cites

³² Vincent TitaNji "Economic and social setting of the reign of Galega II [1940-1985]" in TitaNji et al., *An introduction to the study of Bali-Nyonga*, p.93.

³³ Kaberry et al, "An outline of the traditional political systems of Bali-Nyonga", p.169.

³⁴ E. M Chilver, *Zintgraff's Explorations in Bamenda, Adamawa and the Benue Lands 1889 – 1892*, Buea: n.p, p.32.

³⁵ Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, New York: Orbis Books, 1988, p.71.

Vielhauer as stating, “*mungaka* is a Semi-Bantu language modified by many languages of the Sudanic group.”³⁶ He goes on to say that Ba’ni appear to be ethnologically of Sudanic origin because the main features of their original language, *mubako*, are Sudanic modified by Semi-Bantu influences. The *mungaka* on the other hand is a Semi-Bantu language with Sudanic modifications.³⁷ *Mubako* is the language spoken by the other Bali *fondoms* that we have met above.³⁸ The Bali Nyonga now speaks *Mungaka*. *Mungaka* simply means *mu*= ‘me’ *nga*= ‘I say’ [conjugated], *ka*= ‘affirmative particle’- literally this means ‘me I say’.³⁹

Mungaka is in greater part⁴⁰ the language of the Ti people, a group we have already met who allied with Gawolbe and later with Fonyonga against the Bamum. Lima Adolf Sema states that some scholars contend that either Galega adopted the language as a military strategy or its simplicity offered an opportunity for uniting his empire. Lima however argues that whichever way we view it, it is evident that it must have been an evolutionary process.⁴¹ On the eve of colonialism the Bali Empire wielded great influence in the region, it was a booming trade centre such that most other people spoke *mungaka*. This includes people of the Bamileke province.⁴²

When the Basel Missionaries entered the Grassfield they recognized it as a valuable medium of instruction in vernacular education and evangelization. The first grammar of

³⁶ M.D.W.Jeffreys, *The Bali of Bamenda*, p.112.

³⁷ M.D.W.Jeffreys, *The Bali of Bamenda*, p.112.

³⁸ In Bali Nyonga the language has become court language only, even before the arrival of Zintgraff. The *Lela* songs are sang only in *mubako* since in *Lela* songs, the *Ba’ni* recount their past glories. Until recently names were usually in *mubako*. Also when the *Fon* appoints a *Nkom* he is given a *mubako* title. The present *Fon* has gone back to his roots by using the prefix ‘*Ga*’ to his throne name instead of the *mungaka* ‘*Fo*’.

³⁹ Lima Adolf Sema, “The Mungaka Language - Its Development, spread and use”, in TitaNji et al., *An introduction to the study of Bali Nyonga*, p.112.

⁴⁰ Although scholars generally agree that *mungaka* is the Ti language indigenous speakers may not quite agree. This researcher’s findings seem to come to the same conclusion. For example, the fruit plum is called *dzom* in *mungaka* and the same in *mubako*.

⁴¹ Lima Adolf Sema, “The Mungaka Language - Its Development, spread and use”, in TitaNji et al., *An introduction to the study of Bali Nyonga*, pp.115-119.

⁴² L. Dugast, “Inventaire ethnique du Sud-Cameroun”. *Memoires de l’IFAN*, no.1, 1949, p.117, in Bali Oral History, p.13. Committee

mungaka was published in 1906. Subsequently many publications followed. The Basel Mission adopted *mungaka* as the Synod language for the region.

Mungaka however did not serve the missionary interest for long. Earlier on, the Basel Mission stated in their formal application that they intended to use Cameroonian languages for educational and evangelistic purposes. Though the Government approved of it she later turned against the use of these languages for political reasons. Fonyonga soon had considerable power, which made the German colonial authorities afraid of his influence. To reduce his power and his dominance the Government asked that the Basel Mission should not teach *mungaka* outside of Bali Nyonga. The colonial Government also encouraged the villages that paid taxes to Fonyonga to seek autonomy. To this effect the new school policy of 1910 stated "...in native schools no other language is to be tolerated as a medium of instruction and as a subject except German and the actual dialect which is spoken by the people..."⁴³

Conclusion.

In this chapter we have traced the history of the Ba'ni from when they left their homeland of Koncha. Through wars and alliances they absorbed other groups into their system so that by the time they settled in the Grassfield region of Cameroon they were an agglomeration of various ethnic groups united under one traditional ruler. In order to consolidate his empire Galega abandoned the mother tongue of the Ba'ni for the *mungaka* language, which he considered as a means of fostering national unity. We have also considered the Bali concept of life from birth to death. We also looked at the traditional political organization of a settled Bali community. All these are helpful for us to understand the people whose religious life we are discussing. In the next chapter we will look at the religion of the Bali.

⁴³ Basel Mission Archive, 1910, Education Committee, in Gwanfogbe, *Changing Regimes and the Development of Education in Cameroon*, p.183.

Chapter Three: The Religion of Bali Nyonga.

Introduction.

Bali Nyonga is a collective group formed from ethnic communities of diverse backgrounds who at the period of the missionary encounter were one people who strived towards a common identity. A study of their religion must take into consideration this complex process.

The materials at our disposal concerning the religion of Bali Nyonga have come to us through the works of colonial agents, ethnographers, cartographers, administrators and missionaries whose documentation of the religion was mostly interpretations based on their observations or information which passed through many interpreters and therefore subject to distortions. They had worldviews that were quite different from that of the Bali. It becomes necessary to make a careful study of what makes for religion in contemporary Bali. However, one may have to recognize that any study of Bali religion in the aftermath of the Christian presence may encounter difficulty in an attempt to distinguish Christian influence on the traditional religion.

Bolaji Idowu warns us of three pitfalls that confront the researcher and interpreter. First is the temptation of taking appearance for reality without adequate verification. The second is the temptation concerning the question of origin, a process whereby the researcher eagerly traces the origin of a people's belief and culture to sources outside the people as if they are incapable of being their own originators. In trying to escape from these two temptations, the researcher runs into the third, which is "morbidly shrinking from any suggestion of similarities or identification between one category of religious terminology and the other."¹ He cautions therefore that there is no point at all in creating distinctions where they do not

¹E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olódùmarè, God in Yoruba Belief*, London: Longman Group Ltd., 1962, pp.2-4.

exist merely because of the fear of being accused falsely of applying foreign categories where they do not apply.²

In this chapter we will first present the views concerning Bali religion as seen and recorded by Europeans.³ We will then look at what the local scholars have written concerning their views of Bali religion and the people's understanding of God. The data from written sources will be related to the result of oral interviews that we have conducted. We shall in our exploration seek to understand how far the conception of God among the Bali is owed or not to missionary influence. Our approach shall be descriptive and analytical.

3.1. Bali Nyonga: A Religious Tabula-Rasa?

3.1.1. The Pre-Missionary Period.

3.1.1.a. Zintgraff's Version.

The people of Bali Nyonga had their first contact with a European in 1889. This was the German explorer Dr. Eugen Zintgraff⁴ whose exploration was in a bid to open up a trade route from the coastal regions through the grassfield regions up to the Adamawa. Zintgraff was the first European to enter the region. He immediately fell in love with Bali and tried to convince the German Foreign Office to build a station at Bali. Galega I offered Zintgraff brotherhood that was sealed through a blood pact, each person made a cut on his body, mixed the blood and each licked it. By this blood pact they both swore to defend each other from their enemies⁵.

² E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olódūmarè, God in Yoruba Belief*, London: Longman Group Ltd., 1962, pp.2-4.

³ The works available to us are not exhaustive, but they seem to be the best that I could lay hands on during the period of research.

⁴ Eugen Zintgraff, *Nord Kamerun*, Berlin, 1895, in this work Zintgraff narrates his journeys and experiences and describes the people whom he encountered in his travels. What we have at our disposal are extracts of Zintgraff's book, courtesy of Dr. E.M.Chilver who says that "the book, is the first by a European about the Grassfields has not been translated and is hard to get second-hand." She has helped the reader by writing summary sections in italics while "free and condensed translations of the texts are put in inverted commas." E.M.Chilver, *Zintgraff's Explorations in Bamenda Adamawa and the Benue Lands 1889-1892*, Buea, 1966, pp.xi & 1.

⁵ E.M.Chilver, *Zintgraff's Explorations*, p.6.

The hospitality of *Fon* Galega and his people impressed Zintgraff and this had great implications for subsequent European encounters, colonialists and missionaries alike, with Bali as would be seen later. Here is Zintgraff's view of Bali religion.⁶ According to him,

Definite ideas of God and an organized cult are absent. There is a belief in spirits which expresses itself in various situations, and angry ghosts. And their appeasement, are in the center of things.⁷

His conclusion was that a good God was not worshipped. Although *Nikob* [God] denotes a superior being, he is a fearful bush demon that is propitiated when the unfortunate occurs. Besides, Zintgraff capitalizes on the *Fon*'s philosophical pragmatism concerning the matter of religion when he had said,

Man only knows what he sees, knowledge is the only right basis of belief and everything else is useless speculation; but if the missionaries came to my land I would, if I could see the advantages of it, be willingly baptized, but would not exclude other beliefs since those of men are only good if they do not rely on one particular belief; but I wish to be a friend of the whites and take the Good from wherever it is to be found.⁸

A credit to his honesty however is when he says, "It is difficult to get any insights into Bali religious beliefs as they are reserved and unwilling to talk on the subject."⁹

⁶ Chilver rightfully notes that "Zintgraff's knowledge of Bali [*mungaka*] and Hausa was very slight, and his discussions of character, motives and political institutions are consequently superficial and open to criticisms." Besides, he had no means of checking the information given to him. He did not have any training in ethnography neither had he any exposure to a similar culture before. That notwithstanding, "he was, however, a good observer, and his descriptions ...can be regarded as fairly reliable." p.ix. Perhaps this observation serves even for other subsequent works of the time since a lot of discrepancies shall be found.

⁷ E.M. Chilver, *Zintgraff's Explorations*, p.10.

⁸ Max Moisel, *Zur Geschichte von Bali und Bamum*, *Globus*, 1908, Bd. XCIII, Nr. 8, p.271. Dr. E.M.Chilver made this extract available to Dr. M.B. Gwanfogbe, see also Ndofontah, *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon*, p.115.

⁹ E.M. Chilver, *Zintgraff's Explorations*, p.10. This statement is remarkable because our analysis would make use of religious actions which Zintgraff describes with precision which he seems to think have no religious significance.

3.1.1.b. The view of Max Esser¹⁰

Max Esser was a merchant banker before he became interested in developments overseas. He accompanied Zintgraff in a brief visit to Bali in 1896. He reported that while discussing religion with *Fon* Galega I, the *Fon* said “the religion of the white man is good because his God is stronger than our gods, but he allows the white man only one wife. One wife is not enough for a man.”¹¹ *Fon* Galega went on to recount how under his father, the people still had a great religion but which alongside their fatherland had been abandoned as they fled. In a sense they no longer had any religion, though they could not confess to Islam. Esser thinks that even though they fled from Islam, they were still influenced by it.

Esser was convinced that the *Fon* feared the devil he claimed killed his son two months earlier.¹² When Esser was leaving, Galega “asked for a missionary with whom he could make big medicine and kill the devil.”¹³

Esser then describes what he calls “a really striking farewell scene” in which the *Fon* says, “I will bless you so that luck and good health may accompany you.”¹⁴ So saying he sprinkled water on their heads saying “let your eyes be as clear as this water so that no misfortune catches you.”¹⁵ He sprinkled their back while saying, “just as water causes everything on earth to flourish, so may you flourish, stay strong and defeat your enemies.”¹⁶ The *Fon* then poured the rest of the water partly on their feet and partly over his threshold while he said

¹⁰ Max Esser, *An der Westkuste Afrikas*, Berlin, 1898. We have this extract, thanks to Dr. E. M Chilver who has made it available to the South West Provincial Archives, Buea. This document together with others that would be mentioned as the need arises are put together under the title “Some materials for the study of Bali-Nyonga.” Unfortunately there was no file name for them. The Archivist informed me that Dr Chilver just recently sent them to the Archives. The page numbers that would follow are those from Esser’s book.

¹¹ Max Esser, *An der Westkuste Afrikas*, p.136.

¹² Max Esser, *An der Westkuste Afrikas*, pp.136-137. Some discrepancies may be found in Esser’s report. His work is silent about Zintgraff who was present with him. He only mentions Zintgraff to state that he remained behind. Besides, he gives us the impression that he was playing the leading role in the transactions with *Fon* Galega. His reports seem a little bit exaggerated.

¹³ Max Esser, *An der Westkuste Afrikas*, p.148.

¹⁴ Max Esser, *An der Westkuste Afrikas*, p.148.

¹⁵ Max Esser, *An der Westkuste Afrikas*, p.148.

¹⁶ Max Esser, *An der Westkuste Afrikas*, p.148.

As water puts out fire and lessens the pain of wounds, so may it guard you from pain and strengthen your feet, so that they can take you to your distant home, and never may your foot suffer ill-luck crossing my threshold or that of one of your friends.¹⁷

3.1.2. The Missionary Period.

3.1.2.a. Jakob Keller.¹⁸

Jakob Keller was among the first three resident missionaries sent to Bali to open a mission station in 1903. The *mungaka* language owes its written form to the efforts of Keller and Adolf Vielhauer. Keller initiated the work that was later carried on by Vielhauer. These missionaries' first and most important task in a new area was to tirelessly learn and research the language. The propagation of the Gospel would become possible only when the language had been completely mastered by the people. This would enable missionaries to wean the people away from 'false gods' and 'idols' to the true living word. This view was held by Missionary Fr. Lutz in 1905 during an inspection of the Basel Mission's work in Bali Nyonga.¹⁹

Keller's earlier view of *Nyikob* can be gleaned from his notebook and the Bali Primer.²⁰

Keller's pupils tell him that they do not eat frogs because "*a nyekob*"²¹ [it is God] and no matter how hard he tries to convince them they respond, "it is God for sure."²² He observes a thanksgiving after the birth of twins where the family head killed a fowl and dripped the blood on his father's grave as a type of blessing while he thanked *nyekob ba me* [god of my

¹⁷ Max Esser, *An der Westküste Afrikas*, p.148.

¹⁸ Keller was among the first three missionaries to settle in Bali from 1903. We shall say more about him later.

¹⁹ Fr. Lutz, *Im hinterland von Kamerun: Über Bali nach Bamum*, Basel: Basel missionsbuchhandlung, 1907, pp.16-17. Excerpts of this work have been made available to the South West Provincial Archive [S.W.P.A.] by E.M.Chilver under the working note: "An inspection of the Basel Mission's work in Bali-Nyonga in 1905".

²⁰ Excerpts of this work have been made available to the S.W.P.A. by E.M.Chilver under the working note Extracts of Bali-Nyonga interest from: Paul Valentin [ed.], *Völkerkundliche Aufzeichnungen aus dem Notizbuch eines Kamerun-Missionars, 1890 - 1914*, Basel: Basel Afrika Bibliographen, 1978. Our source says that this is a pamphlet of 37 pages based on Keller's notebook. Keller served in Bali 1904-07, 1909 - 1914.

²¹ M. D.W. Jeffreys in his collections between 1936 - 1945 states "The Chief and his elders denied that the frog had any significance.", p.111 in M.D.W.Jeffreys, "The Bali of Bamenda," in *African Studies* 16-2-57.

²² Paul Valentin, [ed.], *Völkerkundliche Aufzeichnungen*, p.33.

father]. He states further [possibly through questioning] that it is a good sign if the fowl flutters for long and finally falls on its left side, but if the fowl dies at once, it is a sign that the father has not accepted the sacrifice in which case a diviner will be called in to investigate the matter, and a second fowl will be slaughtered.²³

He also found out that “pagan spiritism crops up especially in connection to psychic illnesses.”²⁴ Also in the Bali Primer of 1906 it is written that “*ju-ju be nu nyikob bun si-si* [juju is the God palaver of black people or juju is the religion of Africans].”²⁵ Since Vielhauer arrived in Bali in late September 1906, the phrase in the primer surely belongs to Keller. Vielhauer mentions Keller as a senior missionary who was in favour of *Nyikob* but Balz has pointed out that Keller’s view on the issue is not known. However in 1925 Keller published an article in Germany captioned “*Nyikob ba me*”.²⁶ This is his view as quoted directly by Balz.

This cult of the *Nyikob ba me* was and is the great obstacle for the Bali man which has prevented him from reaching a higher and purer knowledge of God. He knows almost nothing of a great spirit, creator of heaven and earth, as other pagan people know him. The ancestor’s burial place and their spiritistic cult has tied the Grasslanders’ eyes down to the earth. His heart, eyes and senses were not able to elevate to the more sublime and pure view and idea that the Supreme Being has his throne above them, beyond or in the stars. For them, ‘the earth is God’. This great importance of *Nyikob ba me* also deprives the Bali man of the real understanding of salvation in Christ. It is, after all, not more than a mere way of talking if the Bali say: ‘I believe in Jesus, I agree with the God matter’. Jesus came from God and became man-‘the same is true of my own father’. Jesus died and went again to God, he was and remained God-‘my father too, was born of a woman, died and became a god, he became *Nyikob ba me*, that is father god.’ Jesus is present among his people, he helps and supports them in troubles and is invoked in prayer: the same is the case with the *Nyikob ba me*,

²³ Paul Valentin[ed.], *Völkerkundliche Aufzeichnungen*, p.34.

²⁴ Paul Valentin, [ed.], *Völkerkundliche Aufzeichnungen*, p.35.

²⁵ *Bali Primer*, 1906.

²⁶ This article was published in *Neue Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift*, 1925, pp.211-219, in Heinrich Balz, *Where the Faith has to live-Studies in Bakossi Religion, Part II: The Living, the dead and God*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1995, p.642.

which is a great difficulty for accepting and understanding the fullness of salvation.²⁷

3.1.2.b. Adolf Vielhauer.

The long list of *mungaka* literature is to a large extent the achievements of Vielhauer. Dah tells us that Vielhauer was the first university-trained theologian of the Basel Mission to be sent to Cameroon before 1914. Upon arrival in Cameroon in 1906 he was sent straight to Bali station.²⁸

Vielhauer wrote that nature spirits were unknown to the Bali unlike their neighbours who revered those spirits. The Bali call sparrows, frogs and earth spider “*ba nyikob*’ but they do not sacrifice to them, but only protect them from being killed and children are scolded if they kill any of such creatures.²⁹ The opinion of the Bali was that:

Everybody had his own God who made him and who, after his death, makes a new person. This protective god is not a spirit of a special ancestor. Hence the expression: “That came out of my *nyikob*’, in reference to an inborn disposition. It is responsible for his creation but not sacrificed to...all prayers and sacrifices are made to *nyikob ba* from whom all good things stem who hears the prayers of his sons scattered over the earth.” The Bali single God for all mankind was called *nsi* or *nyinsi*. His function goes beyond fulfilling curses and allaying illnesses. However “the origin of the world and growing things is put down to a *Nyikob* but he is not further described or prayed to.”³⁰

Although the missionaries had used *Nyikob* for the Supreme Being in their preaching and translation of Bible stories, they nonetheless had an argument whether the name *Nyikob*

²⁷ Heinrich Balz, *Where the Faith has to live*, pp.642-643. Balz has observed that ‘this is a rather pessimistic conclusion after some twenty years of preaching the Gospel in Bali and in the *Mungaka* language.’ p.643.

²⁸ Jonas N. Dah, *Missionary Motivations and Methods - An examination of the Basel Mission in Cameroon 1886 - 1914*, n.10, p.301.

²⁹ E.M.Chilver found them in the field notes of Bernhard Ankermann [first ethnographer to visit Bali 1907-1909], which appeared in 1959 in Baessler Archiv. Among them is a letter from Vielhauer of 29-2-1910 in which Vielhauer attempts to answer some questions raised by Ankermann. Vielhauer gives one Gwe as his informant who E.M.Chilver was unable to trace. We have these extracts in the South West Provincial Archive, sent by E.M. Chilver under the title: “Bali Nyonga: Brief notes on spirits, divinity, and occult powers [1960-1963]”, p.5. These are from her notes.

³⁰ E.M.Chilver, Bali Nyonga, pp.5-6.

once chosen should remain or there will be consideration for substituting it for a more appropriate term.³¹ The senior missionaries in the field preferred *Nyikob*, but Vielhauer opted for *Mbu'timvi*. The discussion did not satisfy Vielhauer and in 1912 he wrote a letter to the Director of the Basel Mission requesting an official decision on his proposal. His studies of the names of God in the region revealed that *Nyi*, *Nyikob* and *Si* in a religious context always refer to something that is down or in the earth. It was only in Bagham that the sky god *Mbomve* is understood to be in a special relationship with the chief. Since *Mbomve* is equivalent to *Mbu'mvi* or *Mbu'timvi*, in *mungaka*, it is preferable to use *Mbu'timvi* rather than *Nyikob* who is associated with frogs, caterpillars, spiders, persons and all sorts of things called *nyikob*. He argued that since a chief is the most elevated status the Grassfield people could imagine, *Mbu'mvi* for God will make him to be seen as the chief of the world, the chief of chiefs. Balz has summarized his main arguments:

1. The Lord or ruler of the world would mean much to the Grasslanders because of their strong chieftaincy;
2. It would exclude superstition better than *Nyikob* ever can do, by making a "sharp cut" between what is old and what is new'
3. It would facilitate the spread of the Gospel by clearly defining what is new not through the person of Jesus only, but through a new understanding of God as well; and
4. Translation into other tribes around Bali would also be less problematic since they all have words both for 'ruler' and for 'world' or at least for 'land' or 'earth'.³²

Excursus I

In the late 1970s Professor Heinrich Balz³³ collected information from the whole of the North West Province, part of the then Grassfield region. His findings are worth mentioning. He attempted a regional classification of the use of *Nyi*. He explained that the Bamilikes

³¹ Jakob Keller, "*Nyikob Ba Me*", p.218f. Heinrich Balz, *Where the Faith has to live*, p.641.

³² Adolf Vielhauer, Handwritten letter to the Director of the Basel Mission, dated Bagham 31/5/1912, in the Basel Mission archive files, transcript by Mrs. I Dah-Steger, 12 pages, no numbering, in Heinrich Balz, *Where the Faith has to live*, pp.641-642. Basel considered Vielhauer's letter of importance and sought the opinions of two experts on African languages and religions. They were C. Meinhof and D. Westermann. Their opinions were finally rejected in favor of the view of the majority of missionaries in the Grassfields. See Dah, *Missionary motivations and methods*, pp.192-194.

³³ Prof. Balz was Principal of the Presbyterian Theological College Nyasoso. See his book *Where the Faith has to Live - Studies in Bakossi Religion, Part I & II*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1995.

further east [in part of the Grassfield who are now in the Western Province following the present administrative organization] have names like *mbong* or *Si* for God unlike the Tikars and the Chambas who are relatively new in the area. *Nyi* [*Nyuy*, *Nwie*] is used in Babungo, Nso, Kaka and Wimbun. Moving to Santa, Mankon, Bafut and Bali, *Nyi* titles are restricted to parents of twins like in *Tanyi* or *Manyi* [father or mother of god], which are names, adopted by parents of twins. Here Balz attempts to understand *Nyikob* in the same way Vielhauer and Zintgraff tried to understand him. He sees the name *Nyikob* as consisting of *Nyi* the common name attributed to deity and *kob* [forest], thus the two words combined as *Nyikob* [god of the forest]. The Mankon and Bafut call him *Nyingong* [God of the earth], while the Widikum tribes call him *Nyieko* understood as creeping upward.³⁴

What is curiously absent in the studies of Keller, Vielhauer and Balz is that nothing is reported about deity from any of the other Bali *fondoms*. God in the *mubako* language is *Vodneb* as Tita Nyangang and other elderly people told this researcher. It would also have been necessary to find out the name by which the Bati³⁵ addresses deity. Is it possible that all along in their migration and with the assimilation of other ethnic groups they did not have a name for deity until they entered the Grassfield region where they borrowed from the Tikars? Was there no name for deity in the Bati language that they adopted? These are questions that lead one to the suggestion that to say *Nyikob* is a combination of two words is like trying to force or support a theory. It is possible that *Nyikob* stands in its own right. The former researchers on the notion of the knowledge of deity seem to have ignored the

³⁴ Heinrich Balz, *Where the Faith has to live*, pp.715-720. Pascal Fossouo in his Doctoral Thesis is led to the same misrepresentation by stating that the German missionaries, misled by their language helper, wrongly added 'kob' to *Nye* to describe the Supreme God and the missionaries included it in the *mungaka* Bible. *African Sacral Rule and the Christian Church: An Investigation into the Process of Change and Continuity in the Encounter between Christianity and African Tradition with Particular reference to Cameroon and Ghana*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 2003, p.103, n.141. His line of argument is not tenable because before the missionaries came many colonialists had documented *Nyikob* beginning from Zintgraff as we have already seen. It is a misrepresentation to group all the Grassfield *fondoms* together and treat them as one. All previous researchers have acknowledged this difficulty; and this becomes more difficult when looking at the concept of God.

³⁵ The 'Pati' are sometimes called 'Ba Ti' or 'Ti'.

historical dimension of Bali, which reveals that they had probably come into contact with Islam.

3.1.2.c. Bernhard Ankermann

Dr. Bernhard Ankermann an ethnographer visited Bali in 1907 and made expeditions from there to other parts of the region. He left in January 1909.³⁶ His field notes were edited and published in 1959. His studies in Bali revealed that “the realm of the dead is underground” but not all dead people go there. Suicides, witches, *ghangsa* and *ghangfu* and those killed by *ba nyikob* do not go there.” Dark eerie pools are called *Lam nyikob*. *Lam* and *nyikob* are synonymous. The ghosts of the dead, *fufob*, and also *ba nyikob* often appear in human form. Concerning nature spirits, he says the abode of the spirits is underwater. They communicate with each other through the *ndambung* [rainbow]. Human beings can sometimes be kidnapped by the *nyikob* and are sent back with a message of good or bad omen, which is about to befall the people. The *ba nyikob* are water spirits that sometimes are out of the water.³⁷

3.1.2.d. The Hunt Assessment Report.

W.E. Hunt an administrator of the Bamenda region under British rule in an assessment report on Bali in 1955 states

If by religion is meant a belief in a superhuman being who rules the world and must be propitiated, or, in other words, if no man is religious who does not govern his conduct in some measure by the fear or love of God or gods, then the BALIS appear irreligious. A definite conception of god and a form of worship based upon that belief is unknown. The Bali is essentially a realist. To him knowledge is the right religion and all mysticism is vain imagining...they have no belief in a material existence after this life and there appears to be no formal worship of ancestors.³⁸

³⁶ Maxwell Gabana Fohlung, “Self-Portrait of a Cameroonian” in *Paideuma* 38, 1992, p.247

³⁷ E.M. Chilver, Some notes on Bali Nyonga, p.3.

³⁸ W.E.Hunt, *An Assessment Report on the Bali Clan in the Bamenda Division of Cameroons Province*, Bamenda, 1925, p.29.

Hunt goes further to state that the only rite, which the Bali have in connection with their ancestors, is one that is performed by the family head alone when trouble comes to the family or when an ancestor appears in a dream. In which case the head of the house

Takes half a calabash, split vertically and kept for the purpose, and putting some guinea corn and water therein, goes to the gate of the compound and sprinkles a little across the opening, first placing a spear to the ground to the right of the entrance. He then calls on his father and grandfather to avert any disaster. It is by reason of this rite at this place that it is tabu [sic] for women during their menstrual periods to pass through the gate and a special hole for their use is cut in the fence. The Balis have no word for soul. The word for ghost or spirit is 'empty man'. They have a vague belief in reincarnation to the extent that if a dead person loves you he or she will return some day in the shape of a son or daughter to you or your relatives.³⁹

Hunt felt that the Bali were the most 'free thinking' Africans he had ever come across and because of such rationalistic attitude of mind Bali was an unfruitful soil for missions.⁴⁰ According to Van Slageran, J. Keller had earlier on seen Bali in the same light as Hunt. He was very disappointed to note that until 1915, of the thousands of pupils who passed through the mission school in Bali, only about fifty had received baptism. Worst of all, some of them denounced their baptism soon after leaving school.⁴¹

3.1.2.e. E. M. Chilver⁴²

Dr. Elizabeth M. Chilver, an ethnographer with a passion for Bali, did considerable research on the people of the Grassfield. She has raised a pertinent issue which cannot be overlooked, but which the others ignored. She wondered whether Vielhauer's "idea of divinity are really

³⁹ Hunt, *An Assessment Report*, pp.29-30.

⁴⁰ Hunt, *An Assessment Report*, p.30.

⁴¹ J. van Slageran, *L'Eglise Evangelique du Cameroun: Missions Europeennes et Christianisme Autochtone*, Yaounde: Cle, 1972, p.100. In Lekunze, B. Forcha, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon, 1886-1926- A historical and comparative analysis of the evangelistic strategy of the Basel Mission*, unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, 1987, p.118.

⁴² She is an ethnologist who has done considerable ethnographic work among the Grassfield tribes on the North West province with a particular passion for Bali. As we have already seen she has been helpful in making available her notes on Bali interest as well as extracts from documents that are in German and may only be found in Basel Mission Archives or which may not even be found.

connected in a belief system, whether they are the realizations by different politically united but ethnically diverse polity or whether they formed the beginnings of synthesis.”⁴³

To this effect she endeavored always to locate the ethnic group of the person who was giving her an answer. However, we consider that ethnic demarcations would not serve our purpose since we are considering the Bali Nyonga as a people who were already bound together by a common language united under one *Fon*.

She states, “*Nyikob* first appeared in Koelle’s *Polyglotta Africana*, 1854 as the term for God [or god] in Pati, in vocabulary collected from a recaptured settler in Sierra Leone c. 1850. *Mungaka* is a dialectical form of Pati.” She is told that *nsi* [earth] can also refer to God since all the powers of *fu* [magical medicine] come from the earth. She found that frogs, spade-tailed slowworms, *nyo nindong*, [snake of heaven], *tamambi* [bright coloured caterpillar] were regarded as spirits. She was also told that *ngun ko’* [guinea corn] pinned on gates by *Voma* members attracted birth spirits. In one compound she found a *tu nyikob* to which a *nyikob* had been attracted and below which an offering stone was to be found.⁴⁴

She provides us with another source which she simply states as an Administrative report of 1922 in which an unknown Bali Nyonga interpreter says:

There is a big *Nyikob* who is too great to be concerned with health and crops, but who is good and gave life and death. He sent a messenger to the great-great-grand father of the present *Fon* to say that human sacrifice must cease and a ram was substituted.⁴⁵

3.1.2.f. Johannes Stöckle.

Reverend Johannes Stöckle came to the Grassfields in 1938. He became fascinated with the Bali and decided to document their traditions. He observes:

A family or the whole tribe does not exist of the living alone, but that it comprises also the dead, the so-called living dead or ancestors. The close connection of the living with their ancestors is indicated by the number of rites and sacrifices. It is the ancestors who care for the welfare and peace of the

⁴³ E. M. Chilver, Bali-Nyonga: brief notes, p.6.

⁴⁴ E.M.Chilver, Bali Nyonga, Brief notes, pp.3-6.

⁴⁵ E.M.Chilver, Bali-Nyonga-Brief notes, p.7.

living community. They are the mediators between the living and the highest being. The belief is that the negligence of the ancestors indicates also an indifference towards God and has therefore consequences...every body knows that God is the creator and provider and maintainer of life and its necessities. Man should respect and serve him. If somebody e.g. took advantage of another person or maltreated him, he was reminded of God by saying, "God knows" [*Nyikob lin*] or "God is there" [*Nyikob wu*].⁴⁶

We have so far only presented what Europeans had documented mostly during the colonial and missionary times. We now present what the Bali says they mean when they do what they do. Also by reading against the grain and with what we have been able to glean from other secular writers concerning Bali Nyonga we are still able to distinguish their primal religion in its mostly regular form. Considering that the religion is still practiced today one is able to see elements that are still in its original form. Given of course that religion like culture is dynamic and subject to borrowings and modifications, it may be difficult at any period of study to say with precision that this or that was the pre-Christian understanding.

In this sense Pieres has provided us with a paradigm for the study of a people's religion in the modern context. He upholds that "...each language is a distinctly different way of "experiencing" the truth, ..." Pieris makes a further claim to this with the fundamental assertion that *language is the "experience" of reality and religion is its "expression"*.⁴⁷

Pieris goes further and asks the question "what is the fundamental reality that a particular culture grasps through its own language and symbols"? In answer he says

Learn, first, the folk language. Assist at the rites and rituals of the Asian people; hear their songs; vibrate with their rhythms; keep step with their dance; taste their poems; grasp their myths; reach them through their legends. You will find that the language they speak puts them in touch with the basic truths that every religion grapples with, but each in a different way: the meaning and destiny of human existence; humanity's crippling limitations and its infinite capacity to break through them...⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Johannes Stöckle, *Traditions, Tales and Proverbs of the Bali Nyonga*, Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 1994, Preface, pp.13-14.

⁴⁷ Aloysius Pieres, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, New York: Orbis Books, 1988, p.71.

⁴⁸ Aloysius Pieres, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p.71.

Although Pieris' words are in the context of Asian liberation theology, they fit well in our context for the study of the religion of the Bali Nyonga people. We shall use this approach for the study of Bali Nyonga religion.

3.2. Concepts of God in Bali Nyonga Past and Present.

3.2.1. The Supreme Being.

Bali Nyonga fall among the group of African peoples who Parrinder says believe in God but for whom God is thought of "as so great and remote that he is offered no regular worship."⁴⁹ We must make the distinction from the onset that knowledge of the Supreme Being should not be equated with the worship of the Supreme Being. It is important to recall that the thesis of this research is whether the Bali Nyonga people had a prior notion of God before their encounter with Christianity and if they did, can we find any continuity of this prior knowledge in their contemporary Christian practice?

Any notion of Deity among the Bali Nyonga relates to the notion that deity meets the aspiration of humanity; ensuring well-being, blessing the living with posterity, prosperity and protection. *Nikob fa fu' mfa ndzu i, ni nkiti yu' se.* [God give us prosperity, give us those to enjoy the prosperity and give us protection].

Andrew Walls has argued that in the map of reality in all African cultures there is knowledge of God, the Spirits and the ancestors but that in different cultural contexts, prominence is given to one or the other but they are never absent.⁵⁰ As we have noted earlier, the explorer Zintgraff felt that "Definite ideas of God and an organized cult are absent." He nonetheless acknowledged that *Nyikob* denotes a superior being, possibly a fearful bush demon, but that a good God was not worshipped. In later days the missionaries would make the same remark concerning the knowledge of God. Zintgraff states that Galega frequently met with his people on *ntsu' ntan* and that this day seems to have a religious significance. The name of this weekday is associated to *ntan Nyikob* [God's courtyard]. On

⁴⁹ Geoffrey Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion*, London: Sheldon Press, 1978 edn., p38.

⁵⁰ Lecture, September, 2003, Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre, Akropong, Ghana.

this day people gather at the *ntan-Nyikob* and invoke deity to carry away any evil occurrences such as theft, an epidemic or rampant deaths. They ask *Nyikob* [God] to carry all evil things to the *big world*. By *big world* they mean the land of the dead. The missionaries Vielhauer and Keller also made the distinction between *Nyikob* and *Ba nyikob* [God and gods].

If *Nyikob* was a frightful bush demon then *ntan-nyikob* will not be located in an open place. This means that *ntan-Nyikob* was a place for collective traditional prayer invoking *Nyikob* to take away calamity or disaster.

Concerning blood-pact, Zintgraff remarked that although for some Africans it is an empty formality, which is regarded by the chiefs as a means of getting presents or other advantages, in the Grassfields it had a kind of sacredness. He also remarked that Bali seldom trusts the word of a foreigner, but once a blood-pact has been established, they adhere to it scrupulously. This scrupulous adherence to the blood-pact is because they believe that an invisible force has now made separate individuals to become one person, as Galega himself remarked to Zintgraff after such a blood pact "we have two bellies, but one head".⁵¹ Only *Nyikob* can perform such an impossible act.

3.2.1.a. The Attributes of *Nyikob*.

The religion of Bali Nyonga does not have any documented literature on dogma, doctrine and liturgy. This does not mean that those things are not there. They exist in oral and other forms.⁵² Through orality religious traditions are passed on to the next generation in songs, myths, legends, naming, stories, proverbs, hymns, incantations and ritual prayers.⁵³ *Nyikob*

⁵¹ E.M.Chilver, *Zintgraff's Explorations In Bamenda*, p.10.

⁵² The researcher came across a rope with a priest in charge of purifying families whose relative has committed suicide, those who have drowned or encountered any untimely and violent death. The rope contains a piece of cloth each, belonging to each of such persons who have died through violence since the settlement of the Bali was founded.

⁵³ Kashim Ibrahim Tala, *Orature in Africa*, Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan University Press, 1998, p.47. It should be noted that most of our material in this section has come from oral sources, which have been passed on as one grows up. Some have been gathered during general conversations on social occasions and in *nda kum* or *nda mandzong* [social group]. Some, like the figurative expressions, shall be cited as oral source; while other

as we had seen earlier is the generic term for God, documented as far back as 1854. *Nyikob* has no shrine or temple where he is worshipped. *Nyikob* is considered as the Supreme king of the world according to the sociological and political organization of Bali where the *Fon* is the supreme ruler of his people.⁵⁴ Vielhauer himself acknowledged that “the origin of the world and growing things is put down to a *Nyikob* but he is not further described or prayed to.”⁵⁵ Since *Nyikob* has neither shrine nor sacred place the casual observer may not be able to discern his reality to the people.

Zintgraff recognized that the people do not feel inclined to talk about religion. To ask about their religion is to ask that they talk about *Nyikob*. *Nyikob* as Supreme Being is greater than the *Fon*. The *Fon* who is lesser than *Nyikob* is not talked about. As the people say, *ntun nge beh tun Mfon* [the grass is the ear of the *Fon*]. By this the people mean that one has to be careful about what one is saying in relation to the *Fon*. The *Fon* may hear it. *Nyikob* does not have images made of him because his nature defies description and is genderless for no one had seen *Nyikob*. It is for this reason that he can be given only descriptive attributes. Only through his works can *Nyikob* be known. He is known as *Ma'mvi*, *Nchamvi*, *Mbommvi*, and *Mbu'ti mvi*, which we shall now consider.

Nyikob has his food here among human beings. Humans dare not tamper with food that belongs to God. There is *nkendon Nyikob* [God's plantain]⁵⁶; *nyah Nyikob*⁵⁷ [God's garden egg]; *kuh Nyikob* [God's cocoyams]; *tuen Nyikob* [God's palm] and *tam Nyikob*⁵⁸ [God's tree yam]. These crops, which bear the name of *Nyikob*, explain the concept of his nearness to human beings. Ndangam has remarked to the effect that the missionaries though happy to

sources are through interviews and questionnaires. Others have also recorded some of the folklores from which we base our interpretations.

⁵⁴ Fomuso Buma-Foncham Henri, *Sacrifices among the Balinyonga in Mezam Division, North West Province of Cameroon* [A descriptive analysis], Dissertation for the Degree “Licence en Theologie”, Faculty of Protestant Theology, Yaounde, 1976, p.14.

⁵⁵ E.M.Chilver, Bali Nyonga: Brief notes, p.6.

⁵⁶ Johannes Stöckle, *Traditions, Tales and Proverbs*, p.302.

⁵⁷ Johannes Stöckle, *Traditions, Tales and Proverbs*, p.311.

⁵⁸ Johannes Stöckle, *Traditions, Tales and Proverbs*, p.360.

find a people who believed in deity nonetheless wanted to find out if the word *Nyikob* implied a deity who inhabited the forest. Their inquiries about the deity, his attributes and abode and relations with humans probably revealed to them that the Bali had no such thoughts. Their answers were vague, and they were honest to admit they did not know.⁵⁹

One attribute of *Nyikob* is *Mahmvi* [thrower of the world - in the sense of a farmer scattering seeds]. *Mahmvi* can also mean owner of mankind on the analogy of a slave owner known as *ngan mah ba kwan* [a man who keeps slaves]. The verb *mah* therefore means to throw-scatter or to keep and both senses fit for *Nyikob* as either the thrower-scatterer of men meaning one who brought them forth or a keeper of men as one who has control over them. As Fomuso points out “there is an ontological reasoning here in the fact of saying that *Nyikob* is the originator of everything in the world, the original cause who was not caused.”⁶⁰

Another attribute is *Mbomvi* [builder or potter of the world]. It would appear that the original understanding of *mbom* is limited to a potter because originally and even now one ‘ties’ a house [*kud ndab*]; one does not build a house. In this sense the verb *ma bom* [to build] is only associated with a potter and so should be understood as meaning to mould. If you were to criticize someone’s physical defects or character the one would ask you: *u be mbom ma e?* [Are you my moulder?] This means that one’s physical structure and character depend on *Nyikob* who is the *mbom* - moulder even of persons. Hence names like *Ajim bom* [only the moulder knows]; *Munnimbom* [a person is according to how he was moulded].

Nyikob is also the one who laid the world. One often hear expressions like *lo’ ndze Nyikob ka nou mvi o le a* [*Nyikob* laid this world] *Nyikob* is also *Mbutimvi* [the one who rules the world]. By this is meant that *Nyikob* rules supreme in the world. He is also *Nchamvi* that is

⁵⁹ Gwanua Ndangam, *Bali Culture -Growth, change and continuity*, presented at the 17th annual congress of the Bali cultural association-USA, Minneapolis Minnesota, 2004, p.5.

⁶⁰ Fomuso Buma –Foncham Henri, *Sacrifices among the Bali Nyonga*, p.16.

Nyikob surpasses the world.⁶¹ In other words he is the being beyond whom there is no other. This also means that he was there before all else.

The attributes of *Nyikob* reveal that *Nyikob* is above human beings; *Nyikob* caused their existence; *Nyikob* has control over them and *Nyikob* has dominion over them.

3.2.1.b. Figurative expressions denoting concepts of *Nyikob*.

Mbiti's remark that "Africans are notoriously religious"⁶² holds true for the Bali. Nobody joins a religion; people are born into the religion. A man stubs his toe on the way and says: *Nyikob lun ku be nka siku a tshed me* [If *Nyikob* were not there I would have cut my toe]. When people sit somewhere and suddenly every body becomes quiet they say *Nyikob la me* [*Nyikob* has passed by]. In ordinary conversation you hear expressions like: *me ntsha'ti Nyikob nga...* [I am greeting *Nyikob* that...].⁶³ *Nyikob fo'* [*Nyikob* is there], or *Nyikob ni ndzo ngon nu me'* [*Nyikob* is seeing everything] are common expressions which people use for self vindication in case of false accusations.

When a woman is pregnant they say: *Nyikob lad mu ni* [*Nyikob* has licked her].⁶⁴ The expression means that *Nyikob* has blessed the woman. The stretch marks that appear on a woman's thigh during pregnancy are called *ngwad Nyikob*⁶⁵ [*Nyikob*'s tatoo marks].

Nyikob blesses humans who are not greedy as this old song explains: *Nyikob ni mfa yum mbo mun I to fa bun dzu a* [*Nyikob* gives things to the person who will give to people to eat]. At the same time when libations⁶⁶ are poured the priests asks that *Nyikob fa fu' mfa ndzu i* [

⁶¹ Fomuso Buma-Foncham Henri, *Sacrifices among the Bali Nyonga*, p.16.

⁶² John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969, p.1.

⁶³ *Tsha'ti Nyikob* is a common phrase used in daily conversation as one looks forward to the help of *Nyikob* in a given situation. Christians have adopted the phrase as the name for prayer and the act of praying.

⁶⁴ Johannes Stöckle, *Traditions, Tales and Proverbs of Bali Nyonga*, Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 1994, p.21.

⁶⁵ Johannes Stöckle, *Mungaka [Bali] Dictionary*, p.307.

⁶⁶ Ba Tita Nyagang the highest traditional priest of the land says that he pours libation in the name of *Nyikob* who is in heaven. Interview 19/12/2003. Ba Tabe Family head who also doubles as priest of the Tabe family pours libation to satisfy the family members psychologically, but it is on *Nyikob* that he depends. According to him everything is a belief system of a people. If a community of one hundred people decide on a thing and it is

Nyikob give us prosperity, and give us posterity]. This means that blessings mean nothing to the possessor if he does not have people to enjoy his blessings.

Nyikob equally punishes the wicked. In order to explain the origins of the chimpanzee and why it looks like human beings a myth is told that the chimpanzees are a people of a certain village who were inhospitable to *Nyikob* when he visited them. To teach them a lesson he decided to transform them into chimpanzees.⁶⁷ Concluding this myth the adults teach their progeny to be hospitable to strangers since *Nyikob* often take the form of human beings to visit and see whether people are kind to wayfarers.

Nyikob gave even witchcraft to a few special people but they abused the privilege. The purpose of witchcraft was that the possessors should use it to enter into the human body and trace the causes of internal diseases. These people entered and saw how the heart was beating and they eventually took it for food. In the same way *Nyikob* gave man the ability to understand animal language but man misused the gift. The myth states that those who were endowed with the gift to understand animal language were warned on pain of death not to divulge the secret to anybody or to tell anybody what they heard the animals say. To default was instant death for the teller as well as the hearer. Under pressure somebody disclosed what he heard to a large group of people who all died. *Nyikob* was angry and withdrew the gift for he felt that humans were not yet fit to have such a gift⁶⁸

Nyikob is the provider of sustenance and deserves to be thanked. He seems also to reside above human beings. This is exemplified in the proverb *u be nven bi u ti kiti kutu e?* -When you pick kola nut, must you not look up to say thank you to the provider? Besides all leaves are said to be opening heavenward in perpetual thanks to their maker. Fowls are said to look upward as a sign of gratitude. Each time they sip water they look up to give thanks to the

generally accepted by about eighty percent then it becomes seemingly effective for them. Interviewed on the 28/06/2004.

⁶⁷ Babila George Fochang, *The Revolution that never was*, Yaounde: Moral Fiction Series, 1998, pp.30-33.

⁶⁸ Babila George, *The Revolution that never was*, pp.35-38.

provider. Even in the face of calamity *Nyikob* is thanked for what he has left unharmed. When a woman for instance has a miscarriage it is said *ba fa ndzika mbo Nyikob nga ntsi keti ma'ti leh* [We thank *Nyikob* that the water was spilled but the calabash was not broken].⁶⁹ If the calabash is not broken then one should not be sorrowful since there is the possibility of still fetching some more water.

The whole destiny of humans depends on *Nyikob*. As Ba Fonso remarked at a funeral, “when a man has guest and he decides to kill one of his chickens for his guest, he does not demand or request the permission of the chicken. In the same way when *Nyikob* chose to call somebody away from this world he does not need the permission of the person.”⁷⁰ There is a common expression that *ba beh ma ngon nkad* [we are in a visiting country] meaning that we are strangers in this world.

The human name *Andin* [who knows] is a question whose answer implies that only God knows. There are names like *BamNyikob* - *Nyikob's* bag and *Bammunjih* - another person's bag. This means that one is only a custodian of what belongs to *Nyikob*. *Kehmia* means *Nyikob* has rescued me, and *Bissona* - by *Nyikob's* grace. However the Bali unlike their neighbors do not attach the name of *Nyikob* to human names. This is because it is unusual to hear somebody's birth name used. For example, one might have the prefix *ta* or *ma* added to the name of one's child as a name for the parent. Accordingly *ta* Babila and *ma* Babila mean father and mother of Babila respectively. However, during the missionary era it became fashionable for people to give names that were affixed with God. Ironically those names had nothing to do with Christianity. Men took on names like Godfree, Godsabi, Godknow, Godnogree.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Babila Fochang, *Wisdom of the Ancients*, p.13.

⁷⁰ Ba Fonso was an elderly man, he is deceased. See Babila Fochang, Collection of wits and folktales, unpublished typescript circulated among friends for study.

⁷¹ It should be noted that *Godfree* is not akin to Godfred. *Godfree* would mean God has freed me. *Godsabi* is pidgin English for *Godknows* which is the same like the next name. *Godnogree* is pidgin for God does not accept.

The *Fon* for example may never be addressed by his real name. In his presence one can only use attributes like *ndum ti* [big tree], *isha bu nfon* [surpasser of *Fons*] *ngu nyam* [lion] *nswen son* [elephant tusk] and *som sang buwi Nyonga* [soap for the women of Nyonga] *yum lo' ma mba' ntsi* [something coming out of the force of the stream].⁷² *Nyikob* is also mostly addressed by attributes.

There seems to be no discernible worship of *Nyikob*, but he stands as the highest place of appeal to whom the individual turns. In any situation of unjust treatment, one looks up to heaven and ask *Nyikob* to be witness. If a person is refuting an allegation that is considered true, the person will be told: *nyum la' dzi' kon u sun* [when the sun will plant its spear you will tell] - at midday it is said that the sun has planted its spear. This is because shadows disappear at midday.⁷³ There is a connection between *Nyikob* and heaven as one of the popular myths states that their leading blacksmith descended upon the village from heaven.⁷⁴ Although *Nyikob* seems transcendent he remains immanent. His immanence and transcendence is likened to a mother who leaves a baby in the room alone while doing some work around the house. The baby is not alone because the mother is just around the house, yet the baby is actually alone in the room. On entering a house by night one says: *Nyikob su'ti nda ba* [*Nyikob*, make way for me to pass]. Keller reports to this effect that the people say "Go away that I may pass."⁷⁵ When a woman is taking her pot off the fire she says; "*Nyikob teh tu u mu ma ntsi' ban ndu u bo* [*Nyikob* make way lest I put the pot on you]."⁷⁶

Nyikob has brought about the world and all that is in it. He is aware of human need and he does what he does in spite of humans. This is particularly so since he is good and does not

⁷² This last expression, which is also an ululation, has a religious symbolism because Gawolbe's name means "*Fon from the water.*"

⁷³ There is a possibility that *Nyikob* has a connection with heaven. Heaven is *nindong*, the sun *nyum* and, the moon *nnu*.

⁷⁴ Ndifontah B. Nyamndi, *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon*, p.1.

⁷⁵ Jonas N. Dah, *Missionary Motivations*, p.195.

⁷⁶ Jonas N. Dah, *Missionary Motivations*, p. 195.

need to be placated.⁷⁷ He has hidden death from human beings as the saying goes *Nyikob lem vu* [*Nyikob* has hidden death]. Probably because of this recognition the people chose not to worry him or trouble him. It would appear that the realization that *Nyikob* acts according to his will has caused the Bali to look for an alternative means of securing response. This must have led to the dependence on the lesser deities who we shall now consider. This may also explain the emphasis on *Nyikob ba me*. It appears however that the lesser deities are considered as messengers of *Nyikob* because according to Keller *Nyikob* meets with *Nyikob ba me* at holy places.⁷⁸

3.2.2. The Divinities and the Ancestors.

In this section we shall consider deities like *ba nyikob* [the gods], *mu Nyikob* [God's child], and *ghang sa*, [spirits] and *Nyikob ba me* [God of my father].

The divinities of Bali Nyonga are numerous. Some are benevolent spirits while others are malevolent. Their existence depends on humans and they act for them. Even the bad spirit can be manipulated by humans to bring trouble upon others like the *ghang sa* – 'occult' spirits which are often in league with *ba lüm* - witches and who consume the heart of human beings as meat in nocturnal 'occult' assemblies.⁷⁹

3.2.2.a. *Mu Nyikob*-God's child

As a custom, no girl child throws water outside at night without saying: *Nyikob teh tu mun u* [God turn away your child's head].⁸⁰ It seems that since children are believed to be a blessing from *Nyikob*, he is asked to take the baby out of the way of the water. By pouring water on the child one may cause *Nyikob* to take the child back. If he were bringing the child to that family he would take the child back since pouring water on the child is discourteous and inhospitable.

⁷⁷ Cf *Fon Galega* I asking Esser that he should send missionaries with whom he can get into arrangement and make medicine to kill the devil. According to Esser Galega, considered that since the good God had power over the bad god, it was even more necessary to be on good terms with the bad god since he was cheaper to win than the good God to whom he was subordinate. Max Esser, *An der Westküste Afrikas*, p.136.

⁷⁸ Jonas N. Dah, *Missionary Motivations*, p. 195.

⁷⁹ Cf. E.M.Chilver, "Some notes on alternative therapies", p.4.

⁸⁰ Gwanua Ndangam, *Bali Culture*, p.5.

Chilver was told in 1960 that *tito*⁸¹ [frogs], *nyo nindong* [snake of heaven], and *tamambi* [bright colored caterpillars] were birth spirits.⁸² Keller, as we have already noted, says his pupils said they did not eat frogs because they believe it is “*Nyikob*” [it is God]. This researcher found out that the *nyo nindong* and the *tamambi* are not killed. If one comes across it, it means a member of one’s family will become pregnant or is already in the early stages of pregnancy. To kill it would be to drive the child away.⁸³ *Mu Nyikob* signifies that conception does not take place simply by the union of two persons, but that *Nyikob* sends the child through one of these sacred creatures into the woman’s womb. That explains why the request is made at night that he should take his child out of harm’s way.

On the other hand these creatures are like angels who bring good tidings of a child to be born. However, those who see the creatures usually keep it to themselves until when there are signs of pregnancy, or news of a family member’s newborn baby. This is like a prophecy that is remembered only when the prophecy has been fulfilled.

Newborn babies, especially twins, are considered to be divinities - *ba nyikob* [gods].⁸⁴ And because newborn babies are gods one does not come into a house where a newborn baby is left alone without making noise. The noise is to alert the baby who may have taken the form of an adult and was roaming the house in search of food. Besides, a nursing mother does not eat anything without at least dipping the finger into it and giving to the baby. The baby may curse you if you fail to do that. More so, there are myths that tell that there is a land of the unborn where people choose to be born, and to which family they would belong to and for how long they will live in that family. Kindness and the love of parents towards a child may cause a child who wants to live briefly on earth to decide not to go back [die] at the

⁸¹ M.D.W.Jeffreys while researching In Bali Kumbat a kindred Bali village states, “The Chief and his elders denied that the frog had any significance among them.” *The Bali of Bamenda*, p.111.

⁸² E.M.Chilver, Bali Nyonga-brief notes, p.6.

⁸³ The researcher got this information while in conversation with some elderly women at a funeral at Ntaiton quarter in March 2004.

⁸⁴ E.M.Chilver, A Few notes on twins in Bali Nyonga, notes collected in 1960 and 1963.

appointed time. This may invoke the wrath of age mates of the land of the unborn who may employ spiritual and physical methods to take the one back.⁸⁵

3.2.2.b. The Ancestors.⁸⁶

Chilver and Kaberry found out in 1960 that there was no state cult of the royal ancestors that center on royal grave shrines as was found in most *fondoms* of Bamenda. The *Fon* poured libation of water on the ground at the main gate of the palace invoking the blessing of Nyongpasi.⁸⁷ They further stated that “state ritual and ceremony center on the *Wolela*, the pyramid of stones in the palace piazza”⁸⁸ Stöckle was informed in 1988 that when a *Fon* dies, the *Ba Nwana* wrap him in a grass mat and take him to the bush. They bury him there and when his body has decomposed they exhume the corpse and take off the head and bring it to the palace. After one year the nobles gather in the palace to pour libation. While pouring the libation they say, “you have now returned to the palace.”⁸⁹ It is possible that they did not enquire further concerning the *Wolela* since there are some ‘special’ stones there representing the departed [late] *Fons*. This researcher was told by Ba Tita Nyagang, the Chief priest of *Lela* that among the stones at the *Wolela* there are few sacred stones among them representing the *Fons* who have ruled over Bali Nyonga.⁹⁰ In the footnote they state that the Banten have a chthonic cult of the ancestors⁹¹ It would appear that differences

⁸⁵ Oral Tales.

⁸⁶ It is obvious that the English word ancestor in regard to religion in Bali Nyonga can only be used tentatively since the cult seems to be complicated even by the priests themselves. This would reveal itself as the work unfolds.

⁸⁷ P.M.Kaberry et al, *An outline of the traditional political system of Bali-Nyonga*, p.364. Although Fonyonga II had recovered Gawolbe’s skull from Bafu-fundong, the recovery probably played only a political rather than a religious role. The skull was interred at a ceremony where the other Bali *Fons* attended, but that did not lessen their autonomy. Gawolbe cannot be used, as a ruling title for this would imply paramountcy. No one may ascend the throne of Gawolbe.

⁸⁸ P.M.Kaberry et al, *An outline of the traditional political system of Bali-Nyonga*, p.365.

⁸⁹ Johannes Stöckle, *Traditions, Tales and Proverbs*, pp.26-29. A traditional committee probably convened by His Royal Highness, the Fon, granted the audience to him in the palace.

⁹⁰ Interview conducted by the researcher on 21/12/2003. Ba Tita Nyagang told me that he has served in that capacity for 65 years. It is curious to note that in all her works where she cites her several sources, no mention is made anywhere of Tita Nyagang.

⁹¹ P.M.Kaberry et al, *An outline of the traditional political system of Bali-Nyonga*, p.364, n.2.

lie in the manner of practice, since *Lela* itself is a festival centred on the ancestors as we shall see later on.

The ancestors play a significant role in the life of the Bali people. As such it is important that there must be a *ndzui ndab*⁹² [inheritor of the house - successor], since it is the *ndzui ndab* who performs the priestly duties of the family or the household. Three types of shrines can be found in relation to the ancestors.

As we have noted in a previous section, Keller noted that the dead father or family head is elevated to the rank of gods and he also becomes an individual god for the living. In the same way the dead chief becomes the village father.⁹³

Concerning the role of *Nyikob ba me* he said that when a family head dies, a stone is touched on his head and kept somewhere in the house to mark his continuous presence. When there is illness, misfortune or if there is need for thanksgiving, palm wine or the blood of a slaughtered fowl or sheep is poured on the stone.⁹⁴

Chilver also mentioned that they call the dead *fufob yum* [empty shell], and that they do not have a name for the soul. If we reason from the fact that an empty shell of groundnut is called *fufob mbiyan* [empty groundnut shell], it implies that the body as *fufob* is empty. The *dze'ni*, should be understood to mean soul and not breath. When a priest talks to the ancestors he emphasizes that *a bin ni ndzo yui, bu ma ni ndzo yin beh* [you are the ones seeing us, we do not see you]. It is commonly said that a *kui mbe nda' dze'ni ni ntshi mun ntun* [it is only the breath – soul - keeping somebody alive].

Unfortunately Chilver did not tell us what the people do, or the significance of what they do, but this is what I was told during my fieldwork. I interviewed traditional priests who were usually not alone so the opportunity was available not only to hear from the priests but from

⁹² The title of *ndzui ndab* as inheritor of the house can be understood in the sense that traditionally the *ndzui ndab* moved into the house of the deceased.

⁹³ Jonas N. Dah, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, pp.194-195.

⁹⁴ Jonas N. Dah, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, pp.195-196.

those who participate in the rites. This was especially so in one of the compounds where I witnessed the performance of such a rite.

3.2.2.c. *Tu Fom* and *Lob*⁹⁵

The *Tu fom* is a shrine placed in the palour of a *ndzui ndab*. According to Ba Tabe the *ndzui ndab* is necessary to perpetuate continuity of the family⁹⁶ legacy. It is believed that succession ensures contact with the *ba kusi* [the dead in the earth - ancestors]. For this reason, at succession, certain rites are performed on the *ndzui ndab*, which enable him to be in contact with the *ba kusi*. The centrality of the *ndzui ndab* lies in the 'family cup', which is the cup of the first ancestor. In his case the cup is a *ntu' mfon*⁹⁷ [the horn of an ox] which is about two hundred years old. Whoever handles the cup has contact with the ancestors. The cup is used for oath taking in traditional marriages of daughters of the family. It is also used for cleansing and purification. Above all it is used for the blessing of the family members.

He explained further that the rite of *ta'ni ndzui ndab* [anointment of the *ndzui ndab*] includes swallowing the heart taken out of a live cock. This heart is put inside a mixture of clay chalk mixed with water, which the *ndzui ndab* swallows. He said that the significance of this is that the *ndzui ndab* has to be of calm disposition, consider every body as belonging to him. The heart of the cock symbolizes that the *ndzui ndab* now has two hearts, which indicate

⁹⁵ A description of *Lob* and *Tu Fom* has been given by Stöckle, see *Traditions, Tales and Proverbs*, pp.92] 94. His informants told him that when water is poured inside a *Lob* the priest says "Father give riches and an inheritor who can have them." This is done as often as the need arises. Meanwhile a *Tu Fom* is established at the death of a father or a mother. He repeats the same procedure of sacrifice, which we shall see in detail here below, but he adds that if the *Tu fom* is that of a mother a hen is used in place of a cock, p.93.

⁹⁶ Family as would be understood in the context of this section is not limited to consanguinity alone. The family here would include about four or five compounds tracing their roots to a common ancestor as far back as the eighth generation. Sometimes the generations have to be 'cut off' so that intermarriage may take place, but most importantly so that the ancestors should no longer consider the others as belonging to them.

⁹⁷ There are two kinds of cups that the titleholders or nobility uses. The other type is the *ntu' nyad* [buffalo horn cup]. Ordinary people do not drink out of these types of cups. They either use cow horn cups or any other container.

courage and boldness.⁹⁸ The calm disposition the *ndzui ndab* is supposed to demonstrate stand for humility, which is a true mark of leadership.

In family traditional prayer Ba Tabe calls *Nyikob* through the ancestors at the *Tu Fom* to send his blessing upon the family. The importance of such family gatherings lies in the cohesion it brings and seeks to maintain within the family. Before going to the ancestral shrine all the family members present have to confess any grievance against any member of the family. When everybody speaks his or her mind, water and palm wine is put inside the cup and everybody present drinks from the cup to show that there is no animosity towards one another. When this is done he can now go to the shrine and slaughter a cock. If the cock dies lying on its left side it means there is still an unconfessed hatred or that the ancestors are angry. In this case the matter has to be *tsho 'ti* [looked into by a diviner].⁹⁹

Ba Fonmbe, another *ndzui ndab* when he was asked about the *Lob*, he explained that it is the place where the *kusi* [the dead] come to drink water when they come into the house. It always contains palm wine and some special leaves. On the day of *ked Tu Fom* he goes to the *Tu Fom* with a cock. Before he goes there, he informs the *ba ngondzam* [daughters of the family] that he is going to converse with the fathers and they encourage him to do so. When he enters he calls the *kusi* by names and slaughters the cock. He calls them beginning with the one who died recently, he then calls his own name and concludes: "and all those whose names we do not know." According to him the cock is given to the ancestors as their share of the chickens that the living eat. He then sprinkles the blood of the cock and drink in the shrine. After that, he rubs the stone with cam wood mixed with water. He then mixes clay chalk in water in a calabash, and gives it to the *ba gonndzam* and the *bundzad* [grandchildren of the family] to eat. When he finishes there is jubilation and feasting.¹⁰⁰ The fowl is eaten only by the *bundzad*.

⁹⁸ Chilver also reports a similar rite being performed to a mother of twins. When she asked why she was told it was to let the mother know that she now has two hearts. She must not be angry, greedy or selfish. E.M.Chilver, A Few notes on twins in Bali Nyonga, notes collected in 1960 and 1963.

⁹⁹ Interview by researcher on 28/06/2004.

¹⁰⁰ Interview by Researcher on 18/02/2004 during the occasion of *Kad Tu Fom* in Ba Fonmbe's compound.

The ancestors are also remembered in naming. Names like Bila, Babila, Nahbila, Dohbila and Gabila mean he has returned, father has returned, mother has returned, grandfather has returned and the *Fon* has returned respectively. Such names are given to children born immediately after the death of one's parents or of some other close relative. In such cases it is said that the deceased does not die, he or she only goes to renew his or her body. Thus when a *ndzui ndab* is anointed it is said that *a nwom nwom, a kui benben beh* [it is only bent, it is not broken].

According to Rev. Fomuso Buma-Foncham Henri, the *Tu fom* is a periodic ceremony which comes once a year in each family while the *Lob* is performed only when it is deemed necessary.¹⁰¹

Further investigations revealed to me that the heart of the *Tu Fom* and *Lob* is the quest for well-being, prosperity, posterity and the unity of the family. Such occasions bring the family together. Misunderstandings are settled when everybody drinks from the same cup. After this it is wrong to be party to any plot against the person with whom one shares the same cup. The priest prays by pouring libation with these words: *ndum mungwi, ndum munbang yi I bati mo' nu mbuiked mbi mo' mun ma dzi yo nged a a tso ni matu I* [the witch or wizard who schemes evil on any member of this family let the evil bounce back to such a person]. It is only the unity of the family that assures such protection because *ted tomu nda yin beh mbe wu, mo' nu ti ye u beh* [if the three stones of your family are intact there can be no evil force that can have any effect upon you]. The emphasis in such rites or rituals is family cohesion. That is why they have names like Wakuna [gather your brethren].¹⁰²

3.2.2.d. The *Lela*.

We have noted earlier that the *Lela*, apart from being a political institution with a social outlook, is also a religious cult. *Lela* has two sacrifices. One is often called the major *Lela* which sacrifice takes place in the month of *potasia*, which falls between November and December. This sacrifice takes place at the *ntsi su'fu* [stream of purification]. The minor

¹⁰¹ Fomuso Buma-Foncham Henri, *Sacrifice among the Bali Nyonga*, p.29.

¹⁰² Babila fochang, *Wisdom of the Ancients*, pp.24-25.

Lela takes place in the month of June and it is called *keti Nyikob*.¹⁰³ The sacrifice of *su'fu* is either a ram or a cock. Rev. Ntam Martin, a retired pastor of the PCC, in an interview told me there was a year that missionary Vielhauer supplied the ram for the sacrifice.¹⁰⁴

According to Fomuso, during the sacrifice at the *ntsi su'fu* Tita Nyagang prays "We pray that nothing evil should enter our land and that no evil should arise amongst us. Let every body be happy and live in peace." It is also an occasion of thanksgiving to the ancestors for their watchfulness over the land through out the year. The ancestors are also reminded that as intermediaries between the people and *Nyikob* they should continue to intercede for them.¹⁰⁵ The *keti Nyikob* is merely a drink offering. While Tita Nyagang pours the drink [which he does three times], he prays that the women of the land should be blessed and made fertile. Blessings are also requested for the land for a good harvest. As in the *Tu fom*, a drink is brought and everybody present drinks from the same bowl. This is an oath taken before the ancestors of the land and *Nyikob*. Anybody who reneges or betrays another person after the oath is liable to serious repercussions from these invisible beings that served as witnesses or before whom the oath was taken.

When the swearing is accomplished the people await the response of their request to the ancestors and *Nyikob*. Unlike *su'fu* where the people get the response through an animal's position on the ground, the acceptance at *keti Nyikob* is through a spider, which comes down from the top of one of the *Tutuwan* [Bali war standard] to the ground. Noteworthy is the fact that only the priest and his attendants see the spider while the rest of the people see only the web of the spider. When the spider is seen, Tita Nyagang draws the attention of the *Fon* to it. By this it is believed that the sacrifice has been received.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Fomuso Buma-Foncham Henri, *Sacrifice among the Bali Nyonga*, pp.27-28.

¹⁰⁴ Interview by this researcher on the 26/06/2004.

¹⁰⁵ Fomuso Buma-Foncham Henri, *Sacrifice among the Bali Nyonga*, p.45.

¹⁰⁶ Fomuso Buma-Foncham Henri, *Sacrifice among the Bali Nyonga*, p.47.

Concerning his function as chief priest, Ba Tita Nyagang¹⁰⁷ told me what he does is for the *ba kusi* [the ancestors] whom he considers as *ba nyikob* [gods]. While coming back from the *ntsi su'fu* on 19 December 2003 Tita Nyagang's son¹⁰⁸ complained that the *Lela* was not good. He interpreted what many people also observed. When Tita Nyagang slaughtered the ram it did not struggle as it was supposed to do. Surprisingly, immediately he opened its belly, removed its entrails and placed them in the required bowl, the ram started struggling. Secondly, one of the Tutuwan¹⁰⁹ [standard bearer] did not plant his flag well, so it did not unfold properly. But as soon as the sacrificial animal struggled, the flag unfolded. Many people saw an ill omen in what happened. And as earlier mentioned Ba Tita Nyagang died on 1 June 2004. At his funeral, many people associated his death to the bad omen they expected as the sacrifice had indicated.

3.2.2.e. The *Voma*.

This cult is concerned with first fruits. Kaberry and Chilver report that the *Ba Nwana* “perform annual sacrifices in September-October at the *Voma* festival to promote the growth of guinea corn, and again in January; they might also be called upon by the *Mfon* to sacrifice in times of drought, storms and epidemics.”¹¹⁰ In olden times when the Bali had only guinea corn as their staple food crop, nobody dared to harvest grain until *Voma kwed ngun* has performed the ritual by moving around the village putting bundles of grain at people's gates. This grain, as we saw earlier on, attracts birth spirits. The belief is that during this occasion the *Voma* weaken the power of any evil forces that may have invaded the land. Although

¹⁰⁷ Interview by researcher with Ba Tita Nyagang on December, 20th 2003.

¹⁰⁸ David Tita Nyagang is the likely person to succeed his father and assume the role of chief priest. When the researcher was interviewing the father David Tita Nyagang was present, and the researcher asked him why he had said that the *Lela* was not good. He explained that the behavior of the ram was not right. He further stated concerning libation and sacrifice that what he knows is that when those things are done the people do not think that there is anybody beyond the ancestor. For him what his father does is merely to repeat what had been done since of old so that tradition should not be forgotten. He however, likened the sacrifice to Old Testament sacrifices thus qualifying the Bali sacrifice as being directed to *Nyikob*. Ba Bani, one of the Tutuwan who was visiting said that libation is intended for the fathers to send blessings to the children so that they should be well, because if one ignores it a curse may descend upon [him] the priest. For him the *Lela* blessing, which actually is a monarchical cult, requests blessings for the entire land.

¹⁰⁹ The name Tutuwan is the name of the Bali war standards. There are two of them. Tutuwan is also the title given to the people who carry the standard.

¹¹⁰ Kaberry et al. *An outline of the traditional political system of Bali-Nyonga*, p.364, see also Ndifontah, *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon*, p.64.

Fomuso claims that their prayer is offered to *Nyikob* and to the ancestors, it is doubtful since all the activities of *Voma* are always done nocturnally and in secrecy. Tita Nyagang told me that *Nu Nyikob Ba'ni beh Lela* [*Nyikob* palaver¹¹¹ of Bali is *Lela*]. He claims that *Voma* was borrowed from the other Balis.¹¹² Although Tita Nyagang is a member of *Voma* by virtue of his office as chief priest of *Lela*, he is not the priest of *Voma*, whose office of priest belongs to Tita Gwanvoma. Kaberry and Chilver however state that *Voma* is also in Meek's group A Chamba and is described as 'among the most ancient institutions brought by the Bali from Koncha.'¹¹³ I have not been able to find out the deity to whom the *Voma* sacrifices are directed.

3.2.2.f. Other Divinities

We have mentioned the *ngamnsi* [earth spider] which, Chilver was told, is a god, and which is the messenger who comes to tell Tita Nyagang that the *keti Nyikob* is accepted. Perhaps a plausible understanding of the *ngamnsi* is what Hans Knöpfli tells us. He says that the *ngamnsi* [earth spider] is considered as the bearer of ever-ready wisdom and is able to cope with life situations. It is endowed with supernatural sense, which it receives from the living dead in the underworld. It is believed to be a mediator between the living and the dead, linking the spiritual world to the material. That is why the *ngambi man*¹¹⁴ is indispensable, since he alone is endowed with the ability to interpret the secret message and propose appropriate applications.¹¹⁵ There are *ba nyikob* who live in groves, under special trees,

¹¹¹ Interview by me with Ba Tita Nyagang, December 20th 2003. Bali seems not to have a name for religion. Religion is spoken of, if at all, as *nu Nyikob* things concerning *Nyikob*.

¹¹² Tita Nji gives a plausible explanation. He states that the absence of *Voma* was precipitated by the fact of a temporary monarchy in the reign of Nahnyonga since it is a male dominated sacra, p. 80 "The Traditional Political Institutions of Bali-Nyonga", in Tita Nji et al. [eds.], *An Introduction to the study of Bali-Nyonga*, p.80. One could raise the same argument for the *Lela*, which is also male dominated, but which has never been absent at anytime.

¹¹³ Kaberry et al. *An outline of the traditional political system of Bali-Nyonga*, p.364.

¹¹⁴ Popular Cameroonian pidgin term for a diviner.

¹¹⁵ Hans Knöpfli, *Sculptor and Symbolism-Craft and Technologies: Some traditional craftsmen and women of the Western grassfields of Cameroon, Part II, Woodcarvers and blacksmiths*, [edited by Paul Jenkins] Basel: Basel Mission, 1990, p.41. Ba Issac Kwati explains that the *ngamsi* is knowledgeable because it moves around mostly in the night, its borough is underground. For these reasons it is believed to go where human beings cannot go, even the underworld. For a full procedure of how spider divination is conducted see, Johannes Stöckle, *Traditions, tales and proverbs of Bali Nyonga*, pp.106-107.

unusual hills and in deep eerie pools.¹¹⁶ These spirits or *ba nyikob* can be good or bad. Fobuta an elderly informant of Chilver told her that the *ba nyikob* come to you in dreams. One could distinguish the good one from the bad ones. Large and hairy *ba nyikob* portend bad luck if they are seen in dreams. The good *ba nyikob* are smaller and angel like and it is good luck to dream of them.¹¹⁷

Human beings are also considered as *ba nyikob*. As a child grows up parents emphasize the importance of obedience to them because one's parent are one's *ba nyikob*.¹¹⁸ In the same way, uncles¹¹⁹ and grandparents are considered as one's *ba nyikob*. It is evident that the obligation towards the dead is merely a continuation of filial and consanguineous responsibility that began when they were alive, an obligation that not even death can disrupt.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have traced the concept of *Nyikob* beginning with documentary sources, which pre-date the missionary period. In the second section we have examined the concept of *Nyikob* taking note of what and how the Bali conceive him through his attributes and through figurative expressions. Then we considered the ancestors and the role they play in the life of families and the community as a whole. We also considered other divinities; these included the natural environment and human beings as well. The conclusion drawn from this survey is that the existence of the spiritual universe is inextricably linked to the physical and that the spiritual exist to serve the purposes of the living which, as Fomuso rightly sums up, are for human fecundity, fertility of the soil and for peace¹²⁰, to which should be added unity and social cohesion since there can be no peace without these.

¹¹⁶Johannes Stöckle, *Traditions, tales and proverbs of Bali Nyonga*, pp.94-95.

¹¹⁷ E.M.Chilver, Bali-Nyonga-brief notes.

¹¹⁸ Babila Fochang, *Wisdom of the Ancients*, p.37.

¹¹⁹ For the Bali an uncle is a mother's brother only, a father's brother is either one's older or younger father as the case may be. The same applies to aunt, an aunt is a father's sister, one's mother's sister is either older or younger mother.

¹²⁰Fomuso Buma-Foncham Henri, *Sacrifice among the Bali Nyonga*, p.64.

Our findings reveal that *Nyikob* is the provider of sustenance; he is considered as the highest court of appeal, which means that he is the greatest judge. He caused the existence of the world and all that is in it. While he blesses people he also metes out punishment to the wicked. We also found out that it is difficult to show with clarity any direct worship to *Nyikob*, but the belief is that worship and sacrifice are directed to *Nyikob*. This is clearly seen in the name given to the 'ancestral cult': *Nyikob ba me* [God of my fathers], which is not the same as *ba me Nyikob* [my father God] this would mean that the ancestors are the end whereas in *Nyikob ba me* they are a means to an end - *Nyikob*.

Chapter Four: Early Encounter of Mission with indigenous culture: The Inter-Face of two Worldviews.

Introduction.

The early history of the Church in Cameroon is closely linked with the colonization of Cameroon. Thus we cannot discuss the missionary enterprise in its early stages without a survey of the colonial political history of Cameroon. We shall therefore consider the factors that precipitated the Basel Mission to begin work in Cameroon. The factors leading to their arrival shall be considered along side the coming into existence of what is today known as the Republic of Cameroon. The next sub chapter would consider the formation of the Basel Mission against the religio-political background of Europe, the cultural, theological and doctrinal policy of the Basel Mission in general and Bali in particular and the early beginnings of Basel Mission work in Bali. We shall also look at the transactions that took place when the two worldviews came into contact. We shall want to know the attitude of missionaries towards Bali Nyonga worldview and how the Gospel was presented and received.

4.1. Early Missionary engagement and the annexation of Cameroon.

Carthaginian adventurers led in their travels by Hanno first sighted the Cameroon Mountain about 500 B.C. and called it "Chariots of the gods". To commemorate his journey of discovery, Hanno placed an inscription in the temple of Cronos at Carthage.¹

However, we become familiar with the name when in 1472 a Portuguese navigator Fernando Po arrived on an island off the mainland of today's Cameroon. In the second half of the 16th century Portuguese traders who had come up the estuary of the River Wouri found out that it had a lot of prawns, so they named it "*Rio dos Cameroes*"² - which in Portuguese is "river of prawns". The name soon came to stand for Douala the

¹T. Eyongeta, & R. Brian, *A History of the Cameroon*, London: Longman, 1978, pp.9-10, see also Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, p.1.

² The British called it the Cameroons latterly Cameroon, the Germans called it Kameruns or Kamerun and the French called it Cameroun. We shall maintain Cameroon; the current English usage unless otherwise mentioned.

town at the mouth of the Wouri River.³ When the Basel Mission took over the mission field in 1886, Cameroon still referred only to Douala and the countryside around the river Wouri.⁴

The nineteenth century witnessed the influx of European nations into Africa as the scramble for Africa became top of Europe's agenda. Portuguese hegemony in Africa was waning. The Dutch, British and French followed them. Most of these countries established trading posts on the West African coast. Along the coastal area of the Wouri, the German firms of C. Woerman and Jantzen and Thormaehlen, both of Hamburg, had been merchants along the Wouri estuary for many years.⁵

The initiative of Mission work in Cameroon was by people who had their roots in Africa. During the 50th anniversary of the Baptist Mission in Jamaica, many of the freed slaves who remembered their homeland in Africa decided to come and share the good news of salvation with their brethren. The Rev. John Clarke of Jericho, Jamaica and Dr. G. K. Prince⁶, children of Jamaican freed slaves arrived in Fernando Po in a trading vessel in 1841. These two missionaries began work on the island. They also made visits to the mainland and made contacts with the Douala traditional rulers of the Cameroons River and King William of Bimbia.⁷

The second party of missionaries to arrive on the island in September 1843 included an Englishman, Rev. Alfred Saker, Joseph Jackson Fuller and Joseph Merrick.⁸ The Clarke

³ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, Victoria: n.p., 1969, p.1.

⁴ Erick Hallden, *The Culture policy of the Basel Mission in the Cameroons-1886-1905*, Lund: University of Uppsala Press, 1968, p.57.

⁵ Shirley Ardener, *Eye-witnesses to the Annexation of Cameroon*, p.19.

⁶ Prince preached the first sermon to the inhabitants of Douala in February 1841, J. van Slageren, *Histoire de l'Eglise en Afrique [Cameroun]*, Yaounde: Editions Cle, 1969, pp.60-61.

⁷ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, pp.1-2.

⁸ Clarke and Prince left for England to report on their work, they met with a storm at sea which caused their vessel to drift and arrived in Jamaica again. The Jamaicans were happy to hear of the work and many others wanted to accompany them. One of them was the Rev. Joseph Merrick who left his large parish to accompany them. In England four couples volunteered for the work in Africa. These included the Rev. Alfred Saker who founded Victoria on the Cameroon mainland. He was born in 1814 in Kent to protestant farmers. His work in Douala began on June 22nd, 1845. Jackson Fuller was the son of a freed Jamaican slave. He was born in 1825, arrived at Fernando-Po on February 16th, 1844. In 1858 he accompanied Saker for evangelization to Douala. He was ordained by Saker on April 4th, 1859. He laid the foundation

and Saker couples traveled first to Jamaica to take along some “Negroes” who, it was hoped could bear the tropical climate better than the Europeans. Forty-two people accompanied them, among them children. Some went as missionaries and others as settlers.⁹ As soon as they arrived at Fernando Po, Merrick accompanied a trader to Bimbia but could not convince the King to sell land. After much persistence he became successful in 1844. He settled there and opened the first station. Saker finally secured land from the King of Bimbia in 1884.

Fernando Po was ceded to Spain in 1778, which they abandoned in 1782. The British Government obtained permission in 1827 to form a settlement to base a naval squadron to intercept vessels engaged in the slave trade. The representative of Catholic Spain, Captain Lerena, at the time of the arrival of the missionaries declared that the security of personal liberty, property and religion would be guaranteed to all the inhabitants. It was under this condition that the English Baptists began their work.

However in September 1856 a Spanish bishop landed with several priests and was instructed to expel the Baptists missionaries from the island. That was forestalled because they did not have absolute authority. On May 22 1858, Don Chacon, Commander of the Spanish squadron and Governor General anchored in Clarence. Six Jesuit priests accompanied him. They proclaimed that the sole religion of the island was Roman Catholicism and that no other religious profession was to be tolerated. On May 27 the Christians gathered for public worship for the last time, and on 9 June 1858 the first group of settlers sailed from Fernando Po to Bimbia, which Saker named Victoria after the British monarch.¹⁰

In 1841, the Rev. J. Clarke and Dr. Prince paid a visit to Douala. On June 10 1845 Saker went there to start a mission. He baptized his first convert on 8 November 1848. He had consecrated the marriage of this convert three months earlier.

of mission in Deido and Bonabeeri. He distinguished himself in his fight against secret societies. J. van Slageren, *Histoire de l'Eglise en Afrique [Cameroun]*, p.60.

⁹ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, p.2.

¹⁰ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, pp, 2-4.

Other European countries were challenging British domination in trade through the first half of the nineteenth century. Thus the two German companies in Douala were fast expanding. The Douala traditional rulers thought it was time they benefited from the competition. On 7 August 1879, they wrote a letter to Queen Victoria expressing their desire to have her laws in their towns. They complained of wars, "idol worship" and murders in their country. They said they had spoken to the British Consul several times, but to no avail. Even though, British traders and consular representatives tried to influence the British Government she was reluctant to get involved. Meanwhile the French were moving along the coast towards the Cameroons from the west and from the south, establishing commercial enterprises called "factories", claiming territory, and introducing tariffs. Scared by such French discriminatory activity which virtually excluded non-French goods, both British and German traders combined their forces with the traditional rulers to make further demands to the British Government. Thus in 1884 the Germans bribed these rulers and they easily transferred their allegiance to the them.¹¹

In February 1885, Dr. Eugen Nachtigal was appointed by the German Colonial Government and sent to Africa, to study German trade and prospects for a coaling station in Africa, to look into British intentions concerning annexations in West Africa and to secure the rights of German merchants on foreign territory, as well as concluding corresponding treaties with the chiefs of independent areas. The British Government was asked to support him where necessary since he was sent to collect information concerning German trade. However before he arrived in Africa, Bismarck was pushed towards a colonial policy by the merchants and on 28 April 1885 he drafted a new dispatch to Nachtigal with instructions to take the coast between Bimbia and Cape St. John, to hoist the German flag and declare that the German firms based in Cameroon had concluded negotiations with the traditional rulers. Even before Nachtigal arrived in Cameroon, the agents of the firms of C. Woerman and Jantzen and Thormaehlen, both of Hamburg and for many years merchants along the Wouri estuary, signed a treaty with the Douala traditional rulers on the 12th of July 1884, and the German flag was hoisted. The

¹¹ Shirley Ardener, *Eye-witness to the Annexation of Cameroon*, pp. 19-30, Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, pp.8-10.

traditional rulers who signed the Treaty were kings Bell, Akwa and some of their Douala subordinates.¹²

Meanwhile the British Government decided to annex Cameroon and commissioned the British Consul of the Bight of Benin and Biafra, Edouard Hyde Hewett, to carry out the exercise. He arrived three days after the German treaty. The treaty had been signed in such a clandestine manner that it took even the British merchants and missionaries by surprise. Max Buchner, a German, admitted, "The River was without doubt under British supremacy that the English had omitted to annex it."¹³ Lewis also confirms this when he states that the English "considered the whole land as under British protection, and were persuaded that the possession of it would never be contested."¹⁴ Further investigation by the British revealed that the German Consul had signed a similar Treaty with the Bimbia chief. The British made do with Victoria where they hoisted the British flag. Victoria was a little strip of land with only ten miles of coast and a small township.¹⁵

The Douala traditional rulers later told the British that they were not given a copy of the treaty. After the hoisting of the German flag the natives were angry with king Bell. So he fled with his family. The people of Joss razed the village of Bell to the ground. Dr. Nachtigal had hurriedly left for some other mission without as yet setting up a colonial German Government; neither did he leave any German soldiers behind. The soldiers eventually returned and punished the people who burnt down the town. They felt that such an action was against the Germans.

The Germans often used force to penetrate into the hinterland of Cameroon, forced labour for their plantations; the local people fiercely resisted these. Although the

¹² Shirley Ardener, *Eye-witnessess to the Annexation of Cameroon*, p.22.

¹³ Shirley Ardener, *Eye-witnessess to the Annexation of Cameroon*, p.25. Our source does not specify who Buchner was, but he was in the Cameroons and in 1887 he Published *Kamerun Skizzen und Beitragen*, and *Aurora Colonialis* in 1914. Ardener uses extracts from these books.

¹⁴ Shirley Ardener, *Eye-witnessess to the Annexation of Cameroon*, p.25. Lewis was the son of a blacksmith. He was born in Wales, United Kingdom. He visited London for his first time in December 1882 for an interview by the Baptist Missionary Society who had sent out an appeal for missionaries to send to Cameroon. The extracts of his work used in Ardener's book was published as *These Seventy Years: An Autobiography*, London: The Carey Press, 1930.

¹⁵ Shirley Ardener, *Eye-witnessess to the Annexation of Cameroon*, pp.26-27.

Germans at first allowed the Baptist missionaries to continue their work, it soon became clear that all English people were seen as the instigators of the uprisings against the Germans. Lewis records for instance that a search was conducted in his house and an old single-barrel, muzzle-loading gun was discovered. He later found out that it made capital news in Germany where the gun story became evidence against the missionaries who were considered "the worst agitators against German ascendancy"¹⁶ Lewis reports that a newspaper cartoon represented "a bearded British missionary leading the natives of Cameroon against the German forces, with a Bible in one hand and a pistol in the other."¹⁷

Relations between the Germans and the English missionaries became strained and the Baptist missionaries could no longer operate freely in Cameroon. They entered into negotiations to request a German Mission to take over their work in Cameroon. The British Government, in order to protect her interests in Nigeria, was ready to give up her claim on Cameroon. As for Victoria it was agreed that "the German Government should come to a satisfactory arrangement with the missionaries..."¹⁸ Besides, as the Baptist Missionary Society began work in the Congo, they decided to shift their resources to the Congo where they started work in 1878.

In October 1885 the representatives of German Evangelical Missions met in Bremen to discuss missionary work in German colonies. In the course of discussion it was agreed that the Basel Mission because of her experience in the Gold Coast, should assume the work of the Baptist Mission in Cameroon. This was a choice that was politically motivated since it was considered that German Protestants exhibited better patriotism and so were more suited to implant German culture and influence in the colonies.¹⁹ An appeal was made to the Basel Mission to participate in the establishment of German rule in Cameroon.²⁰ The Basel Mission was reluctant at first to take over the Cameroon

¹⁶ G. Lewis, *These Seventy Years*, pp.73-78, in Shirley Ardener, *Eye-witnesses to the Annexation of Cameroon*, p.34.

¹⁷ G. Lewis, *These Seventy Years*, pp.73-78.

¹⁸ Shirley Ardener, *Eye-witnesses to the Annexation of Cameroon*, p.48.

¹⁹ Erick Hallden, *The Culture policy of the Basel Mission in the Cameroons*, pp.1-5.

²⁰ BMA. E-I. Preliminary discussions about Cameroon mission containing correspondence between the Basel Mission and Baptist Missionary Society as well as the Government, in Mathew Basung Gwanfogbe,

mission field which they considered as just another “death trap” which could cause a lot of death. When they finally agreed to take over the Cameroon field, they sent a resolution to the German colonial office. The text stated:

1. The Society pursues the goal of planting Evangelical Christianity among the heathen and of assembling converts into Christian congregations to the exclusion of any political objective.
2. By establishing Christian primary schools, the mission seeks to equip those in its care to read the Holy Scriptures, and to develop an educational system that will lead to the growth of a Christian people.
3. Through higher schools it trains natives as teachers and pastors and seeks to develop further education with protestant evangelical spirit, which will match local needs.
4. It controls the religion and the moral life of the gathered congregation through the introduction of a Christian Church order in accordance with biblical principles.
5. The mission works towards a situation where the Christians’ own contributions pay for the expenses of their congregations. This is not only intended to reduce the financial load the mission has to carry, but is also seen as having an important ethical significance.
6. The Society takes it as its duty to protect the national peculiarities of the people among whom it works, as long as such are not steeped in paganism, or in contradiction to Christianity. The indigenous language has priority in her Schools although other languages are taught as necessary.²¹

4.2. The Basel Mission in Cameroon.

The first four German missionaries arrived in Cameroon on December 23rd 1886. They took over the work and property of the English Mission for which an amount of 3000 pounds was paid. At the handing over it was agreed, according to Lewis, that “the main condition of the transfer was that the native Churches should retain their own chapels and their Baptist faith, and were in no way to lose their independence.”²² The Basel Mission in her terms of reference indicated that she would not change her practice of infant baptism just to please the Baptists. They were to take over the pastors as long as

Changing Regimes and the Development of Education in Cameroon 1886-1960 [with special reference to the Basel Mission], unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of London Institute of Education, 1995, p.164.

²¹ Jonas N., *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, pp.69-70, also in Pascal Fossouo, *African Sacral Rule and the Christian Church: An Investigation into a Process of Change and Continuity in the Encounter between Christianity and African tradition, with particular Reference to Cameroon and Ghana*, unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 2003, p.253, n.388.

²² Thomas Lewis, *These Seventy Years*, p.90 in Lloyd Kwast, *The Discipling of West Cameroon: A Study of Baptist Growth*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1971, p.79.

they [the later] were ready to abide by the terms laid down by the Basel Mission. The pastors had the freedom to baptise their children when they thought fit whilst the congregations were to follow the order and discipline of the Basel Mission.²³

The first Basel missionaries were the Rev. Gottlieb Munz and his wife, Rev. Christian Dilger, Rev. Johannes Bizer and Rev. Friederich Becher. Munz was appointed the first Field Secretary due to his experience in the Ghana Mission field where he had worked from 1880 - 1883. Rev. Becher died of malaria four days after their arrival. Rev. Dilger wrote in a letter to the Home Board: "It is the Lord whom it has pleased to introduce our band in such a way. We therefore can and will not withdraw."²⁴

The Basel Mission took over 203 Baptist Church members, and 368 school pupils. A year later the congregations at Bethel disagreed with the Basel Mission on Church organization. They petitioned the Basel Mission and after fruitless negotiations they broke away on March 15 1888.²⁵ The congregation of Bell town was also involved in the break away. In 1889, the congregation of Victoria also separated from the Basel Mission because of a language problem.²⁶ The Baptist Mission of Berlin came to the aid of the Baptist congregations. On December 8 1891, Mr. and Mrs. August Steffens arrived in Victoria. He was a German American. These separated congregations worked together until 1898 when there was another separation, which gave birth to the Native Baptist

²³ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, p.11.

²⁴ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, p.13.

²⁵ The petition read:

1. We the elders of the Church of Bethel do not approve of sprinkling, we agree so far to abide in the old mode of Immersion,
2. To support our own pastor as before also to carry out all our affairs under our own expenses,
3. To govern our own Church and all matters subjected to the elders be referred to the Church for approval and settlement,
4. That as your Mission is new to us we are willing that the infant be sprinkled according to your mode, see Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, p.13.

²⁶ The Victoria congregation felt that the missionaries did not consider their problem so they wrote to the Basel Mission: "We, your humble petitioners be [sic] respectfully forward to you our complaint respecting the sort of teaching given to our children in the Douala 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 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 Douala language is not our native tongue..." in Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, p.14.

Church and the Baptist Church. During the First World War, the Germans were interned and the Paris Mission took over the Baptist congregations in French Cameroon²⁷. The congregations in English Cameroon, who were left alone during the war years, were catered for through a decision of the North American Baptist Conference of May 1944. They sent nine missionaries to cater for them. The Church became independent in 1954, and became the Cameroon Baptist Convention.²⁸

The Basel Mission on its part continued to work in the coastal area while also penetrating into the hinterlands. They were involved in opening congregations and schools. These early missionaries gave most of their time to the spiritual care and the strengthening of the already existing congregations. They used the Douala language as the medium of instruction in the schools and in the congregations. Alfred Saker had translated the Bible into Douala and had produced other literature like John Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress*. It was not until 1902 that the missionaries made the first move into the Grassfield region of Cameroon. How was the ground prepared for them before they arrived? This is the question we attempt to answer in the next section but before that it is necessary to know a little bit about the Basel Mission.

4.3. Historical Background of the Basel Mission.

The Evangelical Missionary Society in Basel known for short as Basel Mission was founded in 1815 as an off-shoot of the German Christian Society that was founded in Basel in 1780. The founding members envisioned an inter-denominational school where missionaries of the various mission bodies could be trained. Its membership was drawn mostly from people who were influenced by Wüttemberg pietism.²⁹ Its first trial mission was to the Caucasus in 1821. Due to difficulties, it gave up two years later. The Basel Mission together with the Church Missionary Society sent missionaries to Liberia in

²⁷ See map 4 for Cameroon showing the Anglophone and Francophone sections.

²⁸ Lloyd Kwast, *The Discipling of West Cameroon*, pp.81-95.

²⁹ A major result of pietism was philanthropy, which led to the formation of many missionary bodies. For a treatment of pietism see E.S. Waterhouse, "Pietism" in James Hastings [ed.], *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980, Vol. X, pp. 6-9.

1822-1824. The Basel Mission started work in India in 1824, Ghana [Gold coast] in 1828, China 1847 and Cameroon 1886.³⁰

4.4. The *Fon* of Bali Nyonga Request for Missionaries.

Although colonialists and missionaries had been operating in coastal Cameroon for more than four decades none ventured into the deeper hinterland. In 1884, the German born Eugen Zintgraff accompanied the explorer Chavanne to the lower Congo. He entered the service of the German Government in 1886. In 1886/87 he made some expeditions around the Wouri estuary, and established the Barombi [Kumba] station in January 1888. He pushed his way further inland and arrived in Bali in 1889. Upon his arrival, Zintgraff was impressed to see Africans for the first time who looked him straight in the eyes. He was also impressed to meet “a welcoming and helpful crowd with palm wine and a hospitality we had not encountered elsewhere.”³¹ What also made an impression on the explorer was to see about two thousand warriors with their Dane guns and spears upright waiting in perfect silence.

Fon Galega convinced the explorer to settle in Bali. Zintgraff accepted Galega’s idea of establishing a station although he had his own motives. When he made his decision known to the *Fon*, it was decided that a station be constructed for him. The *Fon* and Zintgraff took an oath in the customary fashion with the killing of a goat and the rubbing of each other with cam wood. Galega and Zintgraff entered into a blood pact in which they licked each other’s blood. The *Fon* told Zintgraff that Zintgraff came to his house like a little chicken and would have been killed if he as the *Fon* had so decided to; he told Zintgraff not to be afraid although people constantly advised him to kill the white man. He felt that “...it is better to obtain knowledge of the white and to have them as friends to our lasting benefit, than to take a short-lived advantage of them by robbery.”³² In the same vein Galega told his subjects that they should not think that because the white man is small he is not to be feared. He told them that the leopard is small but the

³⁰ Jonas N. Dah, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, p.6.

³¹ E.M.Chilver, *Zintgraff’s Explorations in Bamenda*, pp.2-3.

³² E.M.Chilver, *Zintgraff’s Explorations in Bamenda*, p.6.

Galega entered the land as conqueror and continued to expand, yet he said, "War and force make people fear and empties the land, but land without people is like a burnt-out-fire."³³ He aimed at becoming the chief arbiter of disputes and uniting the Grassfield *fondoms*. Zintgraaf intended to use Galega's plan to the advantage of the German colonial enterprise. He hoped to establish a commissionership in Bali whose major preoccupation was to be "...the regulation of Galega's leadership and the establishment of a general administration for the Grassfields."³⁴ Typical of European popular estimation of other people during that period Zintgraff saw Galega as

Indeed an African barbarian, honest when it suits him - as in his dealings with the whites, and a bandit when honesty does not suit his purpose, but he has worked out for himself the notion that all should be one.³⁵

Zintgraff felt the Commission at Bali would serve four aims: Protection of European traders, missionaries or other types of incomers; security of the caravan route; justice among the natives; and unification of the divided villages under Galega.

Zintgraff signed a treaty with Galega in which the *Fon* transferred his powers to Zintgraff. In return Galega was to be recognized and protected as the paramount ruler of the surrounding *fondoms* of the northern Cameroon hinterland³⁶

Thus Bali became the first political colonial station in the Grassfield, and it was soon to become the first missionary station in the area. Due to the hostility of Bafut and Mankon to Zintgraff's emissaries, Bali allied with Zintgraff to fight them. About 180 Bali people were killed while Zintgraff lost four of his colleagues and the Bafut/Mankon alliance lost about 600 people. This aggravated hostilities by other *fondoms* of the area towards Bali and this was to have an effect on the missionary enterprise in the area. Zintgraff's plan was a venture in futility because the German Governor was indifferent because he felt Zintgraff's action was independent of the Cameroon Colonial Administration.

³³ E.M.Chilver, *Zintgraff's Explorations in Bamenda*, p.23.

³⁴ E.M.Chilver, *Zintgraff's Explorations in Bamenda*, p.23.

³⁵ E.M.Chilver, *Zintgraff's Explorations in Bamenda*, p.23.

³⁶ E.M.Chilver, *Zintgraff's Explorations in Bamenda*, p.22-23.

Not long after the Bafut/Mankon - Zintgraff/Bali battle there was an outbreak of a serious epidemic - dysentery. Galega in council suspected witchcraft and put people through the ordeal of drinking sasswood-poison in a bid to identify the guilty ones. This took the lives of many until Zintgraff upbraided the *Fon* for his folly. The *Fon* agreed with Zintgraff, accepted and supported his sanitary and medical measures, which involved a thorough clean-up campaign and the prohibition of in-door burials.³⁷ The epidemic ceased and the white man's influence and popularity soared. He was made *nkom* and called *Fombolingong* [chief who pacifies].³⁸

Zintgraff would very much have loved to build Bali into a veritable German military and political headquarters for the region, but fate was against him. He was on sick leave and died on his way home in December 1897. His blood brother Galega died in early 1901.

Galega was succeeded by his son whose throne name was Fonyonga II. The colonial administration recognized him as paramount ruler of thirty-one villages. He collected taxes for the administration from these villages with ten percent for himself. He also supplied the German plantations with labor, which he recruited from the villages. The work began by Galega had to be continued by his successor Fonyonga I. Ironically the benefits, which the *Fon* received in taxes, did not add up to the tributes these vassal villages had been paying to him in the past. The method, which he used in collecting the taxes and recruiting labor, caused unrest even among his own subjects. The treaty signed with Zintgraff, took away the power of life and death over these villages from the *Fon*. The colonial administration soon felt that Fonyonga was becoming too powerful for them. They asked him to return the 2000 guns which Zintgraff gave him, which he did not do. The administration started encouraging the villages to gain their autonomy. During his stay in Bali, Zintgraff tried to win Galega's interest in Christianity but the *Fon* was quite pragmatic and philosophical in his response, as we have already noted in chapter three.

³⁷ E.M.Chilver, *Zintgraff's Explorations in Bamenda*, p. 32.

³⁸ Ndifontah b. Nyamndi, *The Bali Chamba of Cameroon*, p.98.

4.5. Missionary beginning in Bali Nyonga.

In keeping with his philosophy of taking the good from wherever it came from, Galega in 1897 sent a petition to the Foreign Office asking them to encourage the Basel Mission to begin work in his village.³⁹ He did not live to see that day since he died in 1901. Fonyonga renewed the request for the missionaries to come to his land and open a school. In his words to the first reconnoitring missionaries: "For 4 years we have been crying for mission. To every European, who came we said - 'send the mission people to us.'"⁴⁰

The Committee of the Basel Mission gave the go ahead for feasibility studies to be carried out in Bali. They too must have heard about the advantages of Bali where the first German station in the Grassfield was located. It was also a trade centre - especially for slave trade, the supply centre for plantation labour⁴¹ and above all, was Zintgraff's Baliburg. The missionaries E. Schuler, Jakob Keller and G. Spellenberg left Bombe on the 31 October 1902 and arrived in Bali on the 29 November 1902.

At Bali they were given a very warm reception. The *Fon* treated them nobly and gave Schuler a royal robe having the royal insignia⁴², which he urged Schuler to wear any time he appeared before the *Fon*. The *Fon* was very happy to see Schuler in the dress the next time Schuler was in his presence.

On Monday 17 November 1902, which was *foncham* [Bali weekly day of rest] Schuler delivered his first sermon to the Bali people. There was an estimated audience of 1500-2000 persons present. Schuler was dressed in the traditional dress given to him by the *Fon*. He called the sermon a 'heathen sermon'. The sermon was based on Acts of the Apostles chapter 17:30-31. They sang songs accompanied on the trumpet and the *Fon*

³⁹ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, p.26, Mathew Basung Gwanfogbe, *Changing Regimes and the development of education in Cameroon*, p.92, J. van Slageren, *Histoire de l'Eglise en Afrique*, p.92.

⁴⁰ BMA, dossier Bali Kamerun, a letter sent to the Basel mission by Rev. Spellenberg in 1903.

⁴¹ Douala has a quarter named 'Bali'. This is where the Bali used to camp when they went down with slave labor for the plantations.

⁴² The royal robe is just like any ordinary robe by design, but behind the dress is an oval shape piece of cloth of a red colour sewn on the dress. It is an honour to be given such a dress by the *Fon* since nobody can put on such a dress except with his permission.

liked it so much. He preached in Douala, and it was translated into *Bafo*. The *Bafo* translator was a young man, so by tradition he was not allowed to address the crowd directly. An elderly, huge man of dignified appearance whose size was magnified by his traditional attire had to proclaim the news. The missionaries jokingly called him 'the bishop'. He always approached with his head bowed since the *Fon* was sitting near to the preacher. The 'bishop' would bow down to the ground and receive the message from the speaker. Six other elderly men who served as witnesses as he delivered the news surrounded him. Each time he received the news he stood straight and shouted the news with a mighty voice to the crowd.

The Gospel had been presented to the Bali people for the first time in a very cultural form even though the preacher saw it as a "heathen sermon." First the preacher was in traditional attire with the royal insignia. Second, the day chosen was the traditional day of rest and third, the sermon was presented to the people in a royal nature. These were good indicators, which would have been exploited to missionary advantage. The missionary/preacher was elevated and honoured by speaking to the people through the *Fon's* mouthpiece. The *Fon* hardly speaks to people directly.⁴³

The missionaries agreed that "the time was ripe to start missionary activities there" and they also thought to settle in Bali before the rainy season arrived. According to them, there was "all conditions for good, blessed and efficient work with the people of Bali" because:

1. They had an exceedingly friendly reception by the respected and mighty *Fon* and the whole Bali inhabitants.
2. The *Fon* had been longing for school and education.
3. As opposed to the coastal area where villages were small clusters the missionaries witnessed for the first time large populations with about 6,000-10,000 inhabitants living in one town. Moreover, they realised that there were large villages in the Grassfield that

⁴³ I remember when I was growing up my father came home full of glee. When his wife asked him the reason for his joy he said he had conversed directly with the *Fon*. The *Fon* had ignored protocol and called him by name and talked with him directly.

were dependent on Bali. They felt that in the course of time, Bali would become the starting point for their efforts to reach the other more important tribes in the area.

4. They realised that the *Fon* enjoyed power and respect, which he was ready to use in serving the Mission, as far as he understood Mission at the present time. He wanted to build a house for the school immediately on a beautiful site near his palace but the missionaries asked him to wait for a while.

5. Bali had a healthy climate that was to their advantage.

6. The land was fertile so they could grow their own basic food supplies. Besides, Zintgraff had introduced potatoes, which were being cultivated. Lastly, the Bali would supply able-bodied men to carry loads from Bombe at moderate cost.⁴⁴

Schuler also felt that it would be easy to build temporary houses with mud walls and thatched roofs, which the *Fon* was ready to organise.⁴⁵ The missionaries made several subsequent visits to Bali. Each time the *Fon* was very anxious to know exactly when to expect them. They consoled the *Fon* with the prospect of a definite arrival in April or May. It took them a lot to convince the *Fon* before he allowed them to return to the coast. He gave his son to them to go be educated.

4.6. Arrival of the first Resident Missionaries.

Reverends Ferdinand Ernst and Rudolf Leimbacher were the first two missionaries appointed to open the Bali Mission Station. Leimbacher was a builder. They left Bombe on March 5 and arrived in Bali on Sunday, March 17 1903. The *Fon* warmly received them. Reverend and Mrs J. Keller and child followed them on 22 January 1904. Leimbacher immediately launched a great building programme. He had to build houses for the missionaries and schools. He equally engaged himself with training the local people in various crafts. Ernst was named *Fonyungtsu* [*Fon* with the beard] by the Bali because he had very long beard. Ernst established good relations with the *Fon* and

⁴⁴ BMA, Dossier Bali Kamerun, 1903.

⁴⁵ There was enough clay of good quantity so there was no difficulty in erecting good brick houses. Although there was scarcity of wood in the vicinity, he did not entertain any fear because there was enough wood at a distance of about three or four hours walk. The *Fon* commanded thousands of people who reliably obeyed every wish of his, so the collection of wood did not pose any problem. See BMA, Dossier Bali Kamerun, 1903.

became his personal adviser and the new voice in the Bali station. On his part, Keller concentrated on the study of the Bali language and the proclamation of the Gospel. He moved about in the village and engaged in conversation with the Bali people, asked them the names of things and wrote them down. He always made the effort to speak with them.⁴⁶

Fonyonga's interest in the mission must have been twofold; the need for the education of his people and the quest for power. The Colonial authorities, afraid of an African ruler who may become too powerful for them to handle had reduced the authority that the Bali *fondom* had hitherto commanded. Following in the footsteps of his father Fonyonga thought the mission would help him regain his lost status. There was another factor that must have encouraged many to look forward with great anticipation to the arrival of the missionaries. The atrocities of the German colonial Government and their soldiers as Keller puts it, "has become a rod for the people and crushes [sic] everywhere."⁴⁷ The result was that "everyone is longing for a new era, the gospel will be their salvation if they will yield to it."⁴⁸ Although the *Fon* had been zealous for a school in his *fondom*, his subjects did not share his enthusiasm. According to Rev. Elisa Ndifon⁴⁹ who was one of the first pupils of the school, force had to be used in order to bring children to school. Parents regarded the idea of sending their children to school as a foolish idea. The *Fon*, to meet this deep-seated suspicion, had to adopt new strategies.

During the recruitment of the second batch of students, the *Fon* played a trick on the children, which Vielhauer saw as magic.⁵⁰ Maxwell Fohitung recounts how while going

⁴⁶ Unpublished manuscript of Ndifon's biography.

⁴⁷ Basel Mission Archive, Report from Bali signed by J. Keller, F. Ernst and R. Leimbacher in Jonas N. Dah, "The Planting of Christianity in the Grassland" in Jonas N. Dah [ed.], *A Century of Christianity in the Grassland of Cameroon-1903-2003*, Bamenda:n.p, 2003, p.24.

⁴⁸ Basel Mission Archive, Report from Bali signed by J. Keller, Dah, p.24.

⁴⁹ Rev. Elisa Ndifon was among the first batch of pupils for the school. He was the first son of Bali to become a pastor. He co-translated the Bible into *mungaka*. For that work he went to Germany in October 1931 and stayed there with Vielhauer until October 1933. He went again in March 1954, and worked with Vielhauer till December 1955. See epilogue to *Nwa'ni Nyikob ni tsu Mungaka [The Holy Bible in the Mungaka Language]*, Basel: Evangelical Missionary Society, 1960, p.457.

⁵⁰ What Fohitung as an indigene saw as a trick played on them by the *Fon*, Vielhauer saw as magic. He describes how the *Fon* laid an ambush and with the application of magic recruited children for the school in 1904. Extract from Adolf Vielhauer, "Ich will sie mehr und nicht mindern" in *Mission Jubilee*, 1936, see Maxwell Gabana Fohitung, "Self-Portrait of a Cameroonian", *Paideuma*, 38, 1992 p.246.

to the farm with his mother one day they came across the *Fon* and his *tsinted* at a place called *Ntan Nyikob* [the plaza of *Nyikob*]. As parents came along with their boys, the latter were caught, especially the young ones. While they were wondering what would happen, they were taken to the *Fon*'s palace. The *Fon* asked that a certain powder be rubbed on their foreheads, after which they were told that any one who dared to run away from school would die because the powder was a bad medicine.⁵¹ This put fear into the pupils. On 1 December 1903, the school opened its doors with 63 boys, none of whom would have come without the *Fon*'s orders. The second batch of recruits was in July 1904. This time it had an enrolment of ninety boys.

Another strategy of the *Fon* according to Ndifon, was to organise traditional dances, and then towards dusk, he would ask his soldiers to capture the boys. They were taken to the palace. When there, he would tell the parents their children no longer belonged to them. Each time the missionaries wanted pupils, all they had to do was to tell the *Fon* who had to apply his strategy to get children for them. The *Fon*'s soldiers moved from compound to compound, and caught children for the school.⁵² Parents soon became wise and hid their children from the soldiers but gave the children of slaves to them.

As a sign of interest in the education of his subjects Fonyonga gave 200 Marks to the missionaries to buy slates for the children. He surprised even his subjects when he personally began to read and write. During their reconnaissance trip Schuler asked the *Fon* of his willingness to urge children to come to school. This offended the *Fon* and after a period of silence he remarked: "I want to learn reading myself." His zeal for learning was a subject of constant praise by missionary Ersnt.⁵³ Inspector Lutz reported how the *Fon* sat in the midst of the school children on examination day with two retainers carrying his banner by his left and right sides.

Lutz was also keen to observe that the *Fon* though moved "to learn something for himself...had at heart the advancement and education of his people. The Mission has

⁵¹ Maxwell Gabana Fohung, "Self-Portrait of a Cameroonian", p.221.

⁵² Unpublished manuscript of Rev. Elisa Ndifon.

⁵³ Extract from Max Moisel, *Zur Geschichte von Bali und Bamum* in *Globus*, 1908, Bd. XCIII, Nr. 8, p.271.

experienced his strong support for their school.”⁵⁴ Lutz considered Fonyonga a true friend who truthfully advanced the cause of the Gospel.⁵⁵

In June 1906, the *Fon* officially declared Sunday a day of rest. That same year the first Church house constructed in local style was completed. It had a seating capacity of four hundred and fifty. In March 1907, all the sub-chiefs of Fonyonga assembled children of their areas in the Bali market place. Out of a total of two hundred and eighty three boys only one hundred and sixty three were recruited. This was because of the scarcity of teachers. Due to this scarcity it was decided that some pupils from the boys’ school attend classes in the morning and teach in the vernacular schools in the afternoon.

The day of great jubilation came on 20 November 1908 when on this Sunday, Rev. Ernst baptised thirty-two scholars at Bali. Bali people thus had their first Christians.⁵⁶

Maxwell Fohitung, one of those who was baptised on that day, writes:

On 20th November 1908, 30 of us were solemnly baptised, and we formed the nucleus of the Christian Church in the Grassfields. On that occasion Dr Vielhauer declared us to be his brothers, and to show that he meant what he said he took me, his houseboy, to dine with him for the first time, wearing shoes and a tie.⁵⁷

One of the boys baptised on that day was Tita Susiga, son of Fonyonga whom he gave to Rev. Ernst when the latter was going back home to Germany.⁵⁸ A year later, thirty-two boys and four girls were added to the number of converts. The first three couples married in 1909. By 1908 the pupils in the *Erste klasse* [1st class] acted as “pupil teachers” in the vernacular schools in the villages and on Sundays they preached in those villages.⁵⁹ When this first batch completed their course in the boys’ school, schools were opened in ten villages outside Bali for them to teach. The *Fon* himself promised the thirteen teachers a monthly allowance of five shillings each.

⁵⁴ Excerpts from Lutz, *Im hinterland von Kamerun*, p.17.

⁵⁵ Excerpts from Lutz, *Im hinterland von Kamerun*, p.18.

⁵⁶ Werner Keller, *The History of the prsbyterian Church in Cameroon*, p.28.

⁵⁷ Maxwell Gabana Fohitung, “Self-Portrait of a Cameroonian”, p.222.

⁵⁸ Maxwell Gabana Fohitung, “Self-Portrait of a Cameroonian”, p.222.

⁵⁹ Maxwell Gabana Fohitung, “Self-Portrait of a Cameroonian”, p.223.

On their part, the missionaries did not relent in their efforts in learning *mungaka* and by 1905 they were already fluent in the language. Rev. Göhring installed a hand press on which he printed a collection of stories from the Old and New Testaments and a *mungaka* Primer. A little arithmetic book, and some hymns for Divine Services on Sundays were printed.⁶⁰ Two female missionaries joined the others in January 1909. Anna Merkle was in charge of medical work and Klara Schultze was in charge of the girls' school. Rev. Ernst went home to Germany in 1909. He fell ill and died in the same year. Leimbacher completed the Church house, which was inaugurated on March 8 1914.⁶¹

One of the reasons why the missionaries saw Bali as a strategic missionary station was that it would check the advancement of Islam. The Hausas asked to settle in Bali in 1910 but the *Fon* refused. In November 1903, Rev. Ernst paid a visit to Bamum to find out the possibility of beginning work there. He was greatly impressed by the hieroglyphic script of the Bamum people invented by King Njoya but had no semblance to Arabic. The Muslims were already in Bamum. Another visit was paid to Bamum in November - December 1905 by Stolz, Leimbacher, Lutz and Göhring. This visit was to begin negotiations. In March 1906, Leimbacher and Dorsch began construction of a building there. Rev. and Mrs. Göhring went to Bamum on April 10 1906 to begin work. The king of the Bamum supported the work, a school was started with 60 boys, followed by a girls' school in October with 51 girls. In 1907, the king ordered that the mosque beside the palace should be pulled down and a Church house put up in its place.⁶²

The mission continued to expand in the Grassfield. In 1909, when work began in Bagam, some graduates of the Bali school were sent there as catechists. The next station was opened in Bangwa in 1911, and was placed in the care of missionary Striebel after handing over the work in Bagam to Vielhauer. His most reliable co-worker was catechist Elisa Ndifon who became a pastor. Bandjoun was the next station to be opened. At first only a catechist was placed there, but in February 1913, Rev. G. Amann moved to

⁶⁰ Excerpts from Lutz, *Im hinterland von Kamerun*, p.18.

⁶¹ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameron*, pp.28-29.

⁶² Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameron*, pp. 29-30.

Bandjoun in November 1911. Rev. G. Spellenberg followed him later. Rev. Billmann was stationed in Bana, and in June 1914, he and his wife moved to Babungo⁶³ It is striking to note that of these stations only Babungo is within the Bamenda Grassfields. Bamum, Bangwa, Bana, and Bandjoun are all in the now Western province. This in itself clearly indicates that the missionaries were making comparisons for *Nyikob*, but drawing from the wrong sources.

4.7. Evangelistic Strategies.

We have already noted that the school was seen as a better way of evangelization. When the inspector paid a visit to Cameroon and the Grassfield in particular he stated

The brothers have it in mind to build schools in several places in the larger realm, in which these young people will be inducted into teaching under the supervision of the missionaries. Meanwhile they must continue to visit the school at the [Mission] Station so as to increase their range of knowledge. It is hoped the Lord will give us, from these schools, honest and intelligent people who can spread the Gospel. The brothers have followed this policy since the start... the propagation of the Gospel, which calls for understanding of the local language will only become possible when the language is more completely mastered. Then it can be tirelessly presented so that the people, the Bali included, can be weaned away from their false gods and idols to the true, living God and our Saviour. The living word will also conquer the dark powers of heathenism, which oppose the Mission in the Grassfields, as well as divination, sorcery and polygamy.⁶⁴

Lutz followed in the footsteps of Theodor Oehler [1850-1915]. Dah regard Oehler as “one of the main figures who shaped the work of the Basel Mission in Cameroon,”⁶⁵ and who “taught practically all missionaries who worked in Cameroon before the First World War...”⁶⁶ While he was Inspector, he was a teacher of homiletics and missiology in the mission seminary. His sixty-seven divisions of Missiology include among others: The

⁶³ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, p.31.

⁶⁴ Excerpts from Lutz, *Im hinterland von Kamerun*, pp.16-17.

⁶⁵ Jonas N. Dah, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, p.71. Oehler was born in Bresslau, Germany in June 1850 of pietist parents. At thirty-four he was elected Inspector of the Basel Mission in 1879 following the resignation of Schott his predecessor, see Dah, p.72.

⁶⁶ Jonas N. Dah, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, p.71.

task of Mission, the Missionary, Missionary work and methods and the “pagan congregation” that we mention here for the purpose of this section.

According to Oehler, preaching which follows in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and the Apostles is a prime task of the missionary. Preaching could be on the streets, the market grounds, open meeting grounds, Church and schools. House preaching was useful in enabling dialogue in smaller groups and creating friendship. The mission school was a “means to draw the adults nearer and open the way to the homes of pupils...popularize mission among the heathen.”⁶⁷ The task of mission schools was therefore to bring the “heathen” to faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to the word of God. Healing was considered a method for evangelization. The missionary did not have to be a doctor or nurse before giving medical advice. When the Gospel is preached medical personnel could follow as a strong complement to dispel pagan beliefs connected with illness. Christian missions did not need to avoid being agents of a ‘higher culture’ among ‘cultureless’ or ‘poor cultured peoples’. The “natives” learn the higher culture through employment by missionaries who train them in building, furniture making etc.⁶⁸

It would appear that the missionaries applied Oehler’s method in their evangelistic approach in Bali to the utmost. In school the pupils were already taught, if only implicitly, to become agents of the Gospel. Lutz mentions for instance that the hymns taught by Rev. Ernst “are to be heard ringing out all over the town. Many of the boys had acquired a really good knowledge of Bible history.”⁶⁹ They could reach out to their parents when at home they sang those hymns and recited Bible stories. Perhaps most important of all was the use of prayers. In the morning as they heard the birds in praise of God they too were to get up and pray thanking God for a new day.⁷⁰ They started the school day with prayer and a meditation before the beginning of classes. They were encouraged to learn to read so that they could read the Bible and other books. Even those

⁶⁷ Jonas N. Dah, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, p.97, from Oehler’s handwritten manuscript transcribed by H. Huppenbauer “Missionslehre von Missionsdirektor Theodor Oehler, Ocktober, 1941 [unpublished].

⁶⁸ Jonas N. Dah, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, pp.97-98.

⁶⁹ Excerpts from Lutz, *Im hinterland von Kamerun*, p.15.

⁷⁰ *The mungaka Primer*, p.31.

beginning to learn to read phrases were already taught what was Christian or pagan. The Primer states for example “*wani bun Ndzamu ka ku keu beh lin nu mbiked beh*”⁷¹ [many people died without knowing what is true]. The truth here must obviously stand for knowledge of the Gospel. In learning the letter ‘j’ the pupil read “*juju beh Nyikob bon sisi*” [juju is the god of black people]. The children were encouraged to recite bedtime prayers in which they were to remember all the members of their family by name. Who will hear his son asking God for his welfare and will not have reverence for God?

On market days the missionaries usually took some Christians to the market for evangelization. They chose strategic spots where they sang hymns, prayed and the missionary presented a brief homily. This was repeated at various strategic spots of the market. Bali has a big market which attracted about 2000-3000.⁷²

The missionaries considered it a prerequisite to establish friendly relations with the various *fondoms* and villages of the Grassfield. They also assumed the roles of helper and peacemakers as means of evangelization. They intervened in many disputes between the people and the colonial regime, which prevented bloodshed.⁷³ Leimbacher was not only engaged as a builder but also as a teacher. Lutz tells us Leimbacher had to exhibit a lot of patience as he trained

...quite unschooled people in the various branches of house building. Today there is in Bali not only a builder, but a group of more or less trained sawyers, bricklayers and carpenters. This educational side of mission is seldom appreciated.⁷⁴

Since “cleanliness is next to godliness” the missionaries felt that one evangelistic strategy was to introduce modern style European houses even against the wish of the Bali. Bali traditional houses are without windows, and they have only one door. It is only the *fonte*, *Ba nwana* and *ba Sama* whose houses have back doors.⁷⁵ One day Vielhauer

⁷¹ The *mungaka Primer*, p.25.

⁷² The *mungaka Primer*, pp.50-52.

⁷³ Excerpts from Lutz, *Im hinterland von Kamerun*, p.17.

⁷⁴ Excerpts from Lutz, *Im hinterland von Kamerun*, p.14.

⁷⁵ These are nobles who assume priestly roles. When any of them dies, he is conveyed for burial through the back door because mourners are not supposed to know when he has been buried

cut a window in the house of Mr. Kwati in his absence.⁷⁶ This was the origin of windows in Bali houses.⁷⁷ Since they considered themselves agents of a higher culture they also felt that they had to encourage the natives to pay taxes to the colonial administration. Ndifon states:

Tax paying is something on which people quarreled and refused to pay. So we used to advise people in many places to obey and pay government tax whole-heartedly. We advised them using the word of God so that they could pay their taxes. We quoted to them Romans 13:6-7, Titus 3:1 and explained to them the contents of the passages.⁷⁸

Fon Fonyonga was very enthusiastic about the missionary enterprise in his *fondom*. He occasionally attended Church services with his nobles and encouraged his wives and children to go to church. How then did he take it when missionary preaching became antagonistic towards the culture of which he was the chief custodian? Edward Lekunze has presented certain traditional values, which give credence to the authority of a *Fon*. They include legitimacy, he is the father of all within his jurisdiction, he is a primary religious functionary, he is supreme judge of his land, he holds moral authority since he is the custodian of tradition, he is custodian of land in his *fondom*, and he is supposed to be the wealthiest person.⁷⁹ However missionary preaching and teaching subtly aimed at subverting the *Fon's* control over traditional structures which missionaries branded as 'pagan' and uncivilized.⁸⁰ When Fonyonga appointed Ernst as *Nkom* he possibly was fulfilling what Lekunze has pointed out were his main interests: knowledge, governmental affiliation, money, European advisors, and diplomatic agents at the royal courts - these symbols of power and prestige.⁸¹

⁷⁶ The window in Kwati's house created a furor because he was a 'child' according to tradition. The compound heads of the quarter took the matter to the *Fon* because they feared that they might be punished for allowing a 'child' to have a double door [for them there was no distinction between a door and a window] in his house. After listening to the matter, the *Fon* good-humouredly asked that the 'door' should be allowed to remain. See Gwanua Ndangam, *Bali Culture*, Appendix C. The First window in Bali.

⁷⁷ Gwanua Ndangam, *Bali Culture*, Appendix C. The First window in Bali.

⁷⁸ Elisa Ndifon, unpublished Manuscript.

⁷⁹ Edward Forcha Lekunze, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon*, p.77.

⁸⁰ Edward Forcha Lekunze, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon*, p. 120.

⁸¹ Edward Forcha Lekunze, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon*, p.120

No doubt that when Ernst [*Fonyungntsu*] died in 1909 while on leave Fonyonga exclaimed: "How can I live now?"⁸² The people joined their *Fon* to mourn for him. A mourning service was organized for him on the 8 August 1909. On that occasion J. Keller preached from Hebrews 13:7.⁸³ After the mourning, the *Fon's* attitude towards the mission became that of indifference.⁸⁴ Fonyonga reminisced about how Ernst used to help and advise him when he had a problem; which may explain why at the outbreak of the First World War, after the missionaries were interned, he locked the Church house and gave the key to the administrator in Bamenda.

The missionaries were not fair in their dealings with the *Fon*. Just as Zintgraff caused Galega to sign a treaty the implication of which he did not quite understand, so too is the manner in which the missionaries acquired land from Fonyonga. The *Fon* gave the mission about thirty-five hectares of land. It was his wish that the mission should construct a station. The irregularity in the agreement was that whereas the measurement of land was stated, the compensation was merely stated as "the Mission Society has given him a return present adequate to the value of the land". The document did not state the nature of the "present" of "adequate value" to thirty hectares of land. The second curiosity is that Jakob Keller signed as Basel Missionary Representative while F. Ernst and Engineer Leimbacher both signed as his witnesses, Fonyonga made his marks alone without any witness.⁸⁵

Early missionary preaching challenged slavery. This must have come across as a shock to the nobility since most nobles had slaves. We have noted that parents hid their children and urged the children of slaves to attend school. This was especially true of later years when it was observed by parents that rigid school discipline involved the flogging of children. It was expected that these children would bring the "good news" of liberation to their parents who in turn would become converts. As such " the

⁸² Aaron Su, "Bali Nyonga, the gateway in christianizing the Grassfield of Cameroon" pp.93-123, in Jonas N. Dah [ed.], *A Century of Christianity in the Grassland of Cameroon*, p.96.

⁸³ Aaron Su, "Bali Nyonga, the gateway in christianizing the Grassfield of Cameroon", pp. 96-97.

⁸⁴ Edward Forcha Lekunze, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon*, p.119.

⁸⁵ South West Provincial Archive, Basel Mission Land title, 1906. The agreement was drawn up in Bali on the 31 January 1905.

be a place of honor for some persons who otherwise would never have had any honorable place in society.”⁸⁶

As will be expected of such a situation, the *Fon* and his nobles became helpless. The common people who found new status through the mission subtly challenged their masters with songs like:

Ba Mfon mfon bi wa' nu nted nto ndzu lun, nted la veh.

Ba kom ngong bi wa' nu ngong nto ndzu lun, ngong la' mi

Fons, you should abandon the palace, come and enjoy life, the palace shall pass away.

Let the *ba kom* abandon the duties of state and come to enjoy life, the state shall pass away.

The reaction of the nobles comes out in expressions like *mukali nun mu nson ni ntsu ngob* [the white man has put teeth in the mouth of fowls] or *nton feu mu bo nti' nu ni nkondzi'* [the porridge is cold and now people can drink through the nostrils]. Some coined names like *Nyongpua* [we now have a new world; things are no longer the same]. Some of the nobles nonetheless continued to see some importance in the new religion as they allowed their wives to become converts. These nobles gave land to the mission and congregations were opened in their compounds. Ba Fomuso gave land for the construction of a church house. Although his polygamous life did not permit him to become a Christian, his compound became a Christian compound and today five of his sons are pastors.⁸⁷ Ba Tita Fokum on his part recognized the healing ability in prayer when through one of his wives some Christians prayed for his sick child and he was healed. He was a specialist in *ngamnsi* [spider divination]. In one of his divinations the spider told him to receive ‘those strangers’ because *mundzambo* [somebody is behind them].⁸⁸ Tita Fokum then gave land and a church was constructed in his compound.

⁸⁶ Jonas N. Dah, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, p.254.

⁸⁷ Interview with Retired Gendarmerie Colonel, Gaius Fomuso, [son of Ba Fomuso] on 25th April 2004.

⁸⁸ When the burrow of a *ngamnsi* [earth spider] has been located the diviner makes a clearing of about a square metre around it. He protects it with some small logs. When he wants to find out something he goes there with his divination cards, which he lays within the enclosed area. Some sticks are also located within the area. These sticks represent members of the family of the person who is seeking to know the future. After this the place is sealed very well with plantain leaves. The diviner now retires to wait; sometimes it takes hours for the spider to come out and divine. After sometime the diviner comes and opens the place

Since he was a specialist in divination, he used a pictorial Bible storybook he was given and abandoned his traditional form of divination. He called the book *Bu' ngam a* [my divination bundle]. For him the Bible storybook was a replacement of the cards he used in interpreting what the earth spider said in divination and he called it 'my divination bundle' – meaning the cards for interpretation. When he wanted to hear a story from the book he asked one of his sons to bring his divination bundle. He looked at a picture and asked for its interpretation. Thus the Bible became a replacement but understood only within previous categories. He however was not permitted to receive baptism because he was a polygamist.⁸⁹

4.8. Response of the first Converts.

If that was the reaction of those who felt that the presence of mission was the annihilation of culture then what was the reaction of the converts? Although the idea of the Christian village, which the Basel Mission adopted in the Gold Coast [Ghana], was not implemented in Bali, Christian obligations were meant to alienate the Christians completely from their roots.

The Christians were made to understand that anything traditional was satanic. The idea of damnation and punishment were central themes in missionary preaching. The Christian was asked to shun Satan at all cost. The fear of Satan and hell was so strong in the Christians that they composed songs like:

Satan ni nya' mun ndze mvu ni nya' nyam a, Yesu. Lunnu na

Satan hunts people like a dog hunts animals, Jesus save me.

Yesu ni mfun yin ngan munang satan u lo' ya ma mandzie?

and if the spider had come out and scattered the things, the diviner then interprets what it means. Two things of interest to note in the *ngamnsi* are 1. Each card of the diviner represents an unusual occurrence that had taken place within the community. 2. The spider comes out because it thinks it is nighttime since it does not generally move by day. When it comes out and the place is sealed it moves around looking for an opening to pass through and in the process it scatters the cards and the sticks. We can say that the diviners were more of psychologists than mystics. Spider divination is commonly practiced in Cameroon.

⁸⁹ Interview with retired Commissioner of Police, successor to the Tita Fokum stool, son of late Ba Tita Fokum, on 15 March, 2004.

Jesus is calling us, Satan the traitor what do you want on our way?⁹⁰

If a Christian continued in “the way of Satan” he was exposed to serious Church discipline. Sins that merited grave discipline included, sacrifice to the ancestors, divination, wearing of a talisman, performing bad medicine, swearing by the *Fon* and swearing falsely to God. Christians were also banned from joining any social group dance. They were not to go to the palace with lawsuits; if they were disposed to do so they were to consult the person in charge of the congregation. Concerning succession to family position, if becoming a successor meant that one must sacrifice to the late father, perform traditional medicine, marry many wives, or do any of those things that non-Christians do, then a Christian could not be involved.⁹¹ According to Montoh Simon Voma, a Christian could be brought before the congregation and be judged for merely watching the performance of a traditional dance. A lay preacher who preached in traditional outfit was sanctioned. Such persons were considered still to be under the influence of Satan.⁹²

How well did the converts remain loyal to such teaching that said one was no longer part of one's people? Maxwell Fohitung's autobiography helps us to see how the mind of the early converts functioned. Maxwell Fohitung was among the first batch of school pupils. After completing the *Erste Classe* [1st class] he taught as a “pupil teacher” of the lower school and a Sunday school teacher. He was among the first thirty who were baptized on November 20 1908. He served as houseboy to Dr. Vielhauer, and as we have seen earlier, Vielhauer called him “my brother” and he shared the master's table on that day. In 1909 he was appointed as Basel Mission teacher. He left because the pay was not encouraging and joined a company in 1911. In 1913 the company wanted to transfer him to Ngoundere in the Adamawa region far away from home. In his words:

I entertained grave fears about this and these fears robbed me of my Christian belief. I engaged a *Ngambi* person, a native fortune-telling sorcerer. He looked at his charms, once, twice, three times and the same

⁹⁰ Montoh Simon Voma, *Preaching the Gospel in Bali Nyonga [1902-1987]*, Thesis for a Diploma in Theology, Presbyterian Theological College, Kumba, 1988. Montoh's father Ba Gwandingbe Montoh was one of the people on the panel of translators who assisted Vielhauer in the translation process.

⁹¹ *No 'u Nku 'mu bun-Kristo ba-Evagelisi, [Constitution of the Evangelical Mission]* articles 140, 169 & 196-200, pp. 63-64.

⁹² Montoh Simon Voma, *Preaching the Gospel in Bali Nyonga*, p. 22.

answer came up every time: 'I see you go but I do not see you return.'
The interpretation of this could only be that if I went on transfer to Ngaundere, I would not return home, but die there.⁹³

He then explained how on his way he was attacked by a serious bout of high fever and his conviction was that the diviner was right. Because of this he hatched a plan and deceived those who were with him, diverted his course and ran away from his employment.

He further stated that when his wife eloped with another man it "affected me deeply and robbed me of the Christian principle of one man, one wife." He then recounts how he took a second wife, a third until at last he had fourteen wives. In 1916 he had also succeeded his father as a *mfonte*.⁹⁴

We realize that as soon as he was faced with a difficulty, it was the traditional category of solving problems that first came to him. Yet he was quite God-fearing and for him it was painful that he had to be excluded from the Christian family because he was a polygamist. Despite the exclusion, he states, "in all other respects I did not forsake its teaching. I have always given freely to the Church, and have ardently supported those who preach the Word of God." The last contribution he made was in 1960 when he donated 170 pounds for the rebuilding of the congregation in his quarter of the town.⁹⁵

Fohtung was anxious to rejoin the Church, which meant divorcing all his wives except one. This he finally did on 10 December 1961. According to him he did this to fulfill the teaching of Christ to 'Forsake all and follow me.' Fohtung was influenced to take this decision by his former master, Missionary Adolf Vielhauer who in 1949 wrote to him expressing his anxiety to see Fohtung mingling in heaven with the Saints, where he hoped not to miss him. Vielhauer endorsed his card with the words: "A very good Christian, if not for polygamy. I wish some one would save his soul."⁹⁶

⁹³ Maxwell Gabana Fohtung, "Self-Portrait of a Cameroonian", p.225.

⁹⁴ Maxwell Gabana Fohtung, "Self-Portrait of a Cameroonian", pp.222-243.

⁹⁵ Maxwell Gabana Fohtung, "Self-Portrait of a Cameroonian", p.243.

⁹⁶ Maxwell Gabana Fohtung, "Self-Portrait of a Cameroonian", p.243.

One cannot help reflecting whether polygamy alone can bring one's soul to damnation! Divorcing his other wives in fulfillment of the command of Jesus Christ is equally in violation of his admonition that marriage was not meant for divorce. One contemporary of Fohtung was Ba Lima who also became a polygamist and encouraged his contemporary Elisa Ndifon to quit his Catechist job and marry other wives since "one tree cannot make a forest."⁹⁷ Ndifon stood firm for the faith; refused his father's stool and passed it to his brother. But he was always present when family libation was being poured. His convictions, according to his death wish, were inscribed on his tomb: *Nka bi'ni ni mm, me'ti ni mm* [I started with yes, I finished with yes].

4.9. Mission and Indigenous culture: Shifting Perceptions.

Lamin Sanneh⁹⁸ points out that missionaries should not be considered as surrogates of colonialism [although we cannot just dismiss their contribution in the colonial process]. Sanneh argues that by translation the missionaries helped in preserving the African culture while at the same time they provided the tools of enlightenment for the Africans. Sanneh can be proved right in the Bali context where translation and publication in mother tongue enabled the Bali to read from the Bible and found encouragement for things that missionaries challenged.

The missionaries however were not fair in their choice of some words since they were influenced by their view of Bali traditional religion. If they considered that the meaning conveyed by a word reminded the people of their previous religious categories, they simply brought in loan words. The fig tree, for example was given a *mungaka* pronunciation *tu fiko*, whereas the fig tree is *tu wob ndzi* in *mungaka*; but since the fig tree is associated with traditional religion it was completely left out. The meaning of the first commandment was completely altered as will be explained hereunder. However the missionaries could not completely avoid those words that had religious connotations. The phrase in the Apostles' Creed: "... dead and buried. He descended into hell..." was translated

"I ku, bo tun I ma si, I swi nge ma ngong ba kubon..."

⁹⁷ Interview with Na Tangwi, sister of Rev. Elisa Ndifon, 20th June 2004.

⁹⁸ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message – The missionary Impact on Culture*, New York: Orbis Books, 1989, p.88.

He died and was buried in the grave; he descended to the country of the dead.

Ngong ba ku bon is how the people had always known the land where the dead reside. When the dead is buried in the grave, the *fufob* remains there but the *dze'ni* continues to the land of the dead. From this land some people chose to *mbun'ni mbum yab* [take on new form] to come back and be born again. It is also there that the *ba kusi* reside and make intercession for the living. Possibly these conflicting worldviews on the notion and the abode of the dead, led to the argument between Keller and the Bali where the latter states that *Nyikob ba me* [God of my Fathers] had long fulfilled what Jesus Christ came to fulfill.

When the people read these phrases it provoked in them an interest in the Christian faith because most of the things they read from the Bible were similar to what they already knew. They read in the Bible how Isaac and Jacob called *Nyikob 'Nyikob ba me'* [God of my Fathers] which was not different from their *Nyikob ba me*. In fact, they identified with the Bible stories such that it became their story. Fohtung for example in his autobiography at one time saw himself as Daniel in the lions' den.⁹⁹ On another occasion he found himself "in the position of Joseph in the Old Testament."¹⁰⁰ Yet we have seen how he quickly turned to traditional categories to solve his problems. On the ethics of non-participation in dance they read in the psalms that they should bring all their instruments, and praise God with them. The very instruments the missionaries told them were demonic. Gradually all musical instruments found their way into the Church and people could sing new songs with old rhythms in praise of *Nyikob*. The Christian congregation soon became just another *nda mandzong*¹⁰¹ as it was used in celebrating the death of Christians. Such celebrations always began with an open-air meditation in the compound of the deceased giving an opportunity for the unconverted to hear the word of God.

⁹⁹ Maxwell Gabana Fohtung, "Self-Portrait of a Cameroonian", p.225.

¹⁰⁰ Maxwell Gabana Fohtung, "Self-Portrait of a Cameroonian", p.240.

¹⁰¹ the general name for social groups.

4.10. The Theology of the Basel Mission in Cameroon.

The theology of the Basel Mission in Cameroon may not be considered in isolation from Basel Mission theology in their various mission fields. However some documents of the Basel Mission published in local languages in Cameroon indicate that they formulated some doctrines that reflected the Cameroonian situation and sometimes even referred to specific regions in Cameroon.

The Church Constitution of the Evangelical Mission of Basel in Cameroon published in 1935 and revised in 1939 has an interesting chapter, which refers specifically to the Bali Nyonga people.¹⁰² This text reveals the missionary position on the religion of the Bali people. The Constitution also reveals to us that although it is said to apply to all Basel Mission congregations in Cameroon, the situation in Bali exceptionally called Christians to pledge to denounce traditional healing prescriptions meant for the welfare of the people.

The first question in the Catechism asks:

U to gha' ma ta' koe? What have you come here to look for?

Response: *N'ta' ma du'ti nu Nyikob I mbiked, ti' mun*

I have come here to search for things of the True God.¹⁰³

Question 71: *Ntu' I kuisui be I la e?*

What is the first advice-commandment?

Response: *ntu' I kuisui be nga: Bimo' ba nikob u ma mbe a kue mbe mue.*

The first advice is that you do not have other gods it is only I.¹⁰⁴

The first commandment says that 'you shall have no other gods besides me, which does not exclude the presence or existence of other gods; but the catechism states that 'you do not have other gods, I am the only one.' It is the same translation in the *mungaka* Bible. Even though such translations were efforts to safeguard the Gospel I still think that they do not reflect the biblical text that gives the option and acknowledges the existence of

¹⁰² See appendix III.

¹⁰³ *Catechism of the Basel Mission*, p.3. [The document at my disposal is old and some papers have fallen off. It is difficult to determine the publisher, place and date of publication].

¹⁰⁴ *Catechism of the Basel Mission*, p.72

other gods. The problem is the same *Nyikob* who says this has never been ranked with other gods.

The missionaries seemed to have modified scripture in their teachings. Question 72 asks what this commandment means. The answer is that what *Nyikob* means by this commandment is that we should reject all 'empty' gods, reject divination, bad medicine, communal meals between the dead and the living, appeasement of dead relatives, reject traditional dances, reject death celebrations and swearing in the name of the *Fon*.

Conclusion.

In this chapter we have examined the activities of the Basel Mission in the Grassfield and Bali in particular. We also gave a brief history of the annexation of Cameroon. We presented a background history of the Basel Mission and factors that precipitated their arrival in Cameroon. We have also looked at the evangelistic strategies of the Basel Mission as well as their theology, and how the people received the message. We also considered how effective translation was in the evangelistic endeavor and how this led to changing perceptions, which enabled the people to appropriate the Gospel

We discovered that the missionaries failed to fully embrace and appropriate the Bali worldview that would have been necessary for evangelization. Contrary to this the missionaries considered evangelization and westernization to be synonymous. The new status accorded to Christian converts caused social friction since some ordinary people saw themselves elevated above the nobles. If we consider the life story of Fohtung as a representation of his time we may conclude that no matter how long people lived as converts, they continued to reason in the previous traditional categories. We also noted that in the process of translation the missionaries refrained from using some words, which they saw as a reflection of the traditional religious categories. However, we noted that such words could not be eliminated. Translation became beneficial as it enabled the Bali to identify with the cultures of the Bible especially the Old Testament.

Away from the missionary period, we may ask; 'what has changed after a hundred years of Christian presence?' This is the question we seek to answer in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Religious Co-existence and Adaptation.

Introduction.

Stöckle has observed;

The tradition of the Bali-Nyonga is not a closed and rigid system, but it is open to new knowledge, to new impressions and new insights, which may complete or even change old conceptions and habits.¹

In the previous chapter we have looked at the inter-face between Christianity and the Bali worldview in the early phase of the encounter between western missionaries and the Bali religion. In this chapter we shall look at Christian practice in Bali Nyonga. We shall begin with a historical interlude, the period of the absence of missionaries up to the time of the return of the missionaries. This shall be followed by a look at the persistence of traditional religious practices in Christianity, how Christian concepts found their way into traditional religion. We shall then analyze some prayers and hymns to see how or not they reflect the pre-Christian conception of God.

5.1. A Historical Interlude.

We have noted how the missionaries were interned during the World War of 1914 - 1918. On October 21 1915 British soldiers entered Bali, captured the missionaries and they were interned on October 23. By the time the missionaries left Bali there were 150 Christians, and 300 in Bamum. Christians suffered persecution at the hands of the villagers. In Bali, the *Fon* locked the Church house and gave the keys to the Divisional Officer in Bamenda. However some catechists continued with the propagation of the Gospel. Among them were John Ashili and Jacob Su who carried on with Gospel preaching in the Bafut area. In the Meta area John Musi, John Mukum, Daniel Fonningon and Thomas Feh continued with the work. The Revs. Ekese and Modi Din occasionally came from the coastal area to oversee the work in the Grassfield and to administer the Sacraments. Some of the Paris missionaries came to administer the sacraments to the Christians. The Divisional Officer Mr. Hunt eventually returned the key of the Church house in Bali, and services recommenced. During this period the only scriptural text that the Grassfielders had were the Bible stories. In 1924 the British Administration granted permission for the Basel Mission to return to Cameroon. Vielhauer returned to Cameroon with his wife who fell ill

¹ Johannes Stöckle, *Traditions, Tales and Proverbs*, p.14.

at Victoria. Rev. Eduard Wunderli arrived in Bali on March 5 1926, Vielhauer and his wife arrived in Bali on 26 March and his wife died on 3 April.² Vielhauer wrote concerning the death of his wife: *yondzo fa' mfi le ka ku ndzi ni nge' a* [This is how the new phase of the work began, with suffering].³

Upon their return, there were one thousand nine hundred and fifty four Christians in the Grassfield, one thousand eight hundred and thirty seven catechumens, six hundred and one school pupils, about forty catechists working in thirty-two areas. Vielhauer stated that only God's grace made the spread of the Gospel to continue during this time. Leimbacher and his wife joined them in December 1926. His wife continued with orphanage work. A Catechetical school was opened in Bali in 1928. Vielhauer himself taught *mungaka* in the school. The school was moved to Bafut in 1940 and closed in 1951. In 1929, nurse Else Bleher opened a polyclinic in Bali.⁴ On 18 April 1937 the golden jubilee of the Basel Mission in Cameroon was celebrated in Kumba. During this celebration five Cameroonian pastors were ordained, among them were John Ashili and Jacob Su from the Grassfield. These were among the first Cameroonian pastors ordained by the Basel Mission. On 30 January 1938, Elisa Ndifon and Daniel Fonington were also ordained in Bali.⁵

Vielhauer conducted a tour of the congregations of the region. After the tour he observed that the Christians were inclined towards heathen practices such as sorcery, traditional dances and mourning. People hung on to an outward form of Christianity to the extent that congregations were filled with non-believers on baptism days, while older people sought baptism only at the imminence of death. He nonetheless acknowledged that Church growth during the ten years without missionaries superseded that of the missionary period.⁶

Vielhauer also observed that during the period without missionaries many Christians withdrew from the congregations around mission stations or in areas where Europeans

² Adolf Vielhauer, *Nu a ka ndze Nku'mu bun-Kristo Kumvi a* [history of the Christian Church in the Bali language], Basel: Basel Evangelical Mission, 1944, pp.308-309. [Translation mine].

³ Adolf Vielhauer, *Nu a ka ndze Nku'mu bun-Kristo Kumvi a*, p.308.

⁴ Jonas N. Dah, "The Planting of Christianity in the Grassland" [pp.19-92] in Jonas N. Dah [ed.], *A Centenary of the Gospel*, pp.47-49.

⁵ Adolf Vielhauer, *Nu a ka ndze Nku'mu bun-Kristo Kumvi a*, p.310.

⁶ Jonas N. Dah, "The Planting of Christianity in the Grassland" [pp.19-92] in Jonas N. Dah [ed.], *A Centenary of the Gospel*, pp.47-49.

lived before the war. He felt that the withdrawals were due in part to European life styles because Christianity around mission stations was considered 'a whiteman's matter' that did not touch the hearts of the Africans. Conversely

Missionary preaching was often far above the heads of Africans either because of language difficulties, or because missionaries did not understand the thought forms of Africans, or simply that Africans could not comprehend what was being preached or else it was a matter of cultural differences.⁷

Vielhauer considered that Christianity in the African's understanding meant "being friendly with Europeans, 'book learning', wearing nice clothes, carrying a lot of money, no longer obliged to work but to play masters."⁸

His observations led him to make some recommendations among which were the following: that the Constitution of the Church in the Gold Coast [Ghana] be translated into Douala and *mungaka*. Preachers of the word be neatly dressed, possibly in suit, while missionaries shall appear in their cassocks. He ended by suggesting that there was the need to study and rule on circumcision, the rubbing of cam wood, dances and customs related to marriage and funeral.⁹

Although there was marked numerical growth in the Graasfields Bali seemed to have registered an insignificant growth. A census of November 1931 revealed that the town congregation had one hundred and fifty eight Christians, forty-seven catechumens and twenty-five Sunday school children out of an estimated population of six thousand.¹⁰ It is no wonder that the missionaries were happy with Sara Mona who at age sixty was able to answer the test questions to their satisfaction after three years of catechism classes.¹¹ In 1909, Keller felt the same frustration at the slow pace of conversion among the Bali. He wrote:

⁷ *Evangelisches Missionsmagazin* [EMM], 1928, pp.204-216, in Jonas N. Dah, "The Planting of Christianity in the Grassland", p.51.

⁸ *Evangelisches Missionsmagazin* [EMM], 1928, pp.204-216, in Jonas N. Dah, "The Planting of Christianity in the Grassland", p.51.

⁹ *Evangelisches Missionsmagazin* [EMM], 1928, pp.204-216, in Jonas N. Dah, "The Planting of Christianity in the Grassland", p.51.

¹⁰ Jonas N. Dah, "The Planting of Christianity in the Grassland", p.56.

¹¹ Jonas N. Dah, "The Planting of Christianity in the Grassland", p.58.

Until now we believed that the king of Bali and his people would be converted to Christianity. The missionaries sounded a triumphal trumpet. Since 1909 rather with sorrow one learns something else.¹²

5.2. The Persistence of Traditional Religion in Christian practice.

While we shall come to pay particular attention to hymns and prayer in order to discover continuity or discontinuity of the pre-Christian concept of God, it would be misleading if we limit our analysis to these two. The reason being that the context in which a prayer is made may be in a traditional religious setting. Therefore we shall not only consider what is said in prayer but where the prayer is being said. Stöckle observed insightfully that the mind of the Bali “is not narrow nor irrefutably linked to old conceptions, but is wide open for new and creative ideas without giving up old principles which have somehow proved feasible and helpful.”¹³

It was reported that a mass conversion took place in 1947 following an eclipse of the sun.¹⁴ That day was *ntanmbutu* - one of the market weekdays.¹⁵ A proverb has been coined because of the eclipse. Christians and non-Christians alike use this proverb. When an unexpected misfortune strikes somebody, the one will say *ndzem ntanmbutu sen mui na* - the darkness of *ntanmbutu* has befallen me - meaning that the matter took the person unawares. The mass conversion was linked with the fear of the judgment of the last days. The eclipse was seen as a sign of the last days, and was to usher damnation and perpetual punishment in hell for the unrepentant. This was the teaching the missionaries emphasised.

Today many titleholders are Christians. Some were Christians before becoming *ba dzui ndab* [successors to deceased family members] while others were *ba dzui ndab* before becoming Christians. A *ndzui ndab* has to assume a priestly function and pour libation and sometimes sacrifice to the ancestors at the ancestral shrine. Divination as we have noted is closely associated with religious practices since most sacrifices take place at the request of

¹² Steudle, Jahresbericht 1931, E-5-2. 7-8, in Jonas N. Dah, “The Planting of Christianity in the Grassland”, pp.56-57.

¹³ Johannes Stöckle, *Traditions, Tales and Proverbs*, p.14

¹⁴ Guy Thomas, *Why do we need the White man's God? African contributions and Responses to the Formation of a Christian movement in Cameroon, 1914 – 1968*, unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of London, 2001, p.209, Babila Fochang, *Wisdom of the Ancients*, p.40.

¹⁵ The people of the Grassfields have an eight-day week.

the diviner. It is difficult to determine the belief of the individual, but it is of help if one knows where the individual turns to for help or succour in the face of adversity. Taking this into consideration I included in the questionnaires and interview questions the issues of divination and ancestor veneration.

Responses to the questionnaire that was distributed¹⁶ to Christians of the congregations where this research was done reveal that 95% of people who responded to the questionnaire forms have consulted a diviner at least once. 70% claim to have done it several times. 80% believed in what they were told. About 85% consulted a diviner after a death occurred in the family and almost all of them have also consulted in order to determine their future. Even some of those who have never consulted believed the truth of divination depending on the diviner. They refrained from divination not because it was not true, but because it was seen as the instrument of the devil; meanwhile some say they consulted only to satisfy a family wish, and therefore do not believe any diviner can say any thing positive.

Among those who responded to the questionnaire, 12 of them were *ba dzui ndab*, who pour libation and sacrifice to the ancestors. Of the one hundred, ninety have attended family sacrifices and libation. We shall give a few examples from the respondents that will represent the general trend of responses.

Respondent One: Ba Isaac Bidga Fokum¹⁷ is seventy years old and is a Christian of the Ntaiton congregation. He was baptised in 1934. At one time his wife fell sick and none of the hospitals they went to was able to cure her. He was strongly urged to consult a diviner/healer. He went and the wife was healed within a short period.¹⁸ He also told them things that had happened to them and things that will happen by which they will know who bewitched the wife. These things turned out to be accurate. He also believes in the ancestors because they act as intermediaries between *Nyikob* and the living.

¹⁶ The nature of selection and distribution has been stated under data collection in chapter one.

¹⁷ We should here state that people's names are mentioned with their permission. The right of those who opted for anonymity has been respected.

¹⁸ Some diviners double as healers.

Respondent Two: Mrs. Esther Bangu is thirty-four years and is a Christian of Ntanfoang congregation. She has consulted diviners several times to find out whether all was right with her. Sometimes she believes in what the diviner says, sometimes she does not. She is always present during ancestral sacrifices in their ancestral home. She is not too concerned where the ancestors are or where Jesus Christ actually is at the moment. The talk about heaven and the protection by ancestors are mere human imaginations aimed at convincing people. In the past *Nyikob* spoke through the ancestors, who are like the Christian saints. The ancestors and Christians alike both believe in *Nyikob*. Whether people shall be with *Nyikob* or with the ancestors is a matter of personal belief.

Respondent Three: Mrs. Comfort Nahvote Letema is a forty-five year housewife who has been a Christian from childhood. She has often consulted diviners to find out the cause of deaths in her family. The results have always been positive. She does not feel that it compromises her Christian faith. She has a lot of reverence for her ancestors who are her saints. She even names her children after them so that she can remember them each time she pronounces the name. This keeps their memory alive in her mind. She does not want their good deeds to be forgotten. Besides, they act as intermediaries between *Nyikob* and her family.

Respondent Four: Na Helen Bobga is sixty-five years old. She has been a Christian for forty-five years. She has consulted diviners several times though the results are not always positive. She is a *ndzui ndab* so she pours libation to her ancestors who she believes are with Jesus Christ since they too were children of *Nyikob*. They too worshipped *Nyikob* at their *Tu Fom*; they also shared in communal meal, which was their own Holy Communion. During their yearly *Tu Fom* they called on their ancestors and *Nyikob* for guidance. When she stubs her toe, she calls on the ancestors. Both traditional religion and Christianity call on *Nyikob* before anything else.

Respondent Five: Ba Nyonka Emmanuel is fifty-three years and has been a Christian for fifty years. He has been Church Elder of Ntanfoang congregation for two terms. He is a *Tanyi* [father of twins] so he swallowed the heart of a fowl. He is a *ndzui ndab* so he pours libation which he does not see as a compromise to his Christian faith. Due to ill health he

has often consulted diviners and the results have always been positive. For him as far as he knows almost all Christians in Bali consult diviners and partipate in ancestral sacrifices.

Respondent Six: Ba Adolf Muforbah, a seventy eight year old father, has been a Christian for fifty-four years. He has consulted diviners because his family requested it. He has never believed in anything a diviner said. He strongly believes in his ancestors. *Nyikob* has spoken to him through the ancestors several times in dreams and the things that are said come true. For this reason he hopes to be with them wherever they are.

The following two examples from some incidences would be helpful for our subsequent analysis since they form part of a focus group of several persons. I was a participant observer in both cases.

Incident One: Mr X. was a communicant member whose funeral took place on the 28 July 2004 in the Ntaiton congregation. The service was concluded with Holy Communion. Almost all the family members of the deceased participated since they were communicants. The burial was in their family compound. When the pastor arrived at the appointed time for the burial, he was told that the burial had been delayed because a new grave was being dug. When he asked to know why, he was told that the wife of the deceased was suspected of being the cause of her husband's death. She had not been present in Church during the funeral service. While they were in Church she went and collected some soil from the grave. When the relatives of the dead man learned about this they felt that the 'medicine' that was to be performed to track the killer may no longer be effective. So they had to refill the grave and dig another one. When it was burial time, the pastor discovered that there was a 'traditional witchdoctor' at the grave and some people were asked not to come near the grave. One of the family members who received Holy Communion in Church told the pastor that he could come if he chose to. The pastor chose not to. He asked the Church Elders and other Christians who were there to leave. The burial was completed without the active participation of the Church, although the funeral had started in Church.

In the course of discussion with the Elders I was informed that several of such cases took place in the last year.¹⁹

Incident Two: On 16 June 2004, Sampson Langmia²⁰ committed suicide by drinking a poisonous insecticide. His corpse was put in the mortuary. As the funeral arrangements were being made the wife disclosed that it was suicide. The decision was immediately taken that he should be buried in the “traditional” way in which suicide cases are buried. In this case there is no wailing; and a traditional priest does the burial in the bush. The burial took place on Saturday 19 June 2004 in the bush without a coffin, in an unmarked grave. Only a few persons were allowed to be present; after they licked a powder given them by the priest. There were in all thirteen persons present at the graveside. Except for the traditional priest, all of them were communicant members of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon.

Among those present were two ordained ministers. One of them prayed commending the soul of the departed to God’s care asking that God should forgive his sins and the sins of those who drove him to commit such an act. He also asked for comfort for the mourners. The priest warned that none of those present should attempt to shed tears. This warning was later repeated to the rest of the mourners at the compound. The reason was that if the deceased had wished that they should mourn for him, he would not have killed himself. Back in the compound after burial two other ordained ministers joined the gathering. The Rev Fomuso Peter, the parish minister prayed before a meal was shared. According to him it was necessary that the burial should be done following the traditions of the land.

¹⁹ I was the pastor who was officiating at the funeral. I had been asked to do so by Rev. Mokoko Olive, parish pastor of Njenka parish.

²⁰ The Suicide of Mr. Langmia Feh: Mr. Langmia aged sixty-four was one of the sons of *Fanglisi* Thomas Feh. The family of Thomas Feh had been regarded as a model Christian family in Bali that had completely abandoned traditional religious practices. Thomas Feh was not only an Evangelist with the Basel Mission; he was among those who assisted Vielhauer in the translation of the *Mungaka* Bible. Presently among his descendants is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon; one of his granddaughters is married to a reverend pastor. The *ndzui ndab* of the father of Thomas Feh’s wife is an ordained minister. Besides, many of his descendants are or have been Church Elders.

Purification Day: The purification or cleansing took place on Monday 21 June 2004. All the family members were gathered together in the compound of the deceased. There were about a hundred and twenty persons, including children. A 'traditional priest' in charge of such purification was there with four of his assistants and all the things necessary for the cleansing ritual. The sacrificial animals were a lamb and a hen. A concoction was mixed in water and every body present dipped sponge in the mixture and squeeze the liquid into the mouth of the hen that was held open by the priest. While squeezing one had to say ' *yo nu mbiked ma nda' nku' ntum ma dzi yo nged be. Nu mbiked bini nge ma lui a lo' a* [let this evil never happen again in this family. Let the evil return to where it came from].

When the process was over, the priest lifted the hen and smashed it on the ground. Next the lamb was held by the priest and every body present brought a leaf or grass, took some wood ash, sprinkled it on the face of the lamb, wiped the grass on its head and asked that it should carry the evil to where evil belongs. The priest then slaughtered the lamb and some parts of its entrails were wrapped together with the dead hen in clothing of the deceased. The priest buried it in a hole dug in the path where rainwater flows, so that when it rains the water will wash the evil away.

When this was over, the priest purified his tools with water. The water was poured on the ground and everyone present stepped on the patch of ground moistened with the water, the men used the right foot and the women used the left foot. Everybody stood up and faced the west and shouted in unison that evil should go away. After this, the priest smeared all the doorposts in the compound with the dung of the lamb.

On this occasion one of the ministers prayed to thank God for offering his Son Jesus Christ as a sacrificial lamb that carried away all the sins of the world. He prayed that while tradition is followed, the trust was in the assurance that the blood of Jesus Christ has purified us once and for all.

Although there were some dissenting voices against such "unchristian" behaviour, they were overshadowed and they became passive participants. The majority had convincingly argued that if the rites were not performed, the suicide was likely to be repeated within the

family. To argue against the traditional rite meant that one was not concerned about what may happen to the children of Langmia since they were the ones directly involved. Those supporting the argument for the rites used an accident that recently occurred as an illustration of such negligence: This was the case of Mr D. who committed suicide some thirty years ago. He was a Catholic Christian and an enlightened person. He had been given a decent burial in the Catholic cemetery. His funeral took place in the normal way; and his family refused to do the purification, which meant that the evil was still lingering within the family. On the 27 December 2003, Mrs G., a daughter of the late Mr D. was driving in her car from Bamenda to Bali with three of her grown up children. They collided with another vehicle and she together with two of her sons died instantly. The news circulated in Bali was that they failed to do the cleansing when Mr D. committed suicide. Ba Ngu the chief priest in charge of purification and cleansing was strongly of the opinion that the accident occurred because the purification was ignored.²¹

The above cases reveal what some Christians actually believe and what they practice when they are faced with the hurdles of life. Although they believe in Jesus Christ through whom they always pray to *Nyikob*, Christ's importance is that he stands above traditional religious practices, but he is not a replacement of what has been practiced in the past.

Having observed that in most Cameroonian communities certain deaths were considered evil, the Basel Mission Constitution of 1938 stated that those who die by drowning, suicide, falling from a tree top or any other type of violent death should be buried like any ordinary dead person.²² The present Constitution of the PCC does not have that article but the burial liturgy gives an alternative for the commendation of a suicide. Instead of saying "Lord as it has pleased you to call..."²³, the phrase is left out.

What we have seen in the cases cited are what Christians do as individuals. Let us now examine what is done that can be seen as an adoption of traditional religious practices into Christian practice. We saw that death and funeral have great religious significance. We

²¹ Interview 24th of May 2004. I had asked him how far he was convinced of the efficacy of his cleansings and he cited the accident of Mrs. G. as an example of what results from such negligence.

²² *No'u Nku'mu bun-Kristo*, p.37.

²³ Book of Divine Services, Vol. VI, p.22.

also pointed out the fear that if a death is not observed in the appropriate manner, the deceased may bring a curse upon the family. Thus when a person dies, after burial a day is fixed for *Ken vu* [death celebration]. On this day traditional dancers are invited to manifest at the celebration ground, always the compound of the deceased, sometimes extending to neighbour's compound.²⁴ People bring food and drinks and give to the mourners who in turn distribute the food to the dance troupes and other guests.

The Basel Mission Constitution stated that after the burial of a Christian, converts should not celebrate the death as unbelievers do by eating, drinking and dancing. They should not even sleep there. They were asked not to consult a diviner to find out the cause of death [this is a constant practice], they should not *kom tu vu*²⁵ [shave the hair of death], they should not *tad vu*²⁶ [feed the dead], they should not *tse'ni vu*²⁷ [escort death] and they should not *tshed tu vu*²⁸ [cutting the head of death].²⁹ The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon does not have that provision.

The Christians of Bali mark the deaths of Christians. They always begin with an open-air meditation and homily in the compound of the deceased. After this the celebration follows the pattern of traditional practice. The Christians now eat the meat of *tad vu* on the day of celebration. Roasted plantain, fried groundnuts and boiled dried maize that used to be eaten by family members on *ntsu' ma' san vu*³⁰ [food to ward off death] are now brought

²⁴ When a dance is playing at a funeral or at social occasions anybody who feels like dancing just joins the dancers. Dancing is usually performed in an anti clockwise direction.

²⁵ One week after the death of a relative, all the relatives shave their hair. The significance is that the dead should carry all the dirt along.

²⁶ On the fourth day after burial, the compounds that are related to the deceased by ethnicity come together and eat a communal meal which signifies feeding death so that it may be full and not come again into that family.

²⁷ One week after burial the family members leave very early and go to the farm of the deceased. The Bali usually had farmhouses. The idea is to introduce those who are directly involved that they can start going to the farm. This is because from this day the relatives who were sleeping in the deceased's compound will go back to their various homes. Today when there are no longer farmhouses they just end on the way and pretend that they have gone to the farm.

²⁸ One year after the death another day is fixed for another celebration called *tshed tu vu*. This is the final death celebration. This is called *tshed tu vu* [cutting the head of death], possibly because it is the last one celebrated. It gives the opportunity – in case the deceased was a man – for the widow to begin sleeping on a bed, to wear shoes, sit on a chair and eat in the same dish with others; things that she is not permitted to do during the period preceding *tshed tu vu*.

²⁹ *No'u Nku'mu bun-Kristo*, p.38.

³⁰ *Ma' san vu* takes place on the fourth day after death. The women bring maize and groundnuts and the father of the compound provides plantain. The plantains are roasted, the groundnuts fried and the maize boiled. All those who come to the deceased compound on this day participate in the meal. Death is scattered so that it can be confused and not see its way into the compound again.

to the Christians on the day of celebration. Thus in a Christian family the announcer announces the day of the observance of the dead as *ndzo yo be vu Nyikob a ba la' ti' ye ngong nu me' ni ntsu' vu. I le be nga ba la' ma' san vu bo a tad vu me ' ta' nka* [since this is a Christian observance of death, we shall do everything on the day of observance. This means that we shall *ma' san vu* and *tad vu* all at the same time]. Until recently Christian death observances excluded traditional dances. Eventually the Njenka parish combined Christian dances with traditional dances and this was a major issue which was finally resolved by the Sessions of all the Parishes at a Zonal Session meeting.³¹

Excursus II

The issue of whether Christians should celebrate deaths together with traditional dances was debated for a long time. In the 1970s Rev C.U. Fai, who was minister of Njenka parish, lost one of his parishioners through death. The children of the deceased wished their father's death to be observed with many traditional dances. On the day of the celebration the Christians came and were shown a courtyard where they set their drums and bells, but they soon heard a traditional dance in another courtyard. They were told it was for the same celebration so they packed their things in order to leave.

Before then the minister went to the celebration and observed that the Christians were not singing the *alonges* [the name by which Christian choruses are known]. When he asked to know why, they explained the reason to him. In his curiosity he observed that the traditional dancers were mostly Christians. He asked them to stop the hypocrisy and sing the *alonge*. He asked whether it was better for the Christians to dance side-by-side with traditional dances or to refuse the Christian dance and join in the traditional dance? The Njenka parish adopted the practice of celebrating Christian death together with traditional dances, whilst the other parishes resisted the practice. However all the parishes have identified the need for integration and they all dance alongside traditional dances.

The day of *tse'ni vu* has been Christianised; instead of going to the farm, an early morning service is conducted in Church to mark the end of the mourning week. Perhaps the most

³¹I could not have information concerning the date when this meeting took place. For a full treatment of this issue see Montoh Simon, *Preaching the Gospel in Bali Nyonga*, pp.22-25, Patrick Foncham, *Death, Burial and Celebration*, pp.27-29, Babila George Fochang, *The Philosophy of the Bali Nyonga People*, pp.55-56.

significant traditional religious practice concerning death that has been filled with new content by Christians is the *tsed tu vu*. In the 1980s the Bali traditional Council decreed that the *tsed tu vu* should be abolished because it was not economical. Recently in its session of June 24 2003, the Traditional Council resolved, "All death celebrations shall continue to last for one day from 6a.m.- 6 p.m."

However *tu vu* has been indirectly brought into the Church by way of the Memorial Service. The Memorial Service begins with a normal Church Service on Sundays where the family come with wreaths. After Service the congregation moves to the compound where they pray at the graveside and lay the wreath. After this there is dancing of *Alonge*. In contradiction to what the Traditional Council saw as economic waste, the lavish expenditure of the Memorial Services far exceeds that of the *tsed tu vu*.

5.3. Incorporation of Christian concepts into Traditional Religion.

The borrowing is not one-sided. Christian influence has permeated all aspects of life in Bali to an extent that even traditional religious practitioners agree that what they do is nothing other than *no'u ngong* [tradition of the land]. During the *Lela* festival³² of 2003, Ba Gwe who carried the sacrificial sheep is a PCC Christian of long standing. He became a *ndzui ndab* in 2001. According to him there is nothing that is done at the *Lela* sacrifice that compromises his Christian faith. He has been asked to carry on with *no'u ngong*. That does not affect his conviction that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Saviour of mankind of which he is part.³³

For Ba Trukang, who is a priest at the *Wolela* Christ is above the ancestors. *Nyikob* created the ancestors and showed them their particular way of reaching him. So before they anointed the *Wolela* on the night preceding *su'fu* on 18 December 2003, he said a prayer before the proceedings commenced. He prayed to *Nyikob* through Jesus Christ and asked that *Nyikob* should guide and direct the activities of *Lela* especially as it involved a lot of gun firing. He does not think it is just a mere incorporation of Christ into the pre-Christian

³² The political aspect of *Lela* has been explained in chapter two, while its religious role has been explained in chapter three. The festival however remains popular to the people because it provides opportunity for fanfare, jubilation and amusement. It is also the time when those who are out of the village return with presents for family members who are at home.

³³ Interview 19th December 2003.

religion; it is an implantation of the Lordship of Christ over and above the ancestors of the land to whom sacrifices are offered during the *Lela* festival.³⁴

The other avenue by which Christian concepts find their way with ease into traditional religious practice is the reference constantly made to the Old Testament sacrifices which are comparable to the Bali sacrifices. Another common feature is that non-Church goers often begin their conversations by *Nwa'ni Nyikob sun nga...* [The Bible says...]. Others, drawing from Roman Catholic experience insist that their ancestors are their saints. Thus Ba Tita Fokum, a noble and a *ndzui ndab* pours libation because it is hereditary, but he strongly believes in the Lordship of Christ. He thinks that there are about ten percent of *ba dzui ndab* who ignore Christianity because of ignorance or illiteracy. In his words, "the ancestors cannot replace Jesus Christ."³⁵

In the *mandzong* houses, [social groups, usually constituting a dance troupe] the proceedings often begin with prayer. It has become traditional for all the denominations to go to the palace once yearly to greet the *Fon*. During such visits they go with firewood and foodstuffs. They meditate and pray with the *Fon* who in turn gives salt to the women and drinks to the men. Stöckle describes the integration of Christianity into traditional institutions with great precision:

This God is a God of love who has spoken to mankind through Jesus Christ has become the new and liberating Good News to everybody...that Jesus Christ has become the real and trustworthy mediator and spokesman between man and God is part and parcel of the Gospel of God to all mankind.³⁶

Some *mandzongs* composed songs, which were eventually taken over by Christians. This shows that the songs were composed with Christian concepts in mind. The *Nda Mbui* for example sings

Nandzam ntsu'mvi ba wo mun ma dzi beh, a ku ndzi Nyikob
Nobody knows the last day, only *Nyikob* knows.

There is also

Nwa'ni u to mu o o dzid la ni boni.
Your letter has come, have a safe journey.

³⁴ Interview on the 19th December 2003. Ba Trukang is a Christian of the Catholic Church.

³⁵ Interview 15th, March 2004.

³⁶ Johannes Stöckle, *Traditions, Tales and Proverbs*, p.14.

This song reminds us of the Christian chorus;

O mfed a to ni nwa'ni le bo fa masi a, a ti ma be bub be

U la la nge nti' satan ni nkwed song mu.

My brother/sister, bring the book or letter which they gave to you on earth.

If not so you should pass and go to Satan and gnash your teeth.³⁷

Another *mandzong*, the *Nda Ntshibi* sings

Ba Nyikob o mfan ke Ba Nyikob fun a nkwe ba

Father *Nyikob* what have I done wrong, father *Nyikob* call me to return home.³⁸

Thus Christian concepts are permeating all aspects of the Bali *fondom* to the extent that it is meaningless to categorise people as Christians and non-Christians.

5.4. Continuity of Pre-Christian Conceptions of God in Christian Hymns and Prayers.

5.4.1. The Analysis of Hymns.

The Bali has not composed any hymns but they have many choruses. This must be due to the fact that their songs are meant to find completion in dancing. To this effect we shall consider under this section choruses and some hymns, which the missionaries composed, and which the people use quite often. J. Keller compiled the first hymnbook in *mungaka* between 1903 and 1904.³⁹ The book contains an appendix of twenty seven songs which Vielhauer calls: *Ntsi ba-ku-nka'* [songs of the Grassfield people]. These songs are choruses in typical Cameroonian rhythm. Cameroonian songs are meant for dancing. In an introduction to the appendix Vielhauer says: "*mu ni mbu' mbo mbo ngon bun me', bo lin yo ngeni ntsi ba-ku-nka' a, nga, bo nwa'ni ni mo' mo-nwa'ni, ntum mbo mu, mu la' nebti mo-nwa'ni-dzob-ntsi mu.*" [I am pleading with everybody who knows this type of

³⁷ This is supposedly at the gate of heaven where the gate man is asking the dead for his/her Christian identification papers.

³⁸ The Bali seems to reflect so much about death as we shall see even in Christian songs.

³⁹ The hymnbook contained twelve songs. It was revised in 1906 and the number of songs increased to twenty. In 1910, A. Vielhauer again revised it raising the number to forty-seven. He further raised the hymns to fifty in 1913. In a further revision in 1924, he raised the hymns to fifty-seven. The number of hymns was increased to seventy in 1930 and to one hundred and fifty in 1939. These hymns were mainly translations of German hymns. The contributors to this hymnbook were J. Keller, M. Hohner, G. Tischhauser, and W. Schneider. Three Cameroonians composed five of the hymns. Among them were Pastor D. Fonington who composed one hymn, while Pastor Y. Tsi composed three. It appears one hymn was composed by a Bali. Vielhauer says: "*mo mfed yin ka nebti No. 141, la mu ma ndin I be.*" [One of your brothers composed hymn 141, but I do not know him]. Adolf Vielhauer, *Ntsi Nyikob bi ndzobdzob ni tsu mungaka [Christian Hymns in the Bali Language]*. London: Macmillan and Co Ltd., 1958, pp.3-4.

Grassfield songs that they should compile them and send to me, and I shall make a songbook of them].⁴⁰ It would appear that such a collection was never done.

The Synod of the PCC decided that the songs in the appendix should be brought into the main text. Circular letters were distributed to people to send in new compositions but there was no favourable response.⁴¹ Although *mungaka* is one of the PCC's official languages, the language policy did not encourage it. In Bali the Christians sing from the Scottish Church Hymnary and use *mungaka* equivalents only sparingly. However choruses are always sung during Church Services, funeral services and other social occasions.

Some of the missionary compositions shall be considered here. There are two reasons why we should consider some of the missionary compositions: first, these compositions or translations took the Bali worldview into consideration as the words indicate; and second the Bali people have taken those hymns to be their own for they identify with the lyrics. One can discern this by the frequency of their use. We shall examine two songs from the hymnbook, correlating them with Bali choruses where necessary.

Another point of note is that songs composed from other parts, are translated into *mungaka* when they reach Bali. Sometimes the songs are international. We shall make the selections from the most current edition of the hymnbook as cited above.

Among the commonly sung hymns are hymns numbers 2 and 153, which we have selected for analysis in regard to *Nyikob* and Christology.⁴²

God the Father

Hymn 2.

<i>Nyikob bui ni ntsa 'ti u.</i>	<i>Nyikob</i> , we are greeting you
<i>Mbi' nu ngunguh, u ni ndze</i>	Because of the great things that you do.
<i>aNsi ni mboli ma sui u,</i>	The earth humbles itself before you,
<i>nindeng ngyeti luen tu se nkanka.</i>	Heaven praise your name always.
<i>U ka beh lo' ndib kuisui;</i>	You were there from of old,

⁴⁰ Adolf Vielhauer, *Ntsi Nyikob bi ndzobdzob ni tsu mungaka*, p.136.

⁴¹ The late Rev J. C. Kangsen, former Moderator of the PCC, composed one hymn and Dr. Jonas N. Dah composed seven hymns. These were added to the *Ntsi Nyikob* hymnbook and a revision was made in 1987 under the name *Ntsi Bun-Kristo ni Tsu Mungaka*. Dah reminds the Christians that Ba Kangsen said: "a bon, bin bon-ngon bi'ni ma nebti ntsindzobzob ni ndzi ba-Cameroon... le to be kwa' mbi'ni nwa'ni-ntsi Cameroon I ndani." [It is good for you sons and daughters of the soil to start making songs with Cameroon tunes...this will be the beginning of a pure Cameroon hymn book]. Jonas N. Dah in a foreword to *Ntsi Bun-Kristo ni Tsu Mungaka*, pp.3-4.

⁴² We prefer to consider Christian conception of God from the perspective of the Trinitarian concept.

Mvi o la' bi la, u tsi.

When this world shall pass away, you will remain.

Stanza 2.

<i>U kwa' Mfon ntsa fonfon me', .</i>	You are <i>Fon</i> above all <i>fons</i> ,
<i>mbe Fo nindeng bo nsi se.</i>	You are <i>Fon</i> of heaven and also <i>Fon</i> of the earth.
<i>Bon bu boa baagel me'</i>	Your children and all the angels
<i>Ndzobked ntsi, ni ngyeti u mui</i>	Sing songs to praise you
<i>Nga ,u lan, mbon, ndzi'ti, ntuin,</i>	Saying: "you are holy, fine, clever, powerful,
<i>mban nu mbuiked me' nkanyin.</i>	And you hate evil forever."

Stanza 3.

<i>To, ka Ba, ni nkiti yui'</i>	Come Father, and watch over us,
<i>Nga bui nda ni mandzi ndani.</i>	So that we should pass on the safe road.
<i>Ted mankoen bui', ni ntsu' ngeh'</i>	Remain by our side on the day of trouble
<i>Nga bui bim ngeh' me' ni boni.</i>	So that we can bear all troubles with peace.
<i>Vu beh nda' mbi to lo' yui',</i>	When death will come to take us
<i>U fa lun kuimi mbo bui'</i>	You will give us life that will not end. ⁴³

We set out in this research to explore the concepts of God among the Bali Nyonga. Our findings as we have seen in chapter three reveal that in pre-Christian times they knew of *Nyikob* who was understood first and foremost as the Maker of the world-*Mbom mvi*. From the social organisation of Bali where the *Fon* is the supreme ruler of his people, we saw that *Nyikob* is *Mbu'ti mvi*-ruler of the world.

Nyikob is also *Ntsa mvi*-surpasser of the world, which means that he is timeless. He is equally the provider of human sustenance. The people pray asking *Nyikob fa fu' mfa ndzui, ti' nkiti yu' se*-give us prosperity and the consumers of the prosperity and also keep watch over us. *Nyikob* is the *highest* court of appeal and is therefore the culmination of justice and truth. As we have seen, when one is treated unjustly by an adversary or when the powerful and wealthy trample on one's rights,, one simply has to say *Nyikob la' beti u* [*Nyikob* will ask you; or *Nyikob lin-Nyikob* knows].

Perhaps an abnormal conception of *Nyikob*, which we have seen, is the realisation that although he is all that we have mentioned above, yet he seems removed from human existence.⁴⁴

⁴³ The song is my translation.

⁴⁴ For instance we have seen that when a woman is pregnant it is said that '*Nyikob* has licked her'-meaning blessing. This is an acknowledgment that he is the one who gives children. Ironically when a woman does not have a child she goes rather to the ancestors or to a diviner to find out why she does not have a child.

The only instance where we can actually discern that *Nyikob* is sought for directly is when he is called upon as a judge, an embodiment of justice and truth. Even then his justice may not be visible. Since he is timeless when one says '*Nyikob* will ask you' one is, in other words saying that the truth shall prevail and that justice is on the side of the righteous and the innocent. This understanding has been transferred to Yahweh with ease as Tita Nkankuh⁴⁵ a popular composer has done. He sings:

Ma 'ti ngong nu me ' ni bo Yawe.
Leave everything in the hands of Yahweh.

He sings about wickedness and how people hate each other but he ends up by asking that in such situations all should be left in the hands of Yahweh.

Nonetheless, *Nyikob* is so close that people in normal conversation say '*mu ntsa 'ti Nyikob nga...*' - 'I am begging *Nyikob* that...' This type of begging is unlike Christian prayer which may have fixed times and even specific places and postures. Prayer for the Bali is an inner communion with *Nyikob*, which takes place irrespective of time, place, posture or choice of words. To this end we can better appreciate when the Christians sing *Nyikob bui ni ntsa 'ti u, mbi' nu ngungu u ni ndze a. Tsa 'ti* can be greetings like good morning, afternoon, evening; it can be thanks or no greeting at all. For example one may say *mu ntsa 'ti u* - I am greeting you. That is already a greeting but the phrase indicates information of the intention to greet, in which case one may expect that the greeting should follow.

In English it may be said that one "visits" the sick in hospital, in *mungaka* one goes to *tsa 'ti dzan* - "to greet" the sick. Thus greeting *Nyikob* for the great things he is doing is an embodiment of thanks, request and the hope of a wish to be fulfilled.

The song *nindeng ngyeti luen tu se nkanka* recalls the cosmology that acknowledges that all creatures live in perpetual praise of their Creator. The leaves face upward and fowls after sipping water, look up to thank the provider before swallowing the water, and human beings, after picking kola nut look up to give thanks to the source.

However if it is that the ancestors are the agents of *Nyikob*, then we can concede that just as the *Fon* is not approached directly so too *Nyikob* need not be bothered when his subordinates can deputise for him. We have noted earlier that people pass through the *Fon*'s mother to reach him.

⁴⁵ Tita Brown Nkankuh in his maiden music album titled "*Nku 'muh Fedfed*", released in 2003.

When the Christians sing *nsi mboli ma sui u* the picture that comes to mind is one stooping before a superior. For instance, the best way to apologise for a wrong is *ma we ku* - holding the leg of the offended person. In the process of holding the person's leg the offender stoops which is a mark of humility. To say *Nyikob ka be lo' ndib kusu* is to acknowledge his existence before his creatures and to say *mvi o la' bi la u ted* is indicative of his timelessness. *U kwa' Mfon ntsa ba fonfon me'* cannot be gainsaid. We have seen attributes of the *Fon* ranging from 'elephant tusk', something of priceless value, 'big tree' under which people can take shelter, *ngunyam*- lion, a symbol of strength to protect his subjects, soap for the women folk- meaning he provides for the daily needs of his people.

To ka Ba brings to mind the responsibility of the father. The father, to the Bali, does not necessarily refer to one's paternal father.⁴⁶

The choice of a *ndzui ndab* depends on his character. A father with many children observes their relationships with each other and chooses his successor. When the children are eating the father asks one child to share the meat to his siblings. The child who shares and takes his first is a greedy child and will not be able to care for others. The person who shares and takes his last exhibits signs of justice.⁴⁷ Once a *ndzui ndab* one is a father and, as Hunt observed "the authority of the father is strongly upheld. It is Bali custom to fold your two hands in front when speaking to a 'big man'. This is a sign of reverence."⁴⁸ 'Big man' here may be some body whose age is comparable to the least of your sons but if he is *ndzui ndab* then he is your father. The responsibility of a *Ba* is likened to the labour of mother hen, who whilst human beings enjoy its labour, goes to lay other eggs!⁴⁹

In the previous chapter a *ndzui ndab* and a *Tanyi* swallow the heart of a life fowl which symbolises the acquisition of courage, flexibility, discernment and the ability to overlook

⁴⁶ A common mocking expression is that *u be mun, ni nda' ku mun* [you are a child and you will die as a child]. *Ba* refers to the compound head. Whoever succeeds to the stool is the father and the stool passes on to his son. Thus if your brother becomes a *ndzui ndab* it means that you remain a child for ever because in case of his death the stool passes on to his son who will pass it on to his own son. But all succeeding generations of males continue to bear the family name. And no matter how small that son is he becomes your father because he is the one who communicates with the *ba kusi* [the ancestors], and he is the one keeping the family cup.

⁴⁷ Maxwell Gabana Fohitung, *Self-Portrait of a Cameroonian*, p.221.

⁴⁸ W. E. Hunt, Assessment Report of Bali Nyonga, pp.30-31.

⁴⁹ Babila Fochang, *Wisdom of the Ancients*, p.20.

offences and insults. Thus *Nyikob* as *Ba* is understood as flexible, discerning, able to offer protection and has a gentle and a forgiving heart, for a heart that ignores insults is forgiving.

We have also seen that the Bali lay a lot of emphasis on death. The aged do not actually die. At the death of an old person, the death is reported by expressions like *I feti mue bi* [he has rested], *I kwe mue bi kundzu'* [he has gone back home], the dead are asked to travel in peace as it comes out in these dirges: *dzid yabyab ntso mbo bo*. [Take gentle steps as you go to meet the others]. The living dead are requested to receive their guest *ngeun u mandzi o ni nto* [your guest is on the way coming to you].⁵⁰ Thus the Christian trust that *Nyikob* is there to give everlasting life when death approaches is based on the previous hope of existence beyond the horizon of death. Eternal life offered by *Nyikob* after death confirms the reality that the *ngon ba ku bon* [home of the dead] is real, and this is the more reason why people can continue to believe in their ancestors

Christology

Another popular hymn is hymn 153: *Nsun bo mboked be Mfon Yesu* translated by J.Keller.

Nsun bo mbonked be mfon Yesu;
I ni ngyemti ngon bun me'
Nu be ndzan u ma dzi ntu u,
U ghe nsun mbo I nindeh
Ba ni nsobni ntsu'mvi ndzamu,
Ntu bo nsa' bo se nkanka
Mbi' ba lem mo'nu ni ntu bo
Kui ted nsun mbo Ba bo be a.

Our good friend is *Fon* Jesus
 He helps everybody.
 If something hurts you in the heart,
 You should go and tell him quickly
 We are sorrowful in many days,
 Our hearts judge us always,
 Because we are hiding something in our hearts,
 That we have not yet told our Father.

Stanza 2.

Lui be nsensen ntui a ngeti
San nyin ti ma nta se beh,
U ma mbo' beh, Ba ni ndze u;
Bu'mbo mbo i, nsun nu me'.
Bun be mban, u ndze tobni
Bo a nge', a ntsa'mui nu,
U mbu'mbo mbo Kristo Yesu,
I ti ndzu', ni ngyemti u.

Places may be dark and your heart is shaking,
 Even if no single star is shining,
 You should not be afraid, Father is seeing you.
 Clap your hands⁵¹ to him, tell him everything.
 If people hate you, and you see torment,
 And suffering that is above you,
 Clap your hands to Christ Jesus,
 He will hear and he will help you.

⁵⁰ Babila George Fochang, *The Philosophy of the Bali Nyonga People*, p.44.

⁵¹ The Bali generally greet by stooping before a senior and clapping the hands. These days they shake hands and embrace as well, but it is cultural adaptation. To beg or plead with somebody one says "mbu'mbo"-I clap my hands.

Stanza 3.

Ke be nkam mbo ni mo' ntsu'
Ke u ndzan dzan, nta' maku,
u ma mfuli mbum u mbi' le beh,
Yesu wu', nto, ndunyu nu.
Na u, ba u fed bu, sun bu,
Bon bu, bo a ngwi u me'
Be ngwa' u madzi ngeh' u,
Yesu yemti u ninde.

If you lack things on some days,
Or maybe you fall sick and are about to die.
Do not be frustrated because of that,
Jesus is there coming to help you.
Your mother, father, your brothers,⁵² your friends,
Your children, and even your wife,
If they abandon you in your sufferings,
Jesus helps you quickly.

What is discernible is the ability of Bali Christians to easily understand the Nicene doctrine of the Son being the same substance as the father: *Nyikob* as God the father is *Fon* above all *Fons* and Jesus Christ is *Fon* as well. The other unique theological concept as noted in the Bali understanding is the belief of *Nyikob* having a child. It is equally of interest to know that their understanding of Jesus as the child of *Nyikob* dispels the gender issue. There is no noun gender distinction. Jesus Christ is the 'child' of *Nyikob*, not his Son; which for this researcher reveals that mother-tongue theology redeems and makes inconsequential the gender issue, which seems commonplace in contemporary theological discussion. We have already observed that in pre-Christian understanding, *Nyikob* has a child though the image of that child is unclear. We noted how on pouring water outside at night a woman would say, "*Nyikob* should move the head of his child." So it became easy for the Christians to acknowledge that *Nyikob* [Yahweh] has a son. It was easy as well to accept him as *Fon*. As the father's only child he is considered a *ndzui ndab* because *bo ma ni ndzu'ti' ta' ka' ndu' ma ntan beh* [you cannot taste the only jug of wine in the market]⁵³ - this proverb refers to a man who has only one son. There can be no question of who the *ndzui ndab* should be. Jesus therefore can be *Fon* just as his father is *Fon*. He is ruler of the world just like his father as revealed in this chorus:

Bi ye ndze Yesu tsi ni leng mfon ni mbu'ti mvi
See how Jesus sits on a throne and is ruling the world.

Since he is *Fon* of heaven we need to accept him so as to inherit eternal life.

Yesu be mfon nindong,
ba bim I nda' ndzui lun.
Jesus is *Fon* of heaven
Let us accept him so that we shall inherit eternal life.

⁵² The *mungaka* language does not distinguish between sister and brother on the basis of gender. The word "*mfed*" stands for both.

⁵³ Babila Fochang, *Wisdom of the Ancients*, p.28.

Nsun bo mbonked be Mfon Yesu. The word *nsun* [friend] carries with it a deeper meaning than mere friendship between human beings. It is said that *nsun mun I mbonked be kun I* [a person's best friend is his bed]. This portrays friendship as trust, reliability, availability and provider of comfort. At the same time the bed as a friend is honest to the point that if it accuses you, you cannot claim to be without guilt as this proverb states: *ma kun u I kui sie be nsung nga u shi mui u ti' nku' nkeh ntan be mue* [if the front bar of your bed accuses you that you have fouled the air how can you put up a defence anymore]? Jesus therefore as humanity's best friend is the assurance of ever ready comfort and honesty. As *Fon* he stoops low to make friendship with commoners to indicate that commoners have favour in his sight, but then his humility and friendship must not be taken for granted, so one has to be ready to accept when one is guilty if accused by such a friend. The bed as a friend is patient to bear the burden of carrying the individual every night; so too does Jesus shoulder human burdens everyday.

This train of thought comes out fully in choruses like

Yesu be ngan tsham bon
 Jesus is one who sympathizes with people.
Yesu sun nga bi to nda' ndzui lun.
 Jesus asks that people should come to inherit life.

Jesus is immanent. Although he is *Fon* of heaven he is always present with the people as this chorus reveals:

Ba be gha' bui a we e?
Ba beh gha' bui a Yesu,
Ba be gha' bui a Yesu Ma'mvi
 Who are we here with?
 We are here with Jesus;
 We are here with Jesus the 'thrower of the world',⁵⁴.

Jesus' immanence does not compromise his transcendence since people are asked to leave earthly things in order to meet with him.

Ma'ti ke masi gha' nge bu mbo Yesu,
Ke ndab le u kud a,
ma'ti ke masi gha' nge bu mbo Yesu,
Ke bon le u vi a

⁵⁴ The attribute of *Ma' mvi* in the *mungaka* translation is given to Jesus. We have already pointed out that *Ma' mvi* is thrower of the world which is equivalent to *Mbom mvi*-moulder of the world.

Leave everything on earth here and go to Jesus,
Even the house that you have built,
Leave everything here on earth and go to Jesus;
Or the children that you have given birth to.

Jesus is also *ngeun lung* [fufucorn⁵⁵ of life] as expressed in this chorus:

*Mbe ngeun lun e,
Ngon yin me' bi to ndzi nu,
Mun I la dzi lun a, lun ted ma dzi ntui.
I am the fufucorn [bread] of life
Let everybody come and eat and drink,
Those who shall eat, life shall remain in their hearts.*

For the typical Bali one has not eaten food if one has not eaten *nguen*. When one meets people eating *nguen* one does not greet them; one just washes the hand and joins in the eating. *U bi to mfon masi* [the *Fon* was down when you arrived] is a common expression, which means you have come at the right time when *ngeun* is being eaten. *Ngeun* is life. Jesus Christ as *ngeun* is not just the *ngeun* of life but life itself since *ngeun* is what sustains life.

The Holy Spirit

It is easy to deduce how Christian choruses reflect pre-Christian thought-forms through the scarcity of songs reflecting the Holy Spirit. The Spirit seems not to have been a religious preoccupation with the Bali. The soul, *dze'ni* – breath is associated with a common expression as *mun be nda' dze'ni* - a human being is just the breath - meaning soul]. Thus, *mun be nto'ti ma dze'ni mbe yi nu mi mue* [if a person ceases to breathe then it is finished for the person]. The absence of frequent use of the Holy Spirit comes out also in prayer. The PCC ends their prayers mostly in two forms: 'through Jesus Christ, your Son our lord, Amen', or 'through Jesus Christ your Son our lord who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever, Amen'. Bali Christians end their prayers *ni lun Yesu Kristo* [in Jesus' name], or they pray directly to *Nyikob* or *Ba Yawe*.

The Holy Spirit has been translated as *Dze'ni Nsan'niked* [Sociable Spirit] as in the Trinitarian pronouncement, but the Holy Spirit is also translated as *Dze'ni Nyikob* [God's

⁵⁵ Fufucorn is a paste prepared with dried maize that has been grounded into powder. It is the staple food of the Bali. The verse 'I am the bread of life' has been translated as '*Mbe ngeun lun*' - 'I am the fufu of life'

Spirit] like in the Apostles' Creed. The hymnbook contains songs to the Holy Spirit but the Spirit does not feature much in popular theology. In choruses that I collected, we have only this one that speaks of the Spirit:

*Dze'ni Nyikob ti ma mbe ma ntui pastor
mbe yi ntum bong I ni nsan a ni nda momom*
If the Spirit of *Nyikob* is not in the heart of a pastor,
Then the Good News he is spreading is in vain.⁵⁶

5.4.2. The Analysis of Prayers.

A popular Cameroonian chorus states that 'prayer is the key, Jesus started with prayer and ended with prayer.' We have noted that prayer has been translated '*Tsa'ti Nyikob*' - greeting *Nyikob*. We have also noted that the expression '*tsa'ti Nyikob*' denotes an inner communion between the individual and *Nyikob*. That is why there is the common expression *a ku ndin Nyikob a*. [only my *Nyikob* knows]. This figurative way of speaking [which is typical of the Bali] is what Keller and Vielhauer interpreted as each person having his god. What we have translated as prayer at the *keti Nyikob* or at the *Tu Fom* is *ma fung ke ma tan ngam bui a ba ba bo* [to call or to converse with our fathers].⁵⁷ *Tsa'ti Nyikob* therefore as prayer is a new understanding. Thus the common expression of 'let us pray' or 'pray always' is not *Ba tsa'ti Nyikob* or *Tsa'ti Nyikob nkanka* [as would have been the normal expression if their understanding were limited to the new understanding of the coinage] but *bi ye ba fung Ba* and *ti' fung Nyikob nkanka* [let us call on *Nyikob* and call *Nyikob* always].

With this explanation we can now look at the key concepts in prayer. We must note here that the PCC is a highly organised liturgical Church with everything done in a uniformed manner. There are six Volumes of the Book of Divine Services with prayers for all occasions. Although it has been suggested at meetings that *ex-tempore* prayers be said during Services, people are still stuck to the written prayers. For this reason the prayers we shall consider in this section will not be taken from any of such prayers. We will depend on extemporaneous prayers since they are contextual.

⁵⁶ The word pastor is interchangeable with Elder, Christian etc.

⁵⁷ Interview with Ba Tita Nyagang, 20/12/2003 and Ba Fonmbe, 18/02/2004, Ba Tanyi Ntsu, 19/12/2003.

We recorded fifteen prayers during different occasions but we shall only present two of the prayers which contain the concepts that feature constantly in prayer.

During a practice session of the Hallelujah Choir of Ntaiton⁵⁸ Ma Nah opened with this prayer:

*Bon ba Yawe mfon nindeng bo nsi,
Bui ni mfa dzika mbo u mbi' u fa yo tsu' mvi le mbo bui a.
To la ka ntsamvi ni ngvemti yui'
Mbi' a wu mbe ndu ba ku' mbe ta bon ntsi se.
Fa lan mi boa tun mbo bi ntsu' ndio bo a ngon ntsu' mvi me. Amen.*

Good father Yahweh, *Fon* of heaven and earth.
We give you thanks because you have given us this day.
Come now o 'surpasser' of the world and help us
Because you are the husband of widows and father of orphans
Bless us and give us strength today and always. Amen.

During a Zonal Session meeting at Gungong on 29 may 2004, Mr Nji prayed:

*Ndzika ma' mvi ni tun yi u fa mbo bui ndia.
Bui ni ngugu luen tu nkanka mbi mfon ba fonfon me' a.
Ndzo u lo ndo' yui not mui ma gha le a andzo u to lo' yui kwe mu a.
senti yui ni ngon bati yui me.
Ni luen mun u Tita Yseu. Amen.*

'Thrower of the world', thank you for the strength you gave us today.
We exalt your name at all times because you are *Fon* above all *Fon*
As you brought us here so too you will take us back.
Strengthen us in all our deliberations;
In the name of prince Jesus. Amen.

The key concepts that feature in prayer that we do herewith analyse are, *Bon Ba Yawe Mfon Nindeng bo nsi* [Good Father Yahweh, *Fon* of heaven and earth], *ndu ba ku'* [husband of widows], *Ta bon ntsi* [Father of orphans], *Taabon* [Father of children], *ngan ma' yui* [The one who owns us], and *Tita Yesu* [Prince Jesus].

We have already noted that *Nyikob* is *Ba*. In prayer he is not only *Ba* but also *Bon Ba*-good father. He is *Fon*. All these we have already discussed above. Yahweh has easily found a place in the minds of the Christians so that when they were asked about God's name before the planting of Christianity some Christians responded that he was called *Yawe*. The

⁵⁸ This was on 17/04/2004.

new and striking concepts that we find here is *Nyikob* as the husband of widows, father of orphans and father of children. The widow and the orphan are less fortunate people in the Bali community. The widow is subject to harsh treatment and inhuman acts. Sometimes the late husband's brothers take everything. If a widow is maltreated her children suffer with her as well. *Nyikob* as husband of widows and father of orphans shows that he is considered to be a compassionate, loving defender of the defenceless. As father of children according to Fomuso Buma-Foncham *Nyikob* performs to humanity the filial obligations that parents perform to their children.⁵⁹ *Ngan ma' yui* [the one who owns us], this tallies with *Ma'mvi* which we have already analysed under hymns. *Nyikob* as *ngan ma' yui* means the one on whom humanity relies. That is why he is also known as *ke'ntsu ndab* [key]. *I be nke' mun ti fuen be, I be fuen mun ti nghaa be* [if he opens no body can lock, if he locks nobody can open].

Lastly Jesus Christ is considered as Tita. Tita is the title of a prince but sometimes some people are appointed to special duties with the title of Tita. Although Jesus is *Fon*, he is Prince as well.

Conclusion.

We opened this chapter with a survey of how traditional religion in general finds continuity in Christian practice. We used responses gathered from field interviews to indicate what the Christians actually do when they face crises in their lives. Then we showed that the borrowings are mutual as we saw how traditional religion has been permeated with Christian influence. In the last section we presented some songs and prayers in order to analyse the concepts inherent within them. What we have discovered is that pre-Christian concepts of *Nyikob* provide knowledge of Christians' understanding of the Trinity.

⁵⁹ Fomuso Buma-Foncham Henri, *Sacrifices Among the Bali Nyonga*, p.15.

Chapter Six: Summary and discussion

6.1 Summary.

This research set out to explore the Bali Nyonga conception of Deity in the old dispensation and to find out how today Christians of the PCC in Bali understand the God of the Bible. We therefore sought to find out whether the biblical God of Israel is understood as a completely new God or he is understood only in the light of previous understanding. Since theology does not arise in a vacuum but out of a people's endeavour at appropriation, contextualization and the quest for relevance, we gave a historical overview of the people we are dealing with in chapter two. In the same chapter we considered the social organisation in order to prepare ourselves for a better understanding of their worldview. Chapter three concerned itself with the religion of the Bali in general and their conception of God in particular. First we presented the findings of Europeans who came in contact with Bali before and during the missionary period. We went further to compare notes with what the indigenes say concerning their knowledge of the Supreme Being. We also read through the lines in the work of the early chroniclers of the religion. Our conclusions were that the Bali had knowledge of the Supreme Being even if that knowledge was hazy and that it was the biases of the Europeans that blinded them from acknowledging that the Bali knew the Supreme Being. Besides they were children of their time, and the outcome of those early encounters confirms the fact that one may not be able to assess the worldview of another culture except in terms of one's own worldview.

This misunderstanding of the worldview of the Bali was the focus of chapter four which presented the encounter between the two worldviews. Some of our sub problems were to find out how much the missionaries understood the Bali worldview and also how well the Bali understood and received the message that was propagated to them. We pointed out that in as much as the missionaries gave their time to the study of the Bali culture they probably did not understand the mindset of the Bali. We also realised that missionary evangelistic strategy and theology undermined the values, which the Bali held dear, and this became a hindrance to early acceptance of the gospel.

Chapter five was a presentation of the understanding of the God of Scripture within the present dispensation. An analysis of songs and prayers was our major interest in this section. Our findings revealed that the understanding of the new was based on the previous one, which means that the God that has been presented to them has been understood only in terms of their understanding of *Nyikob*. We also realised that the Gospel has a strong influence in Bali even if the people are not all churchgoers. The influence of Christ permeates all aspects of life as we found out; that even in the practice of traditional religion they pray first to the God of scriptures. His influence is also felt through the composition of secular songs that are eventually taken over by Christians. We also saw that Christians are incorporating new meanings into traditional institutions and transporting them into the church and filling them with new meaning.

What this means within the context of our intellectual framework is that the understanding of the God of scriptures in the minds of the Christians of the PCC in Bali is based on continuity rather than discontinuity. This means that Bediako and the other advocates of continuity are right as the Bali Christian practice reveals.

The Bali philosophy proves that the new is understood only within the previous categories as we can discern from the wisdom of the ancients: *bo ni ntun' mandzi mfi bo kui mbe ma tsed I nden* [when you dig a new road, you must cut across the old one].¹ This means that change does not mean completely doing away with the past. Part of the old is necessary for the establishment of the present and it is a sound working premise for the future. They also say "the hawk said it was necessary that old people should not all die, lest the younger generation take it for their meat."² There is the need for old people to exist so that they can pass on the customs, traditions and religion of the land to the next generation.

We will in the next section attempt an analysis on the conversion and theological implications of our findings.

¹ Babila Fochang, *Wisdom of the Ancients*, p.12.

² Babila Fochang, *Wisdom of the Ancients*, p.43. The hawk is not eaten by the Bali.

6.2.Discussion.

6.2.1. Interpretive Key.

Although we have proven that there is continuity in the understanding of God among Bali Christians, how does this enhance Christian faith? Apart from continuity, the *raison d'être* of this work was to have an overview of the nature of conversion within a given community “where the faith has to live³ or where the faith is living. Walls states that

Conversion implies the use of existing structures. The “turning” of those structures to new directions, the application of new material and standards to a system of thought and conduct already in place and functioning. It is not about substitution, the replacement of something new, but about transformation, the turning of the already existing to new account.⁴

Let us assume what Walls says is from the perspective of the converter who is bringing the Gospel. Before we find out what takes place at the encounter it may be helpful to find out what motivates the individual or the community to respond to the Gospel message. We shall use Jacobs as our interpretive key to understand what motivates conversion and this will enable us to interpret the process of conversion in Bali Nyonga. Jacobs states that there is a cultural imperative that induces in people an

Almost relentless desire to interpret data in light of some frame of understanding which helps them to categorize the data and assign labels. They therefore create cultures which are, in the last analysis, each group's grids for analyzing, sorting out and tabulating data.⁵

To this end each culture has philosophical presuppositions that have to do with elemental concepts which involve time, space, ontology and epistemology. Epistemology deals with what constitutes knowledge, ontology deals with the dynamics of being, the influence of beings upon one another, and the nature of freedom and power. Time concepts concern whether time is conceived of as being relational, quantitative or linear, and what constitutes meaningful time. Lastly, space concepts discuss whether what constitutes space is merely material or whether space is a spirited universe.

³ Borrowed from the title of Heinrich Balz' book *Where the Faith has to Live – Studies in Bakossi Religion, Part II: The living, the Dead and God*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1995.

⁴ Andrew F. Walls, “The Translation Principle in Christian History”, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, Maryknoll New York/Edinburgh: Orbis Books/T & T Clark, 1996, p.28.

⁵ Donald Jacobs, “Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion – Reflections in an East African Setting” in *Gospel in Context*, Vol. 1, No. 3, July 1978, p.4.

These philosophical presuppositions are what provide a culture and individuals of that given culture "with a ready-made key to an understanding of the nature of the universe."⁶

The concept of ontology will be the area of our emphasis but without overlooking the other areas. In each worldview, according to Jacobs, there is the area of cosmology where "powers are identified and classified"⁷ There is a variety of sources of power; these can be "local or exotic, malevolent or benevolent, immanent or distant, demanding or indulgent, complicated or simple..."⁸ the powers may be in conflict with one another at one time and at other times they are complimentary to each other. It is the "cosmology of powers that is at the very centre of a group's existence."⁹

According to Jacobs what ought to happen at the encounter of the individual with the Gospel - if the conversion has to be sustained - is that

A person must elevate Jesus Christ to a position of Lordship in his or her power constellation and keep him there through Christ-honouring living. Unless this happens little else really matters...unless Jesus Christ is elevated in the person's cosmology as he is in heaven, dualisms persist, syncretism is advanced, and Jesus is reduced to being simply an additional helpful source of power, perhaps equal in power with traditional spirits and personalities.¹⁰

Jacobs goes on to say that it is however difficult to ascertain the place of Jesus Christ in a person's world, since most Christians the world over may score high on a doctrinal questionnaire as to the person of Christ. "*The test comes, however, in times of crisis when we require power or knowledge which we feel Jesus withholds. Such crises bring out one's true cosmology.*"¹¹ [Italics mine]. Our findings and analysis have shown that in times of crises majority of Christians who answered the questionnaire and those who were interviewed, depend on the diviners and the ancestors and other powers. We have noted that those are pre-Christian conceptual presuppositions. However we also pointed

⁶ Donald Jacobs, *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, pp.6-7.

⁷ Donald Jacobs, *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, p.7.

⁸ Donald Jacobs, *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, p.7.

⁹ Donald Jacobs, *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, p.7.

¹⁰ Donald Jacobs, *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, p.8.

¹¹ Donald Jacobs, *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, p.8.

out those who claim that no matter what they do they have implanted the Lordship of Jesus Christ where they carry out their sacrifices.

Jacobs states that powers are like an inner core whose immediate covering consists of what he calls '*kinetology*'. This is what provides a scheme for understanding cause and effect. "It defines the nature of power, how power operates, the concept of life-force and vital protection, curses, blessings, the dynamics of how events are caused and controlled, and how power moves effectively from source to point of motion."¹² Conversion does not necessarily alter a person's *kinetology*; it is the person's pre-conversion *kinetology* that is the context in which the person first experiences the Gospel.¹³ We have noted that there is an emphasis on divination and a strong belief that the dead if not properly mourned may bring a curse upon the living, but we also noted that there are those who honour the ancestors as a filial obligation though not as a dependable source.

An outer layer surrounding kinetics are cultural themes: "philosophical presuppositions and an understanding of powers give rise to cultural themes which are in turn embodied in myth systems which exist in the mind."¹⁴ If conversion means a shift only at this level it does not affect the other areas, unless there has been a prior shift at the 'power' level. Thus combating "syncretism" can only be effective if the problem is considered at the 'powers' level and not at the thematic level. Meanwhile it has to be acknowledged that anthropologically it is "highly unlikely that a culture will be able to sustain at the same level of importance two equal competing themes"¹⁵ as one is likely to have dominance over the other.¹⁶ We have noted that the Bali claim that what they do has an anchor in the Old Testament with which they identify. Here one sees a conflict of themes since cultural themes often supersede those of Scriptures. We saw in the example of the purification of the family from the suicide that precedence was given to traditional belief than to the teachings of the Church or drawing inspiration from Scripture. We may however say that there is a feeling of want or inadequacy. The Church seems not to have provided

¹² Donald Jacobs, *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, p.8.

¹³ Donald Jacobs, *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, p.8.

¹⁴ Donald Jacobs, *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, p.9.

¹⁵ Donald Jacobs, *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, p.9.

¹⁶ Donald Jacobs, *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, p.9.

convincing spiritual alternatives that address the concerns that the people battle with in their daily lives.

Jacobs further states that the thematic and mythical matrix gives birth to values. It is likely for a shift in values to take place when a person is converted. Normally the expectations are that the shift will be away from previously held values to Scriptural values. However, since the Gospel has a trans-cultural dimension, the tendency is for the shift to move towards the values of the converter.¹⁷ This too is the expectation of the converter. The appendix to the Basel Mission Constitution of 1935, which referred particularly to Christians in Bali, stated for instance that Christians should not swear by the *Fon*, by his throne, or by the earth, and that if a Christian was to swear, it should only be by God or by the Bible according to the English custom.¹⁸ In this sense the Bali were expected to abandon their values for those of the masters and the missionaries and not the values of Scripture. It is quite obvious that they would have been asked to swear by the German crown if Cameroon was still under German control. The Bali on their part enjoyed education as a western value, an acquisition of the white man's knowledge. This is evident as most of those who were baptized in school resorted to traditional values.

Lastly, the conceptual aspects of culture-worldview - as outlined above are duly formalized in life. Both the metaphysical and the cosmological find expression in symbols, rituals and in everyday behaviour. What is noteworthy here is that although changes may occur at the formal level upon conversion, such changes may be inconsequential. Thus when conversion occurs in any culture one expects change to occur at the power level, the value level, the theme level and the formal level, possibly in that order. Though change at any level may have some effect upon all other levels, a change at the formal level does not necessarily cause a change at the worldview level, but "a change at the core of the power hierarchy, however, can and does send shock waves through the entire system."¹⁹

¹⁷ Donald Jacobs, *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, p.10.

¹⁸ Basel Evangelical Mission, *No'u Nku'mu bun Kristo ba-Evangelisi*, p.70.

¹⁹ Donald Jacobs, *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, pp.10-11.

We realized that the change that was expected to take place at conversion was directed at the formal level: asking people not to do this or that without finding out why they did what they did. First impressions have lasting impact. This has been the case with the practice of Christianity in Bali; just as the missionary evangelistic model is what seems to be carried on in the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. We shall come to that later.

From the above we may suggest that the Bali saw Christianity as a source of alternative power. Chilver for instance was told by some of them how "they had hoped to capture the knowledge of the Germans and make it their own. Many said they later regretted that they had been unwilling to submit to the continuous discipline of schooling."²⁰ Even though Galega's interest was in the education of his people, he had made it clear that it was good to take good things from where they come without doing away with previous beliefs. We have also noted that more than a century after Galega, Stöckle, an open-minded missionary, in his assessment of the people, considered the Bali as people who are not tied down to old conceptions but are open to new and creative ideas yet not giving up old principles that have proved useful. This is very helpful for us because it is a pointer that the old plays a significant role in the understanding of the new. The Bali themselves emphasize this with a proverb that *bo ni ntun mandzi mfi tsed I den* [when they dig a new road they cut across the existing road]. This means that any new thing that comes to completely eradicate the old would be resisted with indifference. This shows that the old has a strong impact on the new.

Considering that "conversion is not a single aoristic act, but a process"²¹ which has a beginning but of which "we cannot presume to posit an end",²² we may assume that there is an unconscious effort by the Bali aimed at transforming every aspect of culture, re-orientating them to God.²³ This means that the Christians are turning divination, *Lela*, *Tu Fom*, *Voma* and *Lob* towards Jesus Christ, because when they insist on opening or beginning such gatherings with prayer to God through Christ they are actually naming

²⁰ Matthew Basung Gwanfogbe, *Changing Regimes and the Development of Education in Cameroon*, p.186.

²¹ Andrew F. Walls, "The Translation Principle in Christian History", p.28.

²² Andrew F. Walls, "The Translation Principle in Christian History", p.28.

²³ cf. Andrew F. Walls, "The Translation Principle in Christian History", p.28.

Christ within those structures of power. This may not be seen as “syncretism” or “double standards” but as a genuine endeavor in a process where the Christian acknowledges – without accepting – the old practices as they are and while participating in them transforms them – turning them towards Christ. Thus if the *Ba nwana*, for example, all become Christians, then Jesus Christ will be fully named in their shrines and the rituals that take place there will be given a new significance in which case the shrines will be pulled down and Church houses erected in their places.

Left to themselves the Christians may be unable to realize this if the Church to which they belong stands at a distance and condemns what they do not know and does not care to investigate. The PCC for example states in its Book of Orders that a member of the PCC must not belong to a ‘secret society’.²⁴ The *Ngumba* for instance is considered among the so-called secret societies; but as we have noted, the *Ngumba* is an executive arm of the traditional political system of Bali Nyonga. It may be true that in the past their duties involved the execution of criminals and wrongdoers. It is no longer the case these days. Today their main function is to settle disputes relating to ownership of land. What makes them secret today is simply that non-members do not participate in their meetings. Surprisingly, because of the presence of some Christians among its membership they open their meetings with prayer.²⁵ Secret societies have been lumped together and the understanding of the function of a particular form of secret society from one cultural setting is easily but wrongly transferred to another culture where the significance is not the same.²⁶

The question as to whether polygamists should be accepted within the Christian fold is a doctrinal question – though it is also a social issue, and not a scriptural prescription. The Church has the task of making a careful study concerning this perennial problem. Gwanfogbe claims for instance that one of the reasons why the missionaries failed to

²⁴ Presbyterian Church in Cameroon., Buea: PCC, 1995, p.12. *Book of Orders-Procedures and Practice of the Church*

²⁵ Interview with one of the members of *ngumba*, Ba Njimundikam, who is also a member of Ntanfoang congregation. 18/05/2004.

²⁶ The *Ngumba* is mistakenly taken to be the same as the *Kwifor* of neighbouring *fondoms* like Bafut, Mankon and others. Whereas the *Kwifor* societies are kingmakers in those *fondoms* we have seen that in Bali it is not the case. Cf Vincent TitaNji “The Traditional Institutions of Bali Nyonga”, in Vincent TitaNji et al [eds.]. *An Introduction to the Study of Bali Nyonga*, pp.93-94.

penetrate the minds of the Bali was their rejection of polygamy. We realised how the *Fon* and his notables made occasional appearances in church, and according to Gwanfogbe the *Fon* received catechism instructions for three years only to be told that if he wanted to be baptized he had to divorce all his wives except one.²⁷ The heir apparent in Bali tradition must be born 'on the leopard's skin'.²⁸ The baptism of the *Fon* would have had a great impact upon the citizenry and would have precipitated baptisms by geometrical proportions. Nevertheless, cultural laws like any other laws are made by humans and are subject to modifications. Culture is dynamic and not static. Yet it is the nature of its dynamism that makes it accommodative of the Gospel even as the Gospel seeks to transform it.

Theological discussion.

Bediako's words serve as a paradigm for the search for continuity as we presented in our introduction. He says that the God of the African religious past has found access through African Christian Scriptures into African Christian consciousness with seeming ease.²⁹ From our investigations we may ask whether Bediako's words are applicable to the Bali context.

Keller had stated that it is mere figure of speech when the Bali says they believe in Jesus Christ, while Hunt assessed the Bali as the most free-thinking Africans he had come across. We have also seen where the majority of the people go to in times of crises.

²⁷ Interview by the researcher with Dr. M. B. Gwanfogbe on 20/04/2004.

²⁸ When a *Fon* has been crowned he appears for the first time to address the people wrapped in a leopard's skin. It is only when he has mounted the *Wolela* shrine located in the middle of the palace plaza that he is unwrapped from the skin for the gathered population to see their new *Fon* for the first time. Besides, his stool or throne is always placed on a leopard's skin. Children born before his coronation do not have a right to the throne; only the children born to him after coronation have any right to heir ship. In the case that he has only one wife and she is in her menopause it poses a problem of succession. This is the reason why he has to be polygamous. A proverb states that *bo ma ni ndzi ngwi mfon yi I to vi mfon mfi a be* [they do not know the *Fon's* wife who shall give birth to the next *Fon*]. Secondly the heir apparent must come from pure *Ba'ni* blood. In the case that his wife before his enthronement was not of *Ba'ni* bloodline a problem arises. The Bali has a high regard for recognized institutions within the organization of their community. One of these institutions and perhaps the most respected is the *Fon* whose word is often considered law. *Mfon be nyad bui be ndon' mi* [the *Fon* is the buffalo, we are its horns]. This proverb says it all. In the case where the *Fon* shows his disapproval on an issue his notables will be behind him and as we have noted if parents show their dissatisfaction it will have a ripple effect upon the wives and children. We already saw that children religiously respect their parents.

²⁹ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, p.213.

It is one thing for the God of Africans to easily become the God of Israel whom Christians worship. He happens to be the same God whom the Jews worship. What makes the difference is the Trinitarian concept of the Christians. As Father, Son and Holy Spirit how does the African God quite fit as the Trinitarian conception postulates? The eternal God became human through the incarnation in Jesus Christ. All who put their trust in Jesus Christ are assured of a reunion with God. This means that through Jesus Christ alone can the human yearning for God be fulfilled. Jesus Christ asks humans who are thirsty to come and drink life-giving water. He asks those who are weary and heavy-laden to come to him and receive rest from their labors. What this signifies is that when the God of Israel is understood the same as the African God, Jesus Christ must take center stage in the believer's life. It means that while the God of Israel remains the same God of the African consciousness the African must turn to Christ - conversion. Conversion itself presupposes a felt need in the individual that necessitates the urge to turn to Christ. In this light we remind ourselves once more of Howell's words that conversion is "a process in which the gospel interacts with intimate questions, problems, and needs of the hearer and in the long term enables the person to cope adequately with their problems and gives them answers although not always those which they anticipate."³⁰ Howell further states that the transforming power of the Gospel may not be appropriated to every area of a people's lives, if it does not theologically address issues and problems that confront them in daily life.³¹

Applying these profound words of Howell to the Bali situation we may say that the stark reality of this research reveals that the majority of Christians have not yet experienced the transforming power of the Gospel. As in the missionary times and as it is now, we have observed that the Gospel has not been quite considered as adequate to meet the demands of life's constant perplexities. Fohtung, for instance, despite his close relationship with the missionaries, did not hesitate to resort to traditional 'powers' in order to solve his problem. Even Ndifon who started with yes and ended with yes never failed to be present when the family was sacrificing to the ancestors. His outstanding ability in organization won the admiration of the *Fon* who gave him the title of *Nkom*

³⁰ Allison Howell, *The Religious Itinerary of a Ghanaian People*, p.2.

³¹ Allison Howell, *The Religious Itinerary of a Ghanaian People*, p.2.

Gwansalla.³² He was so proud of this that even during Church feast day celebrations he would appear in his traditional robes. Contrary to the Catechism's teaching that Christians should not mourn their dead and perform certain rites connected to mourning, the converts continued mourning for their dead in a purely traditional manner as in the past. Even when they had to vow that they would not take traditional medicine, they went ahead and did so and this caused the suspension of many of them in 1938.³³

Nonetheless, we still would hesitate to conclude that the place where they go determines what they consider as the source of power in their conceptualizations. This is because in the past when they depended upon such powers they had never elevated any of those powers to the same level with *Nyikob*. Our research has revealed that the majority of the people consider Jesus Christ to be above what they do. No one can confess that Jesus is Lord unless the Holy Spirit leads the one. An appropriate tentative conclusion would be that what is happening in Bali Christian practice is an expression of their understanding of the Gospel contextually which needs to be harnessed and directed by spiritual authorities. This leads us to the implications of our findings for the theology of continuity or discontinuity in the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon.

6.2.3. Continuity or Discontinuity in the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon

The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon will not agree with Bediako that it is the same God of African religion that has found his way through Scripture into the African Christian consciousness and who turns out to be the God of Israel. The catechism of the PCC says that in times of help Cameroonians go to the ancestors, the spirits of the

³² When somebody is made *nkomb* a name is given to him that will reflect the reason for which he was made *nkomb*. The title name is prefixed with *Gwan* which is the *mubako*' equivalent of *nkomb*. Rev. Ndifon's title Gwansalla means a good organizer of people. Ndifon was good at rallying the Christians to go and cultivate the *Fon*'s farm work. Galega II is reported to have told Rev. Ndifon on one occasion that he was above Ndifon only because he was *Fon* but that Ndifon was above him the *Fon* with his ability to organize Christians.

³³ We have specimens of cards from Ndifon's files courtesy of his daughters. These cards belong to Christians and indicate that some Christians were suspended for having drunk traditional medicine that was placed at strategic road junctions for people to drink and wash their face with some. Out of about one thousand two hundred Christian membership cards about one hundred and seventy indicated that the owners had been suspended. This researcher was told by Rev. Fomuso Peter that the medicine was intended to stop the spread of an epidemic that had invaded the village caused by locust.

departed, but that the true God makes himself known in Jesus Christ.³⁴ The catechism does not explain how God was known before he made himself known through Jesus Christ. Although the incarnation was a historical event, Jesus came at least as a fulfilment of what was known already.

The catechism also does not seem to think that Africans can understand Jesus Christ within African categories.

Question 5 asks: How do we accept the witness of the Bible? Answer: The witness of the Bible is presented by the Church to the world. This witness places before man a decision: Jesus Christ asks everyone of us: "But who do you say that I am?" Answer: The Holy Spirit leads us to give the response of faith "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [Matthew 16:16].³⁵

To use Peter's response as a model response of faith can be considered a 'cultural imposition'. When Peter responded that Jesus is the Christ, he was in effect affirming what he knew as a Jewish cultural construct. Besides, Peter as a Jew used the Hebrew word 'Messiah'. The Gospel writers writing in Greek called Messiah 'Christ' thus giving a Greek cultural construct to the understanding of Messiah. Therefore we think that a Cameroonian Christian's response to Jesus' question must originate from a Cameroonian cultural category.

On the issue of creation, the catechism states *inter alia* that "As the Lord of all things God has the power over everything. Nothing is outside his power. There is therefore no need for people to fear the visible and invisible powers, which may impress them [Romans 8: 38]".³⁶ Curiously enough in 1999 the Synod Committee had to transfer a pastor overnight from Nchum parish in Bafut. Some elders who were voted out of office were attacking the pastor through supernatural means.³⁷

³⁴ Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, *I am the Lord your God- Catechism of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, 1965, p.5.

³⁵ Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, *I am the Lord your God*, p.6.

³⁶ Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, *I am the Lord your God*, p.7.

³⁷ I was serving as Chaplain of Presbyterian Secondary School, Bafut, a neighboring parish to Nchum at the time. The pastor in question even told this researcher how he had to go to his home town in order to fortify himself with traditional protective powers before he could experience a bit of reprieve before he was transferred.

Not even African myths of creation can serve as an opening for teaching about God. The catechism states, "There are African stories which tell how at one time 'god' was near man. But man committed a silly mistake and so 'god left men.'" It goes on to give the Bible's reason for the fall of man. What is striking here is that each time the catechism talks of God in the African sense it uses the lower case 'g'. Ironically the Constitution of the Church recognizes *mungaka*, *Douala*, English, French and the local languages of the people as languages of evangelization.³⁸ Preaching in rural congregations is done mostly in 'mother tongue' of the area. Therefore God is called by his names in the various mother tongues. If he happens not to be the same God of previous understanding according to the catechism, why then is God called in local categories? Can we say this unconscious 'official confusion' has been a contributing factor that makes Christians who see nothing wrong by living in double allegiance even when they tell us they are merely obeying the traditions of the land? They have not been given an opportunity to use the new to interpret the old so that the new could be understood in the light of the old, so that their past could be integrated into what they become.

At baptism the convert is asked among other things to denounce the worship of ancestors, fortune telling, the use of charms etc. Unfortunately it is a national obligation in Cameroon to give honor to the ancestors. This means that failure to honor the ancestors can be interpreted as lack of patriotism. The Cameroon National Anthem opens with a tribute to the ancestors: 'O Cameroon thou cradle of our fathers' holy shrines where in our midst they now repose. Their tears and blood and sweat thy soil did water and on the hills and valleys once their tillage rose...' ³⁹

True as it is that a perennial tension exists between the 'indigenizing principle' and the 'pilgrim principle,' there is nonetheless the reality that being a 'new creation' in Christ does not mean that the believer begins or continues life in a vacuum, or that one's mind is a blank slate. Converts are shaped by their cultures and histories. God accepts them as they are, and their Christian minds will continue to be influenced by what was in it

³⁸ Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, *Constitution*, 1998,p.2.

³⁹ Curiously Cameroon does not make a direct allusion to God in her anthem as other African countries have done; cf the Ghana, Nigeria and Liberia anthems etc.

before. Yet God takes them, as they are, not to allow them to remain as they were. God intends to make them into something else. They become part of the whole redeemed family reaching to Abraham, and extending to all generations of Christians everywhere so that none of them should culturize the faith within their context and become so comfortable in it that "no one else can live there..."⁴⁰ While we cast aspersions on the missionaries for imposing western culture upon Africa in the name of missionizing, we must fault ourselves for being reluctant to make the Church a truly African Church. We shall here have a look at the roots of this failure of the PCC to make the Church a truly African Church.

6.2.4. The Legacy of the Basel Mission

Although the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon propagates and ensures the success of a self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing Church, she has been slow with taking an official step towards an indigenous Church. The roots of discontinuity are traced back to the Basel Mission. The PCC state that she is the constitutional successor of the original Basel Mission Church in Cameroon established in 1886 and she maintains the spiritual and theological continuity of that Church.⁴¹ Does spiritual continuity mean that the PCC like the B.M. may be happy when a sixty-year-old woman who after three years of catechism classes is able to answer the questions to the satisfaction of the teachers? Spiritual continuity means not to swear by the *Fon* or his throne but to swear as the English do, not to honor one's dead parents or to take traditional medicine when one is sick?

6 2 5 The Way Forward

We opened this work by citing Herman Herzog who is said to have revolutionized theological education in the PCC, but who years after regretted that while writing the catechism they had failed to take the Cameroonian socio-cultural context into consideration. His hope therefore was for Cameroon theologians to consider this and come up with a catechism that will reflect the Cameroonian worldview. Yet there seems to be some fear of doing this. Dah in a presentation to PCC pastors in April 2004 wondered why pastors blame missionaries for attempting to destroy African categories of

⁴⁰ Andrew F. Walls, "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture", pp.7-9.

⁴¹ Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, *Constitution*, 1998, p.1.

understanding spirituality while they themselves are scared of interpreting Scriptures as Africans.

The PCC takes very cautious steps towards the process of indigenisation as seen in the preface to the Book of Divine Services. It states:

A very difficult intention of the revision was the indigenisation of the liturgy. Since indigenisation is not so much expressed in words as in music, in signs and symbols, and in Christian arts, the aspect of indigenous music is taken care of by a specially appointed committee; the other aspects will have to be dealt with in future as well.⁴²

The last part of the statement vindicates the Church for saying they have implemented a progressive approach to the issue of indigenisation. The problem arises because the issue has been hardly brought up for discussion so far. Besides, the Church seeks to make an African Church only at the level of music, arts, symbols etc. Jacobs has pointed out that these things are merely actualizations or expressions of people's conceptualizations. Change at this level does not affect the power level in anyway. On the other hand change that may have any meaningful effect should be at the level of the catechism, which is the tool of evangelization used as a means of convincing in order to convert and which is aimed at directing peoples' conception of powers from previously held convictions towards Christ as the new source of power.

The Right Reverend Jeremiah Chi Kangsen grasped the meaning of continuity in his speech on the occasion of the Basel Mission completely handing over to the PCC on the 24 April 1968. Kangsen had said among other things that the handing over corrects Cameroonian thinking which had for a long time thought that

The Church was an affair of the whiteman. In fact when I was a boy I thought that all angels were white...by handing over the Church and its institutions to Cameroonian leadership the Basel Mission has by this act shown that God has black angels and black saints in our Church.⁴³

⁴² Preface to Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, *The Book of Divine Services*, n.p: n.p.

⁴³ Jeremiah Chi Kangsen in handing over speech when the Basel Mission handed over all the schools and other Institutions to the Presbyterian Church on 24th April 1968. Kangsen was at the time the first Synod Clerk of the Presbyterian Church. Cited in Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church*, pp.140-142.

Kangsen also captured the essence that taking over from the Basel Mission did not mean a drastic cut away from them but then his use of African wisdom reveals that for him such continuity was the acceptance of the Christian's dual nationality; an acknowledgment that one's present is shaped by the one's past:

Today the Basel Mission is being swallowed up in a special sense by the Presbyterian Church. In some parts of Africa, it is believed, the king never dies. This is so because [according to this belief] when the king is at the point of death, his successor eats the heart of the dying king. This is done in order to ensure continuity. In the light of this, kingship does not really therefore consist of what kind of throne the king has, but of what kind of heart he has whether the heart is a continuity of what has gone before. So today the Presbyterian Church eats the heart of the Basel Mission, in order to live and in order to maintain continuity...in this part of Cameroon inheritance is not so much a matter of property. The main thing in inheritance is the old father's cup. The successor wants to have the father's cup however old it may be; because the spirit of the father is in it, he is taking upon himself the service of the family. That is the sense of inheritance.⁴⁴

He went on to name the list of material things left by the Basel Mission, but indicated that though Cameroonians will love to take over those things since they are part of the inheritance, "that is not the main thing of inheritance".⁴⁵ What was most essential was that "we inherit the old cup from the Basel Mission, and with it the spirit of service, the spirit of bringing the family together. This is the most essential thing we want to inherit".⁴⁶ Inheritance did not depend on the material things "but the spirit in the father's cup and the heart of the king we have eaten cannot be taken away from us."⁴⁷

Kangsen did not consider continuity from the Basel Mission to mean the inheritance of doctrine, for him inheritance meant inheriting the *spirit of service and the spirit of being a uniting factor*. He exhibited this in his practical life, as he became a Moderator of the Church, he was a politician. He was Minister of Education and Social Services in West Cameroon, and while in active service as Moderator was made traditional ruler of his

⁴⁴ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church*, p. 142.

⁴⁵ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church*, p. 142.

⁴⁶ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church*, p.142.

⁴⁷ Werner Keller, *The History of the Presbyterian Church*, p. 142..

village, Kusu in Wum.⁴⁸ We may say that Kangsen had set the pace, which the Church in Africa ought to adopt, and which will be an African approach to appreciating the inevitable necessary tension that exists between the pilgrim and indigenizing principles. Sacral power in Africa did not distinguish between the sacred and the profane. The traditional ruler had sacral authority since he often doubled as priest and the politics of a nation state rested on his shoulders. And as we have noted in the Bali situation the *Fon*'s wish was law to his subjects.

The distinction between the sacred and the profane is a western construct which has been adopted without adaptation but which is harmful to spiritual growth. We therefore suggest that a coherent and meaningful understanding of Christ can only be realizable when the secular and the sacred realms are brought into oneness as was in the past where God is known to be quite transcendent yet also so close that a woman can conversationally ask him to give way lest she puts her pot on him. Perhaps there is no better way than this to understand the one who says "Behold I am with you always..." This oneness may be an opportunity for further research.

⁴⁸ Jonas N. Dah[ed.], *A Century of Christianity in the Grassland of cameroon*, p.126.

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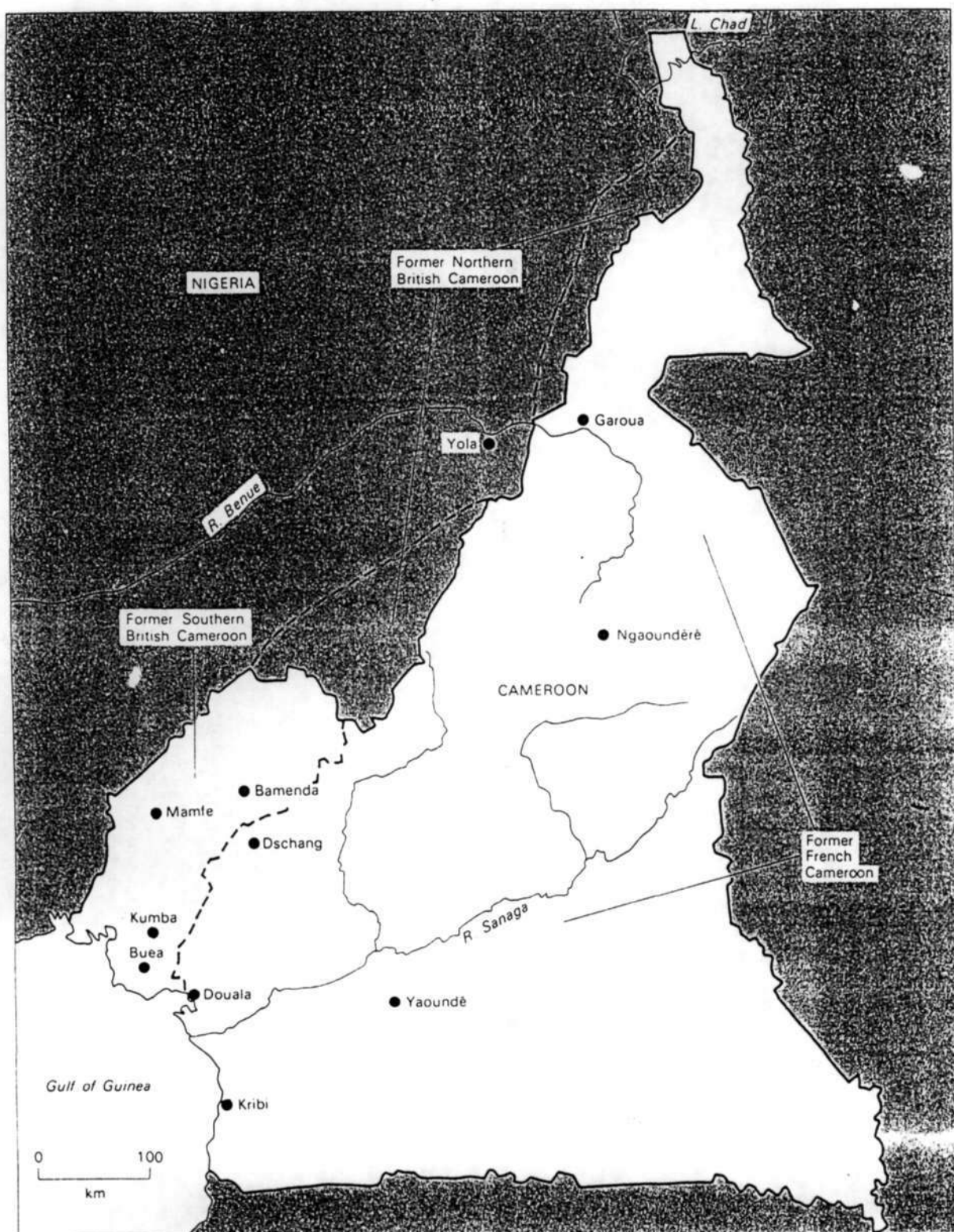
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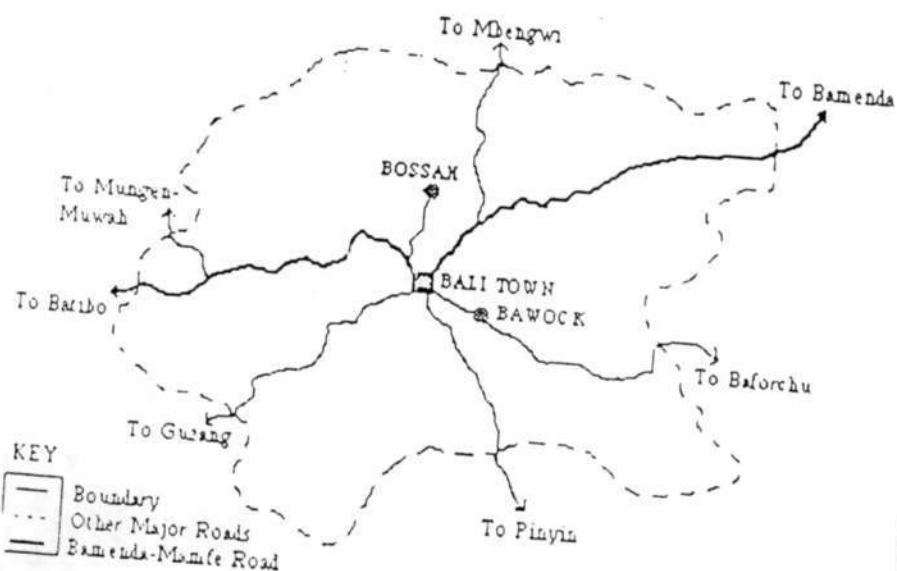
1. Colonel Gaius Fomuso	25/03/2004.
2. Ba Tita Nyagang	20/12/2003.
3. Ba Dinga Tita Fokum	15/03/2004.
4. Ba Tabe	20/06/2004.
5. Na Tangwi	20/06/2004.
6. Ba Tanyintsu	20/12/2003.
7. Ba Trukang	20/12/2003.
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9. Mr. Patrick Fokum	15/01/2004.
10. Ba Ngu Foti	24/05/2004.
11. Mr Martin Nyonkaa	18/01/2004.
12. Ba Gwe Ntali	25/01/2004.
13. Ba Isaac Kwati	19/06/2004.
14. Ba Fombe	18/02/2004.



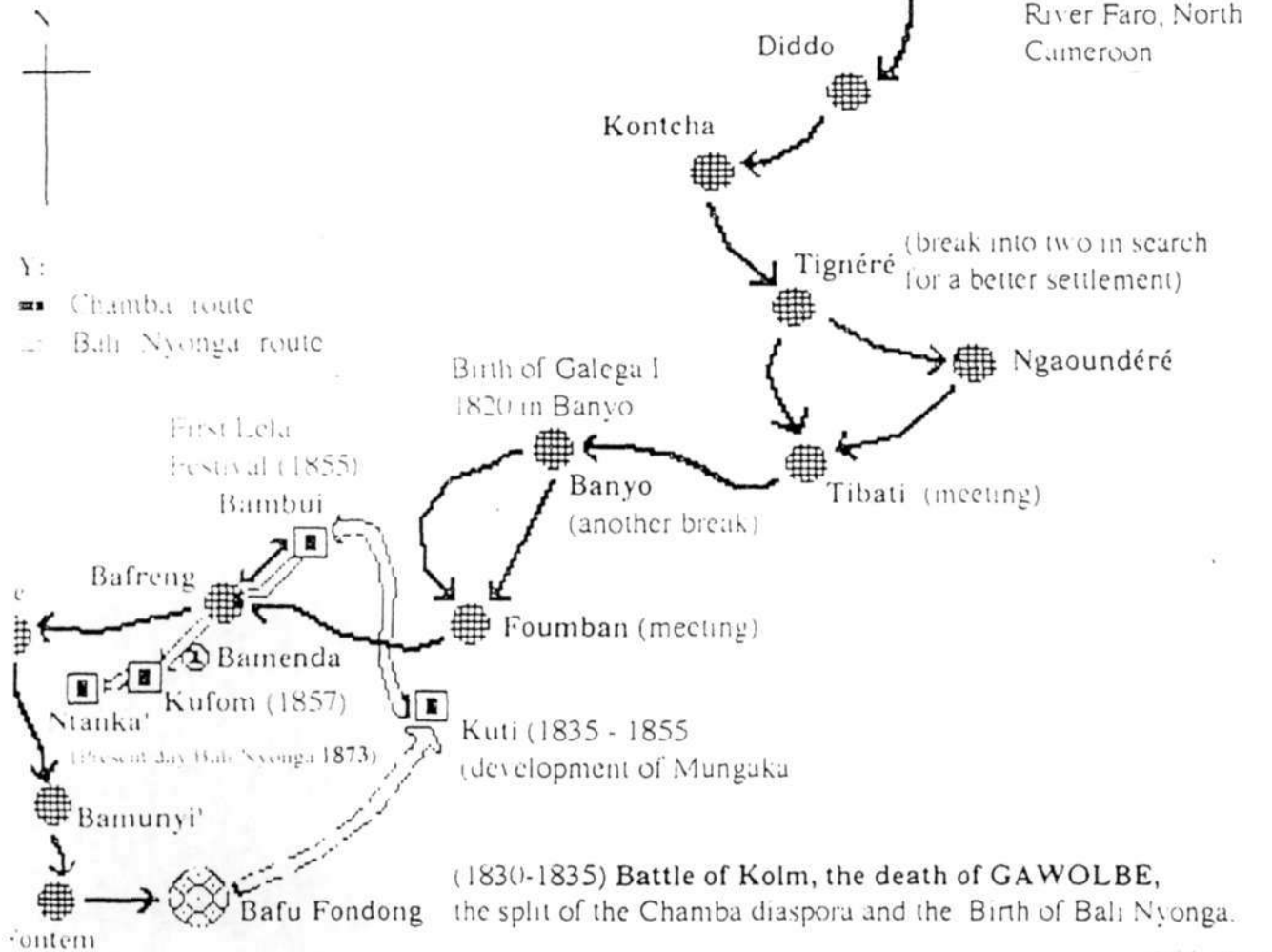
Cameroon: before re-unification on 1 October 1961

Sketch Geographical Location of Bali-Nyonga

he five sub-
ion in the



THE CHAMBA LEKO & THE BALI NYONGA ROUTES 1815 - 1873 -



Bapua Tita Eric

Appendix II

Questionnaire A: Prepared for Christians.

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

Master of Theology in African Christianity.

Student: Babila George Fochang.

Questionnaire for Dissertation.

Topic: An exploration of the conception of God among the Bali Nyonga and its impact upon their contemporary Christian practice with particular reference to hymnody and prayer.

Dear Sir, Madam, Rev., Dr., Prof., His
Majesty.....

I will be highly honoured to receive your honest answers to this questionnaire on the above topic.

Name [optional]

Profession

Position and title in Church – if any

Position and title in Bali – if any

Age.

Questions

1. Are you a Christian?
2. Which denomination do you belong to?
3. How long have you been a Christian?
4. Why did you decide to become a Christian?
5. [Depending on your answer to question 4] are your expectations met?
6. Have you ever consulted a *ngambi*¹ man [be sincere in your answer]?
7. Why did you go there?
8. Did you believe in what the *ngambi* man told you?
9. How many times have you consulted a *ngambi* man?
10. Do you always believe in what you are told by them?
11. Do you believe in the ancestors [*ba kusi ke nyikob ba ba*]?
12. Have you ever received ancestral libation from your father or grandfather?
13. Do you join other family members when they are performing ancestral sacrifices?
14. Do you not feel guilty that such practices like *ngambi* and ancestor sacrifice may contradict your Christian faith?
15. Also in tradition people expect to join the ancestors when they die, while Christians expect to be with Jesus Christ when they die. Now that you are in both, with whom do you expect to be when you die?

¹ Popular name by which diviners are called in Cameroon.

16. If you expect to be with Christ why then do you worship the ancestors?
17. If you expect to be with the ancestors then why are you a Christian?
18. Depending on your answers to questions 16 and 17 does it not appear that you are serving two Gods?
19. Do you know of any creation story according to the Bali?
20. Did your ancestors know God before Christianity came?
21. How was he called?
22. If they knew God how did they worship him?
23. How do you even know that they knew God?
24. Which other traditional gods of the Bali do you know?
25. Do you pray to God?
26. How often do you pray and for what reasons?
27. Do you believe in the power of prayer?
28. Give the strength of the following beginning with the one you consider to be the most powerful: Ancestors, Jesus Christ, a diviner or "medicine man" and God.
29. What in your view is the relationship between Bali traditional religion and Christian practice in Bali?
30. Do you like it the way it is or would you propose some changes?
31. What do you propose?

If you feel that the questionnaire is not enough can you please indicate and give me a contact number so that we can arrange an interview.

Thank you very much. May God richly bless you.

Do you wish your identity to be revealed in this work?

Contact Number: 758 26 85.

Appendix II.

Questionnaire B: Prepared for traditional titleholders.

**University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South
Africa.**

Master of Theology in African Christianity.

Questionnaire for Dissertation.

Topic: An exploration of the conception of God among the Bali Nyonga and its impact upon their contemporary Christian practice with particular reference to hymnody and prayer.

Student: Babila George Fochang.

Dear Sir, Madam, Rev., Dr., Prof., His
Majesty.....

I will be highly honoured to receive your honest answers to this questionnaire on the above topic.

Name [optional]

Profession

Position and title in Church – if any

Position and title in Bali.

Age.

Questions

1. Are you a Christian?
2. Which denomination do you belong to?
3. How long have you been a Christian?
4. What is your title in Bali?
5. Did you receive this title before becoming a Christian or you received it after you had become a Christian?
6. Are you a family head?
7. Why is it that somebody must succeed the father or mother?
8. Why did you decide to become a Christian?
9. [Depending on your answer to question 8] are your expectations met?
10. Did you swallow the heart of a fowl when you were named to succeed your father/mother?
11. Your responsibility requires that you serve as a family or community priest. What are the implications of this for your Christian faith?
12. Does it not compromise your Christian faith?
13. Sacrifice to the family/village ancestors is often closely linked with *ngambi*. How often have you consulted *ngambi*?
14. Why did you go there?

15. Did you believe in what the *ngambi* man told you?
16. How many times have you consulted a *ngambi* man?
17. Do you always believe in what you are told by them?
18. May be you do not consult *ngambi*, but what do you do when your daughter/son, acting on the instruction of a *ngambi* man come to you asking that you should sacrifice to the ancestors?
19. Do you belong to any traditional cult like *Voma*, *Ngumba*, *Nda nsi*, *Tungwe* etc? If yes can you name it? Do you believe in the ancestors [*ba kusi ke nyikoba ba ba*]?
20. Have you ever received ancestral libation from your father or grandfather?
21. Do you join other family members when they are performing ancestral sacrifices?
22. Do you not feel guilty that such practices like *ngambi* and ancestor sacrifice may contradict your Christian faith?
23. Also in tradition people expect to join the ancestors when they die, while Christians expect to be with Jesus Christ when they die. Now that you are in both, with whom do you expect to be when you die?
24. If you expect to be with Christ why then do you worship the ancestors?
25. If you expect to be with the ancestors then why are you a Christian?
26. Depending on your answers to questions 16 and 17 does it not appear that you are serving two Gods?
27. Do you know of any creation story according to the Bali?
28. Did your ancestors know God before Christianity came?
29. How was he called?
30. If they knew God how did they worship him?
31. How do you even know that they knew God?
32. Which other traditional gods of the Bali do you know?
33. Do you pray to God?
34. How often do you pray and for what reasons?
35. Do you believe in the power of prayer?
36. Give the strength of the following beginning with the one you consider to be the most powerful: Ancestors, Jesus Christ, a diviner or "medicine man" and God.
37. What in your view is the relationship between Bali traditional religion and Christian practice in Bali?
38. Do you like it the way it is or would you propose some changes?
39. What do you propose?

If you feel that the questionnaire is not enough can you please indicate and give me a contact number so that we can arrange an interview.

Thank you very much. May God richly bless you.

Do you wish your identity to be revealed in this work?

Contact Number: 758 26 85.

Appendix II

Questionnaire C: Designed for the clergy.

**University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South
Africa.**

Master of Theology in African Christianity.

Questionnaire for Dissertation.

Topic: An exploration of the conception of God among the Bali Nyonga and its impact upon their contemporary Christian practice with particular reference to hymnody and prayer.

Student: Babila George Fochang.

Dear Sir, Madam, Rev., Dr., Prof., His
Majesty.....

I will be highly honoured to receive your honest answers to this questionnaire on the above topic.

Name [optional]

Profession

Position and title in Church – if any

Position and title in Bali – if any

Age.

I understand that you are a minister of the Word and Sacrament:

Questions

1. Which denomination do you belong to?
2. How long have you been a Christian?
3. Why did you decide to become a Christian?
4. [Depending on your answer to question 3] are your expectations met?
5. When did you enter the Seminary?
6. Are you an indigene of Bali?
7. How long have you served as a minister?
8. Have you served as a minister in Bali and for how long?
9. Why did you decide to become a minister?
10. From your theological experience would you say that the Bali knew God before Christianity?
11. Which are the pre-Christian gods of Bali that you know of?
12. Have you ever consulted a *ngambi*¹ man [be sincere in your answer]?
13. Why did you go there?
14. Did you believe in what the *ngambi* man told you?
15. How many times have you consulted a *ngambi* man?

¹ Popular name by which diviners are called in Cameroon.

16. Do you always believe in what you are told by them?
17. Do you believe in the ancestors [*ba kusi ke nyikob ba ba*]?
18. Have you ever received ancestral libation from your father or grandfather?
19. Do you join other family members when they are performing ancestral sacrifices?
20. Do you not feel guilty that such practices like *ngambi* and ancestor sacrifice may contradict your Christian faith?
21. Is it your experience that Christians in Bali consult *ngambi* and perform ancestral sacrifices?
22. What do you advice?
23. What is your view concerning the future of African traditional religions?
24. Do you think that by becoming Christians the Bali should just abandon their traditional religion?
25. What is the greatest challenge that you faced [*face*] as a minister in Bali?
26. What in your view are the challenges of Christianity in Bali?
27. Also in tradition people expect to join the ancestors when they die, while Christians expect to be with Jesus Christ when they die. Now that you are in both, with whom do you expect to be when you die?
28. If you expect to be with Christ why then do you worship the ancestors?
29. If you expect to be with the ancestors then why are you a Christian?
30. Do you pray to God?
31. How often do you pray and for what reasons?
32. Do you believe in the power of prayer?
33. Give the strength of the following beginning with the one you consider to be the most powerful: Ancestors, Jesus Christ, a diviner or "medicine man" and God.

If you feel that the questionnaire is not enough can you please indicate and give me a contact number so that we can arrange an interview.

Thank you very much. May God richly bless you.

Do you wish your identity to be revealed in this work?

Contact Number: 758 26 85.

Appendix III:

***Nu, bun-Kristo bim ma ti' ndze a* [What Christians affirm to practice].**

This is what Christians in Bali affirmed in the month of March 1938 that as individuals they would practice with a willing heart so that they will not be led to commit the same sins as 'pagans'. Therefore, it is good that the catechists should read this document to the congregations once a year, explaining to them, admonishing them to practice what they have heard, because these are the things that they themselves affirmed when they were baptised. I am your brother
Adolf Vielhauer.

As Jesus Christ, the Son of God ransomed me with his blood, seized me from Satan, saved me from sin and death, settled my case with God, gave me birth through the Spirit, and gave me eternal life, I myself made a covenant with him on the day I received baptism in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Spirit of God. I affirmed before God who is good to perfection, hating all evil, and who also know everything that people do, that I have completely renounced Satan, empty gods, divination, cleansing of curses, participating in an appeasement meal, 'bad medicine', the use of talisman, dancing and all other things that non-believers do which are like gods to them on whom they place their trust. I have renounced these things once and for all.

1. Therefore I also affirm that if they should at anytime keep medicine in the community which is coming from the palace and which people are expected to drink or to sprinkle some on their bodies as protection against locust and/or smallpox or any other type of epidemic, I will not drink it. I will not accept that they sprinkle it on my body, I will not accept to remove my shoes or to remove my cap or my waist knife in order to give honour to such medicine. I will not also accept that any protective chain is worn on my body. I will reject any type of medicine on which an incantation is made or which is used for swearing, or even when I do not know where it comes from. If during treatment of sickness the body of the patient is being massaged and the massager run his hands from head to toe and then he touches the ground or firestone with his hands asking the soil to carry the sickness away, or to ask that the patient should lie on a particular object, I will know at once that the medicine is from Satan and I will refuse to be part of it. In the same way I will refuse medicine that is put in small horns or small bags, I will also refuse to wear cowries on the hands of children as prophylactic against vomiting, medicine to conjure rain or to direct thunder, medicine to control the wind, protection against fire, protection against theft and all such medicines, I also denounce 'magic books' and other type of medicines which the Europeans use in deceiving black people saying that it gives knowledge to people, enables them to become rich or protects them from suffering, because I know that these type of things belong to Satan, because the demons pass through those things and control the lives of those who practice them. These things that I have denounced I will also refuse that they should

be practiced on my children and on other people whom God has placed under my care that I should not perform such things on them.

I also affirm that I shall not quickly attend a funeral. If there is the possibility for me to be absent, I will do so because I know that Satan's agents are actively present at funerals, poisoning people's minds. At the death of a relative or a friend or somebody whose funeral I must attend, I will go there only during the day, I will not stay there for long, and while there, I will not sing dirges, I will not dance, I will not pass the night there. Since gun firing is not wrong, I will rather not fire any gun at a funeral so that non-believers may know that Christian behaviour is exemplary, and they shall tend to emulate us.

If a Christian is among the bereaved, it would be good for three or four Christians to offer moral support to the one, but I will not remain there at night to give such moral support unless a missionary or other Church worker has permitted me. But if there are four brethren protecting the bereaved, then I will not remain there. If I am there to protect the person I will make sure I protect myself as well, lest Satan deceives me. If somebody dies in our compound I will assist with work, I will not mourn and rub myself on the ground, I will not pour ash on my head, I will not take off my dress, I will not be poorly dressed or filled with deep sorrow because of the bereavement, I will not dance, I will not sing, I will not join in divination to determine the cause of death, or appease the dead, I will not eat meat prepared because of the death, I will not shave my hair. If I am the only Christian in our compound, I will call three or four fellow Christians who will come and sleep with me during the period of mourning so that they may offer me protection. If I am a family head and my child dies, I will give him/her a Christian burial. I will not accept that any dance should take place at the funeral, I will not be extravagant in the preparation of food for the funeral; I will give only a small quantity of food and drinks to mourners. I will encourage Church workers to tell the Good News of Christ to the mourners. During the evening I will ask mourners to disperse. They shall be no divination, no appeasement, no shaving of hair.

If my child should die out of the village, I will call family members and Christians to conduct a funeral service in my compound, just as it is done at the Christian cemetery. I will give some food to mourners, and after eating they should disperse so that everything can be finalised on just that day.

3. Concerning the planting of a cross on a grave, I affirm that I will go to the cemetery where the cross has to be planted and that after the service at the cemetery, I will not go to the home of the bereaved to eat or drink. I will never call people to come and eat and drink in my compound because of the planting of a cross, because such things abuse the death of Jesus who died on the cross for our sake.

4. I will never swear by the *Fon*, or by his throne, or any object by which disputes are settled. I will swear only by God in heaven, or the Bible according to English practice. In the same way I will refuse to drink sasswood poison, or to agree that they put pepper in my eye to determine a crime, or to cast lots, because these things are not good for Christians.

5. I also affirm that I will observe Sunday and other Christian holidays according to the teachings of scripture, I will be regular in Church services, reading the Bible on my own [if I am able to read], I will visit the sick to comfort them; but I will not do any work that can be done on weekdays or which can confuse people to cause them to think that I undermine the word of God.

6. When I am in doubt concerning any of the above, I will not go ahead and decide on my own, rather I will seek advice from either a missionary, or any Evangelical 'man of God'. And so I will advise people not to commit sin. If a fellow Christian commits any of the above sins, and refuses to heed my advice, I will report the one to the catechist or an elder of our congregation so that the wayward brethren may not be led further into sin, which may become contagious within the congregation.

7. I will do all the things I have pledged to do so that I should deny myself and all worldliness, carry my cross and follow Jesus, passing through the road that leads to life, publicly affirming my faith in Christ; honouring him with what I believe so that others may change their minds and be saved. If I should happen to commit any of these sins out of outright headiness, knowing that it is sin, or if I should argue that it is either good or bad without asking an evangelical 'man of God'; and if I go ahead and do it on my own, then God shall put judgment on me commensurate to my offence and as he deems necessary. So therefore I put my name or signature to this document.¹

¹ Appendix to *No'u Nku'mu bun-Kristo ba-Evangelisi bi Mission ba-Basel ma-Kamerun* [Constitution of the Church of the Basel Evangelical Mission in Cameroon], Basel: Basel Evangelical Mission, 1935 [revised edition, 1939], pp.72-75. [Translation is mine].

Appendix V.

The list here is of some songs that we have not used in the analysis.

Song one.

*Yesu mu ndzombi ba,
u ka ku ma tui mba'ni mbi mue,
nga mue ma nda' sam nu mfon u be.
Nke nka bim Yesu be ni ndib ngeh'*
Jesus the lamb of the father
You died on the cross because of me
So that I will not miss your kingdom.
Even if I accepted Jesus only on a day of misfortune.

Song two.

Nka wad ya kan bui Yesu. Nga mue ma nda' ma'ti I be.
I made my covenant with Jesus, that I would never leave him.

Song three.

U bim madzi ntui u nga ta' ntsu'mvi u la ye Yesu e?
Do you believe in your heart that one day you will see Jesus?

Song four.

Yesu sun ngs bi to, bi to nda' ndzui lun, Yesu sun nga bi to.
Jesus says everybody should come, come and inherit life, Jesus says everybody should come.

Song five.

Ba la ye Yesu, ba la' ye mue ni ke mvi ndib ba la' ye Yesu?
We shall see Jesus, what shall we do with earthly things when we shall see Jesus?

Song six.

*N'ka wa' ya ke masi ni nta' ya lun,
ma bim Tita Yesu,
ngyetiked Ma'mvi Yesu.*
I abandoned all my property searching for my life,
Accepting prince Jesus,
Praise is to Ma'mvi Jesus.

Song seven.

Ndib le nka bi to ba, Nto ba mbombo,

n'to ndze ke masi gha' ni mfun ni ya ngan.
Ndib le mu to bi ghe ba,
n'ge ba mbombo nge nti' Yesu ndze 'ka to a.
 When I was coming I came empty handed,
 I came and met things here on earth and called them my own.
 When it will be time for me to go,
 I will go empty handed to meet Jesus just as I came.

Song 8.

Bi ma'ti ke mvi,
ke mvi ni mbuli ntui yin,
bi ma'ti ke mvi.
 You should leave earthly things,
 Earthly things corrupt the heart;
 You should leave earthly things.

Song 9.

Nindong teun ma la,
mfed a wa'fa' mbum u mfa'fa' Nyikob.
 It is difficult to enter heaven,
 Sister/brother leave your works and do the works of *Nyikob*.

Song 10.

Yesu be nsun nga I to lo' ntu u ndi
Ma' ti mbo I mbad ndzam i.
 If Jesus says he will take your soul today,
 Leave it to him and follow him.

Song 11.

We we vu e,
Vu be mandzi lun yi ba la' ye mi mfon Yesu.
 Oh death! Oh death,
 Death is the path to life through which we shall see Jesus' [eye] face.

Song 12.

Vu Yesu ni nna'ti nga a bong ba bim ngeh'.
A bon ba bim ngeh' ma dzi yo mvi ndzi la' dzui boni.
Vu yesu ni nna'ti be ho e?
 The death of Jesus signifies that it is good for us to accept suffering.
 It is good that we accept suffering in this world before we shall enjoy peace.
 What does the death of Jesus signify?

Resurrection songs. The resurrection of Christ is a thing of Joy as the next songs indicate:

Song 13.

Ba ni ntsanti ndi mbi' Yesu ka dzim ni vu ndio.

We are happy today because Jesus resurrected from the grave –today.

Song 14.

Yo be ntsu' ke? Yo be ntsu' le mu Nyikob ka swi mbo bo a.

Ba ye be mue e? ba ngyeti Nyikob yi I ka tum mun I mbo bo a.

What day is this? This is the day on which the child¹ of *Nyikob* descended to us.

So what should we do? Let us praise *Nyikob* who sent his child to us.

Song 15.

Yesu ka sun nga: Bi gho la ma Galilea ba la' bumti wu.

Jesus said: Go to Galilee, we shall meet there.

¹ The *mungaka* language does not have gender for child, person; neither does it have masculine or feminine pronouns. A child is *mun* and a son is *mun mumbang*-child boy; a girl child is *mu mungwi*-child girl.