

The Impact of Scriptures on Communities – the African Experience

Margaret Jepkirui Muthwii

Preamble

This paper on the impact of Scriptures on African communities draws most of its examples and reflection mainly from the Eastern Africa experience. It is written in honour of Dr. Kees de Blois and his wife Janneke for their many years of dedicated service to the Lord in Africa. In all their life in the Bible translation enterprise they have lived for one thing—to see Scriptures translated into the languages of the peoples of the world. Their success and the success of this enterprise “must not be judged only by the number of languages translated into or by the number of copies of New Testaments and Bibles that have been distributed. For the translator [like Kees], it is the role of the translated Scriptures in the life of the Christian that must be taken as the measure of its impact” (Noss 2004:21). This paper, therefore, explores the impact of the Scriptures in the Christian church birthed in Africa in the 19th, 20th and in the present century.

1. Introduction

While there is truth in saying that the Church in Africa has literally been built upon the bones of countless missionaries and martyrs, the arrival of the Bible in Africa still conjures both negative and positive reactions. To some, it was the cover-up for the colonialists in their exploitation of the continent because missionary work in Africa operated alongside economic and political activities of colonizing powers. A famous saying often heard in the continent has it that ‘when the missionaries came, they asked us to close our eyes in prayer. At the end of the prayer when we opened our eyes, we had the Bible in our hands and they had our land’. While this may be a graphic description of how the people felt cheated by their encounter with colonization, it also shows the collaborative efforts between missionaries and the colonial administration. Missionary “work and expansion closely followed or preceded the colonization of the continent and the establishment of European settlements and hegemony” (Mojola 2007:146). The two kinds of Europeans walked hand in hand thus dually achieving entry into the lives of the African people. Many church historians have described this event in terms of domination, exploitation, hegemony and the setting up of the stage for the impoverishing of the peoples of the continent. Although these vices in many parts of Africa have been shown to have occurred, such negative historical realities should not be

allowed to erode the significant role that the translated Bible in the hands of local people has had especially since the 19th century.

On the whole, the translated Bible has had many kinds of impact and this paper highlights a few areas that mark a definite interaction between this sacred text, the peoples of East Africa, their faith, theologies, languages and cultures. The encounter of the Bible with Africa is looked at as acts of empowering the target audience. Mojola (2007) indicates that as at December 2004, 158 African communities have been privileged to have the full Bible; another 292 have only the New Testament, while another 223 have only a book or portion translated into their languages. With the slightly over 2000 languages in the continent, the translation work is far from over in Africa but it appears to accelerate more in the 21st century than in the 19th and 20th centuries combined. According to recent statistics of the United Bible Societies, this one Bible translation agency has been able to see started over 129 translation projects globally since 2004—this accounts for over 50% of its translation projects—a significant number being in Africa. What this means is that in the 21st century, more and more communities have initiated or sought help to embark on translating the Scriptures into their languages.

2. Early interactions – Scripture, education and culture

Before the 19th century there were Bible translation works happening in Africa (Noss 2004; 2007). Early examples include the Septuagint in Alexandria, the various Coptic translations led by the Bohairic translation and the Ethiopian and Nubian translations (Mojola 2007). Evaluating their impact in the continent, Mojola argues that apart from the Septuagint, most of these early translations and the African Christianities they feed into/from had no impact at all on the rest of Africa and did not influence the modern Bible movement in the continent except perhaps in offering inspiration and example (ibid. 142-146). According to him, the Coptic, Nubian and Ethiopian Christianities failed to advance beyond their own confines but this did not mean that they did not impact their respective contexts. The survival of Coptic Christianity over the centuries in Egypt and especially in the face of the Arab conquest and Islamization can largely be attributed to the impact of the various Coptic translations among other factors (Rhodes 2007; Mojola 2007).

The main agents in the translation of the Scriptures in the 19th century and especially much of the first half of the 20th century were expatriate missionaries with the help of native speakers of the African languages. The missionaries were often individuals with some theological training and the commitment to learn African languages. Although they had no linguistic training as we know it today, the work they did laid a strong foundation not only in the translation of Scriptures but also in the preaching of God's word in the African continent (Bryson 1959; Wendland and Loba-Mkole 2004). Much of their translation work was done alongside literacy efforts to get as many converts as possible to gain basic literacy skills; the result of these early efforts

was a growing number of African peoples who could read the Scriptures in their own languages, give testimony to their belief in Christ, preach and teach. Indeed, at the turn of the 19th century, for example, the Church Missionary Society who had a staff of 1,300 missionaries also had 375 local clergy and 1,000 local agents to support their work. And as Mojola aptly puts it in his foreword to Wendland and Loba-Mkole (2004:ii):

The proliferation of African Instituted Churches owes much to these translations. These translations enabled African Christians who had previously depended on foreign missionary teachings and interpretations to have access, in the respective African languages, to Bible texts often cited by the missionaries. Such access has proved to be a means of empowerment for African converts to the Christian faith.

It is difficult to consider the impact of Scriptures in Africa without looking at what was going on in the school system. Most of the leading schools in countries like Kenya, Ghana and Uganda for example, were missionary driven. As preaching went on in the community, there was an increased clamour for school education by the African people; conversion to Christianity was not enough. African people needed education for more things than its association with conversion. Some wanted it in order to get white collar jobs; others were inspired by the liberation stories of the Bible and saw in these stories parallels for the liberation needs of their African peoples from colonial rule. The Bible stories of the Hebrew people fighting oppressions of various kinds and getting help from God became fuel to some of the philosophies and passions that fed the struggles for independence from colonial rule and from states of servitude (Mugambi 1992; Wendland and Loba-Mkole 2004).

School education in the early history of Christianity in Africa often condemned African cultures or failed to understand them at all. The African children who attended missionary schools were taught to forsake their traditions and to embrace the virtues of a Western civilization and lifestyle. This was the beginning of a furious onslaught which was to be experienced by these African cultures much into the late part of the 20th century. Often, the kind of Christianity that was on offer was sometimes more of Westernization and its cultural traits rather than conversion to Christian biblical values and teachings. What was taught did not take into serious consideration the African context—as Omenyo (2003), quoting the late professor Kofi Busia of Ghana (Busia 1963), says:

Those who have been responsible for the propagation of the Christian gospel in other lands and cultures have not shown sufficient awareness of the need for an encounter between the Christian religion and the cosmology of the peoples outside European culture and traditions. It is this which has made Christianity either alien or superficial or both.

Indeed, it was not just a matter of alienness and superficiality but also one of degrees of confusion; some of the cultures of the Bible affirmed African cultures and practices thus making it hard and confusing to know how to evaluate some of the missionary teachings. In some cases, there were conflicting interpretation, for example, with practices such as polygamy which the people understood and cherished (Vahakangas and Kyomo 2003; Bediako 2000, 2001). Mojola (2007:156), writing on the role of the new Scriptures in local languages, indicates that their appearance marked a watershed where the growing number of Bible readers started

grappling with questions of biblical interpretation from the vantage point of their own cultural traditions and practices vis-à-vis the prevailing missionary interpretations and practices, which did not always seem to conform to biblical norms as understood by some of the new believers. The ensuing clash of cultures, traditions, and interpretations is still ongoing. Some of the initial responses to this clash were the emergence of new churches with local leadership, attempts to develop new liturgical forms and practices, and debates on questions of relevance and of contextualizing or indigenizing the faith in conformity with local cultural forms and practices.

This is the Africa that birthed and bred the tall men of the continent like Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel Arap Moi, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, Festus Kivengere, and Okot p'Bitek. It was an Africa where such people read the Bible or grew up in schools where the Bible was taught to them by missionaries and where conflict of understanding and interpretation abounded. Their immediate contexts became the breeding grounds for their shifts in thinking about politics, governance, society, Christianity and even the economies of their nations, as seen in their writings and pronouncements or in what others have written about them (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986, 1993; Wendland and Loba-Mkole 2004; Vahakangas and Kyomo (2003).

3. Of theologies, preaching and teaching

The latter half of the 20th century saw significant shifts in Christian work in Africa. In Bible translation, especially as demonstrated in the work of the United Bible Societies, more and more local people became the translators of their Bibles (cf. Mojola 1999). In every team set up, the local people were centrally engaged either as translators and/or as reviewers. This approach to Bible translation meant that more African communities acquired knowledge and understanding of what Bible translation entailed. They have had greater ownership of the Scriptures produced among them and in most cases it has been possible to discern better theologizing and interpretation of the Bible in the community (Vahakangas and Kyomo 2003; Bediako 2000, 2001; Wendland and Loba-Mkole 2004; Mugambi 2003; Loba-Mkole 2005). Those who engaged in the translation became 'insiders' and many such Africans

became key players in community decisions beyond translation (Noss 2007; Mojola 1999). And to date, the exponential growth of Christianity in the continent is still taking place through the availability of the Biblical text in the languages of the people.

Another new thing that has characterized this period is the proliferation of Churches in Africa. It is not uncommon to get a small street in a small town today with up to ten different churches. In each of these churches the act of preaching goes on week after week. Preaching is an important part of church interaction and this is accompanied by teaching, singing and much dancing—all, more or less, feeding off the Scriptures. Indeed, it could be argued that the highest number of conversions to Christianity in Africa since the middle of the 20th century is due in part to much preaching and wide availability of Scriptures in languages that people can identify with (Vahakangas and Kyomo 2003). The translation of the Bible into African languages has empowered “African Christians to interpret the Bible texts in their own languages, for themselves, without missionary interventions—on the basis of mastery of their own native idioms and native thought forms ... taking recourse to the ‘worlds’ of his native language and culture” (Aloo 2004:ii in his Foreword to Wendland and Loba-Mkoke 2004). Now, there are more informed debates and conversations on what is ‘bad cultural practice’ and what is acceptable and helpful; there is more understanding that not all African cultural practices are necessarily ‘ungodly’ or retrogressive. The translation of the Greek New Testament and/or the Hebrew Bible into a community’s local language(s) paves the way for the dynamic coexistence of the community’s cultures and those introduced by an interpretation of the new texts.

According to the New Dictionary of Biblical Theology (2000:108), “Biblical theology and preaching have the same aim: to let the text speak”. This can only happen if a people have a text that speaks in their language. Biblical texts in Africa can now speak even in contexts where literacy rates are low. And while there is no doubt about this fact, there is a fundamental question that has been raised on how much these Biblical texts have been allowed to influence theology and hermeneutics. Specifically, there is a lot of concern that most African biblical scholars do not theologize enough from African Bibles but from Bibles read in foreign languages. It is feared that Bibles in foreign languages and their underlying cultural and linguistic ‘worlds’ still have undue influence on the hermeneutics and theologies taught in the African academy (Wendland and Loba-Mkoke 2004; Vahakangas and Kyomo 2003; Bediako 2000, 2001).

4. Translation and the development of African languages

Translation Studies and translation activities in general are not as widespread in Africa as one would expect, going by its history of Bible translations and/or its multilingual contexts. Given the vastness of languages in Africa, the instances where local languages contribute to one another or to dominant

languages and cultures through translation are proportionately very few indeed. By contrast, for example, there is a lot of vibrant translation work going on in Europe for the size of multilingualism found in this small geographical area.

Nevertheless, we note that the kinds of translations that one encounters in Africa include the following:

- a. A few classical works of literature in international languages usually translated into a dominant national or regional language like Kiswahili in East Africa
- b. Bible translations and related scriptural literature into many African languages
- c. Specialized texts (i.e., information bearing documents) which were originally articulated in other languages and translated by Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for the particular language communities they are working with.
- d. Few recent literary works in one African language translated to other African languages or into an international language; most of these may be seen in the Republic of South Africa, for example.

Of the kinds of translations indicated above, Bible translations dominate in virtually every country of Africa. The phenomenon of translating both the Old Testament (Hebrew Text) and the New Testament (Greek Text) has occurred in all the major languages of Africa and increasingly continues to impact even the smallest of languages through the efforts of such organizations like the Bible Societies, the Wycliffe Bible Translators and/or the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Often the translated text is the only substantive literature in that language.

Bible translation is an activity that attracts a whole community; it is a community affair where all people show interest for at least two reasons: either that Bible translation preserves 'our language' or it 'preserves our ways of life!' Some people may add a third dimension: they interest themselves in Bible translation because they want to 'hear God speak to them in their language' (Mojola 1999). All these reasons explain why the 'launching' of such literature into the market attracts a lot of publicity, interest and participation; 'everybody' comes to witness a Bible launch. Such events are taken as moments of celebration because these occasions often mark the first time that a people's language is in print.

While one acknowledges the three reasons given above as to why communities embrace translations of Scriptures into their languages, it must be emphasized that translation within a polity brings divergence, not convergence, and it is debatable whether this is a good thing or not. This is always a major question. Coulmas (1991:1-2), for example, argued about the European situation that tariff boundaries have been successfully abolished, but language

still does much more to separate than to unite the peoples of Europe. Both 'federalists', who favour a strong supranational Community and 'inter-governmentalists', who resent the idea of transferring parts of national sovereignty to the Community, have recognized the divisive potential of the European languages ever since the inception of the idea of a European Community that would peacefully unite the peoples of Western Europe, which in the past so often stood opposed in conflict. But Europe's many highly cultivated languages have also been celebrated as a unique achievement and the Community's greatest asset.

Africanists who encourage the writing of African languages and the translation of Scriptures into these languages clearly see them as assets because diversity is a potential source of great creativity.

Bible translation and its related activities provide the most unhindered opportunities in the development of the continent's languages. In some cases it is the only legitimate language development activity; it least threatens the socio-political status quo because 'important discourse' is still acted out only by the few who are proficient in foreign languages. For a long time in Africa, the masses who unfortunately were unable to arise to the international languages, were cut off from any meaningful engagement with important national decisions and discussions. The rightful place of the masses has been to follow the leaders and believe what they are told. This unfortunate situation is beginning to change slightly with the introduction of vernacular radio FM stations. Just like the Bible, these stations are well known to educate the masses on many subjects and topics.

Furthermore, a translated text like the Bible allows its readers to interact with the way other communities lived their lives, narrated their stories, did their poetry, and even fought their wars! These translations are the basis of comparison and sources of various kinds of inspiration. They are a window into another people's technology, geography, history, environment, lands and cultures. Moreover, in the absence of dictionaries (or in addition to them), Bibles continue to be the archives for Africa's languages, a depository of the words of a language. They represent efforts to systematize a language's orthography and act as a rich pool of the expressions and idioms of that language. They operate as strong foundations for the development of these languages and their literatures. When a new Bible translation effort is going on or a revision of an old Bible is happening, whether we are dealing with the writing of a prayer book or the making of dictionaries or concordances, the language of a people is being developed and maintained. Through translation work and these related efforts, many people read – or at least listen to - texts they understand.

5. Literacy, readership and Bible translation

The majority of African people learn the basics of literacy in school but drop out too soon to have acquired meaningful literacy skills in the language of

instructions—in most contexts the language of the relevant colonial power. This is Africa's reality; school dropouts form the bulk of the population: over 50% of those who enrol in education do not finish even the first circle (Serk and Muthwii 2004; Schroeder 2001). Due to this fact, there are organizations in Africa which have asked themselves how these people access information; what do they read after dropping out of school? The only meaningful response to such enquiries is that the people's local languages hold the key to the question of access to information and development. This is why Aroga Bessong's (2010:9) argument is very apt when he says that "using languages like English, French and other foreign languages that are inaccessible to many result in exclusion, goes against democracy, and cannot lead to sustainable development for the majority of Africans".

The story of literacy in Africa, therefore, must by definition include a careful look at the patterns of production and sales of materials written in African languages; and the Bible is the leading such text in virtually all communities. Since the time of great missionary activity in Africa, Bibles have been the alternative reading material mainly for people who do not have literacy in the dominant foreign languages or those prefer to read in their native languages. Readership of bibles is the most vibrant non English-based literacies in the continent (Banda 2004; Mojola 1999). This is why various Bible agencies not only produce Bibles in African languages but also concern themselves with producing other helps like dictionaries, HIV/AIDS teaching materials, and trauma healing booklets. They also produce transitional literacy materials like the famous New Reader Portions which are meant for people who need help beyond the semi-literacy skills acquired in school. Through such efforts, individuals are enabled not only to improve their literacy proficiency but to also access as much information as is possible in the language(s) of choice.

A classic example of readership in an African language is that seen in the use of regional languages like Hausa and Kiswahili. Kiswahili is read throughout much of East and Central Africa in such countries as Kenya, Tanzania and parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is used by most people as a second language and is the national language in Kenya and Tanzania. Recently, it was elevated to become the country's first official language in Kenya in addition to its earlier role as the national language. Kiswahili bibles are used widely for preaching, teaching and as reference material in the development of Scriptures in other African languages. Its grammar, lexicon and discourse continue to impact the neighbouring African languages through borrowings and adaptation of various sorts.

Gikuyu is the next most read African language in Kenya. Its community of speakers have had the Scriptures written in their language since 1903 (Mojola 1999) with 1965 seeing the production of a translation that "has enjoyed overwhelming popularity in all Gikuyu speaking areas, as well as areas where Gikuyu is a second or related language..." (ibid. 20). Because

there is a market for all sorts of books in Gikuyu, there are numerous other kinds of literature in this language and a new Gikuyu Bible was launched into the market recently while plans are underway to produce a Study Bible for its speakers.

The story of literacy, readership and literature in Kiswahili and/or Gikuyu can be replicated in many nations in Africa with regard to their respective major languages. If sales of a book are indicators of readership, it is rather surprising that in spite of such large readership in African languages, African governments have not shown any awareness of these other literacies as to use them to advance development and communicate ideas or technologies. Indeed, until the late nineties in Kenya, for example, the government appeared to fight any attempts to give information in any other language other than the official European language. In this country, no mediation has existed between the official language, the national language and the other literacies that are clearly in place in the country. However, in a few African nations, we are beginning to see early signs of mediation as discussions and debates on multilingual education take root—some of these are led by the African Union, NGOs and individual scholars convinced of the merits of African languages for development. As we await for such new perspectives to get more converts, Bible agencies will continue to produce literature in African languages as if to get ready for a future when African governments will be willing to mediate between its various languages to assist those who do not use the ex-colonial language. May that day come sooner than later!

6. Orality

Using orality to tell Bible stories to the oral learners in Africa has been a major approach to the success in evangelism, teaching and preaching and this can be traced throughout the African people's encounters with Christianity in the 19th and 20th centuries (Bryson 1959; Loba-Mkole and Wendland 2004, 2005; Maluleke, 2004).

Attitudes toward orality have had their fair share of shaking with the introduction of written materials. People in all lands have been taught that the written is more powerful and more authoritative than the spoken. For several centuries in Africa, there seemed to be a reverse of values where the authority of the older people in society and what they said was challenged by what was written down; if something was written down it was supposed to be taken more seriously. The Scriptures translated into African languages was supposed to carry this aura of authority too. However, due to low literacy levels, the story in the Scriptures has continued to be heard and passed on mainly through orality. The successful acquisition of literacy in Africa by all the people has sadly evaded the efforts of missionaries, governments and non-governmental organizations to such an extent that many have now come to accept the alternative persuasion that other 'ways of knowing' should be entertained. Orality and storytelling continue to be the principal means of communicating

community history and values. Orality has found its place again in the maintenance and dissemination of knowledge, exercising its potency when used alongside the heart languages of the people.

Today, orality is being used again with amazing results to reach communities as many people as possible through the Faith Comes by Hearing programme in communities working with the Bible Societies and in unreached communities that would otherwise be resistant to the gospel (ION/LCWE 2010). Steve Sims tells of one such encounter in Ethiopia where he has used orality recently to engage an unreached Muslim community and in the process, birthing a church there. He recounts an incident when the father of one of his companions wanted to be told a story from God's holy book (ION/LCWE 2010:59-60).

By this time, about seventy people had gathered under the tree, we told the story of the demon-possessed man. When we finished, everyone applauded and I was amazed that no one was offended. In fact, everyone like the story from God's word ... during our first weekend of our visit ... we entered a traditional mud building filled with people of all ages, and sat at the back. About ten people got up and told stories from the Word of God; others shared personal stories of how they had come to faith in Jesus. Many told us that in the past, when Christians had come to their village carrying their Bibles and talking about Jesus, they would pick up stones and stone them. But [now] ... they were interested and wanted to hear more.

Using the heart language or the mother tongue of the people, "together with an oral approach to learning (e.g. storytelling, drama, etc.), transforms hearts and communities around the world. And in this approach we are simply following the example of Jesus who, on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection, spoke to His disciples from the Scriptures in such a way that their hearts burned within them" (ION/LCWE 2010:5).

7. Politics, the economy and ethnic conflicts

There are many socio-economic ills and ethnic conflicts in many spots in Africa. The 2004 Rwanda genocide and the Kenyan 2007/8 post election violence would seem to give the impression that the impact of Scriptures on socio-political and ethnic tensions does not count in Africa. Kenya and Rwanda are two nations which prior to their famous recent conflicts were generally described as Christian nations. However, what individuals did with fellow citizens (through murders, destruction of property and psychological trauma) have begged many questions: do the Scriptures have any impact in the lives of people in these contexts; do they have any role in preventing the occurrence of conflict or should it only be seen in terms of their role in helping people to cope and endure the damages from ethnic and/or political conflict?

A close observation on how Africa governs itself today, how it carries out development, how it treats his neighbour who comes from a different language

group, how it cares for the poor who abound everywhere, makes it clear that something is amiss in Africa's understanding of how one is to be Christian in these issues. Many Christians engage themselves meaningfully with worship and singing but often do not seem to know how to translate what they know or hear to be God's word into real life issues. And this link seems lost to many Christian people who undoubtedly value the Bible as authority on how spiritual life should happen, be organized, and experienced. They are not sure if socio-political concerns, for example, are also Gospel concerns and this is a confusion found in Christians irrespective of literacy levels. Politicians take advantage of this ignorance and admonish Christians to mind spiritual issues and leave politics to politicians (compare the second president of Kenya, Daniel Arap Moi, 1998-2002). The lack of demonstration or the lack of clarity on how Christianity relates to the rest of life is thus manifest in such things as economic, political and social injustice and inequalities. Kenya and Rwanda, like a few other nations in the continent, are already caught up by the ideological identification of language, nation and state whereby at the sub-national level their languages (and dialects) are associated with loyalties and emotions with an explosive potential.

A cry often heard in Kenya and other African nations is: 'How come we are many Christians but corruption is rampant? How can we as Christians have greater socio-political impact? How is it that we are always a begging people?' These are hard questions that contemporary Africa must address one way or another. It is no longer meaningful to vilify the missionary for what was received from them when Christianity and the empire arrived.

Many Christians in the continent are organizing and mobilizing for better Christian responses to the many ills that the continent is facing. Some of the answers proffered for resolving the maladies are clearly based on the word of God and such teachings continue to transform the minds of many as they aim high and work hard to address the issues. In some cases, however, the teachings verge on misleading the people especially when all the people hear is about God providing money, cars, houses, and even spouses in response to their faith. This kind of teaching has been termed the prosperity gospel and it is sweeping across the continent very rapidly. Nevertheless, African Christians continue to find need to sort out the pitfalls in these teachings as they seek to understand what the Bible says concerning salvation, wealth, health, divine healing, death, the occult and such topics which are of great interest in the continent. The continent must stem the influence of unethical preachers who turn God's provision into "a sweepstake" business distorting a good thing. In addition, countries like Kenya and Rwanda with their Christian majority populations, urgently need to allow Christian biblical values to prevail over greed and ethnic chauvinism.

8. The challenge of the unfinished task

The ultimate impact of the Scriptures in Africa will continue to happen as believers engage with what the Word of God says to their various circumstances and situations. However, not all of Africa have the Scriptures to benefit them in this or any way. They are still in ‘darkness’ and agencies like the Bible Societies and their partners have to strategize to help all communities access the Word of God in the languages most suitable to them. In most countries in Africa the Bible translation needs of each community have been or are being assessed. The example of Ethiopia will suffice to illustrate how a strategic approach to providing Scriptures will ultimately ensure that all communities in the nation are in a position to experience the impact of the Scriptures.

Ethiopia is a multilingual country which is estimated to have more than 80 languages and dialects. This diversity is a challenge, yet a blessed reality. In this multilingual context, the Bible Society of Ethiopia (BSE) has needed to set up a strategic plan to enable them see the impact of scriptures in every community. Already the availability of the complete Bible in languages like Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya and Wolayita and New Testaments in over 20 other languages indicates to the BSE that over 88% of its population is interacting with Scriptures for impact. This is great but the size of the unfinished task is very clear. To this end, the BSE is working hard towards seeing either the Bible or the New Testament in 26 languages by 2013. This will comprise over 93% of their total population. Even with this large population accessing scriptures by 2013, the BSE is still aware that another 50 or so languages/dialects will not have the complete New Testament by then. Their plans for translation work, therefore, between 2014-2020 will see the Holy Scriptures reach 95% of Ethiopians in their mother tongues. To the remaining 5% of the population, the BSE for now sees them having to access the scriptures through one or the other languages of Ethiopia spoken as a second language by these communities. This, however, does not mean that the BSE will leave out this section of the Ethiopian population without Scriptures translated in their mother tongues. Instead, every effort will be made to ensure all Ethiopians get scripture in their languages as this is the only way to ensure that there is sure impact of Scriptures as individuals and communities interact with the Bible in languages understood best.

9. Conclusion

The act and impact of Bible translation has brought about spiritual and social change in many African communities. In the 21st century the growth of the church is exponentially expanding and this can be attributed to the presence of Scriptures in languages the people understand best and to greater engagement with the Scriptures through teaching, preaching and theological reflection. According to Zogbo (2007:351) “Africa is, in fact, already becoming a center for Christianity and for theological thought”. Also Bediako argues that African

Christianity today is inconceivable apart from the existence of the Bible in African indigenous languages.

The quest by African Christians today to understand better the message of the Bible with regard to economic and political life is in addition to what they already understand and embrace about the salvation of their souls, their journey through earth to heaven and the defeat of forces of darkness expressed in many ways including the occult. An intellectualized knowledge of the Scriptures is definitely stale to many Africans as they seek to have what God has offered them in Christ and demonstrable answers to the challenges they face.

References

- Alexander, D. T. et al., eds. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Leicester: IVP, 2000.
- Banda, F. "A survey of literacy practices in black and coloured communities in South Africa: Towards a pedagogy of multiliteracies". Pages 10-33 in *New Language Bearings in Africa: A Fresh Quest*. Edited by M.J. Muthwii and A.N. Kioko, eds. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004.
- Bediako, K. "A Half Century of African Christian Thought: Pointers to Theology and Theological Education for the Next Half Century". *JACT* 3 (2000): 5-11.
- Bediako, K. "Scripture as the Hermeneutic of Culture and Tradition". *JACT* 4 (2001): 2-11.
- Bessong, D.P.A., ed. *Sociolinguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation in Africa*. Yaoundé: Editions CLE, 2010.
- Bryson, S. M. *Light in Darkness. The Story of the Nandi Bible*. London: Parry Jackman Scripture Illustrations Limited, 1959.
- K.A. Busia, "Has the Christian Faith Been Adequately Represented?" *International Review of Mission* 50 (1963): 86-89.
- Coulmas, F., ed. "European Integration and the Idea of the National Language". Pages 1-43 in *A Language Policy for the European Community*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991.
- ION/LCWE. *Orality Breakouts: Using Heart Language to Transform Hearts*. Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2010.
- Loba-Mkole, J-C. *Triple Heritage. Gospels in Intercultural Mediations*. Pretoria: Sapientia Publishers, 2005.
- Loba-Mkole, J-C. and E.R. Wendland, eds. *Interacting with Scriptures in Africa*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004.
- Maluleke, T.S. "African Christianity, the Bible and Theology". Pages 161-176 in *Bible Translation and African Audiences*. Edited by G.L.O.R. Yorke and P.M. Renju. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004.
- Mojola, A.O. *God Speaks in Our Own Languages*. Nairobi: Bible Society of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, 1999.
- Mojola, A.O. "Bible Translation in Africa". Pages 141-162 in *A History of Bible Translation*. Edited by Philip C. Noss. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007.
- Mugambi, J.N.K. *Critiques of Christianity in African Literature with Particular Reference to the East African Context*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992.

- Mugambi, J.N.K. *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003.
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1986.
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1993.
- Noss, P.C. "Traditions of Scripture Translation: A Pan-African Overview". Pages 7-24 in *Bible Translation and African Audiences*. Edited by G.L.O.R. Yorke and P.M. Renju. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004.
- Noss, P.C., ed. *A History of Bible Translation*. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007.
- Omenyo, C.N. "Charismatization of the Mainline Churches in Ghana". Pages 5-26 in *Charismatic Renewal in Africa: A Challenge to African Christianity*. Edited by M. Vahakangas and A. A. Kyomo. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003.
- Rhodes, E.. "Secondary Versions: Arabic to Old Slavonic". Pages 91-104 in *A History of Bible Translation*. Edited by Philip C. Noss. *A History of Bible Translation*. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007.
- Schroeder, L. "Mother-Tongue Education in Schools in Tharaka Language Group of Kenya". *Notes on Literacy* 27 (2001): 8-22.
- Sterk, J.P. and M.J. Muthwii. "The Publishing of Scriptures in Africa: Sociolinguistic Challenges". Pages 150-170 in *Biblical Texts and African Audiences*. Edited by E.R. Wendland and J.C. Loba-Mkole. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004.
- Vahakangas, M. and A.A. Kyomo, eds. *Charismatic Renewal in Africa: A Challenge to African Christianity*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003.
- Wendland, E. R. and J.C. Loba-Mkole, eds. *Biblical Texts and African Audiences*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004.
- Zogbo, L. "Introduction: The Field Today". Pages 337-350 in *A History of Bible Translation*. Edited by Philip C. Noss. Rome: Edizioni Di Storia E Letteratura, 2007.