

Introduction

Before the advent of Christianity, the Bamenda people knew an almighty God who created everything they saw around them. The female missionaries in the Bamenda Grassfields area were missionaries' wives who accompanied their husbands to mission fields in Africa. They were later joined by single female missionaries. Female missionaries worked in collaboration with their male counterparts as well as singlehandedly in introducing new mores into the Bamenda Grassfields from 1904 to 2006. However, the activities of the female missionaries in Cameroon and particularly in the Bamenda Grassfields were so pathetically eclipsed to the extent that the epistemological concerns of contemporary African feminist discourse may be questionable.

There is an increasing acceptance that women's contribution to history has not been adequately acknowledged. According to Heather Sharkey, the real impact of missionaries is still a debate in academia. That imbalance and inadequate presentation of historical facts is accompanied by a good number of disturbing problems. First and foremost, and strictly on the basis of academic rigour, the lapses and loose ends in the historical presentation of female missionaries at work in West Africa deserve to be strengthened and reviewed. Secondly, such a partial presentation of missionary women's efforts seems to place them on the periphery of political, socio-cultural and economic changes provoked by missiological activities in traditional African societies. The historical exclusion of the woman from the driver's seat of change and development tends to cast questions on their foundational role in the development of Christianity, economies, education and cultures in African indigenous societies. The activities of the female missionaries in Cameroon and particularly in the Bamenda Grassfields are so pathetically eclipsed to the extent that the epistemological concerns of contemporary African feminist discourse may be questionable. This study hopefully provides solutions to the problems mentioned above by casting a searchlight on the religious activities of the female missionaries in the Bamenda Grassfields and other political, economic and socio-cultural accompaniments. The study will, consequently, provide underpinnings to the feminist discourse that is creeping into all academic disciplines.

The main objective of this study is to show the extent to which female missionary work between 1904 and 2006 affected and influenced the evolution of the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon. This research will carefully discuss the activities of these missionaries of the major Christian mission bodies – Catholics, Baptists and Presbyterians – within the study period so as to get a full picture of both the positive and negative effects of their activities on the evolution of the Bamenda Grassfields. On the basis of the historical evidence that by 1910 female missionaries outnumbered male missionaries by a ratio of 2: 1,¹ this study intends to investigate what the scenario was in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon. Besides this numerical difference, the study seeks to identify their practical activities in their mission and to ascertain their invaluable role in the process of change as a contribution to contemporary women history and emancipation. The study seeks to project the impact of female missionaries in the areas of evangelism and their involvement in the political, economic and socio-cultural changes in the Bamenda Grassfields.

The message of Christ provides liberty and dignity to every human being, male or female. This study is therefore centred on the activities of female missionaries and change in the Bamenda Grassfields from 1904 to 2006. The work is limited to the Bamenda Grassfields renamed the North West Region of the Republic of Cameroon in November 2008. This work examines the influence of the activities of the Baptist, Catholic and Presbyterian female missionaries. In this connection, our study scope is narrowed only to the above three Christian denominations considering the fact that the area under study has Christianity as one of the highest practised religions. We had then considered only the above cases so as to make a good analysis on their socio-economic and political perspectives. It should also be noted that, each of these cases has had different historical moments and records relevant for research and evaluation.

The study time ranges from 1904 to 2006 framing a century of missionary activities in the Bamenda Grassfields. The year 1904 does not entail the beginning of missionary activities in the Bamenda Grassfields.

¹ D. L. Robert (ed), *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century*, New York, Orbis Books, 2002, p. xi.

Before then, there were various attempts by early missionaries to settle in the area under study. The year 1904 has been chosen as the starting date because it was the year in which the very first female missionary (Mrs Keller) settled with her husband in the Bamenda Grassfields. This was therefore the beginning of effective female missionary activities in most communities in the Bamenda Grassfields, especially in the communities of Bali, Bafut, Kom, Mbem, Ndu and Nso. As earlier said, the study ends in 2006. This year was chosen because of the most recent developments tied on to the celebrations of jubilees noticed throughout the Bamenda Grassfields especially by the various women's associations of Christian denominations in the area under study. In this view, after recording significant successes in the socio-economic and political domains, some women associations such as the Christian Women fellowship (CWF) and the Christian Women association (CWA) testified this period as a century of gospel achievement in their respective denominations. In this regard, caution was taken at all levels of the research to maintain the scientific trend of the study and to ensure the researcher's neutrality in the evaluation and development of facts in this book. It shall focus on the land mark events left by the female missionaries in the Bamenda Grassfields.

Theoretical Framework and the Definition of Key Terms

A study of female missionary activities and change in the Bamenda Grassfields would naturally require the explanation of the terms and how they have been used for a better understanding of the subject matter. These operational definitions will be captured as a basis for articulating the theoretical framework of the area under study. In this framework, many scholars have taken interest in developing concepts in line with the topic but in the world at large as such, providing an explanatory force on the subject matter.

Historically and administratively, the appellation "Bamenda Grassfields" nowadays the North West Region of Cameroon, was first mentioned in historical documents in modern times by Dr. Zingraff in one of his works, which recorded his passage through Bafut in 1889. It was called Bamenda Division (1916), Bamenda Province (1949), the

North West Province (1972) and the North West Region (2008). Here, Zintgraff's view about the *Fon* (traditional ruler) of Bafut after his first encounter with Abumbi I is highlighted. Zintgraff described the *Fon* of Bafut, Abumbi I, as an African despot.² From Zintgraff's description, it is evident that the authority of the Bafut *Fon* over his people was so strong and his decisions at one point could cause a conflict situation of great magnitude. In this regard, the numerous communities in the Bamenda Grassfields were consequently going to witness various missionary activities in their respective areas.

As concerns missions, we will define a mission, reflect on the nuances of mission and missions, get an overview of key components of missiology, acquire a feel for foundational concepts in missiology, explore definitions of the term missionary, and conceptualize the changing global context of missionary and female missionary as advocated by early researchers on similar religious backgrounds.

According to Barrett, the importance that scripture gives to mission must influence what Christians think about the church. Missionary outreach is not simply one better thing that churches can do. Because mission is so integral to what it means for the Church to be the Church, those who do not fervently espouse global mission are failing to embrace a core essential for the faith. Barrett quotes Brooke Brown, a mission volunteer in Slovenia who emphasized how indispensable involvement in global mission is for all believers when she said, "People think you have to be called to missions. You're already called from the moment you become a Christian".³

Getting believers of the 20th and 21st centuries to see how foundational mission is to the nature and purpose of the Church has been difficult. In some cases, people have used mission or missions to label anything and everything even remotely related to outreach. Such a broadening of meaning may have been facilitated by the move to use mission instead of missions. A negative consequence of the broadening of

² E. Zintgraff, *Nord Kamerun*, Berlin, Franz Steiner, 1895, p. 16.

³ D. B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, A.D. 1900-2000*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 45.

meaning beyond cross-cultural outreach efforts is that putting everything under the same umbrella tempts Christians and churches to forget their global responsibilities. It is human nature to get most excited about things and people that are close by. One consequence is that without a specific focus on distant places and people's groups, those distant places and least-evangelized groups get less and less attention. At some point, even for those who acknowledge the sinful predicament of all human beings, it becomes easy to say "that is not my problem" about un-reached peoples.⁴

One danger with calling everything *mission* (and putting the label missionary on every Christian) is that, as Stephen Neill has said, "When everything is mission, nothing is mission."⁵ Neill's point was that when mission gets broadened beyond its original usage, pleas to get involved in mission to un-reached peoples can be ignored or shrugged off as someone else's responsibility. Too often the idea of outreach itself has been broadened even further to include every single thing that churches do. Charles Van Engen, former missionary to Mexico, said that such broadening is precisely what happened in mainline denominations during the last half of the 20th century. He noted that when churches began defining mission in all-inclusive ways, it brought church and mission so close as to nearly eclipse each other. Engen further commented, the intention of the actors in this drama was laudable. But we face some disastrous consequences of their perspectives.⁶

Anyone looking at recent missiological literature would conclude that mission is an important word. Seventy-five years ago the more dominant word would have been missions. The change from missions to mission began in the 1960s, although the roots of the shift go back to 1934 when German missiologist Karl Hartenstein started referring to *Missio Dei*. This Latin phrase, which means "mission of God", became a major theme for the 1952 World Missionary Conference in Willingen,

⁴ A. K. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa*, Wellington, New Zealand Education for Ministry Board, 1991, p. 5.

⁵ S. Neill, *A History of Christian Missions 2nd edition*, London, Penguin Books, 1990, p. 28.

⁶ C. Van Engen, *Missions on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology*, USA, Baker Academic, 1996.

Germany, and has since become a common way to describe global mission work. Its use, which some say originated with Augustine's frequent use of *missio*, caused many to begin using mission almost exclusively.⁷

Thomas Hiney explained that, for many people, mission and missions mean almost the same thing and are often used interchangeably. Each of those two words, however, has some unique nuances. Those advocating for the use of mission felt that missions emphasized too much the human side while the singular word mission would be a needed reminder that missionary work is trying to accomplish God's mission. Some thought that missions overemphasized a Western perspective of world evangelism and that its focus on the expatriate individuals doing mission work resulted in a weakened ecclesiology, the theological understanding of the Church that John Howard Yoder, missionary to Nigeria, saw as inseparable from missiology.⁸ A pragmatic and linguistically sound way of approaching the use of the two words is to see mission as the comprehensive label for the Church's response to God's calling while missions are the particular ways and organizational structures through which the Church's global outreach is carried out.

Even the change from missions to mission has not been enough for everyone. In attempts to shed negative baggage that missions, missionary, and even mission might carry, some academics downplay the usage of all three words. Many schools put intercultural studies on diplomas instead of missions or *missiology*. The neutral-sounding intercultural studies were chosen because it would be vague and seemingly innocuous in places where Christianity is suspect and restricted.⁹

One way to sift through both the muck and the fluff about missionaries is to use discernment grounded in good missiology. Though the word missiology is not in the average English speaker's vocabulary, many will know that the suffix *-ology* means "language about" or "the

⁷ Karl Hartenstein, *International Review of Mission*, Vol 42, No. 3, July 1953, pp. 306-307.

⁸ T. Hiney, *On the Missionary Trail*, New York, Atlantic Press, 2000, pp. 5-22.

⁹ *Ibid.*

study of.” Indeed, missiology is the study of, or conscious reflection upon, the practice of Christian mission. The first part of missiology comes from the Latin word *mission*, which means “sending out” or “assigned task” (thus, mission). *Missio* is a participle of the verb *mittere*, the Latin equivalent of *apostello*, a Greek verb meaning “to send” from which *apostle* comes. Based on this etymology, missiology can be said to be the study of sending.¹⁰ Because that definition may not communicate much to anyone other than a missiologist, it may help to think of missiology as “mission-ology.”

According to Barrett, a missionary is a member of a religious group sent into an area to do evangelism or ministries of service, such as education, literacy, social, health and economic development. The word “mission” originated from 1598 when the Jesuits sent members abroad, derived from the Latin *missionem* (nom. *missio*), meaning “act of sending” or *mittere*, meaning “to send”.¹¹ The word was used in the light of its biblical usage; in the Latin translation of the Bible, Christ uses the word when sending the disciples to preach in his name: “He said therefore to them again: “Peace be to you. As the Father hath sent me, I also send you.” And he said to them: The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he sends labourers into his harvest. Behold I send you as lambs among wolves”.¹² The term is most commonly used for Christian missions, but can be used for any creed or ideology.

The *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* defines missionary in a way that fits the experience of Paul and Barnabas and echoes what Tallman wrote. It says that a missionary is one who is called up by God and sent by the Church to serve God in a culture, a geographic location, and very likely, in a language different from the missionary’s own. This does not mean that the only way to be a missionary is to go half way

¹⁰ T. Hale, *Between past and future: Evangelical Mission entering the twenty-first century*, Evangelical Missiological Society, Jon Bonk, 2003, pp. 254–256.

¹¹ D. B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, p. 56.

¹² John 20:21, *The New International Version of the Bible*, Nashville, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995, p. 906; Matthew 9: 37b *The New International Version of the Bible*, Nashville, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995, pp. 542-543.

around the world. In its most biblical expression, a mission field is simply where the sent ones go. The cultural and ethnic diversity that exists within many nations means that a missionary call may be the sending of someone to another culture or language group within that person's home country. India, Nigeria, and Papua New Guinea are typical cases of countries that are complex mosaics of cultural and ethnic groupings. India, for example, is made up of about 4,600 distinct peoples groups speaking more than 400 different languages. Though not a very large nation, Papua New Guinea is one of the world's most culturally complex countries with more than 1,000 groups speaking 816 different languages.¹³

Phillip Jenkins strongly affirms that, sometimes those who cross national boundaries to minister to immigrants from their native countries are said to be doing missionary work. They are not. By definition, missionaries are outsiders among those with whom they work. Thus, a Haitian going to Paris to pastor a congregation of Haitian immigrants would not be doing missionary work. Likewise, a Mexican going to the U.S. to pastor Mexican immigrants would not be considered a missionary. In a biblically rooted ecclesiology, pastors or elders plant or shepherd individual congregations within their own cultural groups while missionaries or apostles are those who develop church plantings and discipleship movements in other cultures.¹⁴ On one occasion people have speculated that youth pastors should be considered missionaries because they work with the youth culture. While there are special gifts and graces needed for youth ministry and some new words or ways of saying things need to be learned, cultural anthropologists would say that youth ministers are working with a subgroup of a larger culture, not a totally different culture. Thus, youth ministers do not really fit within the definition of missionary.¹⁵

¹³ A. S. Moreau (ed), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 2000, pp. 4-8.

¹⁴ P. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom, The Coming of Global Christianity*, New York, Oxford Press, 2002, p. 59.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

A Christian missionary can be defined as one who is to witness across cultures. The Lausanne Congress of 1974 defined the term related to Christian mission as to form a viable indigenous church-planting movement. Recognizing justice as being at the heart of the Gospel, some modern missionaries now promote the development of western government, education and economic structure in the place of pre-existing local systems and tradition. Missionaries can be found in many countries around the world just as the cases investigated in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon.¹⁶

While Hale Little and others have called for every believer to be seen as a missionary, Hiney Thomas' definition keeps it narrowed to people with a distinct vocation and who are sent by the Church to take the gospel to other cultural groups. Not everyone is a missionary in this way any more than every believer is a pastor in the way pastor is used in the Bible. While all believers are to be witnesses and while they may utilize missiological insights in their ministries, not all are missionaries if the message is correctly understood that believers have different callings and gifts.¹⁷

Mission is also not about auto-sending, that is, people deciding on their own to go. *Mittere* and *apostello* both imply that there is someone doing the "sending". Indeed, that is what happens. Missionaries are sent by a mission board as well as by the Holy Spirit and by the Church. The Bible gives an example of that happening when it says the church in Antioch laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and sent them to the cities of what is now Turkey. With a dramatic increase in efforts since the 1900s, and a strong push since the *Lausanne I: The International Congress on World Evangelization* in Switzerland in 1974, evangelical groups have focused efforts on sending missionaries to every ethnic group in the world.¹⁸ In this context, we have therefore decided to briefly discuss the

¹⁶ K. Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the second Century and in Modern Africa*, Oxford, Oxford printing Press, 1992, p. 122.

¹⁷ T. Hale "On Being a Missionary" 2003, William Carey Library Pub, Retrieved on 19th December, 2011; Ephesians 4:11; Acts 14:1.

¹⁸ Brian Stanley, "Lausanne 1974: The Challenge from the Majority to the Northern-Hemisphere Evangelism" In *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Volume 64, Issue 3, July 2013, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, June 2013, pp. 533-551.

following evangelical missions that could also suit the context of the Bamenda Grassfields:

Christianity, Global Change and Liberation

The concept of Christianity and global change has increasingly been handled by modern writers. Until the 16th century very few people ever traveled more than 10 miles from their homes. As a result, societies were much localized. Today, societies thousands of miles from each other are interlocked in communication, commerce, and even popular culture. Sociologist and economist Saskia Sassen held that today's world has become a worldwide grid of strategic places constituting a new economic geography of centrality, one that cuts across national boundaries and across the old North-South divide.¹⁹ This has given rise to the phrase *global village* and sparked fears that unique cultural features will be obliterated by uniformity and homogenization. Others such as anthropologist Brian Howell combine the words local and global into glocalization, noting that rather than tossing everything into a blender, globalization has actually promoted the development of difference, but within a mutually intelligible system.²⁰ No one knows how such flattening will ultimately affect efforts in the indigenization of the church. However, the thought that glocalization is promoting differences may allay the fears of some that a McChurch world is coming, in which churches will look and feel much the same anywhere on the globe.

The concept of Change in the church context is inextricably linked to social and economic development. Theologically, the idea of change stemmed up from the Greek and Jewish civilisations where Christians had to know the Greek language and culture to be able to spread the gospel. This automatically linked them to the Greek idea of natural growth, change and evolution, knowledge and mankind. Change

¹⁹ S. Sassen, *Globalisation and its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money*, New York, New Press, 1999, p. 2-17.

²⁰ B. M. Howell, "Globalisation, Ethnicity and Cultural Authenticity: Implications for Theological Education," *Christian Scholars Review*, Vol. 36, No. 3, Spring 2006, pp. 3-31.