

Strategies for Church Growth in the Cameroon Baptist Convention

by

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DECLARATION

I fervently declare that this thesis has been organized and written by me and that prior to this, it has not been submitted to any institution for the award of a degree. To the best of my ability, all citations and references in the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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04-10-2021

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my wife, Felicia, who inspired me, and gave me the necessary support and encouragement during the time of research and writing of this work. I am particularly indebted to her for the enormous contribution she has made to get me to the point of completing this work.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BBTP: Bakossi Bible Translation Project

CBC: Cameroon Baptist Convention

CABTAL: Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy

CGM: Church Growth Movement

LIM: Loyola Institute for Ministry

ABSTRACT

This research concentrates on the CBC churches among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon. These churches do not increase in church membership despite the fact that the Baptists in general and the CBC churches in particular have existed among the Bakossi people of the South West Region for as long as 50 years or more. Thus, this thesis seeks to develop effective strategies that will promote church growth in CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people. The researcher did an empirical study by distributing questionnaires to twelve Baptist churches and seven to other denominations all from which he received responses. The data collected was analyzed and interpreted. The outcome of the data reveals that not only have Baptist churches failed to grow numerically throughout the over fifty years of their existence in the land, but also that they did not have any intentional plans and strategies to do so. Proof of this is the fact that over ninety-nine percent of the members that make up this churches are non-indigenes who originate from other parts of the country. Therefore, through various resources, the researcher carried out a historical, theological and biblical framework that formed the basis to develop strategies that will enhance effective church growth in CBC churches among the people. The researcher contends that the topic itself, proposed strategies, recommendations and action plans must be embraced and implemented by individual Baptist churches, probably facilitated by the Cameroon Baptist Convention, if any meaningful growth has to take place in CBC churches among the Bakossi people.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Background

The research topic stems from an observation made during a period of twelve years while participating in the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy (BBTP) project which involved work in 152 village communities in Bakossiland in Cameroon. The observation is that the ministerial effect of the Cameroon Baptist Convention has considerably declined among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon in comparison to other denominations like the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, the Roman Catholic Church, and to some extent the Apostolic Church and Full Gospel Mission. Of twenty-four churches, including “prayer cells” that existed in 1995, the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) comprised only of nine churches in 2012. That raised the following question: Why has the CBC among the Bakossi people of the South West Region failed to grow in church membership?

Morris 2016:10) quotes McGavran (1970:198) who states that church growth, “delves into how persons and people become genuinely Christian and revolutionize and bless the cultures and populations in the midst of where God placed them.” To Morris, the mission of the church is directly connected to its growth.

2. Preliminary Literature Review

The literature review explores three key aspects of the study, namely, the definition of church growth from a theological and biblical perspective, its impetus, and an examination of various strategies to enhance church growth through membership. These three aspects are characteristically related.

Rick Warren (1995:17, 51) says, “God wants his church to grow” and that a genuinely healthy church will definitely grow in numbers. He goes further to distinguish between two kinds of growth: quality and quantity growth. He defines the former as the kind that produces disciples that are being genuinely transformed into the likeness of Christ, who use their talents for service and ministry, and who share their faith regularly with others. The latter, he says, refers to the number of disciples a church is producing, who are being brought to Christ, developed for maturity and mobilized for ministry and missions.

David Hesselgrave (1984:118) similarly identifies two kinds of growth patterns: quantitative as well as qualitative growth, both of which are biblical (Acts 9:31; 16:5; 1 Thess.1:4-10). The former, he says, has to do with the number of believers added to the churches and the number of congregations being established. The latter has to do with the level of understanding, Christian life, commitment, increased faith and dedication demonstrated by church members. According to him, in most cases quantitative growth is seen as evidence of qualitative growth.

Will McRaney (2003:7) states that “the church exists for the pleasure of God and for His glory,” and that “the church does not exist for the pleasure and comfort of its members and attenders.” According to him, the gospel is not to be presented just to followers of Christ, but through them to each God-created person in the world and in the various sub-cultures and tribes in which they live.

According to Samuel Olaleye (2014:45), every church that exists for God should grow. Regarding church growth, Philemon Nfor and Samuel Jab (2013:67), two senior ministers of the CBC, remark that the church in Africa as a whole and Cameroon in particular has grown late in time, and that such growth can only be sustainable with good leadership and pastoral care. They claim that there is certainly a growing interest in Christianity and more people are giving their lives to Christ as well as more churches being conscious of the need for church planting, as a strategy for church growth. They add that church planting is a process and not a destination. According to them, every church has potential for growth and every church must always make room for greater growth. Emmanuel Ekwo (2014:27), another minister of the CBC, argues that if Bible-

based leadership is humbly and zealously pursued, it will enhance spiritual as well as numerical growth in the church and this will in turn produce the desired results that God intended for His church. He further states that the purpose of the church is three-fold: to minister to God through worship and praise, to minister to believers through edification and fellowship, and to minister to the world through evangelism, missions and mercy to the needy.

Turaki (2006:89) asserts that “the church of Jesus Christ is the new community of believers founded upon the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross.” Thus, the work of the church is to transform its members into redeemed and recreated personalities in Christ Jesus. According to him, such transformation becomes the purpose of the church in this world and the church is called upon to live under Christ’s commission in both her mission and message. Consequently, the church, within the context and cultures where it exists, must live under the expressions of Christ’s mission and message.

Peter Nyumnloh (2013:69) declares that “Baptists are Baptists” when they are biblically sound in their faith and practices, when they interpret the gospel accurately and are meeting the needs of people in their cultural contexts. In support of Nyumnloh’s idea, Philemon Nfor (2016:43) insists that the integration of the gospel in social life for holistic well-being of the individual was and is of immense importance to the ministry of the CBC. He reiterates Ekwo’s (2014:31) thought regarding ministry to the world through evangelism, missions and mercy to the needy, and he does this by affirming that the objectives of the CBC are to carry out evangelism, missions, church planting, discipleship, and to mobilize support and promote the development of the church where the church exists. Among some practical implications guiding the Baptist history and the history of the CBC, he emphasizes that true Christianity has a positive impact on the socio-political lives of the community in which the church exists.

Peter Wagner (1990:11) says, “The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches.” He attempts to validate church planting as an evangelism strategy and emphasizes that the goal of church planting is to establish indigenous churches as a biblical function. Through these churches, he maintains, God

desires that all people will have the opportunity to worship and serve him in ways that reflects their unique cultural and social environment. To him, this is the surest and most appropriate means to attain church growth. Jervis Payne (2007:1-7) supports this argument by maintaining that there are fundamental principles to evangelism:

Proclaiming the true gospel (1 Cor. 1:23), intentional sharing of the gospel, being Spirit-led and understanding the importance of culture (Acts 17:12, 28-29), being flexible to context (Acts 16) beginning with the people where they are in their spiritual journey (John 4:10), and being sensitive to the fears, hurts and concerns of others while speaking the truth in love (John 4:17-18).

Gi Choi (2005:35) believes that “The mission of the church is worship, praising God, preaching, education, theology, pastoral care, and fellowship.” He further adds that the church, the body of Christ, should grow in maturity (1 Cor.13:11; 14:20; 1 Pet.2:2). Like Nyumnloh (2013:49), he also believes that the church exists not for itself but for the world. Nelson Searcy (2010:11-24) states that when churches, like humans, become slack in taking care of their systems, they fail to live up to their God-given potential. He goes further to propose eight systems that he says every church should set up in order to function correctly, growing in healthy spirituality and thrive. These systems are the “weekend system,” the “evangelism system,” the “assimilation system,” the “small group system,” the “ministry system,” the “stewardship system,” the “leadership system,” and the “strategic system.”

Johnson Todd and Albert Hickman (2012:20) observe that local people can quickly tell whether or not a missionary has a legitimate role in their society. They assert that an outsider does not acquire credibility simply by receiving a visa to live and work among the people. According to them, mission strategy needs to be compared to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. They ask, “How can those who go to present the gospel go not merely in words and religious activities but in the totality of their lives in a way that respects and transforms the society in which they live?” To this question, McGavran (1988:19, 20) provides the following answer: “The science of world evangelism, which is

what missiology is, says clearly: If you are to be understood, you must speak the language of your listener, you must know his culture and speak from within it, you must be all things to all men in order to win some.” Tim Keller (2012:6) states that,

New church planting is the only way that we can be sure we are going to increase the number of believers and one of the best ways to renew the whole body of Christ. The evidence for this statement is strong—biblically, sociologically, and historically. In the end, a lack of kingdom-mindedness may simply blind us to all this evidence. We must beware of that.

Wayne Gordon (2011:6) suggests strategies that may lead to church growth. Among others, he mentions reinforcing the notion of church planting and Christian community development, evangelism, discipleship and solving problems with lasting solutions in the church. He also claims that Christian community development has a holistic approach to ministry. He advocates that to build a healthy Christian community, it is necessary to go to the people, live among them, learn from them, love them, start with what they know, and build on what they have. It will not only make the church grow to maturity, it will also give the people a real sense of belonging.

Olaleye (2014:49) says, “A living church can only express herself in growth.” To him the growth of the true church must be included among the factors that should characterize the church. This does not only imply an increase in numbers, but also depends on many factors of the community in which the church serves. Alan Karr (2010:64) observes that it is imperative for churches to be passionate about church planting strategies if they ever have to attain growth. This, he says, is because most churches have deviated from the main focus of winning souls for Christ and are instead self-seeking. He states that the basis of church planting and subsequently church growth is Christ’s command for us to take the gospel to all peoples of the world, teaching them to obey His commands (Matt 9:35; 28:19-20). This is evangelism, which David Garrison (2006:179) qualifies as “true evangelism.” According to him, “true evangelism goes beyond proclamation to communication. Communication means someone has to hear and understand what has

been proclaimed and effective communication requires understanding the language and worldview of the people you are trying to reach.”

Micheal Frost and Alan Hirsch (2003:11) called God’s initiative in reaching out to helpless humans the “incarnational approach.” Incarnational mission, accordingly, means that the gospel is accepted as a redeeming element for culture and necessitates some cultural modifications that provide the people with meaning and history. According to the authors, “God came in not half way but the whole way to where we are at, doing his work from inside the human condition, not from outside.” They warn that if the gospel is not presented such that it becomes part of a group of people, the church faces the temptation of succumbing to cultural domination. In their opinion, presenting the gospel in a context in a way that makes it relevant implies a real and abiding presence among a group of people as an insider and not an outsider. It means that people will experience Jesus in the context of their worldview and lives.

Jenssen (2015:4) observes that God wants growth and that growth is biblical. He further emphasizes the fact that Scripture clearly demonstrates that it is God's intention that the kingdom should grow and not remain static. He reinforces his claim by quoting biblical passages that illustrate church growth (Matt. 13:31; Mark 4:30; Luke 13:18). He believes that there are eight signs of quality that characterize healthy and growing churches.

The work of the church should help to ensure that these quality characteristics come to fruition. The eight characteristics are: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministries, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism and loving relationships.

Paul Young (2013:26) says, “If we think that only a few can be saved, we will not plan for many, we will not pray for many, and we will not work for many to be saved. The thought that only a very few can be saved is a great hindrance to church growth.”

Alowode Oluwafemi and Joy Eno (2018:18) concur with Young:

When missionaries go to a different culture to evangelise and make disciples, the difference in people's understanding, the communication barrier arising from different languages, customs, environment, and differences in what people value would suggest that it will be foolhardiness to present the gospel to them in the way it is done in the missionary's home culture.

Gene Genz and Joe Wall (2000:5) state that "The Church belongs to Christ; He is the Builder of the church; He is the one who must be given the credit for all true church growth." To them the mission of reaching out to people of other communities in order to lead them to Christ is the heartbeat of God. Wilson Todd, Dave Ferguson and Alan Hirsch (2015) provide a summary of what church growth is: "Healthy growth, both individually and in church, started with Jesus Christ, ends with Jesus Christ, and is all about Jesus Christ...Jesus is always and should always be at the core of our motivation and focus."

In summary, it can be seen from the preliminary literature review that there are two kinds of growth that can be identified with the church, namely, quantitative as well as qualitative growth, both of which are biblical (Acts 2:44-47). However, caution should be exercised with church growth through membership. As Jenssen (2015:4) observes, "not only does growth in numbers not always imply healthy church growth, it can also prevent us from seeing the imperfection of the church."

3. Problem Statement and Purpose

CBC churches among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon do not increase in church membership despite the fact that the Baptists in general and the CBC churches in particular have existed among the Bakossi people of the South West Region for as long as 50 years or more. The church's growth in the number of Christians and the multiplication of churches have been very minimal compared to other denominations like the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, the Roman Catholic Church, the Apostolic Church, and the Apostolic Faith Church. Thus, the purpose of the

proposed study is to establish strategies that will enhance church growth in CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people.

4. Key Question and Objectives

In order to solve the main problem, the proposed study will take the following main research question as its guidepost: Which biblical strategies can be employed to enhance genuine church growth in the CBC among the Bakossi people? In order to answer the question, the following objectives have been identified:

1. To describe the current state of affairs pertaining to church growth in the CBC.
2. To evaluate how the current situation in the CBC among the Bakossi people has affected the growth of the church and its effects on the community.
3. To establish theological and biblical principles of healthy church growth.
4. To propose effective church growth strategies that can be employed by the CBC to enhance spiritual growth among the Bakossi people.

5. Hypothesis

The focus on one main hypothesis, namely, that genuine growth in CBC churches among the Bakossi people depends on effective church growth strategies. The basis for the hypothesis is that church growth is intimately connected to the mission of the church, which is two-fold: exalting the Lord Jesus Christ and changing the spiritual condition of unbelievers (Olaleye 2014:50). From the main hypothesis, the study will postulate two things. Firstly, and based on observations, that there is a negligible growth in membership in CBC churches among the Bakossi people. Secondly, that there is very little indigenous representation in the CBC churches and very little effort is made to increase the church membership through the preaching and teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. These two propositions reveal that most of the churches exist merely for the pleasure of their non-indigenous members.

6. Delimitations

Considering the scope and given the nature, time, and resources available to accomplish the proposed study, it will be restricted to the CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people of Cameroon. While an extensive use of resources will be made, interaction with CBC churches and other churches amongst the Bakossi people will also form part of the research. CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people of the Littoral Region of Cameroon will be excluded from the research.

7. Definitions of Key Concepts

This section stipulates concepts of church growth and other ideas whose meaning is not obvious to the reader.

1. *Bakossi*, also referred to as “Bakossiland,” will be used to refer to the English form of the name given to the people, the land, and the language of the Bakossi people.
2. *Strategy* means intentional and well set out plans or long term duly executed plans of action based on observation and experience.
3. *Church Planting Movement (CPM)* is defined as a process whereby existing churches within a given group of people or population with an indigenous nature is multiplied.
4. *Evangelism* refers to the process of proclaiming, preaching, sharing, or bringing the Good News of salvation to a person. It is also referred to as witnessing. It is the verbal presentation of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the fruits thereof to God.
5. *Indigenous* means “generated from within” as opposed to “started by outsiders”.

8. Presuppositions

The proposed study presupposes that genuine church growth must be based on sound theological and biblical principles. The study will, therefore, uphold the Bible as the authoritative inspired word of God, fully sufficient for our faith and practice.

9. The Value of the Study

From observations and a study of the literature it has become apparent that no other person has conducted a similar study in the past among the Bakossi people. The proposed study will therefore be beneficial to CBC churches in the South West Region of Cameroon, in at least three ways. Firstly, by means of a descriptive survey it will provide accurate data relating to the present state of affairs pertaining to church growth in membership and in this way contribute to the remedy of similar situations in other places in Cameroon. Secondly, the analysis of the biblical and scholarly materials will underscore the significance and value of focusing on genuine church growth. Finally, it will propose practical strategies for church growth in CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people in the South West Region of Cameroon, an academic exercise that has been largely neglected so far.

10. Research Design, Approach and Methods

Paul Kim (2009:24) states that “Ministry has an indispensable relationship with research. Therefore, it is absolutely important for church leaders to review their own ministries in view of the Bible and to re-examine their own practices, such as programs, strategies, or conditions related to ministry.” To him, for any mission to be successful, including the mission of the church, some plans and strategies must be put in place.

The proposed study falls in the field of practical theology and the most suitable model to accomplish its goals is considered to be the Loyola Institute of Ministry (LIM) theological research model developed by Michael Cowan (2000). The LIM model enhances “the goals of practical theology research which are to examine the world to understand the real-life problem, examine the world to see what God’s ideal is, and then develop an action plan to transform what is into what should be” (Smith 2008:205).

The model is factored into four logical steps. First, the introduction, and the aim is to identify a real-life problem; second, to interpret the present situation, “the world as it is;” third, the preferred scenario, namely, to “interpret the world as it should be;” and finally, practical strategies that focuses on the responsibilities of Christians. Through the above

four logical steps, the proposed study hopes to achieve its goals based on the following methodology.

10.1 Approach and methodology

The approach consists of the four steps as indicated in the foregoing paragraph. The aim in the first step is to identify and describe the problem by way of observation. This comprises the second chapter of the study in order to answer the first subsidiary research question: How can the current state of affairs pertaining to church growth in the CBC be described? The problem, as indicated, is that Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) churches among the Bakossi people do not increase in church membership. The hypothesis of the observed problem is that effective church growth strategies are non-existent or existing ones ineffective. Thus, this step presents a literary study of the situation observed over a period of ten years from 2002 to 2012 and thereby indicating that CBC churches among Bakossi people are neither growing in membership nor are the number of churches multiplied.

The aim in the second step (chapter 3) is to interpret the situation as it is and this is done by evaluating the current situation in the CBC churches, its bearing on ministry as well as its effects on the community. This step answers the second subsidiary question: How can the ministry's effect on the community be evaluated? Chapter 3 begins with a systematic investigation of the problem (Smith 2008:204). It focuses on the historical factors that led to the present circumstances and will include the history of the founding of the Baptists and CBC among the Bakossi people and its growth in membership over the years. The descriptive approach will use empirical and literary methods and will include a qualitative (questionnaire) and quantitative (interview) component. A series of questions will be addressed to respondents who are members of five CBC churches and will include twenty-five male and female Christians, the pastors of each of the churches, ten elderly Christians from different communities, and five pastors of different denominations. In addition to the data gathered by way of the questionnaires, twenty-five additional people from the communities will be contacted and interviewed. This information will then be analysed and interpreted in order to determine the current state

of church growth in CBC churches and to evaluate its effect on the growth of the church and its ministerial effect on the Bakossi people.

The aim in the third step (chapter 4) is to focus on the preferred scenario, namely, to interpret the problem situation as it should be. It is during this step that a historical and critical examination of the church's tradition based on biblical and theological foundations has been conducted in order to provide a solution to the problem. Thus, chapter 4 comprises of an exhaustive coverage of sources related to theological and biblical foundations of church growth in order to answer the third subsidiary research question: Which theological and biblical principles will be established to enable CBC churches to multiply? This is done by identifying relevant biblical texts in order to establish a biblical approach to the problem. The LIM model has been developed by using the CBC denominational position, church traditions, and other scholarly sources that are informed by biblical and theological foundations to justify what should be. An analysis of scriptural teachings has led to insights about how the preferred situation could be enhanced.

Finally, the fourth step (chapter 5) focuses on practical strategies that involve the interpretation of the obligations of believers to be genuinely transformed to the likeness of Christ, the use of their talents for service and ministry, and in sharing their faith with others. This has been done by proposing possible, practical strategies to solve the problem. Through this step, the research has developed a feasible plan of action based on the biblical and theological principles of church growth that has been identified in the previous step in order to redress the present problem situation. Thus, the fourth and final step has attempted to answer the last research question: Which strategies can be effectively employed by the CBC to enhance spiritual growth among the Bakossi people? The overall objective has been to develop a realistic and achievable action plan in line with a consistent strategy that represents the will of God for the CBC churches.

Chapter 2

The current state of affairs pertaining to church growth in the CBC

1. Introduction

In this second chapter, the aim is to identify and describe the problem that has been identified in CBC churches by way of observation. The problem, as indicated earlier, is that Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) churches among the Bakossi people do not increase in church membership. Thus, in this chapter, an empirical representation of the situation observed is provided regarding the attitude of the CBC churches that is believed to contribute to ineffective ministry. This research was prompted by personal experience with the CBC churches that were lukewarm in partnering with other denominations in the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy Project (BBTP) and facilitate in the translation and use of the Word of God into the Bakossi language. Equally in this chapter, still through observation, the indifference of CBC churches towards church unity prompts the researcher to contribute a biblical response towards cooperation and church unity. This response is thus substantiated with secondary sources that include published materials as well as internal sources (Kombo and Tromp 2006:100). Through them a literary study of the situation as observed over a period of ten years from 2002 to 2012 is presented. Through the study, the research endeavours to prove that CBC churches among Bakossi people are neither growing in membership nor are the number of churches multiplied.

2. A brief History of the Bakossi Bible Translation Project

2.1 Early beginnings and the constitution of the project

In collaboration with the Bakossi Language Committee, the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy Project (BBTP) was initiated by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), following linguistic groundwork that started in 1972 by a Swiss missionary couple:

Robert and Silvia Hedinger (Hedinger Robert 1987). The translation of the New Testament Bible into Bakossi language, Akoose, then effectively started in 1993, through the Cameroon Association for Bible and Literacy (CABTAL), a national organization charged with the development of national languages and the translation of the Bible into these languages. The Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy project had as main objective, to translate the New Testament Bible into the Akoose language in order to reach out to the people with the gospel, majority of whom are non-literate in English and French, the two official languages of Cameroon (Nkwelle 2006:16). But in order to fully attain this objective, it included the development of the Bakossi language through the creation of mother tongue literacy centers throughout the language area.¹ While, *Mwasundem*, a lower Bakossi dialect, widely spoken and understood by most of the other regions, was chosen as the reference dialect for purposes of standardization, this Bible translation project covered the entire Bakossi language area. With about one hundred and sixty-seven villages, the Bakossi language area is largely divided into four major regions; Western Bakossi, with eighteen villages; Southern Bakossi, with sixty-seven villages; Eastern Bakossi, with sixteen villages; and Northern Bakossi, with sixty-seven villages. While the villages vary in size and potential, they are all recognized as constituted independent village communities headed by traditional community chiefs (Nkwelle 2020).²

During its life time, the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy project spanned from 1993-1999 for the first phase, and 2001-2010 for the second phase. The project comprised of activities that took into consideration all the above village communities that make up the Bakossi language area. When the project started in 1993, seven years

¹ As a CABTAL project, the objectives and goals of the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy Project were enshrined in the vision and mission statements of CABTAL which were as follows- Vision: To see individuals and communities transformed by the Word of God in their language using their language for sustainable development. Mission: To mobilize churches, communities and individuals to carry out Bible Translation and language-based community development through linguistic research, translation, functional literacy, and scripture engagement.

² During the period of ten years that the researcher served in the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy Project, he equally served in various areas of community life like teaching, sub-divisional secretary of the Cameroon National Youth Council for Tombel sub-division, facilitator for a renowned community based organization charged for the elaboration of the council development plan, and member of the Cameroon Elections Council for Tombel sub-division, among other things. All the above roles gave him the privilege to travel throughout the entire Bakossiland and also have a full grasp of the language area.

later, after the foundation was laid, it was temporarily halted due to some structural lapses. Unfortunately, by this time very little was achieved in terms of set goals. Two years later, in 2001, after the recruitment of some new personnel, most of whom served as volunteers, the project was rehabilitated. It was at this time that the researcher joined to serve in the project as one of the two persons who were later to serve as full time volunteers. From that time the researcher served in the project up to when it officially came to an end in November 2010, after the dedication of the New Testament Bible in the Akoose language. While serving in the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy Project, the researcher was an integral part of the team. Amongst others, he held some responsibilities in the project including serving as a literacy teacher, translation team leader, and Scripture Use promoter. The researcher's involvement in the project span over a period of ten years, from 2001-2010. The responsibilities he had and the time spent during the time he served in the project, gave him a complete insight of the project and took him to the different parts of the language community for one activity or another. Some of the activities that he was involved in included: facilitating in trainings, sensitizing the community and sharing the vision of Bible translation.³

2.2 The role of the Church in the work of Bible Translation in Bakossiland

Wayne (1985:454-455) states that Bible Translation is "Possibly considered the central means of evangelization used by the Lord" as through it "many encounters of daily life are reinforced." He adds that the Good News encounter, through the translated scriptures makes the hearers to be motivated by the needs of the moment. It reveals the messenger as communicating love and concern by meeting a need as it is brought to his attention by the seeker, and it assures communication as it uses a language and cultural context that helps in self-validation. Equally, to validate the necessity for Bible translation as a tool for evangelization, Oluwafemi and Eno (2018:18) state the following:

"When missionaries go into a different culture to evangelise and make disciples, the difference in people's understanding, the communication

³ Information about the Bible Translation work in Bakossiland is contained in a document jointly compiled by staff of the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy project entitled, "The History of the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy Project (2009).

barrier arising from different languages, customs, environment, and differences in what people value would suggest that it will be foolhardiness to present the gospel to them in the way it is done in the missionary's home culture."

Considering the importance of the strategy of Bible translation in evangelization, the church, including all Christian denominations within Bakossiland, became and still is the main instrument in fostering the work of Bible translation. As an offshoot of the involvement of the church in the work of Bible translation in Bakossiland, there was the creation of an Inter-Church Committee (ICC). With technical assistance from the staff of the Bakossi Bible translation and Literacy Project, in October 2003, an Inter-Church Committee was convened, which was made of denominational leaders within Tombel, the town that served as the seat of the Bible Translation project and sub-divisional headquarter. During that session, an executive committee was put in place to direct their affairs, and the researcher who at that time was made Scripture Use promoter, served as the secretary of the Inter-Church Committee⁴. Later on sub committees were created within two of the other three regional zones of the Bakossi language area. Among others, the responsibilities of the inter-Church Committee included prayer for the Bible translation project and its workers, and contributing funds for the project. The committee equally ensured the use of translated scriptures in the churches when necessary, it fostered and promoted the work of Bible translation, and it especially represented the churches in the work of reaching people, especially the illiterate, with the gospel in the heart language of the people.⁵

Thus, churches within Bakossiland were and continue to be the direct beneficiaries of the work of Bible translation. This is so because the translated scriptures are to serve as a tool for the church to use in evangelizing, especially to those who are not literate in

⁴ This information is contained in the minutes of that first meeting held at the Bakossi Bible Translation Project office on October 20th to constitute the first inter-Church Committee meeting which brought together 8 denominational leaders. During the session, an executive committee was set in place whose role was to partner with project to promote the use of mother tongue scriptures and to support the project activities spiritually, morally, materially and financially, as it is possible.

⁵ The roles and functions of the Inter-Church Committee were defined by the Bible Translation Project in collaboration with the executive committee of the Inter-Church Committee.

the official languages (French and English), who constitute the largest portion of the population. In those days, as the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy Project contacted and galvanized the churches to take their responsibility in reaching their Christians and others with the translated word, some of the denominations that were in Bakossiland included the following; the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), the Apostolic Church, the Apostolic Faith Church, the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC), the Native Baptist Church, the Voice of the Apostles, Deeper Life Church, Full Gospel Mission, the Lutheran church and the Church of Christ. Among the above mentioned denominations the largest in terms of number of Christians and churches in Tombel town are the Roman Catholic Church, and the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, and to a lesser extent the Apostolic Faith Church, the Cameroon Baptist convention, and the Apostolic Church. Some of these denominations were either members of the Inter-Church Committee of the Bakossi Bible Translation Project, had their Christians serving as volunteers in one aspect of the project or the other, or had the translated Scriptures read in their churches occasionally or regularly.

The Bakossi Bible Translation Project in general and the researcher in particular, engaged with these denominations and their different churches. It was during this time that the researcher observed that the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) was unresponsive in matters related to the work of translation into the Bakossi language. Thus, this situation drew the attention of the Bakossi Bible Translation staff and especially the researcher to probe why this state of affairs prevailed.

2.3 The lukewarm attitude of the CBC towards the work of Bible Translation

While all the other above mentioned denominations were involved in the Bakossi Bible Translation Project activities in one way or another, CBC was visibly absent. After five years of the project's existence, the denomination was not represented in the Inter-Church Committee (ICC), did not attend any of the meetings at the Bible translation project office despite being served with invitations on several occasions, did not contribute any funds to support the project, and especially did not open their doors for

the translated scriptures to be used in their churches.⁶ It was this prevailing circumstance that led the staff of BBTP to visit Hope Baptist Church, Tombel, the largest of the CBC churches in Bakossiland. During this visit which constituted a team of three, including the researcher, a discussion was held with the church pastor. He disclosed that out of a membership of about 250 registered members at the time, there were only two families that were made up of indigenes; all the other members of the church were not native speakers of the language. The rest of the members were made up of people groups from other regions of the country. According to the church pastor, this is why the church was lukewarm to get involved in matters related to the translation of the Word of God into the Akoose language, considering that the church was not going to make use of it.

Within a period of ten years, from 2002 up to 2012, the situation regarding the involvement of the Cameroon Baptist Convention churches in the work of Bakossi Bible Translation Project did not change. From nine churches, including three “Prayer cells,” that the researcher contacted, including the church in his home, no Christian was involved in the work of engaging with the Word of God in the language of the heart of the Bakossi people. Since the Bible translation project collected information on all the other denominations, the number of churches that existed, and places where the churches were found. Even for the Cameroon Baptist Convention churches this information was precise. The CBC churches’ non-involvement and lack of commitment in the work of Bible translation in Bakossiland had little significance to the researcher until 2011, when he enrolled in the Cameroon Baptist Theological Seminary (CBTS), Ndu, the foremost of the two seminaries of the Cameroon Baptist Convention in Cameroon. Having had the conviction regarding the mission and ministry philosophy of the CBC, the researcher then decided to take up this research topic. Within a year as a student in the seminary, the researcher who continued to assist in some aspects of the work of Bible translation went to his community in Bakossiland for practicum. By this time the burden to take up a research topic regarding church growth in the CBC churches among the Bakossi people has been laid in the heart of the researcher.

⁶ These information and statistics are contained in the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy document, “The History of the Bakossi Bible and Literacy Project.”

3. The problem observed: The state of CBC churches in Bakossiland from 2002-2012 to present day

As earlier mentioned, the researcher made an initial contact with a CBC church as part of a team of three from the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy project (BBTP). The purpose of the visit was to share the vision and encourage the church to support the work of Bible translation into the Bakossi language. Along with other churches (denominations) that constituted a data base as partners of the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy Project (BBTP), 24 CBC churches and “Prayer cells” were totalled. Gathering information for data base was done between 2002 and 2005. Thus, within three years, a total of about 90% of the churches and Christians within the Bakossi language area were known. Curiously, like the situation observed in Hope Baptist church Tombel, all the other 23 CBC Churches and “Prayer cells” were only made up of members who were non-indigenes.⁷ Throughout the life of the translation project in Bakossiland there was no CBC Church that was involved in the work. This was for obvious reasons, considering that they were not native speakers of the language, the Christians could not make use of the translated materials. At the time, this state of affairs did not make much difference to the researcher. After futile attempts to share the vision and involve the churches, the Bible translation project staff simply ignored the uninterested CBC churches.

Between 2002 and 2005, CBC churches (including “Prayer cells”) among the Bakossi people of the South West region were in the following communities: Tombel, Manzong, Edise, Mile 18, Mile 20, Cocoa Camp, Ebonji, Buba I, Buba III, water fall, Ehom, Bulutuh, Mahole, Bambele, Ngusi, Bekume, Ngombo, Nyassoso, Kack, Nsuke, Mbabe, Mbulle, and Bangem. While from 2005 to 2010 the CBC was indifferent with regards to their involvement with the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy Project, other denominations like the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), The Roman Catholic

⁷ This information could easily be verified because it was required by the Bible Translation project in order to determine the nature and level of engagement that the project had with a church. For instance, the number of indigenous population would show how many church based literacy classes were needed, how much materials could be developed for the particular church or whether there was need for a readers' club to be created.

church, the Native Baptist Church of Cameroon (NBCC), and to a lesser extent the Apostolic church, Apostolic Faith, Full Gospel Mission, Church of Christ, New Testament Church, Deeper life, Anglican Church, Church of Christ, Christ Embassy, the Lutheran Church were involved and participated in one way or the other in activities of the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy project. For a clear understanding, this information can be presented as follows:

Table 1. Denominations involved in the work of Bible translation and number of communities involved in.

No.	Denomination	No. of village com.
1.	Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC)	48
2.	Roman Catholic Church	18
3.	Native Baptist Church of Cameroon (NBCC)	9
4.	Lutheran Church of Cameroon (LCC)	6
5.	New Testament Church	3
6.	Full Gospel Mission (FGM)	3
7.	Deeper Life	3
8.	Anglican Church	2
9.	Church of Christ	2
10.	Christ Embassy	1
11.	CBC	0

The table above shows the denominations that were involved in one aspect or the other in the work of Bible translation, either by being a member of the Inter-Church Committee (ICC), using translated scriptures in their churches, or raising funds to support the project. It also shows the number of communities in which a particular denomination is involved.⁸ It equally clearly indicates the non-involvement of CBC churches.

As observed from the table above, the CBC was not involved in any aspect of the work of Bible Translation into the Bakossi language. This was up to 2010 when the work was completed with the publication of the New Testament into Bakossi language. Between 2010 and 2012, while in the seminary, the researcher went back to his community

⁸ These information and statistics are contained in the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy document, "The History of the Bakossi Bible and Literacy Project."

during semester-breaks. In all there were four such trips. Each of these sessions were guided by a well constituted plan of work which included sharing the vision, organising mother tongue reading and writing workshops or trainings, creating readers' clubs in churches, and mobilising communities and churches to raise funds for the work of Bible translation. Considering that the Bible translation project officially came to an end in 2010, the researcher was the only one who was engaged in the most comprehensive aspects of the work of Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy project. As a student pastor, the researcher's interaction with the churches especially with CBC Churches, was intentional.

As a Baptist now, most of the Baptist churches were now willing to cooperate with the researcher, not only by being involved in promoting the use of the mother tongue translated scriptures but equally in doing effective ministry that would enable the churches to reach out to many and win them for Christ. A few of the CBC congregations saw the researcher as a possible bridge to foster their mission. These churches invited him on different occasions to preach, as they hoped this might encourage the indigenous population and attract them to their churches. Personal engagements in various areas of ministry in different communities and commitment in CBC Churches together with the need for effective ministry among the people, increased. In the course of interaction with these churches, their composition, organization, and systems were observed and the leaders and members of these churches were asked questions that would help provide appropriate recommendations for more relevant ministry among the people.

The desire was that the CBC should engage in more fruitful ministry by making greater impact among the people in the community where they were found. During contact with different people, it was discovered during some casual conversations, including Baptists and Christians from other denominations and even non-Christians, that the CBC churches among the Bakossi people were considered by many Bakossi people as "Ebese é bechoŋ", meaning "the Church of strangers." Considering this state of affairs, the researcher again decided to undertake a data base of C.B.C. churches that existed among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon, seven years after

the same exercise was undertaken between 2002-2005, through the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy project. From contact made with the different churches, and information provided by some church leaders and administrators of the CBC among the Bakossi people, including Christians, it was observed that the number of churches and “Prayer cells” among the Bakossi people of the South West Region has reduced from 24 in 2002 to 9 in 2012. During this time, the following churches and “Prayer cells” existed; Hope Baptist Church Tombel, Victory Baptist Church Ebonji, Emmanuel Baptist Church Waterfall, CBC Buba III, Zion Baptist “Prayer cell” Mahole, Zion Baptist “Prayer cell” Nsuke, CBC “Prayer cell” Nyassoso, CBC Ngomboku, and Emmanuel Baptist Church Bangem. Upon further enquires it was observed that some prayer groups temporarily closed down because it was a period of the year that most of Christians went home to attend their Cultural and Development associations. Three other churches existed in name only but did not function regularly. Noteworthy was the fact that in all these CBC churches among the Bakossi people of the South West Region, there were only three trained pastors at the time.

It was thus this state of affairs that resulted in seeking ways for CBC churches among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon to engage in intentional ministry that would strike a balance between meeting the people’s needs where they are without going counter to the ideals and ministry philosophy of the Cameroon Baptist Convention in particular, and the mission mandate of Christ, the head of the church, to his church in general (Philemon Nfor 2016:78).

The CBC churches’ non-involvement in the work of Bible translation among the people of Bakossi does not merely reveal a weakness in their strategy in doing effective evangelization among the people, it contradicts the very motivation for missions as Everist Norma Cook (2011:158) states in the following words, “Most of the time, we will need to meet people where they are. In order to do this, we need to speak their languages, listen carefully to their needs, and be able to speak of God’s great love in direct relation to their human needs.”

4. The Cameroon Baptists Convention churches and ecumenism

The unity of the church is an imperative that is commanded from scriptures, exemplified by Christ, the founder of the church. It serves as a veritable proof that the success of God's mission in building His kingdom can only truly be evaluated when the church in its diversity comes together to function as a body, while each part functions to keep the body healthy. This is what John Lynnwood (2017:12) said when he made the following statement;

“God created a unified world filled with diverse life forms who lived harmoniously within one ecosystem, and although this unified world was disrupted by human failure, the story of God's continuing faithfulness that permeates all of Scripture, both Old and New Testament, must be at the heart of any theology of unity. Second, a theology of unity must take into account the New Testament teaching about God's mysterious plan to unite all things in Christ, as well as Jesus' desire to see His disciples united as one. Third, a theology of unity must attempt to understand Paul's principled conviction, outlined in 1 Corinthians 9, that true unity could only be achieved by allowing for diversity.”

Certainly, the intransigence and monotonous approach of CBC churches among the Bakossi people cannot be blamed solely on the very negligible representation of the indigenous population on the overall church membership; this is just actually the effect of the real cause of the problem. The real issue is largely rooted in the denomination's confession of faith towards cooperation with other Christian denominations. As a national entity, the Cameroon Baptist Convention is an organization which has a set of beliefs and practices that are enshrined within the Baptist denomination. Thus, while the CBC has its specifics that are associated to its context, there are guiding principles pertaining to her mission as an agent of spiritual transformation. Unequivocally, the practices of the CBC regarding her mission to the world will be evaluated on the basis of the Baptist doctrines and philosophy of ministry on the one hand, and biblical principles on the other hand. According to Philemon Nfor (2016:75),

“Ecumenism is being involved in or promoting relationship with the worldwide church; seeking a form of Christian unity within the church in general, including non-Evangelical churches such as the Roman Catholic Church. The CBC in particular and the Baptists in general do not get involved with the ecumenical movement for fear of compromising the centrality of Christ in the proclamation of the gospel.”

He further states that the reason why Baptists are not members of the World Council of Churches (WCC) is because of fear that they might compromise the centrality of the gospel. With regards to cooperation with other denominational entities including issues of ecumenism, D.L. Lowrie (2009: 65) states that the Baptist polity itself, which grants autonomy to individual congregations does not grant any Baptist to speak for another body. He declares, “This is done in an attempt to be obedient to the biblical principles that protect the autonomy of the churches.” The local church, according to him, is viewed as the basic unit in God’s Kingdom strategy.

Furthermore, concerning the autonomy of each Baptist congregation and cooperation with other denominations, the Southern Baptist Convention, the mother convention of the Cameroon Baptist Convention, in their statement of faith (2000:1-3) had this to say:

Our confessions of faith are rooted in historical precedent, as the church in every age has been called upon to define and defend its beliefs. Each generation of Christians bears the responsibility of guarding the treasury of truth that has been entrusted to us (2 Tim. 1:14) Facing a new century, Baptists must meet the demands and duties of the present hour.... Christ’s people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary,

educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament.⁹

To affirm the Baptist position on congregational autonomy and the need to be relevant in fostering her God ordained mission, Nfor (2016:75) says, "Effective ministry must take cognizance of the times and answer the fundamental question of how to minister in a culturally relevant and biblically sound way." He goes further to propose some principles that he hopes will guide healthy involvement in ecumenical events; the church should make use of any opportunity to preach the gospel, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:15-16); the church should maintain the centrality of Christ (John 17:3); the church should avoid confrontational evangelism; the church should build relationships (John 17:20-22); the church should focus on peace, social action and all that derives from common interest. Nfor (2016:79) concludes this thought by saying that,

The CBC church used to be a village church and we were able to escape many challenges to effective ministry in a cosmopolitan world. Things have changed. We remain Baptists, committed to biblical authority, separation of church and state as well as to religious freedom and soul liberty. Yet we must have the political religious world around us to deal with. The greatest challenge is for the Baptist minister to be wise and discerning enough to know when to say "No" and to make use of God given opportunities. The bottom line is that Baptists should emphasize salvation by grace through

⁹ The Baptist Faith and Message Adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention June 14, 2000

faith in the Lord Jesus Christ while cooperating with other faiths in the fight for social peace, justice and development; at the feet of the state and her institutions, not as the Lord of the land, but as partners under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Church unity as described by John Isherwood (2010:37) does not aim at uniting churches or different denominations but it essentially involves promoting or maintaining Christian unity. Isherwood traces efforts made by different denominations in the United Kingdom, who broke their denominational traditions, including Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, Salvation Army, United Reformers, and Orthodox Christians to form what became known as Maranatha Community. Through this movement, these denominations prayed together, worked together for common good and served as one. Their motivation stemmed from these words, "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (Heb.11:39-40). Church unity or Christian unity as Isherwood would prefer to call it, is not instituted by today's church; it was practiced by the New Testament church and it was a distinctive characteristic that greatly contributed to the growth of the church. During those days, there were no denominational barriers, the church was one.

Thus, for CBC churches among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon to do effective ministry and fulfil their God-given assignment, it is necessary for them to cooperate with other Christian denominations with a common purpose. Doing effective ministry within the context in which God has placed the church will imply carrying out God's mission. This mission is rooted in the vision of God's great design for all creation which is its irrevocable achievement in the incarnation of Jesus Christ (John 1:1-14). Thus, the church, as the body of Christ acts by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue her life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and so participates in God's work of healing a broken world. Accordingly, Getz Gene and Joe Wall (2000:8) state that, "The mission of God's people today then is to call people to trust in Christ and thus become citizens of his heavenly kingdom. Local assemblies (churches) are important, and cooperative teams of local assemblies (denomination and

fellowship) are helpful.” Church fellowship, or ecumenism is therefore both the gift by which the church lives and the gift that God calls the church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing. MacArthur (1997:67) comments on why the apostle Paul describes the church as the body of Christ. According to him,

Paul’s illustration of how every part of a human body is essential to the function of that body, Paul showed that unity is an indispensable need of the church; but divinely provided diversity with that unity is also necessary. Every part of the human body is unique and helps in performing the tasks of life. Moreover, everybody part has a unique task as determined by God Himself.

Consequently, promoting and participating in fellowship by the CBC churches with other denominations among the Bakossi of the South West region is not only adhering to the biblical command, but shunning from this command because of denominational traditions is in itself a breach in what the Baptists in general uphold as the foremost distinctive, biblical authority.

5. Biblical support for church unity

5.1 The source of Church unity

John Lynnwood (2017:1) says that the unity revealed in the Godhead is the basis for unity in the body of Christ, the church. He substantiates that the Bible through many passages teaches that “God is not only Israel’s God, but is the God of all and the Creator of all. If God is one, and the creation is one, God’s universe should be a perfect unity.” This perfect unity is not only limited to the Christian body but involves the Churches from which these Christians belong. Vidler (1940:101-102) on his part states that,

“The Church of God is not a sect of people who hold the same views. It is the body of Christ, the body of those who have been born again by the acts of God in his Christ and made citizens of the Kingdom of God, irrespective

of their views or their merit or any of their other peculiarities, simply by the pure love and mercy of God. We should be celebrating the rich diversity of the church; but celebrating it with each other.”

This definition on the unity of the church highlights the fact that while the different denominational bodies, just like different parts of the body, belong each to a body that can only function well if they work together. Thus unity in diversity is a key concept. The theme of church unity is so important that it is addressed in many books of the Bible by different biblical authors. Among the many biblical passages, both from the Old and New Testaments that echo the necessity for the Christian church to not only cooperate but also to unite, are the following; Ex. 17:12; 18:17ff.; Judg. 7:21; Ezra 1:3-4; 2:68-69; 5:14-15; Neh. 4; 8:1-5; Matt. 10:5-15; 20:1-16; 22:1-10; 28:19-20; Mark 2:3; Luke 10:1ff.; John 17:11, 21-23; Acts 1:13-14; 2:1ff.; 4:31-37; 13:2-3; 15:1-35; 1 Cor. 1:10-17; 3:5-15; 12; 2 Cor. 8-9; Gal. 1:6-10; Eph. 4:1-16; Phil.1:15-18.¹⁰

The common call for church unity finds its beginning and end in one person, God, he who is the source of the mission of the church as put in the following words,

It is God’s design to gather humanity and all of creation into communion under the Lordship of Christ (cf. Eph. 1:10). The Church, as a reflection of the fellowship of the Triune God, is meant to serve this goal and is called to manifest God’s mercy to human beings, helping them to achieve the purpose for which they were created and in which their joy ultimately is found: to praise and glorify God together with all the heavenly hosts. This mission of the Church is fulfilled by its members through the witness of their lives and, when possible, through the open proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. The mission of the Church is to serve this purpose.¹¹

¹⁰ The Biblical Illustrator Copyright © 2002, 2003, 2006 Ages Software, Inc. and Biblesoft, Inc.

¹¹ World Council of Churches. The Church towards a common vision. Geneva, Switzerland; GPS Publishing, pg 14

The significance of church unity with regards to the purpose and mission that God designed for the church is greater than any particular denomination's tradition. Thus, unity will be a far-fetched dream if any particular denomination fails to look beyond itself and fails to join others in building God's kingdom. Concerning the indifference of some churches towards unity, Kaspar (2004:171) says, "There can be no unity as long as any given church maintains that the accepted and binding truth of another church is contrary to the Gospel."

5.2 Church unity practiced in the Bible

From Acts 2:44-47, Rensburg (1988:3-14) helps the contemporary church to draw some very valuable lessons learned from the unity of the early church at Pentecost. During that special occasion, Peter together with the rest of the disciples, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit converted three thousand followers of Christ. Firstly, all those who believed fellowshiped and had all things in common (Acts 2:9-11). Secondly, the early Christians, as we observe here, exemplified a new social development marked by a community of goods and judicious distribution to the needy. Thirdly, because of the strategies of the early church in fellowshiping together, sharing things in common, and supporting diverse forms of worship many were converted and the church grew. From this passage we can draw two practical lessons. Firstly, church unity ensures and promotes fellowship and goodwill among believers. Secondly, it facilitates flexibility of ministry and enhances both spiritual and numerical growth.

Lynnwood (2017:11) states, "A theology of unity must attempt to understand Paul's principled conviction, outlined in 1 Corinthians 9, that true unity can only be achieved by allowing for diversity." From the implications of the metaphor in 1 Cor. 12:12-27 regarding unity, Rensburg (1988:3-14) concludes,

"This character of the unity applies both to the local church (the unity of the members), as well as the universal church (the unity of the churches (or denominations). The body of Christ is a living unity, and it is not dependent for its existence on the different members; it exists as a living unity because it exists in and because of Christ."

There is only one Church (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:13). Jesus did not establish the Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, Anglican, or Catholic Church; he established only one Church. The Bible says the Church is the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23-32) and that bride is not a particular church but all that belong to the body of Christ. This is the unity of belief to which Scripture calls us (Phil. 1:27; 2:2).

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, a brief history of the Bakossi Bible translation project is presented together with its significance in bringing the church together to help them to make the gospel relevant through the translation and use of scriptures in the heart language of the Bakossi people. Here the work of Bible translation is highlighted along with the envisaged role of the church as the main agent of transformation through the translated scriptures. But more importantly, the work of Bible translation among the Bakossi people portrays the church as the direct beneficiary of this esteemed means. While the involvement and contribution of many of the denominations in enhancing this work cannot be underestimated, the indifference of CBC churches cannot be overlooked as well. It is this situation that was observed that formed the basis of consideration for this research. This observation led to some discoveries; firstly, it was observed that the lukewarm attitude of the CBC among the Bakossi natives towards the work of Bible translation was due to the fact that a very negligible number of indigenous population were members of the church. Thus, the churches claimed that on the basis of this, the members who were non speakers of the Akoose language could not make use of the translated scriptures, reason for their non-involvement in the work of Bible translation.

However, it was observed that the non-involvement was associated to the denomination's tradition which undermines efforts of church unity. The defence for this, as Nfor (2016:75) states is that, "They avoid trying to attempt the possibility of walking with churches with whom they do not agree theologically (Amos 3:3) and Baptists will not involve in what looks like an attempt to build a universal religion. To this position the researcher finds resources that support both from secondary sources as well from the Bible itself. He emphasizes towards the end of the chapter that the unity of the Godhead

and the unity that characterized the New Testament church are all evidences that Church unity or ecumenism is not merely encouraged, rather that it is an imperative.

Chapter 3

An evaluation of the effects of the current situation on the C.B.C

1. Introduction

The aim in the second step (chapter 3) is to interpret the situation as it is and this is done by evaluating the current situation in the CBC churches, its bearing on ministry as well as its effects on the community. This step answers the second subsidiary question: How can the ministry's effect on the community be evaluated? This chapter begins with a systematic investigation of the problem (Smith 2008:204). It focuses on the historical factors that led to the present circumstances and includes the history of the founding of the Baptists and CBC among the Bakossi people and its growth in membership over the years. The descriptive approach uses empirical and literary methods and includes a qualitative (questionnaire) and quantitative (interview) components. A series of questions have been addressed to respondents who are members of five CBC churches and will include twenty-five male and female Christians, the pastors of each of the five churches, ten elderly Christians from different communities, and five pastors of different denominations. In addition to the data gathered by way of the questionnaires, twenty-five additional people from the communities were contacted for interview. This information has then been analysed and interpreted in order to determine the current state of church growth in CBC churches and to evaluate its effect on the growth of the church and its ministerial effect on the Bakossi people.

2. A history of the coming of Christianity among the Bakossi people

2.1 Introduction

The state of the CBC churches among the Bakossi people in particular and the beginnings of missionary work among the people of the South West capital Region of Cameroon in general basically suggests that while the area has enjoyed popular opinion as having the privilege of being described as predominantly Christian, the foundation

was not laid on very solid ground. This is confirmed by an assessment that was made in 2014 by the Joshua Project on the Bakossi people group regarding the progress of the gospel at a global level on the status of the evangelical Christianity. According to this assessment, “The primary religion practiced by the Bakossi people is marginal Christianity, a form of religion which finds its roots in Christianity but not theologically Christian.”¹² Out of about 150 village communities that make up the Bakossi language area of the South West Region, there is none that does not have a church of one kind or another. Since 1895, with the arrival of the first western missionaries, Christianity enjoys its place as the far most predominant religion in the land. It could be said that about 75% of the population refer to themselves as Christians (Ejedepang-Koge 1996:25).

For about 135 years since the coming of the first western mission among the people of Bakossi, churches of different denominations have flourished in the land (Ejedepang-Koge 1996:25). While the main stream denominations like the Roman Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) dominate in terms of Christian population, others like Apostolic Faith, Apostolic Church, Full Gospel Mission, Grace Mission, Lutheran Church of Cameroon, Anglican Church, Christ Embassy, Voice of Apostles, Deeper Life, the New Testament Church, the True Church of God, Christian Missionary Fellowship International, the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) and the Native Baptist Church of Cameroon (NBCC) equally exist. In all, there are at least 16 Christian denominations that are functional among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon¹³ With a long history of 135 years since the coming of Christianity in the land, and with the proliferation of churches, one would have expected a tremendous improvement in the spiritual lives of individuals and the community at large.

However, in spite of all these, much still needs to be desired with regards to the ministry impact of the Christian community in general and that of the CBC in particular among the Bakossi people of the South West region of Cameroon. Whereas the efforts of the

¹² Joshua Project on People groups (2014) accessed online from www.peoplegroups.org

¹³ The information on the types of denominations and the number of churches that each has in Bakossiland is found in the document that was produced by the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy Project titled, “The history of Bible Translation in Bakossiland.”

church in reaching the communities cannot be undermined, there are many vices that prevail among the people that cast doubts on the ministry effectiveness in the land; from a generally uncommitted Christian body, to ills like ancestor worship, witchcraft including regular employment of the services of witch hunters, and a high rate of alcoholism and sexual promiscuity, all indicators of shallow Christian foundation. It is to these that Ejedepang-Koge (1996:56) says, "That these events can be considered signs of a weakly-based Christianity and faith. They point to the serious task ahead and that needs methods for tackling it. It is a society in crisis. This must be a cause for concern to the church as a whole."

Michael (2013:199) observes that the apparent remarkable growth enjoyed by the African church has made Christianity a widespread religion within the African continent. This has increased the social prestige which is now associated to one's identification with the Christian church. According to him, "This social prestige of Christianity often makes the Christian church another social gathering or some kind of religious assembly devoid of biblical understanding of the church and relevant issues in ecclesiology."

It is this state of affairs that led the researcher Nkwelle Ngome (2017:8) to conclude thus;

"Most African communities in general, and my community, Bakossiland in particular, for more than a century and a half, claim to have lived the Christian experience. Yet because Christianity was brought to them 'in a foreign container', most of them are still to be transformed by the gospel of Christ. The bearers of the gospel who came to Africa did the best they could do, but because they came from different contexts and different backgrounds without taking the realities of their receptor context into consideration, their message did not produce the desired results. Africa has her specifics and it is only when the gospel is presented with the African worldview in mind that the people's former frame of mind can be challenged; only then can genuine transformation take place."

2.2 Early missionary work in Cameroon

According to Hastings (2008:259-260), due its strategic position, Cameroon is one of those countries that clearly show the influence of evangelization brought from the west in the context of the African continent. The favorable Cameroon coast became a springboard for many missionaries from Britain, the United States, the Caribbean and other parts of Africa. The first of such a team that arrived in Cameroon on grounds of evangelization was made up of Jamaican preachers, teachers, and artisans all of who were Baptists.

Sundkler and Steed (2004:265-270) state that, "Cameroon welcomed the missions, not so much because of their religious message, but because of their schools. They were all asking for a 'book'." According to them, in 1844, a team of missionaries of the Baptist Missionary Society of London led by Alfred Saker, left from the Port of Clarence, an island of Fernando Po and moved mainland to Douala and 'Victoria'. The English engineer-missionary, Alfred Saker, was the prototype of Protestant activity in Africa. "His combination of engineering, Bible translation and exposition influenced many." He founded and shaped the Victoria community on the coast. Although he did not found Douala, he gave twenty-seven years of his service and shaped it, both architecturally and culturally. Joseph Merrick, an outstanding linguist, was among Saker's West Indian Baptist preachers who moved to Douala. Because of his light colouring (he had a White grandfather) and his Western dress, he was called 'White man' by the local inhabitants. He published the first schoolbook in the Douala language. Although his service in Cameroon was short-lived, lasting only four years, from 1844 until his death in 1848, he made such a great impact in his ministry such that he was called 'the founder of Christianity in Cameroon'.

The future of missionary work in Cameroon was decided at the conference table in Berlin in 1885 when the country was handed over to Germany, and remained its colony until 1916. Throughout that time, Cameroon experienced missionary impact more than most African countries.

2.3 The struggle for supremacy: Traditional religion or Christianity in Bakossiland?

According to Ngole (1997:46), the first contact made by European missionaries to Bakossiland was in the 1880s. However, there is much evidence that prior to the coming of the Western missionaries, Bakossi people were religious, as the African traditional religion prevailed among the people. This religion, according to Ejedepang-Kogge (1996:25), was perpetual. That means it was deep-rooted; it was at the same time a personal, family and community religion. He says it involved ancestral worship, totemism and idolatry. It equally involved the “*Ndie*” which brought together whole communities as a public or community religious ceremony where the manifestations of the “*Ndie*” ceremony was at the center and it involved both worship, thanksgiving and sacrifice, all at once.

The earliest missionaries to come to Bakossiland were missionaries of the Basel Mission in 1896. The team was headed by Friedrich Autenrieth who was accompanied by two others, an Australian, G Basedow and a Swiss, Chapuis (Keller 1997:68). These men settled in Nyassoso village and were involved in three-fold ministry; evangelism, education, and medical care. Within a few years, Nyassoso as the first mission station had a church, a school and a hospital. However, according to Ejedepang-Kogge (1996:30) evangelism was very difficult in this land because African Traditional Religion was everywhere and it was deeply seated among the people. This old religion was enigmatic and difficult to attack, and apparently it was a great hindrance to evangelism. Barely a year after the arrival of the missionaries, through the hard work of Basedow and Chapuis, dividends were paid off as nine persons from Nyassoso village in 1897 became the first converts to Christianity. The preaching of the gospel went hand in hand with the creation of a school which was perceived as a preparatory ground for the implantation of the gospel. While the gospel spread to different communities, young men were recruited to attend the school in Nyassoso. By 1913, Nyassoso mission station had created eight outstations.

However, despite this seeming success by early evangelization, the gospel was under serious attack. There was continuous friction between the missionaries and their

converts on the one hand and the traditional society members on the other. Among traditional Bakossi people, practices like slave trade, polygamy, membership into traditional and juju societies, and other traditional practices were normal practices (Atabe 1986:52). On the other hand, the missionaries and their converts due to their new found religion frowned at them and openly demanded their abolition. This was hard to accept as it made missionary activities suspicious and unacceptable.

Noteworthy is the fact that up to 1914 the Basel Mission concentrated its efforts to the immediate west slopes of Mounts Kupe and Mwanenguba (Ediage Thomas 1996:13). They did not go further north nor further south. Thus only Mwetug, Southern Mwetan, Mwasundem, Mwambong, and Nninong clans were reached. This left Mwanyo, Mbwogmtut, Mwangem, parts of Mwambong, Upper Mwetan, Western Bakossi and Babubog unreached. Thus seizing the chance in 1926 after the First World War (WW1), the Roman Catholic mission made haste to occupy these unreached areas. The evangelistic approaches of the Basel Mission and the Roman Catholic mission were different. The Basel Mission stressed on the use of the local language, in this case the *Douala* language, which was at the time one of the few most widely used indigenous languages in Cameroon. The *Douala* language is a coastal language and it was the first Cameroonian language into which the Bible was translated by western missionaries. This was as earlier as in 1872.¹⁴ Thus this language was taught in “Vernacular Schools” throughout the South West Region and particularly in Bakossiland.

Meanwhile *Mungaka*, a Grassfield¹⁵ language, was the language used by early western missionaries to spread the gospel among the people of the North West Region of Cameroon. The *Douala* language was taught in elementary schools before the pupils later moved on to study official languages, like English and French. It was at the time the main language of the Basel Mission in fostering the work of evangelism throughout

¹⁴ This information is contained in a publication of Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy (CABTAL), which traces the efforts and history of Bible Translation work in Cameroon. The researcher updated this information in 2017 and developed notes from it that are used in teaching during Translation Principles Courses.

¹⁵ Grassfield languages are languages from the North West and West Regions. They are quite different from Coastal languages, where the Bakossi language (Akoose) belongs.

Bakossiland. Apart from this strategy of using an indigenous language, in order to effectively administer their religion among the people, the Basel Mission missionaries were less rigid in destroying everything that they considered counter-Christianity among the people. As early missionaries among the Bakossi people, they tended to accommodate some of the old customs that determined the day to day life of the people which they considered as “pagan.” They could not distinguish between cultural and traditional practices. Some of these practices that attracted condemnation from the missionaries and their new converts included all forms of dances, types of dresses, body decorations, certain types of foods, marriage customs and funeral rites, which were directly or indirectly thought to be related to traditional religions (Ejedepang-Koge 2103:105). This was the approach the first missionaries used in succeeding to break the ground in Bakossiland, and as a result they became the denomination with the largest number of Christians, in terms of number of churches as well as number of Christians.

While the Basel Mission’s approach was the use of an indigenous language to reach the people and also had a tendency to reject most of the cultural and traditional customs and rites manifested among the people, especially their converts, the Roman Catholic mission on their part used a somewhat different approach. They preferred to reach the people through the use of English, Latin and German languages, because according to them, these were the languages that could procure jobs outside the spiritual world. Equally, the Roman Catholic missionaries persisted in complete rejection against any form of cultural or traditional rites that were found among the people who were converted to the new found religion.

According to Ejedepang-Koge (1996:35) the missionaries were not only strict with their converts towards their adherence of all forms of cultural and traditional practices, Christians were forbidden from having any association with non-Christians, who were considered pagans. He adds that,

“This outright rejection of cultural and traditional practices gave rise to a much clearer break between traditional practices and the new found Christian practice...and it led to the whole abolition of traditional and juju practices in Roman Catholic areas of Bakossiland but not quite so in Basel

Mission areas. *Mwanyo* and *Mwasumdem* clans can be contrasted in this context; *Mwanyo* (Roman Catholic mission), *Mwasundem* (Basel Mission). The weapons of excommunication and condemnation to purgatory had a strong influence on compliance by the Roman Catholic, but were rarely stressed, much less used by Basel missionaries. As a result, polygamy, juju societies and *Ndie* celebrations continued to exist in *Mwasundem* in contrast to Roman Catholic *Mwanyo* and *Western Bakossi* areas.”

Ejedepang-Koge (2013:109) traces that despite the efforts made by the early missionaries in spreading the gospel throughout Bakossiland, evil practices like witchcraft, continued to prevail among the people, even among Christians. In some communities, even the very rigid stance of the church against these things did not make them disappear, they simply went underground and continued to wreck-havoc. The year 1903 marked the first exposure, desecration, and destruction of juju objects in Nyassoso and thereafter, but more formally in 1934. This was followed by Mpako village in 1936, Ngombo-ku in 1956, “when these villages fell wholesale under Christianity and convinced of the evil of these societies, they surrendered and destroyed objects pertaining to these things”, he adds (Ejedepang-Koge:2013:71).

Despite the evidence of the spread of Christianity in the land, curiously the very fears and concerns of witchcraft, idolatry and other vices that had shaken the very Christian foundations from the onset resurfaced in a widespread wave throughout communities in Bakossiland of the South West Region of Cameroon from 1991 (Ngole 1996:32). Again in Ngomboku, the village of the researcher, a bastion of the Basel Mission now Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), a witch-hunter’s services were employed with charms and many destructive elements exposed and others surrendered by many, most of whom professed to be Christians. In Nninong, another community of the PCC, the death of a boy, allegedly killed through witchcraft, provoked a serious clash in the village. In Roman Catholic dominated *Mwanyo* clan, consisting of nine villages, 2 suspected witches were burnt to death, 4 threatened with burning, with one of them partly seriously burnt, 3 other seriously burnt and two exiled. In 1998, in *Western Bakossi*, a Roman Catholic stronghold, 2 women and a man, were alleged to have killed

two young men through witchcraft, were buried alive. In Nyassoso, the foundation of Christianity in Bakossiland, beatings, threats of burning, and outright exile were some of the consequences that befell some members of the community suspected of witchcraft practices, most of whom called themselves Christians. Still in Nyassoso in 2001, a man who came to the hospital from another town was burnt to ashes, having been falsely accused to have made the manhood of a young man to disappear.¹⁶ In cosmopolitan Tombel, a suspected wizard's house was burnt. In March last year, 2019, a man was shot dead and another narrowly escaped death, both of whom were accused of having killed a man in the community of the researcher.¹⁷ Throughout Bakossiland, actual burning of persons suspected of witchcraft practices, threats of burning, burying people alive, forcing poison into their systems, strangling, burning of houses, other vices like high rate of alcoholism, and sexual promiscuity are among some of the things that are highly prevalent in many communities among the people of Bakossi of the South West Region of Cameroon.

By the late 1930s, Christianity had taken root amongst the Bakossi people of the South West region and the struggle for dominance was between Basel Mission and the Roman Catholic mission. However, due to their less rigid stance against cultural and traditional practices, the Basel Mission had greater control. This situation prevailed until 1952 when Rev. Otto Ebontene, the indigenous Basel Mission pastor, who was very anti-tradition and culture took a stand in favour of Christianity. His attitude gave the opportunity to another denomination to join the first two early arrivals, in the bid to conquer Bakossiland for Christ. This marked the ushering of another Christian denomination, the Native Baptist Church of Cameroon, (NBCC) to Bakossiland.

¹⁶ Nyassoso is a village not far from the researcher's village (about two hours walking distance). So when this strange incident happened, the researcher together with other young men from his community went to witness the incident.

¹⁷ The researcher witnessed this incident and he even made a contribution during a village gathering by condemning such abominable acts within a community that calls itself Christian. During that session of the village gathering there was a suggestion which was accepted by many persons in the community that money be raised by members of the community to employ the services of a soothsayer in order to reveal all witches and wizards in the village. Persistent appeals from the researcher to dissuade people from making such unrealistic financial contributions fell on deaf ears.

According to Sango Ndobé Solomon (2018), Rev. Otto Ebontene was outraged by the holding of the *Ndie* celebrations in his native Mwasundem clan and particularly because it was heavily attended by his Christians. Thus in an expression of his outburst and as a way of sanction, he refused to serve the Lord's Supper to his Christians. This was seen to be intolerable, both by his Christians and other sympathizers who were non-Christians. All who heard about the decision of the pastor considered it an attack on tradition. Thus, this situation prompted the disheartened Christians and all the members of the Basel Mission church in Ndum to send a delegation to Douala to visit the headquarters of NBC and negotiate for their coming to Bakossiland. The delegation consisted of some elders of the Basel Mission church in Ndum, including Benjamin Bwang, Hans Ewene and Petro Ngulle and was led by two catechists; Paul Koole and Joseph Ngole.

Prior to this incident, wives of juju men and traditionalists had been advised by the pastor not to cook meat or take part in proceeds from traditional gatherings like *Ndie* celebrations. While such women were given membership in churches, their husbands were considered outcasts. Thus, Christianity which ought to reconcile people to one another and to God, was rather perceived to turn wives against their husbands. Equally, a monogamist, who took another wife, was excommunicated from the church while his wives were given membership in the church. To add salt to injury, the two Basel Mission catechists of Mwasundem origin, Paul Etuge Kolle and Joseph Ngole, who had made fruitless attempts to be promoted to serve as full evangelists and be eventually ordained, saw this as an opportunity to be grasped. So eventually they worked to bring in another denomination that would help meet their aspirations.

According to Ejedepang (2013: 110), "It was against this backdrop that in March 1952 a powerful delegation led by the new leader Rev. Marthi Marthi arrived in Ndum, *Mwasundem*, Bakossiland, to set up the Native Baptist Church of Cameroon." The Native Baptist Church, he says, is an offshoot of the London Baptist Mission that Alfred Saker established in Bimbia Cameroon in 1853. In 1926, pastor Lottin Same, the first Cameroonian Baptist missionary, having realized that the Germans Missionaries who inherited the church from London Baptist Missionaries were not recommending Africans

to become pastors, broke from them and founded the Native Baptist Church of Cameroon. The Native Baptist Church insisted on the new converts that as Baptists, the true and genuine form of baptism was by immersion. This incorporated a good measure of African traditional practices by accepting practices like polygamy and juju society adherents. Such persons were baptized with the hope that in time, through the study of the Bible, the people will progressively shed off the practices. This thus marked the circumstances under which the third Christian denomination that arrived Bakossiland was founded.

2.4 The establishment of the CBC among the Bakossi people

In about the year 1975, the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC), joined the earlier arrivals to constitute the fourth Christian denomination to come to Bakossiland¹⁸. The CBC mission activities went on for about two decades unnoticed as the church's strategy did not focus on evangelization among the Bakossi people as the Basel Mission, the Roman Catholic Mission, or the Native Baptist Church of Cameroon. The CBC was little known among the people and the few churches that existed were in industrial agricultural areas known as the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC). These areas are mostly inhabited by non-natives who have come to work in plantations or in farms. Thus the churches did not come about as a result of church plants; rather the churches were made up of those who had been Christians before coming to settle in their new communities.

The first of these churches that existed among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon was in Tombel, the largest of the Bakossi villages, a town which was the center of the CDC with a rubber plantation. While these churches have prevailed over time, they did not fulfil what Hesselgrave (1984:120) calls the logical steps in Paul's master plan for evangelism and church development. He says that, "Transfer growth can never be a substitute for biological and conversion growth." According to the CBC transitional constitution (2008:13), among other things, a local church is considered a church when, "It is the primary instrument of God's Kingdom

¹⁸ This information is contained in the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy Project history.

made up of at least 25 members who through faith in Christ live to glorify God... and also if it plants preaching stations and, or nurtures those entrusted to her by Fields or areas.” In like manner, Rhoads (2002:9) equally states that, “The role of the church is to glorify God (Eph. 3:21) and to further the gospel message to the rest of the world (Matt. 28:19, Acts 1:8).” If a church has to glorify God, and preach the gospel message to the world, this has to be done among the people, some of whom will be the unreached and others the backslidden.

The traditional stance of the CBC among the Bakossi people of the South West Region does not merely reveal their true nature as conservative evangelicals, it equally greatly portrays a deficiency in the church’s strategy in reaching out to the people and winning more for Christ. For about 45 years of the churches’ existence among the people, they have experienced very little numerical growth and also the number of churches is nothing to be desired, compared to other mainstream denominations like the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, the Roman Catholic, the Native Baptist Church and even late arrivals like the Full Gospel Mission and the Apostolic Church of Cameroon. The total number of functional CBC churches among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon is twelve and the research data is going to cover all of these churches. This figures are unevenly distributed among these churches, with the largest (Hope Baptist Church, Tombel) having a Christian body of 230 and the smallest (CBC Ngomboku) having a membership of 25 persons. The total number of Christians from all these churches is 954 persons. This number, compared to the number of years that the churches have existed when placed side by side with other denominations, is very negligible.

Apart from the problem of numerical growth, the data from the research reveals that these churches are merely congregations of non-indigenes who have come from different parts of the country and have met in Bakossiland for different purposes. It is this situation that accounts for the very little or no impact from these churches among the people. Getz and Wall (2000:9) say that local church members all need to be Kingdom-minded and church focused and to do that they must do the following; firstly, they must “Remain open to creative approaches for ‘doing church’ to better reach the

lost, even if it means embracing ministries and worship that make them personally feel uncomfortable” and they should “Support plans for planting more churches to reach unreached people more effectively.” Church growth is associated to clearly thought out and effective strategies; without this, the church will merely exist, as it is the case with CBC churches among the Bakossi of the South West Region of Cameroon.

2.5 Problems associated with Christianity among the Bakossi people

From the history of Christianity among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon, especially in the early days, it is obvious that the foundation was not laid on solid ground. With the coming of many other Christian denominations in Bakossiland, at least fifteen more, in later years, Ejedepang (1996:31) wonders, “But why is Bakossiland so open to new religious ideas? Is it a sign of confusion or disappointment with the early ones?”

As earlier mentioned, the Basel Mission, the earliest arrivals, now Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), used an indigenous language, *Douala*, to evangelize the people but the language was not Bakossi language. While the *Douala* and Bakossi (*Akoose*) languages have many similarities, the people needed to learn *Douala* first, then be able to assimilate it into their worldview. Thus, this process concealed the satisfaction and enlightenment that comes with hearing the gospel in one’s heart language. Apart from using a different language which is not the people’s language, the Basel Mission was equally unwilling to incorporate most of the traditional and even cultural practices of the people, including songs, musical instruments, dances, and body decorations, types of food, marriage customs, and funeral rites. They were suspicious of these things because they were thought to be directly and indirectly related to traditional religion. This was done without actually differentiating those pertaining to the culture from those pertaining to traditional religion.

The Roman Catholic mission on the other hand used foreign languages like German, English, French and Latin as they saw these languages as languages that the people could use to procure jobs Ejedepang (1996:51). The use of these foreign languages did little to challenge the people’s worldview and bring the necessary transformation in their

lives. Equally, Roman Catholic missionaries favoured even a more strict rejection of the people's traditional and cultural practices. This was driven more by ethnocentrism than by the enforcement of Christian values, and so it produced many negative effects. Firstly, it made the missionaries feel that everything that was different from their home culture was sin. This was thus considered by the people as an attempt by the missionaries to impose a foreign religion and culture on them, reason why they were resistant to the newfound religion. As a result, this approach thus became the breeding ground for Christians with two faces; within the Christian community they obeyed whatever the missionaries imposed on them and when they got into the cultural context they practiced the same practices that they were asked to reject. This approach simply made these traditional practices go underground. This prevailing circumstances are confirmed by Ejedepang (1996:54) as he says that,

“In the period that ensued after the presentation of the gospel in Bakossiland, evil traditional practices like witchcraft continued to prevail among the people, even among Christians. In some communities, even the very rigid stance of the church against these things did not make them disappear; they simply went underground and continued to wreck-havoc.”

Another effect of this outright rejection of old traditional and cultural practices is that it created a cultural vacuum that needed to be filled, and this was easily done by importing the customs of the missionary. But because the customs of this new found religion were incomplete, whenever the people were faced with challenges they would turn to soothsayers and witch doctors for the practice of certain rituals. Thus, the converts adopted all what was given to them by the missionaries of the newfound religion and saw everything that was associated to their old life as sinful. This is what reflects in CBC churches where all forms of traditional and cultural practices are seen to be deviant. The second approach employed by the early missionaries which brought negative effects on Christianity among the people was that employed by the Native Baptist Church of Cameroon. In their strategy to win more Christians over, they accepted all forms of traditional and cultural practices of the people. They saw it as an opportunity to evangelise to the people through their cultural and traditional worldview.

Ngole (1997:49), says, “The aim was that with time, these members would, through the study of the Bible progressively understand the incompatibility of some of these practices with Christianity, and thus progressively shed them voluntarily.” Yet this aim was very far from the reality. Thus, the two approaches employed by the early missionaries to Bakossiland through the Basel Mission, (which later became the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon), the Roman Catholic Church and the Native Baptist Church of Cameroon, are what resulted in a weakly based Christianity and faith, which points to a serious task that lies ahead of the church to be tackled (Ejedepang 1996:57).

Between these two approaches used by the early missionaries in Bakossiland, there is a middle ground which Hiebert (2001:184) refers to as critical contextualisation. According to him, “This is an approach whereby old beliefs and customs are neither rejected nor accepted without examination.” He adds that to do this the church uses the Bible as the standard of measurement to either accept or reject the practices. Secondly, the pastor or missionary should lead the church in a Bible study related to the question under consideration. Thirdly, the congregation should critically evaluate their past customs in light of their new biblical understandings and to make a decision concerning their use. While he recommends these approach, Hiebert (2001:187) puts forward the following caution: “The missionary may not always agree with the choices the people make, but it is important, as far as conscience allows, to accept the decisions of the local Christians and to recognise that they too are led by the Spirit of God.”

3. Data Collection (Methods of collection)

The data presented in this research was collected from twelve CBC churches and “Prayer Groups” among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon. In order to collect relevant information and to systematically organize the data (David Evans et al 2014:100), a questionnaire was prepared and tested to determine if it would be helpful in accomplishing the goal of the research. Prior to preparing the questionnaire, the Tombel Association Pastor who is in-charge of most of the churches within the area under consideration was contacted. Another elder, an indigene, who is the Chairperson of the Kumba Field Council of Churches, under which the Tombel

Association of Churches falls, was also contacted. The researcher then travelled to the community and attended one of the three days of the Tombel Association Bible Conference. While there, a discussion was engaged with the Association pastor on the purpose of the research and its benefits to the CBC churches among the Bakossi people. The Association Pastor was equally assured that the information provided by each church will be used solely for the purpose of the research and would be held in strict confidentiality. One of the questionnaires was also handed to the Field Pastor of Kumba Field Conference of Churches who also attended the Association Bible Conference.

Both the Association Pastor and the Field Chairperson were quite enthusiastic about the research, and they gave assurance of their support as the need be. Both persons were very instrumental in the success of the research, particularly the latter who is one of the oldest indigenous Baptist Christians in Bakossiland. Having received the support of these two keys persons, the twenty-four questionnaires were forwarded through the Association Pastor to the twelve churches present. This questionnaire comprised of the quantitative component of the research. In this part, a series of questions formulated in the questionnaire were addressed to respondents and forwarded to twelve CBC churches (including "Prayer Groups") and these were to be filled by two persons, a male and a female from each church. One of the two persons had to be the church pastor or the lay leader and the other another Christian. The Association Pastor gave the questionnaires to the twelve pastors (and lay leaders) of the churches present during the Bible Conference who then each selected another member from their churches to fill it.

Three days after giving out the questionnaires, they were filled, collected by the Association Pastor for Tombel Association of Churches who then later sent them to the researcher. This constituted the first part of the questionnaire data. In the second part of the questionnaire process, ten questionnaires were personally handed to ten other Christians of five different churches. Five of the respondents were pastors while the other five were Christians, one from each of the churches. These churches included Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, Tombel, Catholic Church Bangem, Full Gospel

Mission Ngusi, Apostolic Church Tombel and Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, Ngomboku.

The three days were spent to complete this exercise. On the first day the questionnaires were handed to six of the respondents and they were requested to return the questionnaires on the third day. On the second day the remaining questionnaires were handed to the other four persons, who were equally informed that they would have to return the questionnaires in three days. After four days, all the ten respondents were contacted and nine of them confirmed that they had filled the questionnaires. Four out of the ten questionnaires were filled by pastors and the rest by Christians, among whom were leaders.

A week later, nine of the ten questionnaires were returned by the respondents through a contact person that the researcher designated. The researcher then travelled home and collected all the questionnaires, including those of twelve CBC churches as well as those of the five other churches. By being measured with numbers, and analysed using statistical techniques, the facts and figures of the data of the quantitative component were presented in order to examine the validity of the identified problem. The goal was to determine whether the broad views reflected by the analysis are accurate (Creswell 1996:46).

The questionnaires comprised of questions ranging from the respondent's personal information (including the name, gender, age, position in church, ethnic origin), information about the local congregation (name of local congregation, denomination, years of existence of the church, number of members, average number of persons baptized annually, major ethnic groups in congregation, and percentage of literate Christians), languages used during church service (two most used languages), and information about the local community where the church is found (which major ethnic groups that are found in the community, language commonly used in the community, percentage of literate persons in the community, way used by illiterate community members to communicate), and method used by local church to evangelize.

The second part of the research data comprised of the qualitative component which included interviews. Thus, in addition to the data gathered by way of the questionnaires, twenty-five additional persons randomly selected from twelve different communities were contacted and interviewed by the researcher. These persons were men and women selected from five different denominations other than the CBC. By the use of an android phone, the researcher recorded the responses of the respondents to the above questions. The persons selected for this exercise were all Bakossi people presumed to be mature Christians. Having spent more than four decades among the people, the researcher knew how to choose them. This exercise was carried out in three different sessions. During the first session, eight persons were interviewed, the second day eight persons and the third day nine persons. The responses from the interviews were later replayed from the phone, written down and typed.

The goal of the qualitative component is to understand the underlying factor that characterizes the ministry of CBC churches among the Bakossi people, resulting in the present problem, from multiple perspectives. Thus, the information from both the quantitative and qualitative components will then be analysed and interpreted in order to determine the current state of church growth in CBC churches and to evaluate its ministerial effect on the Bakossi people.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Introduction

The exercise of analysing data involves breaking up retained information into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships. Data interpretation on the other hand involves synthesizing data into larger coherent wholes which relate one's results and findings to theoretical frame work (Mouton 2001:98-110). On the quantitative component of the research, twenty-five CBC Christians and five pastors from five different churches were targeted, all twenty-five questionnaires were given to twenty-five Christians from twelve churches (and Prayer Groups) including pastors, all the questionnaires were filled by respondents and returned to the researcher. Equally, from the ten Christians and pastors that were initially targeted from different denominations

and communities, nine received, filled and returned the questionnaires to the researcher. On the qualitative component of the research, all twenty-five Bakossi persons initially targeted for the interview were interviewed. It is all this information that has presented and analysed from this point.

Table 2. CBC Church statistics among the Bakossi People of the South West Region of Cameroon.

No.	NAME OF CHURCH	YEARS OF EXISTENCE	NO. OF CHRISTIANS	AVERAGE AGE OF MEMBERS	2 MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS IN CHURCH	MAJOR ETHNIC GROUP IN COMMUNITY
1.	CBC BUBA 1	+15	41	30-50	KOM, OROKO	KOM, OROKO
2.	CBC KACK	+20	16	30-50	KOM, YAMBA	BAKOSSI
3.	ZION BC MAHOLE	+30	23	30-50	KOM, NONI	KOM, BAKOSSI
4.	HOPE BC TOMBEL	+30	230	30-50	WIMBUM, KOM	BAKOSSI
5.	EMMANUEL BC WATERFALL	+30	200	30-50	KOM, META	KOM, BAKOSSI
6.	CBC NGUSI	+15	42	50	KOM, OKU	BAKOSSI
7.	VICTORY BC EBONJI	10	134	14-30	YAMBA, KOM	BAKOSSI
8.	NAZARETH BC EBONJI	+15	130	30-50	WIDIKUM, META	BAKOSSI, META
9.	CBC NSUKE	+20	22	30-50	KOM	BAKOSSI
10.	CBC NYASSOSO	+15	21	50	KOM	BAKOSSI
11.	CBC NGOMBOKU	+40	25	50	YAMBA, KOM	BAKOSSI
12.	EMMANUEL BC BANGEM	+15	70	30-50	YAMBA, KOM	BAKOSSI

The table above represents the following information;

CBC Buba1: The church has existed for 16 years, has a Christian population of 41 persons with the average age of Christians being 30-50 years. The two major ethnic

groups in church are Kom and Oroko. The two predominant ethnic groups within the community are Kom and Oroko. People from both ethnic groups are settlers.

CBC Kack: The “Prayer Group” has existed for more than 30 years, has a Christian population of 16 members, with the average age of Christians standing at 30-50 years. The two major ethnic groups in the church are Kom and Yamba, while the dominant ethnic within the community that hosts the church is Bakossi.

Zion BC Mahole: The “Prayer Group” has existed for more 30 years, has 23 members, with the average age of Christians being 30-50 years. The major ethnic groups in church are Kom and Noni, and the ethnic group within the community where the church is, is Bakossi.

Hope Baptist Church Tombel: The church has existed for more than 30 years, with a Christian population of 230 members, and the average age of Christians being 30-50 years. The major ethnic groups in church are Wimbum and Kom, while the ethnic that host the church is Bakossi.

Emmanuel Baptist Church Waterfall: The church has existed for more than 30 years, has a Christian population of 200 members, average age of Christians is 30-50 years. The major ethnic groups in church are Kom and Meta, while the main ethnic groups in community are Kom and Meta, both being settlers in the land.

CBC Ngusi: The “Prayer Group” has existed for more than 15 years, with a membership of 42 persons, while the average age of Christians is 30-50 years. The major ethnic groups in church are Kom and Oku, while the ethnic group in community is Bakossi.

Victory BC Ebonji: The church has been for about 10 years, has a membership of 134 persons, with the average age of Christians being 14-30. The major ethnic groups in church are Yamba and Kom, meanwhile the ethnic community that hosts the church is Bakossi.

Nazareth BC Ebonji: The church has existed for more than 15 years, has a Christian population of 130 members, with average age group being 30-50. The major ethnic in church is Kom and the ethnic community that hosts the church is Bakossi.

CBC Nsuke: The “Prayer Group” has existed for more than 20 years, has a membership of 22 persons, with the average age of 30-50. The major ethnic group in church is Kom and the ethnic community hosting the church is Bakossi.

CBC Nyassoso: The “Prayer Group” has existed for more than 15 years, has a membership of 21 persons with the average age being 50 years. The main ethnic group in church is Kom, meanwhile the ethnic community where the church is found is made up of Bakossi people.

CBC Ngomboku: The church has existed for more than 40 years, with a membership of 25 persons, and the average age being 50. The major ethnic groups in church are Yamba and Kom, while the community that hosts the church is made up of Bakossi people.

Emmanuel BC Bangem: The church has existed for more than 15 years, has a membership of 70 persons with average age of 30-50 years. The major ethnic groups in church are Yamba and Kom, meanwhile the ethnic community where the church is found is made up of Bakossi people.

On the qualitative research component, which included interviews, twenty-five persons randomly selected from twelve different communities were contacted and interviewed by the researcher. These persons were men and women selected from five different denominations other than the CBC. They were all Bakossi men and women. Four questions were asked, including their general opinion about the CBC, their impressions about the CBC liturgical program, the songs used during worship service and the Baptist mode of baptism. In order to understand the problem regarding the ministerial effect of CBC churches, its impact among the Bakossi people of the South West Regions, and to seek solutions to solve it (Eyisi 2016:92), the opinions of individual Bakossi people were sought, through a series of questions:

1. What do you know about the CBC?
2. What do you think about their preferred form of Baptism through immersion?

3. What can you say about their liturgy (Here the researcher mostly explained this to the respondents and then allowed them to comment on it)?
4. Have you ever attended a CBC church service? How did you feel about the songs?

The responses of the twenty-five respondents selected randomly from five different denominations among the Bakossi people, have been of assistance in the discovery of some key issues that can improve the ministry effect among the people. While the diverse opinions were evaluated from a subjective point of view from the individuals, the researcher has drawn some observations. Firstly, the responses indicate that most Bakossi people know very little or nothing about the CBC. Secondly, that most Bakossi people observe the CBC as a “Denomination of strangers.” Thirdly, that three-quarters of those interviewed think the form of baptism favoured by the CBC is biblical, following the example of Jesus Christ. Fourthly, a few of those interviewed acknowledge that the liturgy of the CBC is suited to assist Christians to grow spiritually, as there is no monotony, or reciting of prayers as it happens in other denominations. Finally, a few said that songs sung in CBC churches are uniform, in English language and not contextualised. Most of these observations, if not all, agree with what prevails in almost all CBC churches among the people of Bakossi of the South West Region of Cameroon.

4.2 Church Growth level and ministry impact in CBC churches in Bakossiland

From the different statistics presented above, some analysis can be made. Firstly, it will be worthwhile to mention that the CBC requires that at least 25 persons should make up a church for it to be approved.¹⁹ But a look at the facts from the data indicates that CBC Kack, Zion Mahole, CBC Nsuke and CBC Nyassoso have not yet qualified to be churches, although the average age of existence for the five churches is 20 years. That is the reason why they are still referred to as “Prayer Groups”. However, considering the number of years that these “Prayer Groups” have existed, there is every indication that there is very negligible numerical growth. A church that has existed for twenty years and

¹⁹ CBC Adopted Constitution during an extra Ordinary General Session held at Bello, 2004, 13.

above is considered as a mature church and this maturity should reflect in the Christian population, although this is not the only measure of growth for a church. Equally, after existing for more than 40 years CBC Ngomboku still has a membership of 25 Christians. This reveals that over these years not even one Christian has added to the church.

The second thing that can be observed from the table is that all the twelve CBC churches (and “Prayer Groups”) are found in villages within Bakossiland, including Buba, Kack, Mahole, Tombel, Waterfall, Ngusi, Ebonji, Nsuke, Nyassoso, Ngomboku, and Bangem. However, paradoxically the major ethnic groups in the churches including, Kom, Oroko, Yamba, Wimbum, Noni, Meta and Oku are all ethnic groups that come from a different part of the country, the North West Region of Cameroon. Thus, while the churches are in Bakossiland, the members are generally non indigenes.

The third thing observed from the statistics on the table is that all the villages that host the churches, are either agricultural industrial centers (like Cameroon Development Corporation), semi-urban centers where workers are found or are village communities that are involved in agricultural activities. These people who make up the churches as Christians are people who have their roots as Baptist Christians from their places of origin and have either been transferred to work where they are or they resettled to work in the plantations or are involved in other agricultural activities. This is confirmed by the fact that the most common average ages of Christians from all the churches is 30-50 years. This is the most productive working age group, especially in the agricultural domain.

Thus, the statistics reveal that CBC churches have never been intentional in reaching out to the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon. As evangelicals, considering the “distinctives” and the ministry philosophy of Baptists, the ministry of the CBC can bring meaningful transformation among the people if they become purposeful in reaching out to the people. However, apart from not being purposeful, the conservative nature of the CBC and rigid stance against all forms of cultural and traditional practices is a hindrance to effective ministry and consequently church growth among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon.

Table 3. Statistics from five other denominations among the Bakossi People of the South West Region of Cameroon.

No.	NAME OF CHURCH	YEARS OF EXISTENCE	NO. OF CHRISTIANS	AVERAGE AGE OF MEMBERS	2 MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS IN CHURCH	MAJOR ETHNIC GROUP IN COMMUNITY
1.	PCC Tombel	+80	3300	30-50	Bakossi	Bakossi
2.	Catholic Church Bangem	+80	2000	30-50	Bakossi	Bakossi
3.	Full Gospel Mission Ngusi	+30	400	14-30	Bakossi, others	Bakossi
4.	Apostolic Church Tombel	+30	550	14-30	Bakossi, Non-natives	Bakossi
5.	PCC Ngomboku	+60	350	50-80	Bakossi	Bakossi

Comparatively, table 3 above shows numerical church growth levels in other denominations among the Bakossi people.

PCC Tombel: The church has existed for more than 60 years, with a Christian population of 3000 members, average age of Christians is 30-50 years. The major ethnic group in church is Bakossi and the church is found within the Bakossi community.

Catholic Church Bangem: The church has existed for about 60 years, has a Christian population of more than 2000 members, and average age of Christians is 30-50 years. The major ethnic group in the church is Bakossi and the church is found within the Bakossi community.

Full Gospel Mission Ngusi: The church has existed for about 30 years, has a Christian population of 280 members, with the average age of Christians being 30-50 years. The church is mostly made up of Bakossi people and it is within the Bakossi community.

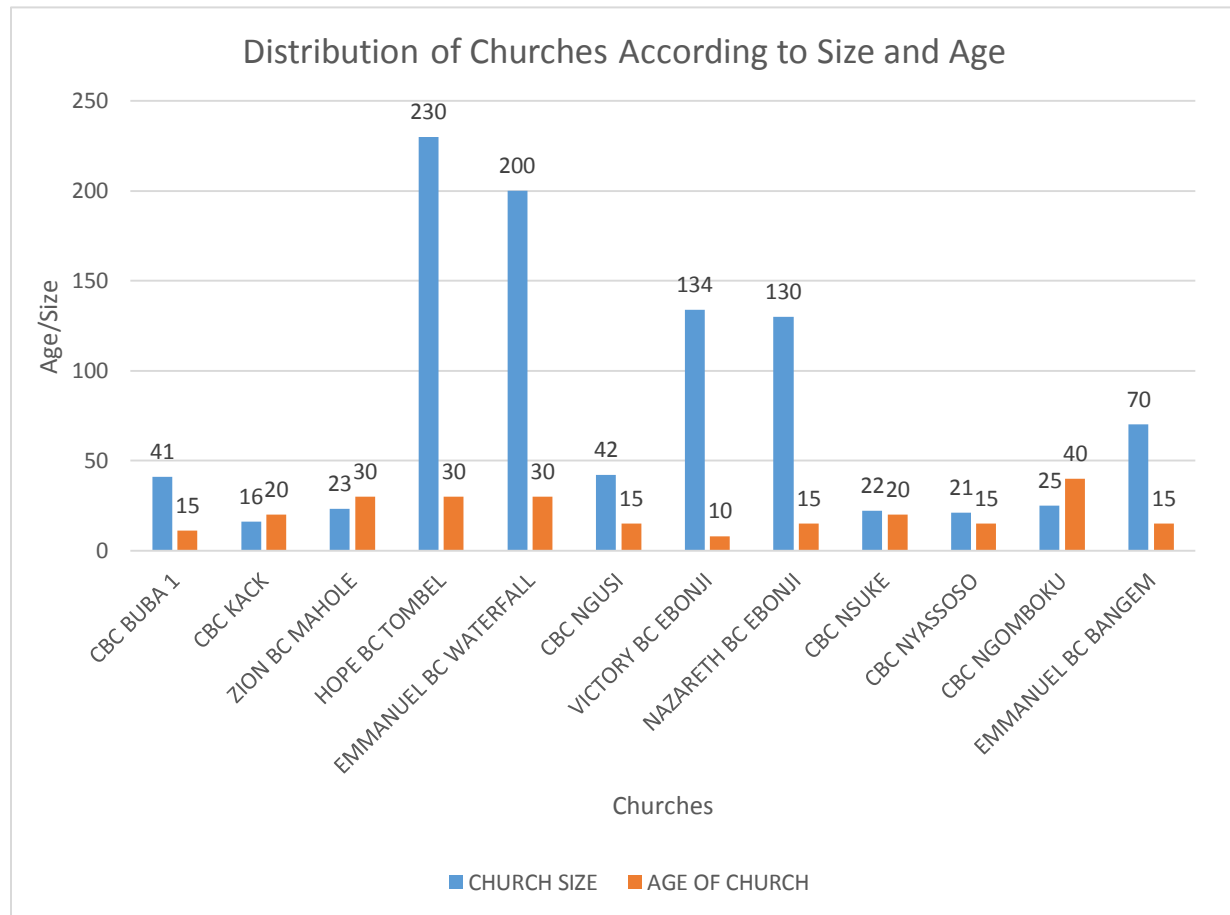
Apostolic Church Tombel: The church has existed for about 30 years, has a church population of 250 members, with the average age of Christians being 14-30 years. The

major ethnic groups in church are non-indigenes and the church is found within the Bakossi community.

PCC Ngomboku: The church has existed for more 60 years, has a Christian population of 350 members with the average age of Christians being 50 years. The major ethnic group in church is Bakossi and the church is within the Bakossi community.

Though some of the churches from the above mentioned denominations have existed for far more years than CBC churches, their growth level in terms of Christian population also speaks for them. Just PCC Tombel alone has far more Christians than (add more)all the CBC churches and “Prayer Groups” put together. Equally significant is the fact that all these five churches have the major ethnic group in church as Bakossi and the major ethnic groups in the communities are Bakossi as well. Thus, relatively we can notice that these other denominations are not only experiencing more growth in membership than CBC churches, but also that they have an impact among the people. However, like CBC churches, only two out of 5 of the above mentioned churches have the average ages of their Christian population between the ages of 14-30. This low youth population indicates that the future of the churches is not assured.

Table 4. Graph showing years of existence and growth levels in CBC churches in Bakossiland



As earlier mentioned, the table above shows the very low growth levels in CBC churches among the Bakossi people. Hesselgrave (1984:119) says, “Numerical growth is an indicator of spiritual growth, although it is not the only indicator”. In order to calculate the growth rate for each of the above mentioned churches, we will divide the current membership by the number of years the church has existed. Thus, the growth rate for the churches will be as follows;

-CBC Buba 1: 41 members divided by 15 years will give a growth level of 2.7 which when brought to the nearest whole number will be 3. We can interpret this to mean that from its creation, an average of three persons is added to the church annually, beginning from the very first year.

CBC Kack “Prayer Group”: 16 members divided by 20 years of the church’s existence will give 0.8 which when brought to the nearest whole number will be 1. Thus, we will interpret that from when the church started, the average number of persons that add to the membership of the church yearly is 1 person.

Zion Mahole “Prayer Group”: 23 members divided by 30 years that the “Prayer Group” has existed gives 0.77 which if brought to the nearest whole number will be 1. At this we will say that throughout the life of the church, only one person is added to the membership yearly.

Hope Baptist Church Tombel: 230 members divided by 30 years of the church’s existence gives a rate of 7.6 which when brought to the nearest whole number will give 8. This can be interpreted to mean that from the beginning of the church, 8 persons are added to the membership yearly.

Emmanuel BC Waterfall: 200 members divided by 30 years of the church’s existence will give a rate of 7.3. When brought to the nearest whole number, this implies that an average of 7 persons are added to the church yearly.

CBC Ngusi “Prayer Group”: 42 members divided by 15 years of the existence of the church gives a rate of 2.8. When brought to the nearest whole number, this implies that an average of 3 persons are added to the church yearly.

Victory BC Ebonji: 134 members divided by 10 years of the church’s existence gives an average growth rate of 13.4. When this is brought to the nearest whole number, it implies that about 13 persons were added to the church membership yearly.

Nazareth BC Ebonji: When 130 members are divided by 15 years it gives a rate of 8.6 and when this is brought to the nearest whole number it will be 9. Thus this indicates that averagely about 9 persons add to the membership of the church yearly.

CBC Nsuke “Prayer Group”: When 22 members are divided by 20 years of the church’s existence it will give a rate of 1.1. When this is brought to the nearest whole number it

will give 1. This then implies that from the inception only 1 person adds to the membership yearly.

CBC Nyasso “Prayer Group”: When 21 persons who make up the membership are divided by 15 years that the church has existed it will give a rate of 1.4 which when brought to the nearest whole number it will be 1. This implies that from the first year up to this time only 1 person adds to the membership yearly.

CBC Ngomboku: When 25 members are divided by 40 years of the church’s existence it will give a rate of 0.6 which when brought to the nearest whole number gives 1. This means that from the first year that the church started, only 1 person adds to the membership of the church yearly.

Emmanuel BC Bangem: When 70 members are divided by 15 years of the church’s existence it gives a rate of 4.6 which when brought to the nearest whole number it will be 5. This implies that from the first year, only 1 person adds to the membership of the annually.

From these statistics we will observe some things which affect the growth rate of CBC churches among the Bakossi people. Firstly, there is generally negligible growth rate. Secondly, it indicates a precarious state in some of the churches in terms of numerical growth, including CBC Buba 1, Zion “Prayer Group” Mahole, CBC Ngusi “Prayer Group”, CBC Nsuke “Prayer Group”, CBC Nyassoso “Prayer Group”, and CBC Ngomboku. Some of these churches and “Prayer Groups” have stagnated so much that the number of years that they have existed has outgrown the membership of the church. The more serious problem is that the churches have been familiar with this state of affairs for so long that they don’t even realize the difference. Thirdly, the implication of these growth levels is that even with the churches that have experienced this minimal growth rate, there has been no conversion growth. The few who have added to the churches over the years have been children of the already existing members, that is, biological growth, or transfer growth.

Table 5. A graph showing Distribution of ethnic groups in Churches

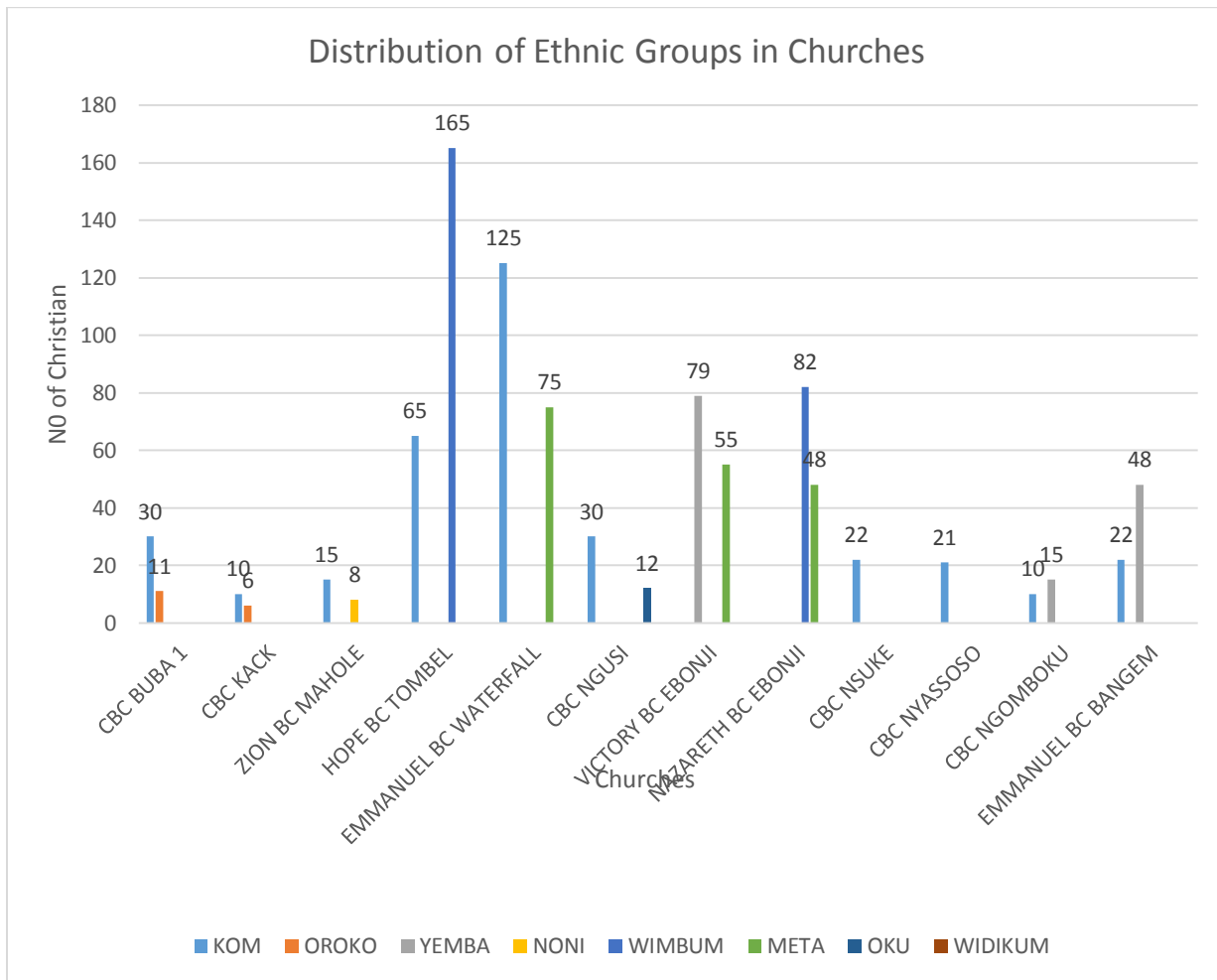


Table 5 above shows the distribution of ethnic groups within the twelve CBC churches and “Prayer Groups” that consist of the research data. Some observations to be made from the statistics are as follows;

Firstly, all the ethnic groups mentioned here are from another part of the country, precisely from the North West Region of Cameroon, even though all the churches are found in Bakossiland. Many of these ethnic groups do not only make up the population in churches, they equally constitute the main ethnic community where they are found. Some of the places where this can be confirmed are in Buba 1, Mahole, Waterfall, and most part of Ebonji.

Secondly, it can be observed that certain ethnic groups are concentrated in particular communities and are not in other communities. The cause of this can be traced from

two sources; firstly, such churches were started by that particular ethnic group and thus it was easy to bring the same people together. This is confirmed by the fact that in all the places where a particular ethnic group dominates, the pastor or lay leader is from among them²⁰. The second thing that the associations of certain ethnic groups in particular communities indicates is preference of certain agricultural activities over others. While one ethnic group prefers working in plantations like Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), others enjoy working in agricultural activities that involve single farm holdings of certain crops like cocoa and coffee. To substantiate the point, it has been observed that while Kom and Wimbang people are found more in plantations, Oku and Yamba people are found in single farm holdings where they are involved in coffee and cocoa farming²¹.

Bakossiland is very fertile, both forms of agricultural activities prevail there at a very high level, and the people are likewise very hospitable. The land has been and continues to be host to people from other communities, especially the hard working people from the North West Region of Cameroon, whose soil is comparatively not only less productive but where arable land is also not easily available.²² Thus this prevailing circumstance whereby whole non-indigenous populations make up CBC churches among the Bakossi people is not only one of the major causes of low church growth rates in terms of membership, it is equally the reason why these churches have made very little or no impact among the indigenous people.

On the other hand, numerical growth rate of the other denominations can be analysed as follows:

²⁰ This information is found on the research questionnaire where the information about the church pastor and his ethnic group of origin is asked. Thus this was all observed and analysed accordingly.

²¹ Having spent more than three decades in Bakossiland and having been involved in various aspects of community life, the researcher knows most communities intimately and can easily identify those areas where non-indigenes are concentrated. There are some quarters in certain village communities that bear the names of some of these non-native communities including, "Yamba Quarters", "Kumbo Quarters", and "Kom Quarters" among others.

²² The researcher spent more than thirty years among his people in Bakossiland and was involved in many aspects of community life. He has equally lived in the North West Region, in different communities during the last ten years.

PC Tombel: A membership of 3300 divided by 80 years of existence gives a growth rate of 41 members annually.

Roman Catholic church Bangem: When a membership of 5000 persons is divided by 80 years of existence it gives a growth rate of 62 members annually.

Full Gospel Mission Ngusi: with a membership of 450 persons and considering that the church has existed for about 30 years, the annual growth rate will be 15 members.

Apostolic Church Tombel: When a membership of 500 persons is divided by 60 years of its existence, it will give an annual church growth rate of 8 persons.

PCC Ngombo-ku: When a membership of 350 persons is divided by 60 years of the church's existence, it gives an annual growth rate of 6 persons.

Thus, from the statistics above, it is glaring that other denominations amongst the people of Bakossi have a growth rate which is higher than that of CBC churches among the people.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, the history of the coming of Christianity among the Bakossi was traced with highlights on the missionary strategies of the mainstream churches including Basel Mission (now PCC), the Roman Catholic mission, and the Native Baptist Church of Cameroon (NBCC). Missionary activities of these early arrivals spread throughout the land with apparent success and the strategies employed enabled them to lay a good foundation. However, some people refused to be impacted by the gospel and these are adherents of traditional religion. Thus, there was the struggle for hegemony between Christian missions spreading the gospel and these adherents of traditional religion. In later years, after the coming of the three mainstream denominations, the CBC was established in Bakossiland. However, unlike the earlier arrivals, the CBC mission did not bring the gospel among the people through evangelisation. The unintentional approach in reaching the people not only greatly affects the growth of the church, it equally reveals the churches' negligible impact as an agent of spiritual transformation among

the people. Even with this, it is strongly contended that the ministry philosophy of the CBC makes it inevitable for effective strategies to be developed for better ministry. This need has increased on the fact that even though about 70% of the people refer to themselves as Christians, genuine Christianity has made marginal impact among the people. The foundation was not laid on a solid rock (Zimmermann 2016:38).

In this chapter, the collected data was presented, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The data was analysed and interpreted accordingly. Through this analysis and interpretation, an attempt has been made to prove that CBC churches among the Bakossi people of the South West region of Cameroon have attained insignificant numerical growth compared to other missions. Based on proven observations and collected and analysed data, it has been pointed out that this negligible numerical growth among the CBC churches is as a result of lack of effective strategies, which has in turn resulted in little or no ministerial impact among the people.

Chapter 4

Establishing theological and biblical principles for church growth

1. Introduction

The aim in the third step (chapter 4) is to focus on the preferred scenario, namely, to interpret the problem situation as it should be. It is during this step that a historical and critical examination of the church's tradition based on biblical and theological foundations has been conducted in order to provide a solution to the problem. Thus, chapter 4 comprises of sources related to theological and biblical foundations of church growth in order to answer the third subsidiary research question: Which theological and biblical principles will be established to enable CBC churches to multiply? This has been done by identifying a relevant biblical text in order to establish a biblical approach to the problem. The LIM model has been developed by using the CBC denominational position, church traditions, and other scholarly sources that are informed by biblical and theological foundations to justify what should be. An analysis of the scriptural text led to insights about how the preferred situation can be enhanced.

2. Key text of the study

2.1 Acts 2:40-47: context and meaning

The book of Acts is a book about missions, that is, it is a continuation of the mighty works of God recorded in the Old Testament. However, unlike in the Old Testament, in the context of Acts, God seeks to bring people to himself through the events in the ministry of Jesus and the early church (Morris 2008:24-25). Through these events, the Christian faith is directed towards the God who has revealed himself as Saviour on the stage of history such that if Christians deny this reality then there is no basis for their faith (1 Cor. 15:17).

According to Barnette (1999:10), “The ministry of Jesus, the early preaching about him and the rise of the churches was nothing less than God keeping the sure promises he made to David.” Jesus is portrayed as the divine-human person whose sacrificial mission is to meet man’s needs in their respective contexts and give them the opportunity to receive wholesome transformation. To this effect, God’s great acts of creating all created things, especially mankind, seeking a way out to redeem man after the fall, and later revealing himself to man in order to restore His relationship with him, are all continued and esteemed in his powerful works, wonders and signs, in the man, Jesus of Nazareth, especially in his death and resurrection (Acts 2:22).

According to Marshall (1980:23–27), the events of the book of Acts help today’s believers to draw some four very important lessons that have significance in the mission of the church. Firstly, these events must be seen as being brought about by God’s will and purpose. Secondly, the life of the church was and should be regarded as taking place in fulfilling the scriptures. Thirdly, the life of the church was and should still be directed by God at all stages of their mission to the lost. Fourthly, the power of God was seen and should be seen in signs and wonders which are performed by the name of Jesus (Acts 3:16). Thus, in Acts we see the engaging purpose of the church, namely, to do mission, and anything short of that is the church’s own agenda. Anything undertaken in this world in the name of mission, according to McGavran (1990:20), has to be the way God desires it to be. “It is not a human activity but *missio Dei*, the mission of God, who himself remains in charge of it.” Thus, the difficulty with mission should be regarded in the light of God’s revealed will.

According to Kunhiyop (2012: 5), God’s work in redemption did not cease with the revelation in scripture and the incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ. God has been at work through the Holy Spirit throughout history to preserve his creation, save mankind and to build his church.

Acts 2:40-47 represents a conversion experience that portrays intentionality in reaching out to a lost people, the Jewish community, whose response was as a result of the reception of a message that appealed to their good consciences towards God (1 Pet. 3:21). Firstly, the recipients were accessible to the message of truth concerning Christ

and they received it with gladness (Philip 1986:64). This message is the full counsel on the deity of Christ and the hope of salvation in him. The appeal prompted by the message moved those present to accept a believers' baptism which ushered them into the Christian fold. The response of these converts who received the first gospel sermon and repented led to 3000 souls being saved and this was confirmed by their forthright baptism (Pratte 2016:56). From this experience of the early church, we learn some important lessons that the contemporary church should emulate.

Firstly, there was an intentional approach in reaching out to the lost with the gospel message. Apostle Peter sounded a note of warning for what awaits a perverse and unrepentant people, yet through the same message he urged the listeners to take the opportunity and save themselves from the corrupt generation (Acts 2:40). Through this approach the priority of mission was revealed as exemplified by Jesus, the founder of the church. According to Maxwell and Elmore (2007:1284), there is need for someone to go out to find the lost. In Jesus' preaching of the message of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son (Luke 15: 4, 8, 20), "...he attempted to underscore God's passion to seek and save the lost." This is the priority of mission.

McGavran (1990:21), equally states that in addition to what God desires in Christ, is the fact that, without doubt, God "wills that the lost persons be found, that is, be reconciled to himself." Accordingly, one of the most important and extremely rare characteristics of mission is a divine finding and this is an enormous task and it must be continuous. To prove God's primary concern for the lost is for them to be saved, he "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Every attempt to foster the mission of God must reveal equal concern for the lost. It is to this end that McGavran acknowledges that simple search, unconcerned witness is only the beginning of the process. According to him, "without the deep wish to convert, without wholehearted persuasion, and with what amounts to a fear of the numerical increase of Christians-is not biblically justified." This is because just searching without finding is not what God wants. God expects that His lost children be found. There is some biblical evidence to prove the fact that God has a passion for the lost, not merely that they should be searched but rather that they should actually be found. In Matthew 9:37 Jesus Christ recognized the fact that simply going

through the harvest-ready fields was not enough; God wanted the grain cut, bound in sheaves, and carried back into his barns.

Secondly, our Lord's parables often emphasized the actual finding. In the parable of the lost sheep (Lk. 15:4-5), the shepherd does not merely search, he actually finds the lost sheep. Equally, in the parable of the lost coin (Lk. 15:8-10), the woman does not merely search, she finds the lost coin. Equally, having been convinced that those reached with the gospel have been saved, the apostles baptized them immediately without postponing it even for one day.

According to Pratte (2016:56), this is typical of the conversions in Acts and it is in contrast with denominational practice regarding baptism. To him, denominations should understand the urgency of baptism. Since the mission of the church is a response to the will of God, the Holy Spirit should be given precedence in directing the affairs of the church instead of depending on human traditions set through denominational tendencies. Thirdly, a significant number of 3000 persons was converted and confirmed through a believers' baptism in the early church. This is a strong evidence that God requires and desires the numerical growth of every church as a sign of the working power of the Holy Spirit (Barnette 1999:14). When the true gospel is genuinely preached and the hearers respond to it with conviction, the result should be an increase in the kingdom. If there is rejoicing in the kingdom over one sinner, then certainly there will be much rejoicing over many sinners who repent (Luke 15:7).

From the book of Acts, we observe marks of a vital church whose strong foundation was laid by the apostles' faithful preaching of the true gospel message. Firstly, the believers were diligent and constant in their attendance upon the preaching of the word. They continued in the apostles' doctrine and never deserted, As faithful ministers, the apostles passed on the good doctrine of Jesus Christ and the believers were nourished in the words of faith and of the doctrine which they carefully followed (1 Tim. 4:6). Preaching the gospel message faithfully is the foundation of a vital body of Christ. This vitality was evidenced in the fellowship of the believers, who not only had mutual affection, but also had a great deal of mutual conversation with each other. In like

manner, they frequently joined in the ordinance of Lord's Supper, in prayer, had frequent meetings for Christian converse and had all things in common (Acts 2:44-46).

Kim (2010:65) affirms that the birth and the characteristics of the early church were entirely the work of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, the leaders of the church worked under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and the believers were obedient to the teachings of their leaders. They were growing spiritually as they practiced love for each other, full of passion, and actively engaged in the evangelization of others. Among them there was a common training both external and internal. First of all, the believers were devoted to the teachings of the apostles and this resulted in internal training. It equally renewed their spirits, while being obedient to their teachings and externally engaging themselves in expressing their love for others. They diligently got together to worship God, practiced communion and showed willingness to learn and engage themselves in communal training activities. In this way, the church achieved a unification of internal, external and communal life, showed that internal maturity brought about external maturity and that what they learned must show in their real life. One might take that as a strategy for growth.

The persistent changes and maturity achieved through both internal and external activities along with communal life contributed to church growth. It is such a powerful proof that quantitative growth and qualitative growth go hand in hand. The text says that, in terms of form, they gathered together every day both in the temple and in homes. This is a good case whereby the small gatherings and large gatherings achieved balance while growing internally and externally in the best sense of the word. These gatherings in the temple and homes were suitable in that context and so greatly contributed to the growth of the church. The use of the two forms of worship at the time and within the specific context could be seen as an effective strategy that enhanced the growth of the church.

According to Wiersbe (2007:329), the early church did more than make converts; they also made disciples in obedience to the last command of the founder of the church (Matt. 28:19–20). He equally observes that,

“The church was unified (Acts 2:44), magnified (Acts 2:47a), and multiplied (Acts 2:47b). It had a powerful testimony among the unsaved Jews, not only because of the miracles done by the apostles (Acts 2:43), but also because of the way the members of the fellowship loved each other and served the Lord.”

2.2 Theological Significance of Acts 2:40-47

Mbiti (1989:47) states that many African peoples, including Christians, perceive God's active part in human history “in terms of his supplying them with rain, good harvest, health, cattle and children; in healing delivering and helping them; and in terms of making his presence felt through natural phenomena and objects.” Africans do not doubt the existence of God and His power to influence or control the affairs of His creation.

The desire of God is to have a relationship with the people He created so that the people will function in communal relationships in a meaningful way. Thus, successive generations must be evangelized and drawn together in fellowship within their given contexts (McRaney 2005:6). The book of Acts in general and Acts 2:40-47 in particular mark the beginning of the Christian church and from this early church, there were all indications that the church is owned by God, and to affirm this fact God gave them proofs of his presence (Acts 2:43). Many signs and wonders were performed by apostles of diverse backgrounds, which in turn confirmed their doctrines and incontestably proved that it was from God.

Starnes (2005:2), says that “the foundations for all church growth methodologies and evangelism strategies must be theologically sound and biblically based in order to justify adoption and implementation.” According to him, the church must count on the divine revelation as recorded in the Holy Bible and thus find the foundations on which to build. He emphasizes that while other things might have some value, the only adequate and reliable means of evaluating the relevance and merit of church growth is the fact that the church must look up to what God reveals to them to do. He goes further to identify the church's dependence on God as a distinguishing factor that enhances growth. He says “The church must look to Christ who is able to build the church (Acts 16:18), the

church must look to the Holy Spirit who is able to empower the church for effective witness (Acts 1:8), and the church must look to God, who is able to cause the church to grow” (1 Cor. 3:6).

Hemphill (1994:24-29), pinpoints what he refers to as spiritual principles which he says are a pattern of divine activity in the way God deals with His people. These include, firstly, every activity that takes place in the church must be viewed always as God at work. Secondly, God always desires and seeks the lost. Thirdly, the plan and work of God are accomplished by his power and thus the glory for every achievement must only be attributed to Him. Fourthly, God requires obedience to His plan for the church. Finally, God has always desired His church to grow. He goes further to identify some evidence of spiritual awakening. Among them he says, the church must have concern for the lost and develop relevant means to reach them, the church should have some God-inspired creative methods which should model commitment to the Great Commission.

According to Drummond (1995:6) evangelistic emphasis and social action are among some of the signs of what he considers as spiritual awakening. Thus, every church is not just called to engage in evangelism; it must emphasize it. To validate evangelistic emphasis as a sign of spiritual awakening, Starnes (2005:1-6), among other things, recognizes the fact that the church must be obedient to the Great Commission (Acts 2:11; Matt. 28:20) as biblical imperative. According to him, the church, as the body of Christ, must not only be associated to a strong theology, but it must equally have a commitment to the Great Commission of our Lord and saviour, Jesus Christ. The mission of the church he reiterates, is to “Make disciples of all nations.” According to him, this has three components associated to it; “Going” which involves evangelism and witness, “Baptizing” which consists of initiation and assimilation, and “Teaching” which consists of discipleship and nurture, He in the same vein, following the passage under consideration (Acts 40-47), goes further to identify other factors that he says are theological foundations to church growth. Among others are the following: the urgency of the invitation (Acts 2:40). In this passage, Peter shared the gospel message of Jesus Christ, not merely in a persuasive manner but also in a compulsive manner and this

necessitated the hearers' brokenness and contriteness of heart. He urged them to repent and they saw the need to do so.

Equally, there is the importance of invitation (Acts 2:41). When Peter's hearers were convicted by his message, they were baptized as a sign of their public declaration of their acceptance of the message. Starnes further that, "Baptism is an ordinance that celebrates the invitation of the new convert into the family of God." Still in this verse, we observe the importance of assimilation. Having been baptized, the new believers must be added to the fold and assimilated into the body. They must be made to feel that they belong and are accepted. Furthermore, there is the necessity of nurture (Acts 2:42). Just like in the early church, Christian nurture for all believers must be a priority in the church.

Fourthly, the church reveals the significance of the supernatural (Acts 2:43). By this it implies that people should see that God is at work in the lives of people and the churches such that it is inexplicable that they become thirsty for the truth of the gospel and this should result in church growth. In addition, there is the value of unity (Acts 2:44-46). Unity of believers more than anything else produces an atmosphere that promotes evangelism and church growth. Finally, Starnes (2005:6) concludes that genuine worship (Acts 2:47) as exemplified by the New Testament church had, "a role in the good favour that the church experienced with the community and to some degree in the growth of the church."

The book of Acts stands in continuity with the acts of God. It is a book about mission (Acts 1:8). The acts recorded in the book, according to Marshall (2008:2), can be narrowed down to, "Salvation history." He adds that, "This history seeks to lead us to an understanding of the various events in the life of Jesus and the early church as historical actions in which the activity of God himself is revealed." Thus he concludes that Christian faith is focused towards the God who has shown himself as saviour to the people and cultures of the old.

Kunhiyop (2012: 6-7) states that what we know about God and how we relate with him is moulded by four factors;

1. Revelation: This has to do with God's unveiling of himself and his will to his creation.
2. Experience: This involves the things humans experience and how those things shape their lives.
3. Reason: This consists of applying our minds to the things that God has revealed to His creation
4. Tradition: This shows that Biblical teachings must be interpreted and as well understood in the context of human traditions and cultures. However, for this to take place effectively, the correctness and validity of the traditions must be evaluated in the light of Scripture. This called critical contextualization.

2.3 Practical significance

Mbiti (1989:29) states that,

“Expressed ontologically, God is the origin and sustenance of all things. He is outside and beyond His creation. On the other hand, He is personally involved in His creation, so that it is not outside of Him or His reach. God is simultaneously transcendent and immanent; and a balanced understanding of these two extremes is necessary in our discussion of African concept of God.”

The source of all church growth is God, but for God to achieve this plan for the church, his co-workers must plant the seed and water it (1 Cor. 3:6-7). Every true church belongs to Christ, he is the builder of the church; it is He who takes credit for all true church growth (Getz and Wall 2000:5). As a Bible believing church, the mission of the CBC among the Bakossi people of the South West region is to call people to believe and trust in Christ. The identity of every local congregation and denominational fellowship is important, but these are pale in significance when compared to the churches' identity and calling to win lost souls for Christ.

The idea of mission, which characterizes the book of Acts and is amplified in Acts 2:40-47, through the conversion of 3000 people in a day, presents God as the source of

Church growth. It reveals Him as saviour on the stage of history; a God who seeks to find and bring the lost to the fold (Morris 2008:24). Mission was instituted by God himself and not by any institution.

Thus to be perceived as a Christian church or denomination, the prime purpose must be to lead people, in this case the lost, to Christ. This is what the CBC churches among the Bakossi people are called upon to do. The churches must be intentionally committed to not only preach on Sundays to a few of its members, but also to seek, and find the lost from among the people where the churches exist. The message must be taken to the people, in order for them to embrace it, bid it welcome, be convicted by it and to accept what it offers (Wiersbe 1992:72).

The purpose of the Christian church was and is still to bear witness to Jesus Christ (Marshall 2008:25). The need to reach out to people of a different community from ours is often characterized by opposition and other challenges. But this is not something that started today. The missionaries of the early church went through the same things (Acts 14:22). If out of about twelve congregations, including prayers cells, that are among the Bakossi people of the South West region, there is none that has even a quarter of the Christians being indigenes, then the church's philosophy in doing mission must be revisited.

3. A brief Baptist history, Distinctives, and theological foundations

3.1 Brief Baptist history

Woodbridge and Frank (2013: 491) date the origin of the Baptists to the year 1611, when the church in exile in Holland (1608–11) led by Thomas Helwys moved back to England. They hold that this first church, referred to as General Baptists (Arminians) rejected infant baptism and double predestination. According to them, in 1610, this church had separated from John Smyth's congregation, who in 1609 had founded what many Baptist historians identify as the first Baptist church of modern times. After Smyth's death in 1612, one of his congregations joined the Mennonites. Baptists are products of the protestant Reformation. They do not share precisely the same heritage,

however, since Presbyterians arose from the “Magisterial Reformation” and Baptists arose from the “Radical Reformation.” Arising from a separatist tradition, Baptists suffered horrible persecution at the hands of Calvinist authorities. The immediate reason why Baptists fled from England, was to avoid persecution (Lemke 2008:10-15).

Nfor (2016:3) states that the biblical teachings of Jesus and his disciples mark the origin of the Baptists. According to him, this can be traced from the first century. He however agrees that if a date is to be associated to the actual beginning of the Baptists as a denomination, it would be in 1609, when John Smith, dissatisfied that he had earlier on baptized himself, requested to be baptized through immersion by a pastor of the Mennonite church in Amsterdam, Holland. Thus, he asserts that 1609 is the more suitable date for the founding of the Baptists as a denomination.

Greer (2009:12), equally dates the beginning of the Baptist denomination from the early seventeenth century. He upholds that, some Puritans in disapproval of certain reforms from within, left the Church of England and “formed separate churches where they could worship as they saw fit.” From this move, they got the nickname of “Separatists.” Accordingly, it was from these Separatist groups that the first English Baptists came into being. Like Nfor (2016:3), he affirms that Baptists believe that their faith comes directly from the Bible.

Broke (2013:7-9), elucidate that the corrupt nature of the Church obligated some Puritans to reform the Church from inside but, even after the attempts to unite the different factions within the Church of England, some persons felt that far-reaching measures were required. As a consequence, these Puritans separated from the Church and formed new groups which became known as “Separatists”. In a move to show how serious they were, John Smyth then baptized himself by immersion and then baptized Thomas Helwys and a group of others. Following this act, he saw it expedient to return to his country rather than flee from persecution and thus he and a few others returned to England in 1612 to establish the first Baptist congregation on English soil.

3.2 Baptist Distinctives

While it is very important to understand that not all who claim to be Baptists worship in the same way, all "Real Baptists" believe in eight "Baptist Distinctives." It is what makes them Baptists. These teachings may easily be remembered by associating them with the letters that form the word "Baptist." According to Bauder (2012:12), Baptists are "Separatists" from other denominations by their characteristic beliefs which when taken together are called the *Baptist "Distinctives."* He further explains that many books have been written about the Baptist distinctives over the past half-century using the same approach, whereby the word "*Baptist*" is taken and turned into an acrostic. Each letter of the word representing a teaching, becomes the first letter of one distinctive. Therefore, according to the above line of thought, rather than one, it is a combination of beliefs and practices that makes Baptists distinctive from other Christian groups.

While each of these individual distinctives is important, none of them qualifies to stand on its own. According to Bauder (2012:120-129), these distinctives center on the Baptist believe in the authority of the Bible, precisely the New Testament, a believer's baptism, pure church membership, individual Christian responsibility, congregational government, and separation of church and state. From the above, eight well known and widely used practices or teachings following the acrostic "Baptists" have been identified in order of chronology.

The first distinctive, which is represented "B", stands for biblical authority (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Baptists believe that the Bible constitutes the final authority in all matters of belief and practice because the Bible is inspired by God and bears the absolute authority of God Himself. Thus Baptists believe as true, whatever the Bible upholds. Accordingly, no human opinion or pronouncement of any church group can supersede the Bible. Other man-made formulations like creeds and confessions of faith which are used to communicate the theology of Scripture lack Scripture's inherent authority.

According to Nfor (2016:25-27), "The bible stands alone among all other writings in that it is uniquely from God and about God. Baptist beliefs and practices are based from the Bible." Bauder (2012:18), however, states that although this approach is widely used in

determining what Baptists stand for, it is slightly misleading. According to this approach, the initial letter, "B" is always made to stand for *Biblical authority*, but while Baptists undoubtedly do recognize Biblical authority, at the same time, it is not actually a Baptist distinctive. On the contrary, the belief that makes Baptists quite distinct from other Christian denominations is their acknowledgement of absolute biblical authority. This belief equally suggests not merely biblical authority in general, but specifically authority of the New Testament, in all matters of church faith and order.

Lemke (2008:10) observes that absolute biblical authority means the Bible is acknowledged as the true center of Christian union, and it is also the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be measured.

The second Baptist distinctive represented by "A" is the autonomy of the local church (Col. 1:18; 2 Cor. 8:1-5, 19, 23). According to Baptists, the local church is an independent body answerable to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church. This further postulates that all human authority for governing the local church only becomes vested within the local church itself. Thus accordingly, the church is autonomous, or self-governing. No hierarchy outside the local church may dictate practices and beliefs that a local church should adhere to. However, autonomy does not mean seclusion and that is why a Baptist church may fellowship with other churches with mutual interests and in an associational bond.

The third distinctive represented by "P" is the Priesthood of the Believer (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 5:9, 10). According to this teaching, "Priest" is defined as "one authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion, especially as a mediatory agent between humans and God." Every believer today is a priest of God and may enter into His presence in prayer directly through our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ. No other mediator is needed between God and people. As priests, believers can study God's Word, pray for others, and offer spiritual worship to God. Believers all have equal access to God, whether they as preachers or not.

The fourth distinctive represented by "T" is the Two Ordinances, which include Baptism and Lord's Supper (Matt. 28:19, 20; 1 Cor. 11:23-32). Ordinances are regularly spiritual

practices or rituals of the church that are very meaningful. Baptists hold strongly that these are the only two ordinances that were instituted by Christ himself (Nfor 2016:43). Accordingly, the local church should practice the two ordinances: (1) baptism of believers by immersion in water, which symbolizes identifying the individual with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and (2) the Lord's Supper, or communion, which symbolizes commemorating Christ's death for believers' sins.²³

The fifth distinctive represented by "I" is Individual Soul Liberty (Rom. 14:5, 12; 2 Cor. 4:2; Titus 1:9). According to this belief of the Baptist, every individual, whether the person is a believer or not, has the liberty to choose what he believes is right in the religious sphere. No one is to be forced to agree to any belief against his or her will. For this reason, Baptists have always opposed religious persecution. However, this liberty does not exempt one from responsibility to the Word of God or from accountability to God Himself.

The sixth distinctive represented by "S" is Saved, Baptized Church Membership (Acts 2:41-47; 1 Cor. 12:12; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 4:3). According to this belief, the local church membership is restricted only to individuals who give a believable testimony of personal faith in Christ and have publicly identified themselves with Him in a believer's baptism. When the members of a local church are believers, there exists oneness in Christ, and the members can endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The seventh Baptist distinctive represented by "T" is the Two Offices – According to this belief, the Bible mandates only two offices in the church, including pastor and deacon (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Acts 20:17-38; Philip. 1:1). The following terms - "pastor," "elder," and "bishop," or "overseer", all refer to the same office. The two offices of pastor and deacon exist within the local church, not as a hierarchy outside or over the local church.

The eighth Baptist distinctive represented by "S" is Separation of church and state (Matt. 22:15-22; Acts 15:17-29). According to this belief, God established both the church and the civil government, and He gave each its own distinct sphere of operation.

²³ This information is from the Eight Baptist Distinctives. Accessed online from <http://cornerstonebaptist-tyro.com/distinctives.aspx>

The government's purposes are outlined in Romans 13:1-7 and the church's purposes in Matthew 28:19- 20. Thus, neither should control the other, nor should there be an alliance between the two. Christians in a free society can properly influence government towards righteousness, however, it is not the same as a denomination or group of churches controlling the government.

In concluding, Bauder (2012:18), affirms that it is not only Baptists who hold all these Baptist distinctives. Baptists like other denominations are characterized by several beliefs. None of these beliefs are completely unique to Baptists. Whichever one of them you choose, there will be Christians of other denominations who acknowledge it. According to Bauder, “No single distinctive by itself is sufficient to distinguish Baptists from all other groups of Christians.” What distinguishes Baptists is a combination of beliefs that they hold. Each denomination believes one, two, or three of these beliefs, but it is only Baptists who believe in all of them put together. Thus, Baptists are distinguished by the combination of teachings, rather than by the individual teachings, and this is what qualifies these teachings as Baptist distinctives.

3.3 Baptists and their theological foundations towards church growth

According to Woodbridge and Frank (2013: 491-92), “the General Baptists believe that Christ died for the sins of all (“general atonement”), not that all would believe. The other type of Baptists is “Particular Baptists”. The Particular Baptists affirmed that Christ died only for the elect and that his substitutionary atonement was effectual only for the elect (“particular atonement”), even though it is sufficient for all. They argue that the Bible teaches believers’ baptism and not infant baptism, and Congregational rather than Presbyterian Church governance. Each of their churches look to Christ as its head.

According to Greer (2009:12-13), at the same time, the churches based their faith upon personal conversion through faith in Christ, followed by baptism for believers. Also, General Baptists believe in a general atonement, that is, that Christ died for all who would believe. They also believed that those who already believe in Christ but later renounce Him can lose their salvation. Their views are often called “Arminianism,” after the Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius.

Broke et al. (2013:9), also observe that John Smyth, the founder of the first Baptist church, became convinced that baptism should only be for professed believers and that it should not be applied to infants. From his personal study of the Bible, “Smyth began to emphasize personal conversion, religious freedom, and regenerate church membership.”

3.4 A brief history of Baptist work in Cameroon and missionary efforts

Hastings (2008:259) states that,

“The coastline of Cameroon with its many islands and inlets, provided opportunities for encounters between Africans and foreigners and between old traditions and new ideas. About that time, Cameroon had some 140 different tribal groups, each with its own language and there was very little communication between these communities.”

Hastings (2008:43) discloses that, by the year 1950, there were at least twenty-three million Christians in the African Continent, south of the Sahara. Out of these, ten million were Protestants and a large number of the churches were concentrated in the east compared to the west with a "comparatively weak with one-and-a-half million all the way from Senegal through Gold Coast, Ivory Coast and Nigeria to the British Cameroons.”

Hastings (2008:44) further states that by this same year, the Basel Mission, had served enthusiastic Presbyterian missions in the Gold Coast and Togo, Nigeria and the Cameroons. Baptists on their part were strongest in the Congo and northern Angola but were present too in Nigeria, the Cameroons and elsewhere. According to him, the British Baptist Missionary Society was founded in 1792, “the non-denominational but largely Congregationalist” London Missionary Society in 1795, and the Basel Mission in 1815. He says the creation of these missionary societies did not leave Africa the same as “their missionaries led the way in the opening up of the interior of Africa to European knowledge, trade, settlement and conquest.”

Weber (1993:1-3) underlines that Baptist missionaries were the first western missionaries to establish permanent work in Cameroon. According to him, these early

comers serving under the auspices of the Baptist Missionary Society (London), included British, Jamaicans and Africans. These missionaries first settled on the Island of Fernando Po in 1841 and were among the indigenous people who lived there. Accordingly, in 1844, some of these missionaries from Fernando Po established mission stations on the mainland of either side of the Wouri estuary at Bimbia and Douala. The first missionary who was accredited to have founded the first mission station was Joseph Merrick who was accompanied by Alexander Fuller, a former slave. This first mission station was the Bimbia mission station which would later become known as the British Cameroon Province. Then later, Alfred Saker, a British along with Sierra Leonian, Thomas Horton Johnson, established the Douala mission station. Then in 1858, Alfred Saker returned from Fernando Po to establish Victoria (today known as Limbe) mission station. This became an autonomous Baptist community acquired from King William of Bimbia on Ambas Bay. All Baptist missionary work that in later years spread to other parts of the country found these rise from these early missionary stations.

According to Nfor (2016:5), the beginning of Baptist work in Cameroon finds its roots as early as 1827 when through the permission of the Spanish, the British occupied Fernando Po, an Island, today known as Equatorial Guinee, just twenty miles off the Cameroon coast. Nonetheless, it took the initiative of the Jamaican Baptist, not of the British, to begin Christian missionary work in Cameroon. Through Dr. Prince and Joseph Merrick, a Jamaican of West African parents, Baptist missionary work found its way into Cameroon in 1844. While very little is mentioned about Dr. Prince, much credit is given to Joseph Merrick who is said to have made some significant achievements within barely four years of his stay in Cameroon, from 1844-1849 when he died. Some of his achievements include the establishment of the first printing press in Cameroon, the first permanent church structure was built with burnt bricks and the first school. He was equally accredited for learning Isubu, an indigenous language, and within just three years he translated the gospel of Matthew and the book of Genesis into the Isubu language.

Despite the fact that Joseph Merrick's stay in Cameroon was somewhat brief, it did not create a vacuum with regards to Baptist missionary work in Cameroon. Rather, the solid foundation that he laid paved the way for the consolidation of the groundwork that had been done. In 1848, a year before the departure of Joseph Merrick, Alfred Saker, a British, arrived in Cameroon and continued with the missionary work, building on the foundation laid by Joseph Merrick (Weber 1993:2).

Weber (1993:2-3) affirms that about this time, all the three Baptist mission stations, including Bimbia, Douala and Victoria were aligned around "a physical and organizational trilogy; a chapel (church), a dwelling house and a school". Thus, this became the pattern of successive mission stations throughout the nation. Additionally, towards the end of 1840s the work of the missionaries and their endeavours in consolidating their efforts was associated to a consistent pattern which included learning the indigenous languages, evangelizing the local populations, translating scriptures, starting churches, and teaching the people literature produced in their local languages. Weber further states that by 1850, no Baptist missionary was left in Cameroon, as some of them died while others returned home to Britain or Jamaica. These missionaries only returned to Cameroon to resume their missionary efforts by late 1850s.

According to Ejedepang (1996:126), the significance of the decrease of the foreign missionaries from 1850 to the late 1850s was that Cameroonians who served along with these early missionaries began to take over responsibility for the functioning of their churches and schools. Weber (1993:3-4), again observes that the decline in the involvement of the Baptist Missionary Society invigorated "The expansion of an independent Baptist congregation with its own leadership not dependent on the missionary community."

However, behind the scenes of the success and expansion of Baptist missionary efforts throughout this period was Alfred Saker, the indefatigable British who according to Nfor (2016:8), preferred to be referred to as "Missionary to Africa." He worked so hard that he was worn out and was frequently afflicted by various sicknesses to the point where

he was described by Kwast (1971:75) as “Worn to skin and bone, emaciated to the degree inconceivable.” These physical challenges finally led him to return home in 1876 where he lived until 1880 when he was called to eternal glory. Alfred Saker was in effect the last missionary of the Baptist Missionary Society to leave Cameroon. In all twenty-one English and Jamaican missionaries couples and nine single missionaries from the Baptist Missionary Society had served in Cameroon between 1842 and 1886.

By 1886, the Baptist Missionary Society whose work has declined due to the considerable decrease of foreign missionaries, decided to hand over its Cameroon field to a German-speaking Missionary Society, the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society commonly known as Basel Mission (Weber 1993:6).

Ejedepang ((2013:109) supports that on German annexation of Cameroon in 1884, Baptist (British) Missionary Society was inherited by the German Missionary Society. He further reveals that the union between German Baptists and Cameroon Baptists was not as friendly as that of British Baptists and nationals. In his words, the German missionaries, “were side-tracking African aspirants to the pastorate, because they suspected them for trying to bring African ideas into the church.” It was this inconvenient alliance that pushed Alfred Bell, a young Cameroonian student, who was a member of church in Berlin, Germany, to complain that the alliance between Cameroon Baptists and German Baptists could not work (Weber 1993:6). This complain eventually received a considerate inquiry which led to the separation of the Cameroon Baptist and the German Baptists in 1888. Thus, three years later, through the initiative of Rev. Edward Scheve, the leader of the Baptist Union of Churches in Germany, August Steffens was sent to assist the Cameroon Baptists. Through his efforts, Baptist missionary work grew from this one missionary in 1891 to 13 in 1897.

As a consequence of this apparent advancement, the foreign mission deemed it suitable to recognize a formal mission organization on the 19th January 1898, known as *Die Missionsgesellschaft der Deutschen Baptisten*, located in Berlin, referred to as German Baptist Mission. This organization aimed at supporting the Cameroon Baptist Mission (Scheve n.d:9-11). Unlike the Basel Mission that had had previous experience

of African missions in their earlier work in the Gold Coast, today known as Ghana, the German Baptist Mission had no prior experience when they began work in Cameroon (Weber 1993:20).

3.5 The founding of the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) and policy towards church growth

After the era of the earliest Baptist missionaries, Baptist work was left predominantly in the hands of three men, all of whom were German missionaries who settled in America. These men, who worked in successive order were Carl Bender (1869-1935), Paul Gebaur (1900-1977), and George Dunger (1908-n.d). Bender devoted himself to see the people of the coastal area, where he had settled, progressively develop from their traditional lifestyle to assume their original role in the Christian world (Weber 1993:78). Gebaur and Dunger worked among the remote people of the Grassfield of North West Region of Cameroon. While Gebaur made an effort to develop a ministry which would increase in value and integrate elements of the traditional society with the hope that they would resonate with Christianity. Dunger desired to see that the church becomes an effective and integral part of the newly emerging culture of modern Africa.

Due to the ministry efforts of these three men, the Baptist mission in Cameroon grew from 28 churches and 1400 members in 1919 to 112 churches and 4164 members in 1939. This tremendous numerical growth was achieved within a period of 20 years (Weber 1993:43). This growth is attributed to the three men, especially Bender, whose association with indigenous Africans was amiable. Due to this ministry style, it was not strange that nationals began taking responsibility in handling Baptist work in Cameroon. The trail blazers of this endeavour included pastor Burnley, Moki, Robert Jam, Joseph Mamadu, Robert Nteff, Daniel Nangu, Samuel Nji, Thomas Toh, and Johannes. While the first two men, Burnley and Moki have their origin from the Coastal area, the rest hail from the Grassfield area of the North West Region. These men from the Grassfields had come to the Coastal area to work in the German established plantations where German missionaries evangelized to them and led them to Christ. Thus, after the work in the

plantations, they then returned to their respective communities and established Baptist churches there (Semi 1975:3, 8).

As mentioned earlier, the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society commonly known as the Basel Mission, bought over the British Baptist Mission and took over its activities in Cameroon (Ejedepang-Koge 2013:128). In the hands of the Basel mission, strong signs were observed that some of the teachings that made Baptists distinct were being compromised. Before this time, western Baptist missionaries were side-tracking Africans, especially by not giving them the opportunity to serve as pastors. It was believed that if they were to be allowed, African pastors would bring African ideas into the church. In 1923, one of the few African pastors at the time, led a campaign that ended in the first split of the Baptist church in Cameroon. He and his sympathizers thus founded the Native Baptist Church with headquarters in Douala. This church had quite a good following as it embraced a sufficient amount of African traditional practices like accepting polygamists and members of the traditional sacred society as church members. The hope of welcoming such members into the church was that with time, through the study and understanding of the Bible, they would shed off these practices as they would find them incompatible with Christianity. This marked the first split of the Cameroon Baptist mission under the British Baptist mission. With missionary affairs now under the Basel Mission in the hands of Africans, another split was imminent.

Between 1945 and mid-1950s, the Basel Mission began negotiating to hand over mission affairs to nationals. The missionaries now became convinced that it was time to begin handing things over to Cameroonians to lead the growing church. Having learnt from the first split that led to the creation of the Native Baptist Church, western missionaries thought that it would be wise to leave a church that would fuse in traditional practices in a good measure (Kwast 1976). However, this was not completely successful as it rather created a more serious problem. The Christian following was divided which led to a second split and this brought to the birth of the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) in 1954.

Amongst the things that led to the breakaway were the stance of the faction of the CBC with regards to faithfulness to the Baptist distinctives, full adherence to biblical authority and non-conformity towards inclusion of African tradition and culture into the church. The CBC equally stood against Christian intake of alcohol, adherence to believers' baptism, and a strict stance on church discipline. Equally, the CBC which wanted to remain faithful to Baptist teachings and beliefs was somewhat different from the Native Baptist Church and the Union Batiste Camerounaise. The latter the French Baptist, both of whom preferred a rather loose approach inherited from the Basel Mission (Ejedepang-Koge 2013:103). Thus, the Cameroon Baptist Convention gained an autonomous status as a national church in 1954. However, the church continued to depend largely on support from American Missionary Society (Northern Baptist Convention). This autonomy did not come automatically; it was progressive (Nfor 2016:12).

3.6 Objectives, ministries and structures of the Cameroon Baptist Convention

The ministries of the Cameroon Baptist Convention have been designed such that the gospel has been integrated into the social aspect for the holistic wellbeing of the individual (Nfor 2016:17). According to the constitution of the Cameroon Baptist Convention, revised and adopted in Bamenda on June 13th 2014, the objectives of the CBC are to promote worship and foster Christian fellowship and biblical reconciliation; strengthen and enable member churches to cooperate in carrying out the Great Commission, and the fulfilment of the Great Commandment, to carry out evangelism, missions, church planting and discipleship, to provide quality education, healthcare to all those who need it, and mobilize, support and promote the development of the church and God's people.²⁴

In order to effectively meet the above objectives, the following departments or structures were created by the Cameroon Baptist Convention:

1. Evangelism and Missions Board headed by a director.

²⁴ This information is taken from the constitution of the Cameroon Baptist Convention, Revised and Adopted on June 13th, 2014. Done in Bamenda, Cameroon.

2. Christian Education Services, headed by a director.
3. Education Services, headed by the Education Secretary.
4. Health Services, headed by a director.
5. Finance and Development Board, headed by a director.²⁵

Furthermore, structures charged with the implementation of the above ministries and services of the church include:

1. The General Session.
2. The General Council.
3. The Central Administration.
4. The Area.
5. The Field.
6. The Association.
7. The local church.²⁶

Following the objectives, ministries and structures as observed above, it is obvious that the CBC does not only desire that the church of Christ grows, but the Convention equally has put effective strategies in place to enhance numerical church growth. Thus, following the example of the CBC, all churches of the Convention, location notwithstanding, are expected to pursue the same objectives, the same ministries and structures in order to grow their churches. Considering these therefore, CBC churches among the Bakossi of the South West Region, do not have any excuse not to plan for growth in their churches among the people.

4. Theological and contemporary implications of church growth for CBC churches among Bakossi people

4.1 Introduction

²⁵ This information is equally in the CBC constitution, just as in above.

²⁶ This information is contained in the Constitution of the Cameroon Baptist Convention, adopted by the extra-ordinary general Session held Belo, Bamenda; Cameroon on the 8th April, 2008.

The key text examined earlier on in this chapter demonstrates some invaluable lessons that will enable CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people to take steps to grow their churches. This research work and the strategies proposed will be placed at the feet of the churches and their leaders on how to grow their churches numerically. However, churches reserve the right whether to use them or not. The situation is like leading a horse to a pool of water to drink water. You may never force the horse to drink, but if it becomes thirsty some other time it will look for the place where the water is.

The church has the biblical mandate to look out to the lost, find them, lead them to Christ and bring them to the fold (Luke 19:10). The church may choose to carry out this mandate or it may choose to keep on sustaining its own agenda. Theological and contemporary implications presented in this chapter may not only enhance church growth in CBC churches; they may even help other denominations among the Bakossi people achieve numerical growth as well.

4.2 CBC and theological implications to church growth

Love for God and love for neighbour as one's self are two of the three purposes of every church that seeks to live the will of God. Not only that, these purposes equally assure church growth (Warren 1995:103). These two purposes resonate with the Greatest Commandments that the Lord Jesus Christ instituted for His followers and by implication His church (Matt. 22:37-39). These commandments are embedded in the worship of God and finding and leading the lost to Christ. Thus, as a command that comes from the founder of the church, no church has the right not to obey it.

The mandate to reach out to the lost carries with it an assurance of God's guidance, empowerment and protection (Mark 16:15-18). While churches have this assurance from God, the responsibility to plan and to help churches grow lies in the hands of churches themselves. They must have a vision and strategies for growth, and they must as well develop a plan to carry out this vision and strategies. Church growth, including numerical growth, is in God's plan and purpose for the church (McGavran 1990:38). However, while accomplishment of these plan and purpose, "require divine wisdom,

intervention and grace, it also requires that the church dedicates itself; body, heart and mind to the task” (Hesselgrave 1984:62).

It is far from saying that churches should focus on just numerical growth. In effect, focusing on numerical growth alone will be missing the point. When churches are healthy, they grow the way God intends (Olaleye 2014:49). Olaleye further states that a church that is healthy achieves both spiritual and numerical growth. And this results in some church growth dimension pattern for the church, among which are:

1. A church must grow up. This form of growth pattern has to do with the church’s relationship with God as rooted in worship.
2. A church must grow wide. This is reflected in numerical increase, both in number of members in individual congregations and the number of congregations that are added.
3. A church must grow in influence. Wherever the church exists, it is expected to make an impact in the lives of the people by meeting their needs.

4.3 An urgent need for effective church growth strategies in CBC churches

It is worthy to emphasize that in order for churches to attain numerical growth, the employment of effective strategies is imperative. The Bakossi people, like every other people group, are brought to the saving knowledge of Christ only through the power of God. At the same time, if the churches are not intentional in achieving growth, do not have the vision, do not plan, and do not develop effective strategies for its achievement, then the need to grow churches will remain a far-fetched dream. It is only when the churches will embrace the need to grow, by viewing such growth through God’s perspective, only then can they be motivated to seek strategies that enhance church growth. Developing effective strategies for church growth must be embedded in the churches’ conviction that God desires church growth. Equally, developing church growth strategies must be perceived by churches as an urgent obligation that should move the church to evangelize and nurture those who accept the call to come to Christ. The Holy Spirit who provides empowerment to the church uses only the church’s readiness to enable them to achieve such a dream.

5. Conclusion

This chapter focused on the preferred scenario, namely, to interpret the problem situation as it should be. In this chapter, a study of a key biblical text regarding church growth, Acts 2:42-47 has been done. The text is situated in its proper context and its meaning explained. Implications with regards to church growth have equally been mentioned and the theological and biblical significance of the text highlighted.

Still in this chapter, a brief history of the Baptists has been traced, the distinctives that uphold Baptists identified and explained and the theological foundations on which the Baptist tradition stands cited.

The chapter also traces the founding of the Cameroon Baptist Convention as a denomination and briefly examines its policy towards church growth. The chapter further presents theological and contemporary implications of church growth for CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people. The chapter equally states the urgent need for CBC churches to develop effective church growth strategies.

Chapter 5

Proposed church growth strategies in CBC churches among the Bakossi people

1. Introduction

In this chapter, the fourth step, the work focuses on practical strategies that involve the interpretation of the obligations of believers to be genuinely transformed to the likeness of Christ, the use of their talents for service and ministry, and in sharing their faith with others. This has been done by proposing possible, practical strategies to solve the problem. Through this step, a feasible plan of action has been developed based on the biblical and theological principles of church growth that have been identified in the previous chapter in order to redress the present problem situation. Thus, this fourth and final step, an attempt has been made to answer the last research question: Which strategies can be effectively developed by the CBC to enhance numerical growth among the Bakossi people? The overall objective has been to develop a realistic and achievable action plan in line with a consistent strategy that represents the will of God for CBC churches.

For more than a decade of the church's existence amongst the Bakossi people of the South West region of Cameroon, the CBC as a denomination, in comparison with other denominations, has been marked with stagnation, underdevelopment, ethnocentrism, and negligible growth, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The honest reason why CBC churches amongst the Bakossi do not reach out to unbelievers and eventually attain numerical growth is the erroneous believe that this "would disturb their comfortable routine. This kind of selfishness keeps a lot of churches from growing" (Warren 1995:216).

Warren (1995:51) further contends that if the exclusive purpose of a church is either quality or quantity and not both, then the result will be an unhealthy church. He adds that a church with many genuinely transformed members attracts others persons who

are not members of the church into the church. Accordingly, “When God finds a church that is doing a quality job of winning, nurturing, equipping and sending out believers, he sends that church plenty of raw materials...Quantity attracts quality.” There is biblical support that the growth of a church can be measured both quantitatively as well as qualitatively (Acts 9:31; 16:5).

Hesselgrave (1984:119-120), equally upholds that quantitative and qualitative growth have to do with added numbers to the churches and the number of congregations being established on the one hand, and the degree of understanding of the word of God, Christian life and commitment demonstrated by the church members on the other hand. He however adds that while there is a relationship between the two kinds of growth, one is not necessarily a prerequisite of the other. According to him, there are churches made up of qualitative Christians which are at the same time experiencing little numerical growth, meanwhile growth in numbers must be accompanied by qualitative growth. To this effect, numerical growth in CBC churches will be an indication of qualitative growth.

The strategies proposed here seek to achieve both an increase in the number of Christians in individual congregations and the number of CBC churches among the Bakossi people on the one hand, and the spiritual growth of the Christians on the other hand, since in the researcher’s view, both are indicators of a healthy church. These strategies will take into consideration the theological, practical as well as contextual benefits that facilitate the growth and health of CBC churches among the Bakossi people. There are many ways to grow a church. God in His creation has shown not only that He is a God of diversity, but also that He loves diversity. At the same time, using different strategies to reach different types of people does not mean altering the message of the gospel; the message never changes (Warren 1995:62).

2. Practical strategies for effective church growth

2.1 Designing the right plan

Krejcir (2005:353) acknowledges that plans are very important to use opportunities, to set objectives to make action plans, and to strategize on going from one point to another in ministry. Plans enable a church to focus in serving Christ and they facilitate service to one another. However, plans are merely a road map, they are not the ministry. Thus, if the CBC churches amongst the Bakossi must grow they must begin by planning to do so. However, the churches need to be careful on how much attention they give to plans. While the churches must be careful not to give too much attention to the plans, they must make sure the plans are not so loose that there is no direction or purpose. Either situation is counterproductive. It is at this stage that the churches have to come up with a purpose, vision and mission statements. These statements provide direction for the church and their purpose for existence, what they want to achieve, how they want to achieve it, and within what given time they have to achieve it. Without such clearly defined statements, ministry will be drudgery and continuously less rewarding.

The World Council of Churches²⁷ (2013:3) describes itself as “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to Scripture and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” This “common calling” impels the churches “to seek together convergence and greater consensus on the ecclesiological issues that yet divide them.” Every church must understand the object of its creation. The role of every individual church is to embed its particular plans, mission or vision under the overall purpose and mission for its existence. Thus the way CBC churches among the Bakossi people should do ministry should largely be determined by their understanding of their ultimate purpose of existence. The clearer this understanding the more focused their ministry becomes. Church growth, whether in quality or quantity, like any other endeavor entails a suitable plan. Such a plan does not have to be haphazard; it needs to be intentional.

Bergquist and Karr (2010:44) observe that the first activity that should be carried out in starting a church as a strategy is to choose a field. The field is the particular people

²⁷ The Church towards a Common Vision, Faith and Order. Paper No. 214. 2013. WCC Publications.

group who may either be unreached, or where the gospel might have been perceived to have made little or no impact. In this case, the CBC churches will identify a particular place within the language community to reach the people, most of whom have heard the message of Christ but have not yet believed. They still cling tightly to their traditional beliefs and other unorthodox practices that are contradictory to the gospel. Thus the plan will target a specific people group or community that has need for and are open to the gospel. The receptive community should be identified more specifically along with particular needs that have to be met and the issues that the church needs to have answered.

McIntosh (2001:7) says that “In order for this to happen churches must get to know their target population’s culture, values, lifestyle, felt needs, motivation ... doubts about Christianity and typical response patterns that are natural to them.” It is only such a clear background knowledge that prepares a church to get into a community and effectively impact it. In order to follow the example of the founder of the church, who met the people’s needs at every given opportunity (Matt. 15:30; Luke 6:17-18), CBC churches should do the same if they intend to do meaningful ministry. Thus, beginning with felt needs means that a particular church needs to survey the community it intends to reach and it is important to do so because every community or area has needs peculiar to their unique situation. Warren (1995:222), maintains that there are needs that are common place among those who have not been reached or not been impacted by the gospel, “They are emotional and relational need; the need for love, acceptance, forgiveness, meaning, worth, self-expression, and a purpose for living.”

The other thing to consider in doing planning is for CBC churches to think about the resources to be needed and for what specific issues. These resources will include human, material as well as financial resources and these will be determined by the felt need. Thus, the quality and quantity of the resources will be determined by the felt needs identified within the community under consideration. It is often said that a problem identified is a problem half solved. However, while the churches may consider meeting needs in areas of social, economic, and even educational levels, the ultimate need that should lead the churches into a community should be the spiritual need. The

spiritual need is the need to find the lost and lead them to the saving knowledge of Christ. This was the heartbeat of Christ, the founder of the Church. He reechoed the fact that he came into the world to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10; John 3:17).

Young (2013:8, states that,

“If we think that only a few *can* be saved, we will not plan for many, we will not pray for many, we will not work for many to be saved. Jesus said, ‘According to your faith be it unto you’ (Matt. 9:29). If we know the facts, we can have confident faith. The fact is, there is a great harvest. Jesus said, ‘The harvest truly is great’ (Luke 10:2), not scarce, not meagre. In Matthew 9:37 He said the harvest is plenteous. The thought that only a very few can be saved is a great hindrance to church growth.”

Warren (1995:203) acknowledges that “It costs to reach your community”, and as we have observed, this cost goes beyond finances. According to him, the first and real cost of ministry is the cost of effective planning. When the churches do good planning, it facilitates successful ministry. Thus every successful ministry is evaluated on the basis of the efficacy of their planning.

Hesselgrave (1984:36-27), summarizes the importance of effective planning in enhancing church growth. He states that experts affirm that there are six steps involved in planning for the accomplishment of any task and these include the following:

1. Understand the task.
2. Compare the task with experience and research (identify useful and helpful approaches).
3. Make an overall plan to accomplish the task.
4. Gather the necessary resources.
5. Execute the plan.
6. Learn from experience (and use what is learnt to modify the plan).²⁸

²⁸ The above plan is taken from Planning and PERT (Program Evaluation and Review Techniques) Monrovia, CA: Communication Center, 1966), 44.

2.2 Choosing the right place

Jesus Christ's call for missions to be taken into "all the world" (Matt. 28:19) is to be heeded by mission-minded churches, especially those that seek to grow. However, trying to reach out to the whole world can be likened to shooting in the dark without any explicit target in mind. The result may be that you accidentally hit a target but one would have lost a lot of ammunition. That is the same kind of thing that I think is happening with CBC churches amongst the Bakossi, in trying to do ministry wherever it is deemed possible without first evaluating its feasibility. In such situations, a lot of valuable resources are wasted. The Lord of the harvest gave clear instructions on the places where ministry should be carried out.

McIntosh (2001:6) affirms that effective use of resources demands that churches carefully select those who will be most likely be responsive to the message of the gospel. He equally states that "The receptivity and responsiveness of individuals waxes and wanes." The implication of this statement is that in every Bakossi community where the CBC church intends to begin, there will be some people who will be willing to accept and respond to the gospel at one time or another, meanwhile there will be others who will reject it, the strategy used notwithstanding. It is not likely to have a community where everyone will respond to or reject the gospel message.

Young (2013:20) recommends that ministry should be taken to where the fish are biting best, or where the most can be caught. Accordingly, each country or community is made up of a varying degree of receptivity. Some parts are more open to the Gospel while some are more resistant. He adds that, "God certainly loves the whole world, and Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. But God's method seems to be to concentrate on the responsive in order to reach the rest." As Jesus Christ sent his disciples into various communities and towns to do ministry, he gave them clear instructions on where they should go, what they should do, where they should not go and what they should not do. He said if they get into a community and they are received, or their words are not heard and accepted, then they should leave such a community, but before they leave, they should shake off the dust off their feet against

the people (Luke 10:8-12). There are others who will listen to the message of the gospel, so leave the resistant and move on to the responsive. It is sensible as well as biblical to give attention to those who are responsive to the gospel message. Thus, as CBC churches get into any community amongst the Bakossi people, they should do the same.

However, if a particular church senses a strong call from God to reach out to some who seem unresponsive, then the church should go. He is Lord and so His grace will keep where His spirit would lead. Philip was clearly led (by the angel of the Lord) to leave a place of many conversions to preach to one man, the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). Only God knows which individuals will reach many others and which groups will be responsive. CBC churches amongst the Bakossi must avail themselves for ministry and at the same listen to the voice of God.

While the target is to reach out for the lost within a given community, the church should bear in mind that in order to transform the lives of individuals, the people must start experiencing the transformation from the perspective of their community. This is what encourages and attracts them to the church. It is characteristic of the CBC churches in general and CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people in particular to build ill-planned structures in some isolated part of the village or community, in the name of a church and expect people to come there for worship. It is advisable for the church to be in an area that is accessible. The appearance of a building and where it is situated can attract or discourage people.

Roberts (2008:118-119) says, the focus of the church should be to mobilize the whole church to engage with the whole society in order to bring about community transformation, which in turn will bring about individual life transformation. According to him, the greatest challenge of those who start churches these days is to realize they are to start with the community and not with the church. He adds that those who want to start churches in a community should think like community developers.

2.3 Implementing the right procedure

Today, there has been a great challenge, more than ever before, on the part of service providers who have made every attempt to step up efforts in order to meet up with the different demands in various aspects of life. While many sectors of society are faced with different challenges in life like poverty, lack of medical and social services, and unemployment, the church has not been indifferent. The church is being challenged today to develop new leaders, new methods and new structures that would suit their respective contexts. However, the CBC churches amongst the Bakosssi continue to cling unto traditional denominational structures and are thus less effective than they were in the past. According to McIntoch (2001:15), "Old denominations have been in decline for half a century and show little potential to regain their status in the current spiritual climate." Roberts (2008:68) states that, "Starting a church for the sake of starting a church is not a good reason. Starting a church because God has brought hungry, seeking people into your circle of influence is a good place to start." The CBC should have a strong reason for starting a church and it should be a reason that should be in favour of those amongst whom the church is. With this motivation to start churches, Roberts goes further to propose what he calls top reasons that people often point to when wanting to start and grow churches.

1. *The Great Commission*. He advances that as Christians, we have a responsibility to fulfil what Christ, the founder of the church, has called us to do. According to him, the most apparent way to fulfil the Great Commission is to share the good news of Jesus Christ. This is what churches are called to do. However, this alone is not enough. Merely sharing the gospel does not solve the people's unending problems.
2. *Evangelism*. Planting or starting a church has been deemed the greatest method of evangelism ever created. Accordingly, Roberts (2008:68) states that the lost can better be reached by new churches than by anyone or anything else. But just evangelism is not enough.
3. *Relevance*. Churches that are planted out of well-intended plans tend to be more relevant in terms of effectiveness and communication. As the gospel is further

shared from one generation to another, each planted church must take the seed of the gospel and plant it in their context. But this too is not enough. According to McIntoch (2001:15), left on its own, the need for the church to make itself relevant can so much consume those who want to start the church such that it can undermine the real purpose of starting the church.

4. *Research and development.* If a church that has been planted is not experiencing challenges, then there are chances that something has not been well done. Starting or planting new churches provides an opportunity to try things that already established churches might not easily be able to do. Even if things don't work out as exactly as it might have been expected, it is still not an indication that things have not succeeded. There will always be other ways that things can be made better. It helps to think about the lessons that have been learned and what might be done right. When CBC churches are started amongst the Bakossi just for experimental reasons, this hinders the real purpose of the church. Thus, it is encouraged that appropriate research be done before churches are started. This will then help the church to attain its natural development.
5. *Future generations.* This states that churches that have existed or been planted since twenty-five, fifty, or a hundred years ago are not automatically the ones to continue to reach future generations. However, this can be done if the church is willing to reinvent itself, but unfortunately, most do not. The church is in trouble when the most pleasant thing you hear about it is, "When we started this church," or "This is how we have always been doing things in this church." CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people should be burdened with the idea of starting or planting new churches in order to reach generations of the times where such churches are planted. Better still, CBC churches that have existed for twenty-five years and above should reinvent themselves if they intend to make meaningful impact in communities where they exist. However, starting churches in order to reach future generations is not sufficient.
6. *Transformation.* According to Roberts (2008:71-72), the only reason worth starting a church is for transformation. A church that has this as a reason for starting will find the other reasons to add to this one. Hence, starting CBC

churches amongst the Bakossi for transformation would enable the churches to dream big and let God do the work. For instance, instead of dreaming about having 500 registered members in one congregation, it is more realistic to strategize on having 2000 people during worship in the first ten years of the churches' existence. Or instead of dreaming of building a multi-purpose structure which includes a 5,000 seat worship center, the people's needs will be better met if a clinic, school, or a community empowerment center is built in the community. Therefore, this kind of thinking will help shape the ministry of CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people ministry in such a way that puts the future into perspective.

Searcy (2014:24) states that implementing the procedure or strategic system stands above every other system or strategy of the church since it serves as an evaluation and monitoring tool that ties all the rest of the things together. It is this stage that serves as an opportunity and instrument in ensuring that the church is constantly improving rather than continuing to live in the church's traditional structure or status quo. Choosing to develop realistic, workable procedures is challenging, but without them, churches will continue to reinvent the wheel year after year and even centuries after centuries. To this effect, well-thought-out procedures will help CBC churches to become more faithful and fruitful in every area of ministry. When a strategy is well put in place which aims at bringing holistic transformation in the lives of the people, these will help the churches improve all their other strategies.

We conclude this section with a thought from Roberts (2008:71-72), which state that,

“There is absolutely nothing wrong with dreaming any of those things. But the question is, Where do you start in your dreaming — the church or the world outside the church? That determines everything. It determines how you organize, where you engage, and how you prioritize. The reality is that we've been starting with the 'church' stuff and have done very little to engage the community and society as we always say we plan to do. What if someone started with transformation first?”

3. Cultural relevance strategy for effective church growth

3.1 Adopting the right Philosophy-Cultural relevance

Not only does the negligible number of indigenous Christian population in CBC churches among the Bakossi people (about a token 5%) strongly indicate that there has been no intentional effort to reach the host population, it equally reveals a big crack in the ministry philosophy of the church with regards to being contextual in approach. For ministry to be effective and in turn enhance the growth of the church, it must be contextual.

Turaki (2006: 108) affirms that the most important reason for the existence of the church is to proclaim the unique Christ for salvation to the lost in all cultures “and also to bear witness to the Lordship of Jesus the Messiah to the whole world.” Accordingly, all intermediaries of any religion or culture fall under the supremacy of the person and work of Christ. By virtue of His deity and his work of redemption, Christ alone qualifies to be the mediator between man and God. While the message must remain the same, it cannot be presented in a cultural vacuum.

According to Bevans (2008:68), there is no theology; there is only contextual theology. He further states that, “contextualization of theology, that is, the attempt to understand the Christian faith in terms of a particular context, is really a theological imperative.” He affirms that when the importance of contextualizing theology is acknowledged, we are equally recognizing the importance of context for both the spread and practice of the Gospel. Accordingly, he advanced two significances of making theology relevant to its context. Firstly, engaging theology contextually takes into account the faith experience of the past that is recorded in scripture and kept alive, preserved and defended. Secondly, contextual theology takes into account the experience of the present, that is, the context. He enforces his argument by stating that while theology needs to be faithful to the full experience and context of the past, it is authentic theology only when what has been received is appropriated, made our own. He retorts that, “For that to happen, the received tradition must of course pass through the sieve of our own individual and contemporary, collective experience.”

Hiebert (2001:178-201) explains that all people see the same world, but they have different perceptions through different cultures and this happens without them even knowing it. He further states that it is these different glasses through which people from different cultures see the world that cause culture shock, when confronted with another culture. Accordingly, while “Incarnational ministry” may be difficult, if those who start CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people, who are always people of another culture, get into their new culture with a willingness to be open-minded, they can always succeed in communicating their message. They will even do so more when they are explicit in explaining their ways to the people and if they also have a mind to learn from the people.

The world of the twenty-first century represents a world that constantly reflects a rich assortment of cultures and even though some cultures and languages are disappearing, thousands of other different cultural expressions continue to prevail in the world (McIntosh 2001:11-12). To these different existing cultures, the message may be adapted. Culture expression is one of those many things that reveal God as a God of diversity. The beauty that has manifested itself in creation shows through the diverse human societies that exist throughout the world. Just like God created different races of people who also are customized to live in different communities, in the same way He bestowed them with wisdom to create cultures to suit themselves, whether unconsciously or consciously. God created humans and humans created cultures. Although it was created by man, culture was in God’s plan and that is why in all of His creation it is only humans who are culture bearing. It is one of the aspects that differentiates humans from other animals. Some people feel prejudiced about other cultures and so they turn to reject it. This is only because they have been influenced to feel this way. It is difficult for ministry to be done effectively without taking a people’s cultural frames into consideration.

Warren (1995:207-208), postulates that in order to penetrate any culture, the church must be willing to make some concessions in matters of style and this will in turn make the people willing to hear the message. It is culture that makes life meaningful to every group of people as they live together and it is through these cultures that we can relate

well with one another and also relate well with the creator. While diversity of cultures is quite obvious among the different people groups of the world, no culture is superior to another. Every culture is suited to the people who bear it. At the same time, since culture is a human creation, no culture is perfect. There are good as well as bad aspects of every culture. The important issue is to promote those aspects of cultures that are good and abandon the aspects that are bad. Thus, in order for CBC churches to be relevant as they do ministry among the Bakossi people, they must be willing to make certain sacrifices that will enable them fit properly in the context of their audience. This they can do without necessarily compromising the content of the message.

Hiebert (2001:64-65), asserts that the nucleus of culture are *ideas* (or knowledge), *feelings*, and *values*. Thus, to minister effectively amongst a people and foster church growth, especially numerical growth, the message must be incorporated into the ideas, feelings and values of the people. It is only then that meaningful transformation can take place into their lives. He further states that in order to reach out to, effectively communicate and transform today's pre-Christian people, "churches must continue to package the gospel in a style, language, aesthetics and music of their target audience".

Hesselgrave (1984:57) notes that a considerable sector of the population, both globally and within different people groups can be identified and referred to as, "The culturally distanced non-Christians". According to him, these people "are people who may or may not be removed from active Christians geographically, but they are far removed linguistically, socially, economically, and culturally." Thus, it is imperative to touch the lives of the host community in all these aspects of their lives. A gap in any of these areas in the lives of the people will serve as a need that will definitely have an adverse effect in their response to the gospel message.

Garrison (2006:178-180) believes that effective communication that eventually enhances church growth requires understanding the language and worldview of the receptor community. According to him, passing through the people's culture facilitates reaching them. He however reminds that the real challenge is to lift Jesus up in a way that the culture does not become a hindrance that would prevent the people from

coming to faith in Christ. Thus, challenging and uncovering the worldview of people groups can greatly facilitate in removing the barriers that stand in the way of the gospel. Garrison upholds that, “Communicating the gospel requires us to get inside the mind of those we are trying to reach and that is impossible without learning the language and culture of the people.” Understanding the culture, language and worldview of the different people groups and using these to reach the people with the gospel is an effective approach in making the gospel meaningful. However, the church must show that their involvement into the people’s culture does not impede biblical truth.

Warren (1995:61), asserts that, “The message of Christ must never change...It is the truth which God gave, once for all, to his people to keep without change through the years (Jude 1:3).” In this regard, Warren goes on to caution that churches should ensure that methods are never confused with the message as the message will always remain the same whereas the methods used to bring the message must change with subsequent generations. Warren (1995:229) goes on to recommend Jesus’ approach in doing ministry through the people’s cultures to churches. To him this approach is clear, relevant and applicable. He upholds that the goal of Jesus was to transform the people, not merely to infiltrate their cultures. While Jesus ministered to the people and infiltrated them, he never become drenched by them. He was in the world, tempted in the same way as the people, yet he was never of the world; he never sinned. He walked amongst the people, spoke their language, practiced their customs, sang the same songs with them, attended their parties and used their present circumstances to hold their attention with his teachings (Luke 13:1-5). In like manner, CBC churches in Bakossiland can minister to the people, without necessarily being saturated in their involvement. Equally, those starting the church can mix up with the people, identify with them in their various needs and challenges, learn their customs and culture and still not allow the content of their message from being tainted.

Hiebert (2001:182-242) acknowledges that ministering within a different culture without making the gospel relevant to the context affects both the messenger as well as the message. In order to overcome this, he suggests that the missionary should be aware of the implicit elements of communication; the missionary must be receptor-oriented and

equally that the missionary should not overlook the fact that God is at work through His spirit in the hearts of the listeners, preparing them for the Good News. He further deals with what people should do when they become Christians and how missionaries should respond to the traditional beliefs and practices of the people among whom they minister. He proposes that the best approach to respond to beliefs and customs is by neither accepting nor rejecting them, but that at all times the Bible should provide the basis for their examination. Furthermore, he upholds that self-theologizing as a principle can be used to judge the independence and growth of young churches planted by missionaries. He explains that since theology is God's revelation in human contexts, the three essential components in achieving the principle of self-theologizing are the truth of the Bible, systematic exposition of this truth referred to as theology, and applying this truth to a specific cultural context.

Ngeh (2015:23, 39), says the church has to understand that people will willingly respond to the gospel when biblical truths reflect their daily cultural experience. Anything contrary to that, the gospel will not seem to be relevant to them. According to him, "there was and there is an indigenous communication system perfectly capable of being used to communicate the gospel to the majority of the people. To communicate the gospel, it does not have to be done using a foreign container."

Frame (2008:874-875) supports that wherever the church is, it must seek to transform culture according to the standards of God's Word. This basically means that, for example, if there are members of the church who are farmers, carpenters, government officials, or whatever, they should seek to do their work as Christians, they should apply God's standards to their work. This agrees with what Paul says, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Whenever Christians seek to do this, and begin to do it, they have had a huge impact on the culture. However, attempts to impact the culture have always attracted criticisms from many persons.

Frame (2008:875) further proposes some responses to these criticisms:

1. Seeking to transform culture in this way does not mean trying to save the world apart from God's grace; it simply means obeying God as our thankful response to his grace.

2. A transformational approach does not assume an unrealistic optimism about what is possible in a fallen society. We know that the world is fallen, deeply sinful, and totally depraved. But we also have confidence in God's common and special grace.
3. To apply Christian standards to art, for example, does not mean that we must turn our artistic works into salvation tracts. The Bible doesn't require that.
4. A transformational approach does not mean that every human activity practiced by a Christian (e.g., farming, plumbing) must be obviously, externally different from the same activities practiced by non-Christians. There is always a difference, but often the difference is that of motive, goal, and standard, rather than anything external.
5. Critics have often lamented about the lack of high standards in Christian art, music, and other cultural activity. To some extent, these critics are right. But the answer to this problem is not to accept secular standards uncritically.

Warren (1995:228), argues that by contextualizing the gospel the Bible is not made relevant; it is already relevant. But in following the example of the founder of the church, we have to show that the Bible is relevant "by applying its message personally to the people's lives." Thus, by applying the gospel message personally to the lives of the Bakossi people, CBC churches among the people are not making it more relevant as it already is. These churches must learn to share the gospel in ways that reveal it both as "good" and as "news." If it is shared such that it is not good news, then it is not the gospel. Accordingly,

"The gospel is about what God has done for us and what we can become in Christ; it is a personal relationship with Christ being the answer to our deepest needs. The good news offers lost people what they are frantically searching for; forgiveness, freedom, security, purpose, love, acceptance, and strength. It settles our past and gives meaning to today. It is the best news in the world."

3.2 Empowering the right people: Indigenous membership and leadership

Gene and Wall (2000:83) consider leadership in general as an indispensable concern in church growth. They postulate that when the right people are in the right positions, that is, “people who are qualified in character and who have a biblical philosophy of ministry, churches will grow not only numerically but also spiritually.” By citing Acts 14:21-23 as a biblical example to demonstrate the importance of leadership in the growth of the church, the authors equally suggest that the type of leadership that is recommended is the one that comes from within those who have been reached by the gospel message. From the above passage, Paul and Barnabas proved this process in a specific way on their first missionary journey. From the passage, we observe three issues. First, while the disciples were in Derbe, “they preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples” (Acts 14:21). Second, when they went back to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, cities where they had already been and made disciples, they strengthened the disciples and encouraged them to remain true to the faith (Acts 14:22). Third, from amongst those communities where Paul and Barnabas have been, preached, strengthened and encouraged the people, they appointed leaders for them for each church (Acts 14:23). From this example therefore, CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people must only seek to bring indigenes into the church, they must appoint leaders of the churches from amongst the people themselves. This, however, has not been the case up to the time of this research. The people who have come to start the churches have always themselves occupied leadership positions and also put their tribes’ people that they meet in the host communities into leadership positions.

Garrison (2006:186-187), with regards to preference over local leadership observes that, “The resources are in the harvest.” By this statement, he challenges missionaries of the CBC who come into the Bakossi communities to reach the people and plant churches, to understand that their role is to pass on the vision, passion, and skills to the indigenous members where they serve. According to him, the most effective leadership teams in church planting movements or ministries mostly have those chosen from amongst those who have been reached in leadership positions. He proposes what he calls the “222 Principle” used in the Church Planting Movement (CPM) which states that, “never do anything by yourself; always bring a brother along with you so that you can model and mentor as you go.” According to this principle, in order to enhance

church growth, the goal of this principle is “to transfer the driving force of the vision into the hearts and lives of those being reached.” Garrison further asserts that to have leaders come from amongst the indigenes rather than from those who have settled in the place, reveals several important points.

1. It sustains the statement that all persons are sinners, all have equally been saved by grace, and all are equally capable of being used by God.
2. It strengthens the truth that Christianity is not a foreign religion, but an expression of Christ’s body given to all believers.
3. It helps avoid setting standards of leadership that are unachievable.

Roberts (2008:54) defines *indigenous* as meaning “generated from within, as opposed to being started by outsiders.” This sustains the notion that the believers are the ones fostering the church ministry, not just the leaders. Most often, the church is started by an outsider; and this is the general tendency in CBC churches, especially in churches amongst the Bakossi people. However, if indigenes are not the driving force of these church, then there is a real possibility that the churches will never grow. Being indigenous encourages ownership and involvement. Roberts asserts that, successful movements, including the church, “cannot be orchestrated or driven from the outside; they are movements, not programs.”

Hodges (2009:45-46) puts forward some reasons why by following and improving “The Biblical Pattern” of choosing leaders amongst the indigenes is advantageous to a church that intends to grow. Firstly, the chosen leaders are recognized by the community “as men of mature judgment by their own people and are natural leaders.” In effect, such a pattern of choosing leaders removes any possibilities of leadership being imposed on the local congregation by a missionary. Secondly, the chosen leaders know their own people and are well versed with their culture. They will do their best to work in their own way rather than in the in the way of the missionary who might have come with a foreign culture. For a church leader to be knowledgeable in the host culture is a necessary factor for a truly indigenous church. Thirdly, the growth of a leader’s ministry will be natural rather than forced. The leader will be looked upon by people of the

community as one of them, instead of as one serving the church. His influence amongst his people will be understandably greater. He will grow into the ministry as a result of normal Christian development and his zeal to work for God will be high. Fourthly, since he already has a means of livelihood or is engaged in farming he will not need to depend largely on the support of the church.

Hodges (2009:24-35), asserts that there are three basic fundamental elements that make a church indigenous, including being self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing. According to him, if any of these vital elements be missing, then the church is not actually indigenous. The church can assure its growth through the enhancement of these necessary elements. Self-governing generates a sense of spiritual accountability that is reflected in self-support and self-propagation. If a church fails in its responsibility of self-governing, it dampens the believers' initiative and thwarts their growth, both spiritually and numerically. Also, the need to foster indigenization demands that the church that has been started among a people be rid of the domination of foreigners who started the church. Foreigners in this case will include both western missionaries as well as non-native of the receptive community like those who started CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people of the South West region. The leadership of the foreign church, starters or planters, is welcomed and appreciated in the beginning, but if long after the church has been established, the management of the church remains in the hands of foreigners, then there is a problem. From the statistics presented in previous chapters, it could be said that none of the CBC churches has even a sign of being indigenous.

Broke (1996:99-105), upholds that self-propagating should be an enthusiastic element and a passionate objective in the program of every church. In view of that, it is reiterated that a church that does not propagate itself will soon cease to exist. Self-propagation is biblical and that is observed within New Testament churches. He equally declares that there are at least five "selves" that distinguish every indigenous church.

Firstly, the indigenous church is self-governing (Col. 2:19). Being self-governing means the local church is able to make its own decisions under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The local church should never be under the control of any foreign body, such as an association or convention. The local church may voluntarily cooperate with such groups of churches, but a group outside the local church should not assume authority over the local church. The church should be able to think and act on its own. Secondly, the indigenous church is self-supporting. To be self-supporting means the local church takes care of its financial needs through the tithes and offerings of its members. Thirdly, the indigenous church is self-teaching (Rom. 15:14; I Cor. 14:26, 31). Fourthly, an indigenous church is self-expressing. The inclination is for every church to express itself in worship the way it feels comfortable with, as long as biblical doctrines and principles are not desecrated, any cultural expression should be contextual. Fifthly, the indigenous church is self-propagating (Matt. 28:18-20). Being self-propagating means the church will be involved in starting other new churches. Not only are there no Bakossi persons in the leadership of CBC churches amongst the people, the churches are equally not self-propagating.

However, self-propagating takes sacrifice and resources. For this reason, “a church should not rest until it is involved in spreading the Gospel in such a way that a new church is born.” God can use anyone fully committed to Him to start a new church. The indigenous church should be able to start another new church in the same way it was started. Broke (1996:99-105), adds that, “An indigenous church established upon biblical principles and fully yielded to Christ is a vibrant, living, and exciting body of believers, confident and courageous in spreading the Gospel.” Some of the dominant characteristics of such a church will be the ‘selfs.’

4. Ministry strategy for effective church growth

4.1 Communicating the right purpose: Christ-Centered

Turaki (2006:10) states that certain qualities set Jesus apart as the Messiah and make Him unique. According to him, Jesus “is not only the Lord and Saviour of the church and individual believers, but also of the world.” Jesus is, indeed, the Lord of the universe,

the Saviour of the world, the one who gives genuine peace and who is a righteous judge.

Christ's relationship with the church cannot be overemphasized. He is the founder of His church (Matt.16:18). He is the foundation (1 Cor. 3:11). He became the cornerstone by His death and resurrection (Acts 4:11; Eph. 1:20-23). He purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28), His resurrection and ascension made Him head over the church (Eph. 1:20-23) and in this capacity, among other things, He gives gifts to the members of His body (Eph. 4:8). As found equally, He was the one who sent the Holy Spirit who activated the church into a functioning entity (Acts 2:33). Thus, giving Christ first place in the ministry of every church is to be expected. Any church that neglects that aspect is not only existing to satisfy its own agenda, it is not fulfilling the purpose of its creation.

Hodges (2009:17) calls to mind Jesus' announcement of His purpose to the church: "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). He evokes Apostle Paul's saying that Jesus loved the church and gave himself for it (Eph. 5:2). According to him, throughout Paul's epistles, he described his own labours as being for the sake of the church. Thus, the church "can have no better goal than the one set forth in the New Testament." Therefore, according to Hodges, the objective of every church is defined this way: The church must desire to establish a strong church patterned after the New Testament model. Consequently, in order to follow the New Testament model, the church must follow New Testament methods.

Krejcir (2005:149) states that, "The Church exists by what Christ has done for us in His glory and the production of His work. The church exists for us to be in Christ our Lord, to be His people, and His hands and feet." Christ is the sure foundation upon which every living and growing church is built (Matt. 16:13-21).

Olaleye (2014:21) upholds that the early Christian church was built on nothing else but on the foundation of its founder, Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38-30). He is the foundation and as well as the head of every genuine church. The saved members of the church, the

flock, belong to Jesus Christ because He purchased them with His precious blood (Acts 20:28).

According to a statement from the World Council of Churches (2013:21), “Christ is the abiding head of his body the Church, guiding, purifying and healing it (Eph. 5:26).” The statement further holds that Christ is intimately united to the church, giving life to the church in the Spirit (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12). Thus, not only is faith in Christ fundamental to membership of the body (Rom. 10:9), every Christian church is sustained by Him and must look up to Him. Accordingly, following the understanding of most church traditions, it is also through the rites and ordinances of initiation that the saved become members of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16).

Roberts (2008:28) says many persons are deceived in thinking that the church is about persons accepting Christ, following God’s call into the ministry, and then feeling led to start a new church. Rather, the church is: Individuals found Jesus, he revolutionizes their lives, and as a result Jesus spreads from their lives to the lives of other persons, whether family members, neighbours or persons they come in contact with. When this happens, the many people whose lives have been transformed then congregate into churches, are assimilated and they grow together with others. Seeking Jesus, growing and depending on Him is the purpose of every church. This is what is called the Jesus movement.

Towns (2007:212) states that Paul's most used metaphor to describe the church is to refer to it as the body of Christ. According to him, Paul used this picture often in his letters to the Christians in the churches in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus and Colossae. Through this metaphor, the Bible teaches that Christ is the head of the body, which is the church. God has made Christ head over all things (Eph. 1:22). Believers are the members of his body and they are to grow up in all aspects into him who is the head (Eph. 4:15). As the head of the church, Christ is also represented by the use of husband-wife relationship. Thus, Christ is to be put first in all things in the life of a Christian because he is head of the body, the church (Col. 1: 18). Paul rejoiced in his sufferings in his service to the Colossian Christians because he considered that it was

on behalf of Christ's body which is the church (Col. 1:24). Christ is also the source and provider of all growth to the entire body (Col. 2:19). The many members, who are Christians, are a part of that one body in Christ and of one another (Rom. 12:5; I Cor. 12:12-31). What these images tell us about church growth is that genuine growth only occurs when Christ is given first place. Accordingly, Towns (2007:212) says, "The priority for every church and for every Christian is to give Christ first place in everything." The reason for this priority is mentioned: (1) All things were created by Him and for himself (Col. 1:16); (2) he came first before all things (Col. 1: 17); (3) all things are preserved by Him (Col. 1: 17; and (4) he purposes to be first in all things (Col. 1: 18).

Therefore, as the head and center of the lives of Christians, Christ must be given pre-eminence. The head is always the part of the body which gives directions to the rest of the parts. Equally, the rest of the body or members are always willing to receive the orders, if the body must function properly. Every church that intends to grow today must know how to pay attention to its head and how to equally respond when direction is given.

Gene and Wall (2000:5), state that, "if the church would only follow her Lord's instructions, both quantitative and qualitative growth would follow" They equally affirm that, "Jesus Christ is the founder and builder of the church." Jesus Himself implied this in His declaration to Peter (Matt. 16:17-18). Jesus further referred to the universal church as His church and Paul equally insinuated that this divine ownership can be applied to a local church. In as much as denominations go by different appellations, that help to distinguish them from one another, including sometimes the names of their founders and especially their doctrinal focus, Jesus made it clear that there is only one church and that founder, builder, and sustainer of that church is Him.

Thus, while different denominations maintain their names; Baptists, Catholics, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Wesleyans, Apostolic and Full Gospel, the source of existence and church growth is Jesus Christ. Thus, attempting to promote or enhance unity and growth in churches without giving Christ first place, will be synonymous to

disobeying the will of the founder of the church. God desires to make Himself known and to have the good news of salvation in His Son communicated to all people of the world. There is glory and it is manifested mainly in the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus, His Son, the only Saviour and Lord. The ultimate mission of the church is that through the power of the Holy Spirit the glory will be spread to fill the earth.

4.2 Focusing on the right premise: The word of God

Morris (2012:91), asserts that inerrancy of the Bible means the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God. He further states that some renowned theologians who fostered the church planting movement in the past, used the word “infallible” to describe the Bible. According to him, some people consider the term “inerrant” to be synonymous with “infallible.” Others, however, consider the term “infallible” to mean that the Bible is without error in matters of faith and practice but that it may be in error in matters of science and history. Thus, those who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible believe that the Bible is not in error in any sense.

According to Kunhiyop (2012:38-39), Scripture is meant to be used for the following purposes;

1. For instruction in godliness. The Scriptures teach us how to live Godly lives.
2. For correction (2 Tim. 3:16). Knowledge of scriptures enables us to recognize wrong teaching about God.
3. For instruction in fighting against Satan when tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1-11).
4. To know and understand the will of God
5. For training in righteousness
6. For doctrine or theology.
7. For guidance in all areas of life Ps. 119:105; 17:17; 2 Thess. 3:14).

Brock (1996:37) holds that the second indispensable component of the church is the Word of God, the Bible. He cites the Bible for the vital role it plays in the life of a believer; “How wonderful it is to see a messenger coming across the mountains, bringing good news, the news of peace!” (Is. 52:7). Also in Isaiah 55:10-11, a simile is used to liken the word of God to rain which make crops to grow and provide seed for

planting and food to eat. It is equally mentioned in this passage that the word will not only do what God planned for it to do, but also that it will do everything He sent it to do. The place and the positive nature of the power of the Word of God cannot be overemphasized. Paul, the greatest preacher of his time had total confidence in the Word. He said of it, "I am eager to preach the Good News . . . I have complete confidence in the gospel; it is God's power to save all who believe . . . The Gospel reveals how God puts people right with Himself." Brock strongly upholds the biblical statement that, "All Scripture is inspired by God . . ." (2 Tim. 3:16). Accordingly, any church that is using human wisdom to pick and choose parts of the Bible, considering some as God's Word and other parts as only man's word, and uses that to decide which part will be beneficial to the church, will certainly have a difficult time becoming a Bible-principled church. He further states that there is only one authoritative book that the church has and the more intimate the church becomes with that book, the more it will grow. God's Word rooted in the hearts of people progressively brings them to understanding, conversion and conviction. Accordingly, the Word is more than sufficient in its own authority. Therefore, "we must remember that what God's Word says is more important and more powerful than anything we can say about it" (Brock 1996:37).

Frame (2008:156-157), notes that one of the most important attributes of Scripture is its sufficiency, which is sometimes referred to as *sola Scriptura*, "by Scripture alone." According to him, the sufficiency of Scripture is a very important doctrine and one that is often misinterpreted. Basically, the meaning of sufficiency of Scripture is that, "Scripture contains all the divine words needed for any aspect of human life." However, he further states that, "sufficiency in the present context is not sufficiency of specific information but sufficiency of divine words." Accordingly, Scripture encompasses divine words sufficient for all of life. It has all the divine words that the farmer needs and all the divine words that the theologian needs. While this is not to say that both the theologian and the farmer, for instance, are serving God equally, each of them can however bring glory to God as they serve people in their chosen fields.

Denver (2005:12-13), asserts that, God has always created His people by His Word and this is revealed from creation in Genesis 1, to the call of Abram in Genesis 12, and from

the vision of the valley of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37 to the coming of the living Word. He quotes Paul as saying, “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ,” Rom. (10:17). This passage reveals two things. Firstly, that CBC churches amongst the Bakossi must intentionally evangelize to the lost before the people can hear the message and make a decision to accept Christ. Secondly, using available resources like the Scriptures that have been translated into the Bakossi language can enhance such programs like Sunday school, Bible studies and Sunday readings in the churches.

4.3 Identifying the right priority: Making Disciples

Denver (2005:31-32) states that biblically evangelism is defined as “presenting the good news freely and trusting God to convert people” (Acts 16:14). He adds that, “Salvation comes from the Lord” (Jonah 2:9; John 1:12-31 13). According to him, conversion goes beyond a sincere commitment made once, which is why the church does not stop at the point where they get everyone who makes such a verbal confession and commitment and thereafter leave them on their own.

However, while the church is to care, to plead, and to persuade, their first duty is to be faithful to the responsibility they have from God, which is to present the same Good News that He's given to believers. When the church presents the Good News God brings conversion (John 1:13; Acts 18:9-10). With respect to his definition of evangelism, Denver conveys three things about the decision people must make regarding the Gospel. Firstly, they should understand that the decision is costly and thus must be carefully considered, (Luke 9:62). Secondly, they should be aware that the decision is urgent and thus it must be made (John 3:18, 36). Thirdly, they have to realize that the decision is worth it and therefore should be made (John 10:10).

Waldron (1990:162) observes that the Great Commission, presented five times in the New Testament (Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:46-49, John 20:21, Acts 1:8) is considered the Christian community's fundamental mandate to the world. As pointed out by the evangelists who recorded this narrative, the writers of the gospels, the Great Commission is coming directly from the Lord Jesus Christ and it is presented after the

resurrection. The means through which the Great Commission is to be achieved is through evangelism and discipleship.

Jamieson (1997:134-136) maintains that the Great Commission is a glorious activity associated with two aspects, namely, the missionary and the pastoral, with two inspiring and complete encouragements to carry out and go through with them. According to them, though these words were uttered to the twelve disciples of Jesus, it is a command that they could never have completed in their lifetime. Thus, while Jesus referred to the twelve, He practically addressed Himself to all who, in every age, should take up the same work that He was commissioning the twelve to undertake. In the Gospel of Matthew, the commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19) was received by all men of all ages through the eleven disciples of Jesus Christ. This commission was to indicate the seal of visible discipleship upon the converts by baptizing them in the name of the triune God. By involving the God-head, in itself, the act which is temporary in nature is merged into another, a permanent act. Through this commission, Jesus broke down the dividing wall, and commissioned His disciples to go everywhere and bring the world to the knowledge of Himself. In these words, we find an implicit affirmation of God's love for mankind as expressed by John 3:16. By these words of the Great Commission, all have been given the same opportunity to be granted salvation on equal terms, class or status notwithstanding.

The missionary aspect, which is the make-contact feature, indicates the permanent institution of the gospel ministry and how it will continue to abide in the church as a divine institution so long as there exists any unreached area in the world or any human being outside of the visible discipleship. The missionary aspect of the Great Commission culminates into the pastoral aspect as the reached, baptized converts are to be taught to not only to be more like Christ, their master, but to be His committed followers as well (Jamieson 1997:136).

Jamieson (1997:136), however, further states that the pastoral aspect seemed "an overwhelming task to the unschooled fishermen," yet with it were engraved the greatest

and most assuring encouragements anyone apprehensive or not having the courage to carry out such a task can ever seek. The encouragement that came with the Great Commission was to enable the disciples to undertake and go through the work. In this regard, on the one hand the task of evangelization of the world is given priority above every other thing in the world and through it every other thing must be overcome in achieving it, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18); authority over all persons, all passions, all principalities, and all movements. On the other hand, it gave the assurance of constant protection at all times. Yet, even with this high stakes and great assurance and encouragement associated to the Great Commission, it is neglected and abused at the expense of triviality. Whereas the Lord Jesus Christ expects His church to be occupied in carrying out the Great Commission, the church is unfortunately busy with “other important things”, most of which are largely in the interest of those who start CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people.

Warren (1995:106) identifies the process of making disciples as one of the five purposes of every church that intends to grow. He says this practice of making disciples is also called evangelism. According to him, the church is in existence to communicate God’s word to God’s people. In order to accomplish the mission of God in evangelizing the world with the word of God, Christians must serve as ambassadors for Christ. Warren further emphasizes that evangelism is much more than a responsibility of the church; it is a privilege. However, the church is not just called to do evangelism, the process is meant to have a target. Jesus said he was called to focus on the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 15:22-28). Having a target in the course of evangelism, like in the example of Jesus, does not mean a church is being prejudiced, rather it shows that it is being strategic.

Warren (1995:185), states that it is necessary to define a target in order that a church “would be effective, not in order to be exclusive”. He further suggests that evangelism rotates around five principles, namely:

1. The church must know what they are fishing for.

2. The kind of fish that is expected to be caught will determine every part of the strategy.
3. The church should go where the fish is bating, that is, where the people are responsive to the message.
4. The church should learn to think like a fish.
5. The fish should be caught on their terms, which is letting the target determine the approach to be used.

Hesselgrave (1985:58-60), outlines what he calls “Paul’s Master plan of Evangelism and church growth” and provides biblical evidence for it as observed below:

1. Missionaries are commissioned (Acts 13:1-4; 15:39-40).
2. Audiences are contacted (Acts 13:14-16; 14:1; 16:13-15).
3. The gospel is communicated (Acts 13:17ff; 16:31).
4. Hearers are converted (Acts 13:48; 16:14, 15).
5. Believers are congregated (Acts 13:43).
6. Believers’ faith is confirmed (Acts 14:21, 22; 15:41).
7. Leadership is consecrated (Acts 14:23).
8. Believers are commended (Acts 14:23; 16:40).
9. Relationship is continued (Acts 15:36; 18:23).
10. Sending churches are convened (Acts 14:26, 27; 15:1-4).

Hesselgrave (1985:60-62) further identifies four important aspects of the above Master plan for evangelism and church growth. Firstly, he says it has a beginning and an ending. Secondly, he states that though it seems logical to see it as a process that begins somewhere and ends somewhere, it is actually better to think of it as a cycle that goes on and on. Thirdly, he says, “the cycle must be viewed synchronically as well as diachronically.” That means while the process can be thought of as progressing from the point of communication, through conversion, to a congregation of believers, and so on, the church must realize that as it proceeds into more advanced stages of growth, it must still carry out the same activities that it started with from the onset. Fourthly, he concludes that it is of prime importance that the “Pauline cycle strategy” be applied both to churches that have existed for long as well as for those that have been started newly.

Every church should not merely undertake evangelism as a practice that should take place occasionally, rather it should serve as culture for the church. A culture of evangelism occurs when the need to reach the lost becomes the controlling factor of the local church. Colon (2010:7-9) affirms that,

“This culture will occur when a church realizes that their self-identity is wrapped up with the fulfilment of the Great Commission. It is who they are. A church that has a culture of evangelism is clearly identifiable. When one talks to the members of such a church, they all resonate with the same passion: their church exists to reach the lost. It is the burning passion that consumes them. When a church has a culture of evangelism, evangelistic thinking permeates every activity of the local church.”

According to him, a church with a culture of evangelism does not allow evangelism in the hands of the evangelism committee. Instead reaching the lost is discussed on every committee and in every ministry of the church. All ministries of the church exist to enable the church to fulfil the great commission.

Heward-Mills (2012:1-5) lists a number of factors that he says emphasize the importance of evangelism, amongst them are the following:

1. Church growth in numbers is a sign of effectiveness in ministry. Church leaders should not be deceived “to think that quality is the only cardinal sign of effectiveness in ministry.” In many passages of the Bible, much is talked about large crowds that followed Jesus’ ministry. The number of people who are saved is very important.
2. Jesus Christ exemplified a great soft spot and need to seek and find the lost. As our model and founder of the church, we need to follow His example. Jesus equally sent the twelve out into the harvest and sent the seventy others as well. He constantly reminded that the harvest is indeed great and that labourers were needed (Luke 10:1, 2).
3. It is an obligation for the church to take the singular responsibility of evangelizing the world.

4. Evangelism avoids a situation where the church has the connotation of being tribalistic or ethnocentric. The Apostles did not limit themselves in doing ministry only amongst their people, they extended to the Gentiles (Acts 11:1-3).

Bright (2003:125) declares that while he was on earth, Jesus gave His last command, known as the Great Commission, as an extension of His desire for us to love others when he said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:19). He adds that as a matter of fact, when Jesus said this he was implying that he wanted us to continue what He came to the world to do which was "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). To him, evangelism "is the God-given mission of every believer on earth, and thus it should be our primary objective." Unfortunately, this attitude is lacking in the body of Christ, particularly in CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people. The majority of Christians who make up the churches, do not share their faith in Christ with others.

Thus, if the command, considered as the last command, seemingly expresses the most important words of the Lord, why then are these words being largely ignored? To this, Bright forwards some reasons. Firstly, he says, there is a lack of know-how. Secondly, there is lack of faith. As a consequence of these two reasons, many Christians are not enthusiastic in reaching out to others. According to him, "Instead of living up to their potential and experiencing a dynamic relationship with others... they live with failure and disappointment every day. Instead of thriving, they have settled for mediocrity." Accordingly, he concluded that, "If as Christians we are not fishing or looking out to seek the lost, then we are certainly not genuine followers of Christ."

Starnes (2005:6) considers obedience to the great commission (Acts 1:11; Matt. 28:19, 20) as one of the theological foundations of church growth. He contends that as "the body of Christ, the church must have both the correct theology and a strong commitment to the Great Commission of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." According to him, the mission of the church is to "make disciples of all nations" and this has three dimensions. Firstly, it involves the "going". This consists of evangelizing and witnessing, that is, the process of seeking the lost, finding them and leading them to Christ. Secondly, it involves "baptizing." This process consists of initiating and assimilating the

new believers into the fold. A church may have effective evangelism in the community and great ministries to the church body, but growth can be limited if new people are not well assimilated into the life of the church (Gene and Wall 2000:112). Thirdly, it involves “teaching” which consists of discipling and nurturing the new believers into becoming more like Christ.

Gene and Wall (2000:111) submit that different kinds of opportunities abound for evangelism. Such opportunities include Sunday school, Bible clubs, vacation Bible school, children evangelism club, and camps for children; Sunday school, fun clubs, Bible studies, camping, trips and campus contacts for youth; Jesus film videos, follow-up on Sunday visitors, door to door visitation, home Bible studies, church Bible classes, meetings among others, with people with special needs and marriage building for adults.

Krejcir (2005:152-157), states that the church has many roles and duties, some of which can be considered biblically as essential priorities. However, others have not been explicitly named in the Bible, yet this does not mean that they have to be neglected. For example, the Bible says nothing of youth ministry, or children’s ministry specifically, but this does not mean that the church does not have to carry out such ministries. In like manner, the church must respond to the call to make disciples, take the authoritative command of our Lord and contextualize it to our situation. The Bible is clear on the church’s responsibility, and the church is called upon to look at those responsibilities and make them work in their contexts of life and the needs of the community. One of the priorities of the church is to love, and care for each other in the community, which is a response to our commitment and call from our Lord. The offshoot of this priority is the response for the saved to pass it on to those around them as a thankfulness response for what Christ did for them. Here are a few Scriptures affirming this priority: Matthew 28:19, 20: “Make disciples”, Mark 12:31: “Love thy neighbour”, Acts 1:8-28:30 “Be witnesses”, Mark 16:15: “Preach the Gospel to all creation”, Mark 1:17: “I will make you become fishers of men”, John 17:34: “That the world may know”, 2 Corinthians 5:18: “God...gave us the ministry of reconciliation”, and 2 Corinthians 5:20: “We are

ambassadors for Christ". Thus, to reach out to the community and world, is one of the prime purposes for a church for a church to exist.

Coleman (2001:64) postulates that in any situation and under whichever circumstance, for the church to effectively live out the Great Commission, there is only the same way to achieving success. Firstly, it is necessary for the church to live the expectations of the master by making the Great Commission an intentional and integral part of the ministry of the church. The church and her leaders should realize that the gospel is the life wire of every Christian life and mission. Secondly, it will be worthwhile to understand that any strategy or approach used to carry out the Great Commission that does not hinge on the pattern of the master, our Lord Jesus Christ, cannot last. No one can successfully prevail in this endeavour depending on himself.

As a biblical mandate from the founder of the church, evangelism is not an option for any church and it so it is neither for the CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people. It is the responsibility of the churches to reach out to people with the gospel, show them care, and to persuade them on the need to accept the message. When churches present the Good News of God, the result will be that some people will be converted (John 1:13; Acts 18:9-10) and when this happens more will be added the fold. Conversion growth, which is the most natural growth for a church is what is lacking in CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people and this is a strong indication that the church has failed in doing evangelism.

As learnt from the definition above, for CBC churches to get involved and be successful in doing evangelism amongst the Bakossi, they must bear three things in mind. Firstly, they have to understand that they must make an intentional decision to reach the people with the Good News. This does not happen haphazardly; it has to be planned and both financial and human resources are put into it to make it effective. Secondly, the churches must be aware that the decision to reach the people with the gospel message is urgent (John 3:18, 36). CBC churches should not think that because Bakosiland is perceived as a Christian community and because many churches exist there, it means they don't have their role to play. There will always be people to be

reached in every community, Bakossiland is not an exception. The church should thus find the people to be reached with the gospel. Moreover, the CBC is the only evangelical mission in the area, and so the content and manner of presenting the message will differ from what other denominations have done or are doing. Thirdly, CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people have to realize that the decision to evangelize the people is worth it and therefore it should be made (John 10:10). For this reason, whatever resources are spent in carrying out evangelism will be worth it.

Thus, the need to carry out the Great Commission should not be a choice for the CBC churches amongst the Bakossi. When the churches heed to the call which comes from Christ who Himself is the message of missions, they will be assured of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. If there is one thing which should motivate the churches to reach out to the people and preach the gospel, more than anything else, it should be our Lord's command to us, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of this age" (Matt. 28:19-20).

4.4 Executing the right process: Discipleship

Michael (2019:9-10) defines discipleship as, "a system that allows a minor to learn from a senior." According to him, the emphasis is on the learning process whose goal is to make learners become better fishers of men and the approach used to achieve that is by following (Mark 1:17). An examination of the definition, the goal and approach used for discipleship reveals that some things should have been accomplished at the end of the process. Firstly, the follower must grow and secondly, this growth should be evaluated in the follower or learner's ability to bring more people to Christ. Anything short of that, it means the process has failed. Michael further states that, "God is committed to every discipleship relationship ... It is a kingdom process; it is God's recruitment formula; thus heaven will not leave it to chance." If God is therefore committed and He is the one making growth to occur, and if the church is not growing

through the process, if it “not becoming”, then it is certain that something must be wrong with the church.

Hammond and Wilkes (2008:3) remark that when Peter preached during Pentecost, about three thousand persons were convicted by the message and were saved and baptized, all in one day. Thereafter the church continued to experience spiritual growth, and this was effected through discipleship, as the believers “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42); the church equally grew numerically, as “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Thus, suffice it to state that executing the right process, which is discipling saved believers, is a prerequisite to spiritual growth which in turn forms the basis for numerical growth.

Floyd and McLung (2012:11-12) say the church should make disciples and train others to make disciples. According to them, the principle is that God wants local churches to grow through leading the lost to Christ, not through transfer growth. “God wants you to grow healthy disciples, not weak Sunday attenders.” They hold that doing Church is about bringing into being a discipleship culture through a healthy discipleship process. Looking at Jesus’ method, disciple-making is how persons are brought to faith in Jesus Christ. The style Jesus used for church growth was discipling people, a process which begins from conversion, not just converting them and leaving them the same. Thus, those who are converted are brought into the fold and they are not disciples, then the church will struggle to keep such members. Thus, every church, especially CBC churches amongst Bakossi people, are encouraged not to depend on transfer growth, that is, Christians joining the church because they have left another church for one reason or another. The churches should do everything to grow “through new salvations.” When this happens, the growth of the church will be natural and lasting. In order to guarantee such growth, the church needs to develop a discipleship process that can take care of new members who have been led to Christ. If the church focuses on making disciples who are appropriately prepared and empowered to make other disciples, then the health and growth of the church will happen naturally. When the church nurtures disciples, God builds the church. The process of making disciples takes time and it cannot be forced into a short cut formula. But when it succeeds, the church

grows and develops a solid, culturally relevant and lasting process of making disciples. Heinrich (2007:17) states that, “Discipleship is all about a journey of total transformation, from within to without.”

O’Donovan (2000:70-71) suggests some programs that can be adapted by individual CBC churches amongst the Bakossi. Such programs will serve as strategies that will help churches in discipling their members and this will in turn enhance the growth of the churches. They are:

1. Form a committee that will be in charge of the discipleship ministry.
2. The committee should identify the areas where church members need to grow and the strategies to be used to disciple them.
3. The committee should gather information on what others are doing or have tried to do to in other churches and then decide on what will work in each context.
4. Set up a strategy planning committee to work out a realistic plan of action for the local church.
5. Distribute information to committed Christians about the actual steps they will need to take to become involved in doing discipleship.
6. The local church should set up a revolving loan fund to empower the committee members in doing discipleship.
7. Members in the local church with specialized skills should be encouraged to help train and equip others in the church in various areas.

While CBC churches amongst Bakossi people should bear in mind that discipleship is a process and not an event, the program should however have a beginning and an end, what should be done and the strategies to be used to make it effective. It should always be made to revolve and in regular time frames, an evaluation should be made. There is always room for improvement.

Olaleye (2014:45), maintains that focusing on discipleship is one of the signs of a living and growing church. According to him, the mandate of the church from the Lord is to “make disciples” (Matt. 28:19). He further contends that discipleship is a biblical and effective process of equipping believers to face life and to engage into ministry. In his

words, “A church cannot be dead where believers are properly disciplined.” To him, discipleship gives every believer in a church the opportunity to grow into maturity in Christ. Such a growth consists of bearing and demonstrating the fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Appropriate discipleship enables believers to cultivate Christ-likeness by exhibiting the fruit of the Holy Spirit. They equally “have the privilege of discovering, developing and deploying their spiritual gifts.

McIntosh (2001:7-8), elucidates that biblical church growth considers discipleship as, “a process that begins with finding the lost, folding them into a local church, and then building them into the faith.” He recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit in revealing a clear process in what he identifies as the three participants that explain how to make disciples, including “going”, “baptizing” and “teaching”. Accordingly, “going” refers to the action of finding and leading persons to Christ. He identifies other concepts including finding, evangelism, believing, and salvation that are associated to the idea of “going”. Furthermore, the second participle which is “baptizing” talks about the action of becoming part of the community of faith. This concept involves twofold related characteristics. In the first place, believers ought to identify with Christ (Rom. 6:3-11), and secondly, believers have to identify with a local church (Acts 2:41). Other concepts that are associated with the action of “baptizing” includes assimilation, incorporation and bonding. Finally, the third participle, “teaching” involves the action of spiritual formation. As earlier mentioned, other concepts relate to the action of teaching, which is an aspect of discipleship, include sanctification, that is, the process of being made holy, education and growth, being built up. Conclusively, McIntosh equally remarks that the idea of discipleship is very crucial for complete understanding and implementation of the Great Commission. Inherent in the notion of discipleship is the idea of a process that moves from believing, bonding to growing.

4.5 Nurturing the right relationship: Worship

Kunhiyop (2012:162) states that the community of God exists to glorify God by fulfilling all the functions it was made to accomplish, namely worship, evangelism, and discipling

prayer.” He defines worship as, “our private or corporate expression of our reverence to God.” According to him, the context should determine the style of Christian worship.

Starnes (2005:4-5), mentions Luke as having included in his narrative an insight into the importance of worship in the life and growth of the early church. He remarks that fervent praise was a part of the worship of the Church of the New Testament and it had a role in the good favour that the church experienced with the community and to some degree the growth of the church.

Hemphill (1994:25-29), calls worship "the Wellspring of Church Growth" and describes the elements of what he calls “authentic worship”: 1. it is prompted by the Holy Spirit. 2) It focuses on praising and adoring God. 3. It makes prayer central. 4. It makes the reading of Scripture central. 5. It makes the preaching of the Word the central piece of worship 6. It makes giving a vital part of worship. 7. It calls the worshipper to commitment and active response. He equally outlines the impact of authentic worship on church growth as follows: 1. It provides the supernatural empowering for the people of God. 2. God often communicates His strategy to His people during times of worship. 3. It is the key to committed service. 4. It is essential to the evangelistic ministry of the church. 5. It is critical to church growth because of its transforming impact on the lives of believers.

Olaleye (2014:46) acknowledges that a growing and living church is a worshipping assembly. Every worship setting is an opportunity to exalt Christ in worship and praise. This is what vitalizes the church with joy and spiritual motivation to live the required Christian life, serve Christ, and share him to those who are lost.

Warren (1995:239-248), states that veritable worship can indeed be a witness. He proposes twelve points that he calls “convictions” about worship. They are;

1. Only believers can truly worship God.
2. Believers do not necessarily need a building in order to worship God (Acts 17:24).
3. There is no precise style of worship.

4. Unbelievers can be inspired by worship.
5. Worship becomes a powerful witness to unbelievers if God's presence is felt and if the message is understandable.
6. God expects believers to be sensitive to the fears and needs of unbelievers when they join believers in worship service (1 Cor. 14:23).
7. A worship service does not have to be superficial in order to be seeker sensitive. The message does not have to be compromised; it just has to be understandable.
8. The needs of believers and unbelievers often have a commonality. While they are different in some areas they are very similar in many areas.
9. It is best to specialize the worship service to the purpose of existence.
10. A worship geared towards seekers is meant for the enhancement of personal evangelism, not replace it.
11. There is no particular way to design a seeker worship service.
12. It takes unselfish, mature believers to offer a seeker-sensitive worship service.

Research as well as experience have revealed that worship in CBC churches in general and CBC churches among the Bakossi people in particular, is not only fashioned to edify the worshippers, it has common characteristics as well. Most often it is through the worship style that CBC churches are identified. While it is expected that the theology and church tradition should have an influence over the preferred worship style, context should determine the specifics of every worship service or atmosphere. God is a God of diversity and this should equally be reflected in worship. Thus, the worship types and styles of CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people should be relevant to the cultural context of the people and should be connected into the people's daily living and practice. This should, however, happen without compromising biblical norms relating to worship. It is such a manner of worship that will challenge the Bakossi people's worldview, appeal to them and attracts them to church.

5. Creating the right structures

5.1 The right ministries

Searcy (2010:20) states that the ministry system determines how the church mobilizes people for noteworthy ministry. The Lord Jesus Christ instituted the church and He equally empowers believers to serve. Service in the different areas of ministry is part of how believers grow as disciples. Accordingly, if the church does not have a system in place that helps believers get involved into ministry, then the church will be hurting both members who ought to be using their gifts as well as potential members.

The goal of every CBC church should be to equip members who will be passionate to serve voluntarily. The church can never have too many people to serve because there will always be different areas of service. The real problem is for the churches to first of all identify the number of members who are passionate to serve. In order to achieve this, the church must do the following; firstly, get a specific number of believers who are willing to volunteer their services within a definite time. Secondly, the churches need to motivate people who are willing to serve. Thirdly, the churches should intentionally set aside time and resources to equip persons who are willing to serve. For the churches to have an effective ministry structure that enhances both spiritual and numerical growth, the churches should think about the way they want their ministry system to look like within a specified period of time, both short term and long term.

Jang (2011:68-69), proposes some ministries that he believes will boost healthy church growth (Acts 2:42; 9:31):

1. Worship Renewal; these include aspects like choir, praise team/prayer band, general music team.
2. Prayer: This can be organized early in the morning, in the evening, all night, Sunday intercessory prayer meeting.
3. Disciple Training: New members' class, various levels of discipleship classes (level 1, 2, 3, 4).
4. Evangelism training, spiritual discipline, spiritual gift discovery class, new life training levels (1, 2, 3).
4. Active Sub-group: Cell-centered, sub-parish, aiming at cell church.

5. Christian Education: Sunday school, Nursery, Senior School, Lifelong education center, English Sunday School.
6. Children and youth ministry.
7. Young Adults: Discipline young adults, young adults worship.
8. Community Council Organization, programs for active fellowship.
9. Church Growth: Evangelism training, participating in foreign missions, large crowd movement worship and event planning.

5.2 The strategy ministry

Hesselgrave (1984:33), defines strategy as, “a deliberate well-formulated, duly executed plan of action based on human observation and experience.” Searcy (2010:24), declares that the strategic ministry of a church stands above every other structure in the church in the sense that it serves as the assessment and monitoring tool that ties all other ministries together. It provides the church the occasion and resources to make sure that it is continually improving, rather than being satisfied with the existing state of affairs. Strategy is challenging, but without it, the church will struggle in monotony week after week, month after month and year after year. A well designed and properly executed strategic plan will enable the church to become more faithful and productive in every area of its ministry. To this effect, the strategic ministry ensures that the church is constantly evaluating and improving all of its other ministries. Show me a church that has stagnated over the years and I will show you a church without a strategic ministry.

Searcy (2010:24), further proposes the following as aspects that help in designing a strategy ministry for a church. Firstly, the church should check the last time it monitored and evaluated all the other ministries of the church. Secondly, the church should assess its level of preparedness in accompanying God for what He intends to do in regard to the growth of the church. To which extent is the church willing to grow? Thirdly, key stakeholders or leaders should know and understand the plan of the church. Finally, the church should do a quarterly and annual evaluation of all the ministries and structures in the church. The strategic ministry keeps the church working along efficiently and

ensures that the church is always proactively looking for ways to improve, rather than being reactive in handling challenges.

MacGavran (1995:279) proposes some essential steps in goal setting, two of which are related to the strategic ministry as it enhances church growth. The first step is to chart a growth level. This should be done as an activity set within a time frame of twenty years; but more often a time frame of ten years is appropriate as well and much easier to carry out. For instance, the total membership of the congregation should be ascertained for each year and a simple line graph constructed that will show the increases, level ground, and decreases. It is equally appropriate to know where the members come from. The church should know if the new members are children of current members (biological growth). Or if they are Christians transferred from another church into their present settlement (transfer growth). Or if they are converts who have just been won over (conversion or natural growth). Realistic, measurable and attainable goals must be set with regards to biological, transfer, or conversion growth. The second step is to make faith plans. Such plans are considered estimates as to what level of growth God desires to grant the church, considering the present circumstances that the church might be facing. Faith projections are what the church feels God wants to use it to do.

Mancini (2008:43) proposes a tool that summarizes the visionary picture of a church. He says, "It is a visionary planning tool designed to provide the right amount of vision content at the right amount of time in the future for the entire leadership team." He describes it as *Foreground*, *Midground*, *Background*, and *Beyond-the-Horizon* and transforms them into time frames for the vision of the church as observed below: 1. Beyond-the-horizon vision: This is a 5-20-year picture of the church's future and definitive contribution to the Kingdom of God. 2. Back-ground vision: This identifies four 3-year goals the church needs to achieve in order to accomplish the 5-20-year vision. 3. Mid-ground vision: This pinpoints the one and only important emphasis/goal for the coming year. 4. Fore-ground vision: This determines four initiatives to be completed in the next three months to take the first steps in achieving the vision of the church. According to Mancini, the above strategic planning tool facilitates the enhancement of the following aspects of the church: Attraction, which connects the church with the lost

in the community; Assimilation, which admits new believers into the faith community; Acculturation, which facilitates in the acquisition of Christian values and beliefs; Activation, which connects believers with God's Mission. If this tool is efficiently used, church growth, especially numerical growth will be assured.

Thus, the strategic ministry of CBC churches in Bakosiland will help the churches to step back, identify priority areas of ministry in the church, intentionally plan and execute them. Such a ministry will help the church not only to do effective ministry amongst the people, it will enhance the growth of the church. The plans should always have both short term as well as long term strategies in mind.

6. Conclusion

This chapter proposes strategies for effective church growth in CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people. Here the researcher proposes a strategy that is divided into main categories, namely, practical strategies, cultural relevance strategy, the ministry strategy, and creating the right structures. The practical strategies consist of how CBC churches need to begin by designing the right plan in order to effect church growth amongst the Bakossi people, how to implement the right procedure in order to guarantee church growth and the right place to implement the strategy. The chapter equally addressed the need for the churches to be culturally relevant should they desire to make the required impact in the receptive communities. Under this strategy, sub-strategies like adopting the right philosophy in ministry, impacting and empowering indigenous members as well as the communities are discussed. The third strategy, the ministry strategy, in one of its subcategories emphasizes that Christ forms the purpose for the creation of every church ministry. It equally identifies the word of God as the right premise upon which every Bible believing church must be sustained. This strategy further acknowledges that disciple making is the right priority for the churches and stresses on the need for the disciples to be empowered and nurtured through worship and an intentional discipleship program. The chapter ends with the structure strategy through which the right structures can be created in order to get the best out of all the other strategies. All these strategies, forming the focus of this research work, are

channels of effective church growth for CBC churches among the Bakossi people of the South West region.

Chapter 6

Summary, Implications and Conclusion

1. Introduction

The preceding chapter, chapter 5, focused on strategies for effective church growth in CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon. In order to achieve this goal, possible practical strategies were proposed. Through this step, a feasible plan of action was developed which based on the biblical and theological principles of church growth and this will be used to redress the present situation. Thus, in the fourth and final step an attempt was made to answer the last research question: Which strategies can be effectively employed by the CBC to enhance numerical growth among the Bakossi people? The overall objective was to develop a realistic and achievable action plan in line with a consistent strategy that will represent the will of God for the CBC churches among the Bakossi people.

This chapter concludes the study by restating the need of the research, provide a summary of the study, its implications as well as the final conclusion of the work.

2. Need for the research

The need for the research stems from observations made during a period of twelve years of participating in the Bakossi Bible Translation and Literacy Project which involved work in 152 communities in Cameroon. It was observed that the ministerial effect of the Cameroon Baptist Convention is not only negligible, but it has declined among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon, in comparison to other denominations like the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, the Roman Catholic Church, and to some extent the Apostolic Church and Full Gospel Mission. Of twenty-four churches, including “prayer cells” that existed in 1995, the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) comprised only nine churches in 2012. It was observed that CBC churches failed to increase in numerical value. Individual churches failed to grow and

number of churches diminished, and this in spite of the fact that some of the churches have existed for about 50 years. Some of these churches were even closing their doors. That raised the following question: Why has the CBC among the Bakossi people of the South West Region failed to grow in church membership? It was thus in the effort to answer this question that this research was started.

The second thing that prompted the research is the fact that, based on research and empirical evidence, almost the entire Bakossi language community is dominated by the Roman Catholics and Protestant churches, precisely the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), with very little missionary influence from Evangelicals, specifically the Cameroon Baptist Convention. The researcher, being a Baptist himself, is convinced of the ministerial philosophy of evangelicals, and more so that of the Baptist. So, he thinks CBC churches have something to offer to the Bakossi people of the South West region. Thus, it is believed that the Cameroon Baptist Convention churches have an invaluable contribution to make with regards to doing ministry.

The third thing that prompted the research was that through personal contacts and personal observation, most the churches had no strategy for numerical growth. While plans and strategies for church growth should never replace the main purpose of ministry, which is to search and find the lost, without them no church that intends to grow will arrive at its destination.

3. Objectives

The research largely used the Loyola Institute of Ministry (LIM) theological research model developed by Michael Cowan (2000). The LIM model enhances “the goals of practical theology research which are to examine the world to understand the real-life problem, examine the world to see what God’s ideal is, and then develop an action plan to transform what is into what should be” (Smith 2008:205).

The LIM model was relevant in the achievement of the goal of the research. It is factored into four logical steps. First, the introduction, and the aim is to identify a real-life problem; second, to interpret the present situation, “the world as it is.” Thirdly, the

preferred scenario, namely, to “interpret the world as it should be;” and finally, practical strategies that focus on the responsibilities of Christians. Through the above four logical steps, the work hopes to achieve its goals based on the prescribed methodology. The objective of the research has been to propose effective church growth strategies that can be employed by CBC churches to enhance especially numerical growth among the Bakossi people. The choice of the Baptist church for the study was motivated by the fact that there is need for increased influence and growth of the CBC amongst the Bakossi people. The second objective is that the researcher has a special interest since he is one of the only two ministers of the Cameroon Baptist Convention from amongst the Bakossi people. Accordingly, it is believed that carrying out such a research in the researcher’s capacity would go a long way to stimulate the path for church growth in CBC churches among the Bakossi people in particular and the Cameroon Baptist Convention in general.

The objective of the approach chosen has been an attempt to fully apply the four steps that aim at solving the research problem. In the first step the problem is identified and described by way of observation. This comprises the second chapter of the study. In the second step (chapter 3) the situation is interpreted as it is and this has been done by evaluating the current situation in the CBC churches, its bearing on ministry as well as its effects on the community. This step began with a systematic investigation of the problem (Smith 2008:204). It focuses on the historical factors that led to the present circumstances and included the history of the founding of the Baptists and CBC among the Bakossi people and its growth in membership over the years. The descriptive approach makes use of empirical and literary methods and this includes a quantitative component using questionnaires and qualitative component using interviews. This information has been analysed and interpreted and it has been used to evaluate the current state of church growth in CBC churches and also used to evaluate the ministerial effect of the churches on the Bakossi people. The third step (chapter 4) focuses on the preferred scenario, namely, it interprets the problem situation as it should be. It is at this step that a historical and critical examination of the church’s tradition based on biblical and theological foundations has been conducted in order to provide a solution to the problem.

Thus, this step comprises of an exhaustive coverage of sources related to theological and biblical foundations of church growth. This was achieved by identifying relevant biblical texts that helped to establish a biblical approach to the problem. Finally, in the fourth step (chapter 5), the focus is on practical strategies of the obligations of believers to be genuinely transformed to the likeness of Christ, the use of their gifts for service and ministry, and sharing their faith with others. This is done by proposing practical strategies to solve the problem. Through this step, a feasible plan of action has been proposed based on the biblical and theological principles of church growth with the objective to redress the present problem.

4. Summary of chapters

The first chapter states the introduction of the problem to be redressed. The chapter comprises the content of the research proposal an explanation of the content on key issues where required. Here empirical findings have been in order to identify where further research and study needs to be done and to avoid replicating research already done (Smith 2008). It is equally in this chapter that the value of the research has been stated, the research is discussed, the approach used to achieve the objective and the method used to identify and find solutions to the problem that has been identified.

Chapter two presents a brief history of the Bakossi Bible translation project, its significance in bringing the church together to help in making the gospel relevant. Also in this chapter, the work of Bible translation is highlighted along with the envisaged role of the church as the main agent of transformation through the translated Scripture. Here also, mention has been made of the lukewarm attitude of the CBC among the Bakossi people towards the work of Bible translation, which was due to the fact that a very negligible number of the indigenous population were members of the church. Equally in this chapter, based on observation, there is concern about the indifference of CBC churches to subscribe to a biblical response towards cooperation and church unity. This response is thus substantiated with secondary sources that include published materials as well as internal sources (Kombo and Tromp 2006:100). Through these resources, an effort has been made to prove that CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people are

neither growing in membership in individual congregations nor in the number of churches.

Chapter three interprets the situation as it is and this was done by evaluating the current situation in the CBC churches, its bearing on ministry as well as its effects on the community. This chapter begins with a systematic investigation of the problem (Smith 2008:204). In this chapter, the history of the coming of Christianity among the Bakossi is traced. It reveals the activities of the early missionaries throughout the land, successes, the strategies employed by the pioneer missionaries and the challenge in doing ministry and influencing the communities. The chapter equally presents the struggle for hegemony among the missions spreading the gospel and the battle between Christianity and traditional religion. Here mention is made of the coming of the CBC in Bakossiland, their arrival among the three mainstream denominations. Mention is also made on how the CBC churches' lukewarm attitude towards evangelization has greatly affected the growth of the church. The unintentional approach in reaching the people not only greatly affects the growth of the church, it equally reveals the churches' negligible impact as an agent of spiritual transformation. In this chapter, it is strongly contended that the ministry philosophy of the CBC hinders effective church growth strategies to be developed and implemented. This has been made evident by the fact that even though a large percentage of the people refer to themselves as Christians, genuine Christianity has made minimal impact among the people. The foundation was not laid on a solid rock (Zimmermann 2016:38). Still in this chapter, analysis of collected data has been done, using both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The data was interpreted. Through this analysis and interpretation, the researcher has proven that CBC churches among the Bakossi people have attained insignificant growth rate compared to other missions. Based on proven observations, collected and analyzed data, it was pointed out that this negligible numerical growth is as a result of lack of affective strategies, which has in turn resulted in little or no ministerial impact among the people.

Chapter four focuses on the preferred scenario, namely, to interpret the problem situation as it should be. In this chapter, a study of a key biblical text regarding church

growth, Acts 2:42-47 was done. The text is situated in its proper context and the meaning is explained. Implications with regards to church growth have equally been mentioned and the theological and biblical significance of the text was highlighted. Still in this chapter, a brief history of the Baptists was traced, the distinctives that uphold Baptists identified and explained and the theological foundations on which the Baptist tradition stands considered. The chapter also traced the founding of the Cameroon Baptist Convention as a denomination and briefly examines its policy towards church growth. The chapter further presents theological and contemporary implications of church growth for CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people. In the chapter equally, mention was made of the urgent need for CBC churches to develop effective church growth strategies. Finally, the chapter then closes with a conclusion.

Chapter five, the main chapter, proposes practical strategies for effective church growth. Here the researcher suggests four main strategies that are equally subdivided into other strategies. The main strategies include practical strategies, cultural relevance, ministry and structural strategies. The first of these practical strategies consists of the need for churches to design the right plan in order to enhance church growth, the right place to carry out ministry and how to implement the right procedure to achieve church growth. The chapter equally addressed the need for churches to be relevant within the context that they exist if they intend to make the desired impact amongst the people of the receptive community and eventually to attain any level of growth. Under this strategy, sub strategies like adopting the right philosophy in ministry and impacting and empowering the indigenous population were addressed. The next strategy proposed is the ministry strategy, which is identifying members of the church and inspiring them fully use their spiritual gifts. This strategy emphasizes that the word of God as the right premise which sustains every healthy and growing church, identifies make disciples is the right priority for every church. The strategy equally calls for the need to equip and empower believers for ministry and recognizes worship as the right medium for spiritual vitality. The chapter finally talks about creating the right structures which enhance of all the other strategies. This chapter then ends with a conclusion.

Chapter six constitutes the summary of the research, its implications and a general conclusion.

5. Importance and Implication of the research

Exchanges with pastors and leaders of CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people clearly proved that, until then, no other person has undertaken such a research in the community. The importance of this research is that the researcher desires that CBC churches amongst Bakossi people should grow. The researcher's mastery of the communities provides an added advantage on where and how to attain the objective of implanting the CBC amongst the people. It is apparent that a majority of CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people do not have an intentional plan for church growth. Thus, this work will be beneficial to CBC churches among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon first, then to other CBC churches elsewhere, in at least three ways. Firstly, the descriptive survey provides data about the present state of lack of church growth in the CBC. The data served as basis for solving the problem. Secondly, the analysis of the biblical and scholarly materials underscores the significance and value of focusing on genuine church growth. Finally, as a pioneer academic exercise in this respect, this work set the foundation for similar studies that relate to church growth in CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people.

In the past, the CBC has been indifferent to pursue church growth amongst the Bakossi people. Their congregations have been few as well, as well as low percentage of indigenous membership in the churches compared to other denominations. Equally, over the many years of existence, CBC churches have continuously been referred to as, "Graffi church." The meaning of this reference is, "the church of the Grassfield people", that is, the church of strangers. For over fifty years since the first CBC church was established and others followed, this general feeling of apathy has been characteristic among those who brought the church to the area as well as on the part members of the community. Considering that this research is being carried out by an indigene and a theologian, who was equally privileged to serve in many areas of community life and is well known throughout the community, it is hoped that this trend of thought is going to

change. CBC church leaders have cooperated with the researcher in order to achieve the objective of this research. It is thus hoped that many people from the Bakossi community will be fascinated with the idea that one of theirs is fostering such an endeavour. This research thus serves as a channel that will raise the spirits of Bakossi people to get into the church.

6. Limitations of the research

Bearing in mind the scope, nature, time, resources available, and especially the purpose of the study, it has been limited to CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon. It was all these that has contributed to the research. CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people of the Littoral Region of Cameroon were excluded from the research.

Another limitation of the research is that focused only on CBC churches. Although the other denominations are bigger the researcher don't know whether that means they have specific strategies for church growth. This might be another research of its own.

7. Areas for further study and research

Every research work is aimed at handling a particular aspect in order to solve a particular problem. The present research was based on the assumption that CBC churches amongst Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon are not increasing numerically, both in membership of individual congregations and in the number of churches. As mentioned earlier, this research is limited to Cameroon Baptist Convention churches. The same problem that CBC churches are facing is the same problem that characterizes other churches amongst the Bakossi people, though in varied degrees. So, a similar study can be taken up for another denomination. In addressing this research, growth in membership could not be handled without the researcher equally talking about spiritual growth, since the two are complementary.

Research focusing on spiritual growth of the church will take a different approach, different methodology and different resources. This too is another area of research that

needs to be taken up. Such a study might not only be limited to CBC churches, rather it will include other denominations within the area under consideration and their ministry impact in the communities where they exist. Over 70-75% of the population of Bakossi people claim to be Christians, yet vices such as drunkenness, high promiscuity, and witchcraft, amongst others, are rampant within the society. With a high percentage of people who claim to be Christians and the proliferation of churches among the people (at least 15 denominations are presented in the area), why do these vices continue to prevail in a high degree? Has the church failed in its assignment of transforming lives through the word of God? Thus, a research topic that addresses spiritual growth of the church among the Bakossi people will also be a good topic to take on.

8. General Conclusion

This research is intended to address the problem of negligible growth in Cameroon Baptist Convention churches among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon. It is also intended to enable them grow numerically, both in the number of Christians within individual congregations and the number of churches. The significance of the topic should be emphasized as it has been that throughout the churches' existence in the area, not only have the churches experienced insignificant growth, but also, their impact in the communities where they exist has been minimal. Most of the churches have existed in little else than just a name. Thus, it was observed that, whether knowingly or unknowingly, for those who created them that the creation of these churches was mostly to serve the church rather than the purpose for which a church should exist. Otherwise, how could it be that out of 12 CBC churches that provided the data for this research, not even one of them has 10% indigenous members of the communities where the churches are found? This is in spite of the fact that some of the churches have existed for over fifty years. As a result of this deep-seated problem, the researcher recommends strategies which he thinks will be invaluable in solving the problem.

It has equally been observed that only four out of the twelve churches have trained pastors, none of whom is an indigene. The only two indigenous pastor do not serve in

within the Bakossi community. Thus, most of the pastors or leaders of the church are not only indifferent in growing the churches, they are equally ill-trained. While the place of the Holy Spirit as the greatest teacher can never be undermined, there is need for persons who sense a calling to do ministry to be trained. The suggested proposals for effective strategies to achieve numerical growth will be a good starting point for the pastors and leaders.

The researcher strongly contends that the ministry philosophy of the CBC among the Bakossi people makes it inevitable for effective strategies to be developed for better ministry. The need for CBC churches to effectively be involved has even increased on the basis that even though about 75% of the people refer to themselves as Christians, genuine Christianity has made marginal impact among the people.

The analysis of collected data proved that CBC churches among the Bakossi people of the South West region of Cameroon have attained very insignificant growth rate compared to other missions. Based on proven observations and collected and analysed data, it is pointed out that this negligible numerical growth among the CBC churches is as a result of lack of affective strategies, which has in turn resulted in little or no ministerial impact among the people.

Finally, the research proposes four strategies that will enhance church growth in CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people. The first of these, practical strategies, consists of the need for churches to design the right plan in order to enhance church growth. It equally talks about the right place to carry out ministry and how to implement the right procedure in order to achieve the goal of growing the church. The research equally addressed the need for churches to be relevant within the context that they exist if they intend to make the desired impact amongst and intend to attain any significant growth. The third strategy proposed is the ministry strategy. This strategy emphasizes on the word of God as the right premise which sustains every healthy and growing church, it identifies the making of disciples as the right priority for every church, calls for the need to equip and empower believers for ministry, and recognizes worship as the right

medium for spiritual vitality. The research concludes by talking about creating the right structures.

The researcher ardently hopes to present these research findings and proposed strategies to the CBC leadership in Bakossiland as well as to the convention. Meanwhile, it is hoped that CBC churches amongst the Bakossi people will first acknowledge that there is a problem and express the desire to solve it. Secondly, individual CBC congregations should be willing to implement the proposed strategies and recommendations. The dream is to see these individual congregations go out of the traditional norm and take the responsibility for action, in order to solve the problem that has been identified.

In conclusion, it is believed that gathering resources, reading them and proposing strategies for effective church growth are merely a prerequisite of the dynamics of mission and the growth of Christ's church. These are merely a glance in the right direction. Stating a church growth concept of mission is not enough (McGavran 1995:286-287). Even a well written research on paper does not serve the purpose. It is only when the proposed strategies are used with the sole motivation of leading the lost to Christ that something be achieved. If the ultimate purpose of the churches' existence cannot reenergize the churches to take action, then however lofty the proposals presented in this research may be, they will be pointless. The work of reaching out to the lost is urgent, the days are short, and God wants His lost children to be found and brought back to Him. Each individual congregation needs to reach out communities that hunger for the word of God. The autonomy that is enjoyed by each of the CBC congregations that exist amongst the Bakossi people should not serve as an excuse for them to be indifference towards the salvation of the peoples. God will evaluate everyone, including the church, not just on the basis of their willingness to respond His call, but more on the obedience and what was achieved in the event of effecting the call.

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Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE

A survey of the responses of church leaders regarding proposals for church growth strategies in CBC churches among the Bakossi people of the South West Region of Cameroon, conducted by Nkwelle Ngome Joseph in association with the South African Theological Seminary (SATS).

- Please note that the information you are going to provide will be held in strict confidentiality. So please provide responses to the questions on the Questionnaire as honestly as possible.
- Thank you for your willingness to contribute to this work.

Instruction:

Please answer within the spaces provided in the Questionnaire.

SECTION A

I. Personal information of church leader

1. Date Questionnaire completed:
2. Name:
3. Gender:
4. Age:
5. What is your ethnic group of origin?
6. Name of your church and of the community where it is located?
.....
.....
7. The denomination/affiliation of your church?
.....
8. What is your position in the church?
.....

SECTION B

II. Information about your congregation

1. Please give some background information on your congregation:
 - a. For how long has your church existed?

.....
b. Number of members?

.....
c. What is/are the major ethnic group/s of your congregation?

.....
d. What percentage of your church members are literate?

.....
e. Please indicate the average age of your church members. Tick one of the following age categories:

14 - 30

30 - 50

50 and above

2. What language(s) is/are used during your church service?

.....
.....
.....

SECTION C

III. Information about your community

1. Please give some background information on your community.

a. What are the major ethnic groups of your community?

.....
.....

b. What language/s do people mostly use to communicate in your community?

.....
.....

c. What percentage of the population do you think are literate in your community?

.....

2. How do non-literates in your community learn and pass on information, since they cannot read and write?

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.....

Please indicate the methods your church has been using to evangelize the non-literates in your community.

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.....
.....

a. Indicate two evangelistic methods that seem to be more welcomed by the community and more successful in bringing people to Christ.

.....
.....
.....

b. Indicate two evangelistic methods that are less welcomed by the community and less successful in bringing people to Christ.

.....
.....
.....

3. What language/s do you use to evangelize your community?

.....
.....

4. Please indicate the non-literates' interest in school and literacy programmes in your community. Tick one of the following:

Much interest Moderate Low interest

Thank you immensely for your contribution to this research. My sincere appreciation.