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Indigenous Culture and Western Christianity: An Assessment of Wimbun Experience with the Baptist Mission, 1927-2008

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Abstract

Purpose: The advent and spread of Baptist Mission Christianity in Mbumland from 1927 constituted one of the major determinants of cultural transformation in the area. The process was catalysed by the multifaceted nature of the Baptist Mission's approach at Proselytization – evangelism, education and health. As a consequence, knowledge of Baptist Mission activities in Mbumland and beyond was commonplace. Like most write-ups with ethnocentric slant, incipient literature on Christianity in Mbumland, emphasized the debilitating effects of the impinging culture on indigenous cultural life ways.

Methodology: This article employs primary and authoritative secondary data to argue that the spread of the Baptist faith in Mbumland between 1927 and 2008 rather led to culture sharing as the contemporary practice of the faith exuded a blend of both cultures.

Results: The study therefore demonstrates that while Mbumland was being Christianised, Christianity itself imbibed Wimbun values and adopted an indigenous complexion specially to suit the practical circumstances.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: The study positions itself within a peculiar academic niche which emphasizes that the advent of the Baptist Mission in Mbumland led to indigenous culture simultaneously affecting and being affected by Christian values. While extant works in this thematic specialisation have often either emphasized the effects of one of the variables on the other, the peculiarity of this work is its midway position which spotlights the sharing mechanisms wherein, indigenous culture affected and was being affected by Christian values since the advent of the Baptist Mission in Mbumland.

Keywords: *Indigenous Culture, Western Christianity, Wimbun, Baptist Mission, Syncretism*

INTRODUCTION

The Wimbun (people of Mbunland) occupy the Nkambe plateau in Donga Mantung Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. They inhabit two out of five sub divisions of Donga and Mantung Division namely Nkambe Central and Ndu Subdivisions. History holds that the existence of the Wimbun ethnic group can be traced to more than four centuries ago when they left Kimi, their ancestral homeland in North East Cameroon and reached their present site in successive groups. War (13 villages), Tang and Wiya (10 villages each). The Wimbun ethnic group is located between latitudes 6°00 and 6°01.13 North of the Equator and Longitudes 10°01.03 and 10°01.03 and 10°01.45 East of the Greenwich Meridian. It is bordered to the south by Tatum in Bui Division, the south west by Noni Subdivision, the North by Ako Subdivision and the West and East by Misaje and Nwa Subdivisions respectively. Though constituted by three main clans, the Wimbun speak a common language called Limbum, possessed a common tradition of origin and political system akin to the Tikar system: The regulatory society, *Nwerong*, the Princes' society, *Ngiri* and the model of seven royal counsellors and seven palace stewards. In a bid to secure safety and settlement, the Wimbun had to conquer their physical, political and socio-economic environments. Physically, they had to conquer their natural environment, politically, they had to contend with the "Bare Chamba"-Fulani marauding bands and Nso invasions directed towards obtaining slaves and political power. Socio-economically, the Wimbun had to maintain sincere adherence to indigenous belief systems, values and practices so as to ward off the wrath of the ancestors. If the gods were placated, it was believed, there would be peace and agricultural related activities would be fruitful hence averting any possibility of war, famine or epidemic.

The social, economic and political life of the Wimbun was therefore informed by their mythical conception of the world. They believed in a transcendental and almighty God whose ability to create and sustain the universe imposed on mortals the need to approach him indirectly. It was in this light that intermediaries such as *Nyunkfu* (god of the farm), *Nyulah* (family god) *Nyumboh* (household god) and *Nyurhoh* (god of the river) had considerable influence on the daily life of the Wimbun. These gods assisted the Fons and Chiefs, believed to be of divine origin. They were also revered for the onerous task of administration, security and/or stability in Mbunland wrought by them. It was the fear of the unknown that made the Wimbun to be religiously yielding to the petulant demands of the gods and ancestors. Sudden deaths, poor hunt and harvest, barrenness, epidemics, defeat in wars and land disputes warranted sacrifices and libations to appease the gods and placate ancestors in an effort to arrest and turn back a possible spiral of oddities. Wimbun religion therefore informed and regulated the total life of the indigenous people as they were all conscious or unconscious worshippers of religion. Perhaps because of this Quarcoopome observed that religion is so woven into the cultural fabric of the life of the African that an African is 'notoriously religious or incurably religious' (Quarcoopome, 1987, p.9) and in Mbiti's renditions, this religion has given the Africans a sense of security and identity and shows them how to act in different situations and how to solve their problems (Mbiti, 2005, p. 17).

Before contacts with the West, the Wimbun had therefore develop an endogenous culture based as a result, upon the skills and techniques employed to harness their environment. This culture however was not static. It was transient and progressive owing to changing times and circumstances. Apart from the Fulani raids of 1870 and 1900, which among other things introduced Islam and what may be described as the "horse culture" given that they used horses (Calvary) in their raids, the advent and spread of Christianity since 1927 by agents of colonialism had a more lasting coexistence with the Wimbun. The contacts between Islam and

indigenous norms and values in the Mbumland was quite episodic in relative terms. Since its introduction in 1927, Christianity provided the inhabitants of the Nkambe Plateau with an alternative religion which logically intended to attenuate the Wimbun grip on their culture. Before discussing the Wimbun contacts with Christianity, its impact and practice in Mbumland, a brief discussion on indigenous culture vis-à-vis Western thought that informed the brand of Christianity introduced in Africa will not be unnecessary.

Justification of The Study

The Mbum in the Nkambe plateau of the Bamenda Grassland of Cameroon distinguish themselves by their unflagging commitment to the Baptist doctrine and practices since its implantation in 1927. In fact, their loyalty to the Baptist Mission, the Baptist activities in the area plus the impact it has left on the people has attracted scholarly attention and copious literature exist, handling one or more aspects of the foregoing phenomenon. While extant literature has largely focused on the impact of the Baptist Mission on indigenous culture, the far-reaching effects of indigenous culture on Mission practices has largely eluded many scholars. This has engendered the need to engage this study intending to uncover the mutualism between the Baptist Mission in Mbumland and the indigenous culture. Apart from filling an academic lacuna, the study provides stakeholders with the basis for an assessment of the works and practices of the Baptist mission in the study area between 1927 and 2008. It also suggests a historical clue to the growing phenomenon of syncretism that has become ubiquitous among the indigenous people in the study area especially in the recent past.

METHODOLOGY

The study makes use of a wide range of sources to succour its central argument. Both primary and authoritative secondary data are explored and exploited to through interviews and general readings to situate the present study within the context of extant literature. Primary data from personal interviews and archival material were complimented with secondary sources including published and unpublished literature were combined and analysed in a historical fashion to sustain the central argument. Meanwhile, the American Psychological Approach (APA) to documentation was used in writing with in-text presentation of references.

Understanding Culture

The totality of the way of life of a people is made up of the material and non-material aspects of its culture. Okoye maintains that material culture is the aspect of culture that is observable and overt, relating to the tangible products of arts, technology, craftsmanship, industry, skill etc which can be seen, that is, the visible possessions of man in society (Okoye, 1998, p. 31). In this light, artefacts such as farm implements-hoes and machetes, hunting and fishing implements-guns and traps, cooking utensils like pots, knives tripods and plates, are the tangible and noticeable culture artefacts of any given society. Simply put, the touchable, concrete and visible human creations are the material elements of culture. Non material culture on the other hand is intangible yet noticeable through the psychological state of the mind and manners of a people. Ejiofor has observed that members of any society acquire these elements of culture through socialisation and could include language, knowledge, attitude, morals, values, habits, philosophy and principles (Ejiofor, 1996, p. 11). This basic understanding aids the comprehension of culture which has been richly documented.

Over time and in different places, people have viewed culture in various ways. In the Western world a narrow view of culture prevailed which restricted its meaning to ideas, values and attitudes. Africans on their part look at culture as the preserved traditions or ways of life of the

forefathers thus limiting the concept to traditions and rites of passage such as birth marriages, initiation, burial and others. Agreeably, these are aspects of culture but not the totality of it. Kluchohn and Kelly have described culture as all those historically created designs for living explicit and impact, rational, irrational, which existed any time as potential guide for the behaviours of men (Kluchohn and Kelly, 1998, p. 44). According to Otite and Oginwo, culture refers to the complex whole of man's acquisition of knowledge, morals, beliefs, arts, customs and technology which are shared and transmitted from one generation to the other (Otite and Oginwo, 2016, p. 86) while Sibani maintains that it is synonymous with the peoples' way of life. In other words, it is the sum total of human creations, intellectual, technical, artistic, physical and moral (Sibani, 2014, p. 107).

Culture is core to sociological and anthropological scholarship and their definitions revolve round a common meaning. For instance, in 1932, Kroeber and Kluckhohn brought together over 150 definitions of culture and concluded that none was diametrically different and so, concluded that, culture consists of patterns of behaviour and artefacts which distinguish one human group from another (Ajagi, 2005, p. 3). The Marxist-Leninist scholarship upholds the view that culture is a specific attribute of society that reflects the level of historical development achieved by man and determined by his relationship to nature and society. It is the manifestation of the specific and represents the development of the creative powers and capacity of the personality (Ajagi, 2005, p. 2). Ethnographically, Burnett Tylor posits that culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Ajagi, 2005, p. 2). Tylor, it should be noted, sees culture as being akin to civilisation, the achievements of man in society. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) defines culture as a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group, encompassing, in addition of art and literature, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs UNESCO, 2007, p. 13).

The plethora of definitions of the term points to one thing-culture does not exist in a vacuum, it is the product of human mind and hand in any given society. Man therefore creates the things that make up culture and absorbs them by living within the culture setting. Culture, therefore is a product of man's environment, and occurs in time and space in each society, the cultural heritage is inherited from the proceeding generation which they used, add to, and pass on to succeeding generations. It follows logically, therefore that culture is dynamic (constantly undergoing changes, modifications and adjustments, either for better or for worse), learned (it is not an in-born trait, it is acquired through formal and informal learning), shared (a group property not owned entirely or exclusively by and individual) and integrated (a systematic whole indicating that the various aspects of culture are complementary to one another).

Understandably, cultural variables that may be good within a cultural group may be obnoxious in another. This makes it improper to use the culture of one people as a parameter for measuring the culture of another. Unfortunately, Western contacts with African societies weighed African cultures within these lenses and concluded that Africa had no culture or history because among other things. the African "mind is as stagnant as the morass which forms its puny world"(Davidson, 1969, p. 22). Where the Europeans dared to acknowledge the existence of African culture, they assumed that, to bring about development, African culture had to be modified if not destroyed all together (Boahen, 1985, p. 217). The study of Africanist history over the years have made it clear that the Darwinian evolutionist theory, anthropological-sociological cultural diffusionist theories and the Hamitic Hypothesis that endorsed the superiority of Western cultural variables over African groups were pseudo-intellectual

rationalisations of preconceived Eurocentric views. Western Christianity penetrated Africa within the era of Eurocentric intellectualism and so was advertised by the agents of colonisation as a “superior” culture that must impact or influence the African “sub or lesser culture” Nwauwa observed in this light that: missionary efforts were surreptitiously targeted to “tame” and “pacify” the so-called savages, and invoke the benefits of the Trinity: Christianity, civilisation and commerce in readiness for the ultimate takeover (Nwauwa, 1985).

Amazingly, the literature of European contacts with African societies in the context of Christianity upholds this view. Chulu holds for instance that, the deification of egocentrism, moralistic prescriptions and the notion that authority is beyond critique is questioned because faced with great difficulties in upholding their cultural identities as their heritage has so far been undermined by the Western cultural identity (Online, Accessed 2015). This thread of reasoning made Chulu to be nationalistic as he posits that, to avoid African culture extinction, there is an urgent need for cultural restoration (Online, Accessed 2015). Sibani in like manner holds that, either by design or accident, Africans have imbibed the Western culture (not just some aspects of it) and have appropriated it so much that it now becomes almost part and parcel of their lives. This paper argues that Wimbun contacts and experience with the Baptist Faith was the flipside of the views endorsed by Chulu and Sibani. Christian activities by the Baptist in Mbumland led to culture sharing wherein the Wimbun accepted aspects of Christianity that were congruent within the self-concept of their society and remained nominal or syncretistic in cases of pressure to adjust to what in their opinion was not practical.

Wimbun Contacts and Experience with Christianity

German plantation economy and the outbreak of the First World War provided the context within which Baptist Christianity reached Mbumland. German plantations located on the coast of Cameroon played a dual role: it furnished German firms and industries with necessary raw materials and also created a situation wherein indigenous labourers from the interior first came into contact with Western culture and technology, the plantations were thus instrumental in the diffusion of new ideas over wide areas of Cameroon especially during the early years of their operation. Ardener holds that most plantation workers maintained very close contacts with their families and ethnic groups and made periodic visits to their home village, often continuing this intimate relationship throughout life (Ardener, 1960, p. 2). This sort of urban-village nexus aided the penetration of the gospel into the interior of Cameroon since many who came visiting were already converted at the coast. The person responsible for the advent and somewhat phenomenal spread of the gospel in Mbumland was Mamadou¹.

With the outbreak of the First World War, the royal cup Mamadou habitually bore for the Fon slipped off his hands and got shattered. Traditionally, he was either to be executed or exiled as a way of punishment. Caught up in this impasse, Mamadou resolved to escape and so secretly left the King's service, his kinsmen and village in search of safety, employment and any other opportunity at the coast. He followed a coterie of Grasslanders who became aware of the possibilities of employment around Victoria (Nfor, 2008. Personal Communication).

In Victoria, Mamadou initially got employment as a servant to the German war soldiers and later on, he attended a government school for four years during which he came in contact with

¹Mamadou is a Muslim name but does not suggest that he ever was a Muslim. Oral sources hold that during the Jihad expeditions of the 19th Century, a certain Ali Mamadou was abandoned by his team because he was injured. He was later discovered and helped by Pa Kitu and he later tended out to be very submissive and obedient winning the friendship of the Kitu's family. He died few months after and his death coincided with the birth of Joseph Mamadou. He was thus called Mamadou in reminiscence of Ali Mamadou.

some German missionaries and professing Christians at the Victoria Baptist Church. Mamadou developed interest in Christian matters and requested for and was baptised by Pastor Burnley in 1918. As a *bona fide* member of the Victoria Baptist Church, manifesting an unquenchable avidity for witnessing, Rev. Bender, one of the Pastors serving in the Soppo Mission Station encouraged and enrolled Mamadou into religious instruction and literacy classes in the mission. In tandem with Robert Nteff, Samuel Aseh, Johaness Tanto, Peter Ndikwi, Abel Ngain and Thomas Toh, Young Cameroonians from the interior, Mamadou received the foundational training in evangelism and basic Bible knowledge. Feeling equipped and burdened by the need to free his village from the web of “traditionalism”, Mamadou responded affirmatively to the challenge from the Victoria Baptist Church to return home and proselytise the gospel of salvation to his own kith and kin.

Arriving Songka, Bum in 1921 and brimming with evangelistic fervor, Mamadou went directly to the palace, presented some coastal gifts to the Fon not necessarily to atone for the cup he destroyed accidentally but as a cup bearer of a salvation message to the ‘lost’ Fon and the people of Bum. Fon Kwanga’s reception of the “lost son of Bum” was enthusiastic owing to his long absence. He assembled his sub-chiefs and councillors to unanimously listen to Mamadou’s new faith but never allowed himself to be enticed by it. He also endorsed his request to move within the community for evangelistic purposes. Mamadou thus commuted from village to village spreading the Christian gospel and enjoining his kinsmen to believe in Jesus such that, by 1924, he had won a considerable number of followers and the First Baptist Church, Songka, in the Grassland was established with the assistance of Samuel Nji and Thomas Toh (Koni, 1971, p. 2).

It was from Bum that the gospel of Jesus Christ spread to Mbumland. Mamadou through visits had succeeded in starting a prayer cell at Mbensankfu adjacent to Ndu, headquarters of present day Ndu Sub-division, with the help of Yungong and Nicodemus Ndunya. As the prayer cell grew progressively, Mamadou established cordial relationship with the Chief of Ngulu, another Wimbun group, who constantly visited Mbengankfu for court sessions wherein Chiefs were drilled by the British Colonial administrators on their role in the administration. As a hunter, Mamadou intimated his relationship with the Ngulu Chief by sending to him and his attendants animals and birds shot during hunting expeditions. He thus prevailed over the Chief to provide land upon which the second church was established in Mbumland by the end of 1927. In his conversations with the Chief, he learned of many villages around Ngulu. Using Ngulu as the centre, Mamadou thus visited other Mbum villages such as Taku, Wat, and Kup where churches were later opened. He also visited Ntumbaw, Nsop Sen, Sina and Ngu where with the permission of the Chiefs, who never really became Christianised, opened up Baptist Churches in the respective areas. These churches were later on grouped into what exist till date as the Ntumbaw Association under the Cameroon Baptist Convention. He appointed church teachers to oversee some of the churches. For example, Ifiom, the teacher of Taku came from Calabar, Nigeria and Isaac Kiyo from Songka was sent to Kup.

In Nsop, Mamadou succeeded, through consistency and persistence, in prevailing over the Njis, the Chief’s advisors, who had sent away an earlier missionary – Johaness Sieber, to accept the preaching of the gospel. According to the Njis, the new religion would annihilate the cordial traditional coexistence as its doctrine would cause confusion. By 1936, a church was established in Nsop with Mathias Mbakite, Elias Kwimnsah, Sam Ngoyop, Andrew Lonkah, Abel Karngong, Peter Njoyah, Mary Ngani, Elizabeth Kiyih and Lydia Ndapfih as the first converts to be baptised into the Nsop Baptist Church (Koni, 1971, p. 2) though the Njis remained consistent in their imperviousness towards the new religion.

Other conversions and eventual creation of churches in Mbumland was carried out by Mamadou's converts or other sons and daughters of Mbumland who got converted to Christianity. For instance, John Nfor, a prominent convert of Mamadou at Ndu, Baptised in 1932, returned to establish the First Baptist Church in his Mbot village and by 1935 baptised his first converts - Simon Lamnyam, Lucas Mayuka and Maria Munjih. He also evangelised Binka, Mbipgo, Jirt and Bih villages where churches were opened in 1936 and 1937 respectively. In other Mbumland villages like Njirong and Wat, the Baptist faith was established by zealous indigenous evangelists such as Peter Yechu and Patrick Kargong in 1934 (Farke, 2020. Personal Communication). It should be noted that most of this converts manifested tendencies that proved that they did not really lost track of their erstwhile traditional practices that were inimical to Christian erudition. John Nfor for instance, the pioneer missionary to Mbot had serious difficulties in this wise. He was disciplined in 1936 by Mamadou after he succeeded his father as member of the *Nwerong* regulatory society (Farke, 2020. Personal Communication).

The efforts at soul winning however caused the Christian population of the Baptist faith to increase progressively between 1934 and 1968 as shown in the table below (Tamngwa, 2004).

Table 1: Statistics of Church Growth 1934 to 1968

Year	No of Christians
1934	556
1947	1500
1955	3000
1960	3500
1963	4493
1965	4700
1966	4960
1968	5664

Source: Koni A.T. (1971) *A Brief History of Ndu Field* (Victoria: Saker Baptist College), 70.

From the table it can be noted that the Baptist experienced numerical growth in membership especially from 1947. This growth was associated to the responsive temperaments of the inhabitants of Mbumland, the tireless efforts of pioneer missionaries and the role played by the CBTS in Ndu. With the creation of the Nkambe, Ako and Mbuntzi Fields, the statistics of Ndu Field as of 2004 were as follows: forty five (45), churches grouped into 11 associations, thirty two (32) pastors and a total of 7918 Christians operating under the men, women and youth wings. Meanwhile, the CBC had a membership of 88749 in 846 churches, divided into 30 fields and three missionary areas (Annual Reports for Ndu, Nkambe and Mbuntzi Fields, 2008).

The Baptist Experience with Core aspects of Indigenous Wimbun Practices

Family life and marriage

Hitherto Baptist arrival, the Wimbun lived a Communal life. Each individual acquired importance because he/she belonged to a family or community. The efforts of individuals acquired some relevance only when they enhanced the good of the community to which they belonged. Laconically, the Wimbun were a community or society oriented in their thoughts, actions and expressions with marriage intent. However, this communalism was vitiated by the coming of western Christianity and its capitalist/individualistic underpinnings. Christianity

foisted on the Mbum converts a brand of civilisation that was asymmetrical to the traditional solidarity. Christian teachings emphasised the fact that salvation was not only personal but that each individual would present a self-account before God on the day of reckoning or judgment. This was contrary to the Wimbun belief that God Almighty - *Nyungong* and other smaller gods watched their activities on daily basis and those who made mistakes or committed crimes were punished on daily basis. There was nothing like a day of reckoning because every day was judgment day.

The implication of the Baptist's stance on this rests on the fact that, group solidarity had no meaning if it did not enhance the exigency of salvation. Consciously or not, indigenous missionaries and their acolytes neglected the strong social awareness that was indelibly etched on the personality of the Wimbun and thus, fruitlessly appealed to some individuals as isolated entities without recognising that a typical Mbum man was and is an inextricable member of a tightly knit society. This idea of rugged individualism, which was drilled into the minds of Mbum converts seems to have caused disruption of communal life in Mbumland and Cameroon in general.

Shared ambition and group salvation that was the common nexus between the indigenous populations now rested on the edge of a precipice. Converts violated societal norms for Christian values, renounced close association with relatives who questioned their new found faith while others denounced membership in some social groups such as activities of the *Ngwerong* and the *Nfuh* secret societies, whose *raison d'être* was antithetical to church doctrine. In some areas in Mbumland, rugged individualism put to question the very power and authority of indigenous rulers. The researchers were opportune to witness an episode in 2007, when the Chief of Ngie, Edwin Tamo summoned Evelyne Saah, Getrude Webngong and Edith Tume to his palace to explain why they had not been part of the coterie that had gone to cultivate his farm. The Chief became more infuriated when it was unveiled that the absence of the women was due to the fact that work on a Baptist Pastor's farm had been scheduled earlier than that of the Chief on that same day. The power tussle between the church and the throne is a common phenomenon in Mbumland since the inception of Christianity, assuming at times, only smothering proportions. Evidently, the united force of the Wimbun was not only broken but may be completely pulverised by the contemporary individualism.

These crippling effects of Christianity on social ties could be viewed as a consequence of the instrumentality of the gospel to canvas for members. In retrospect, this phenomenon bears a semblance, or is rather, a continuation of the early gospel wherein the missionary focus was on quantitative growth which would enable them report to their home government that there was progress in missions in Africa and Cameroon in particular. Missionary announcement of personal account before God was not initially complemented by the biblical teaching which advocates the respect for authorities by God (Holy Bible, 2000, p. 680). It is possible that if the Bible message was initially communicated objectively, the Wimbun and other societies in Africa and the world that embraced Christianity would not have been victims of individualism. It should also be noted that the philosophy of individualism was not only propagated by Christianity but by capitalism which exhibited itself in many facets, Christianity being only one of them.

Those who initially accepted Christianity also saw the church as a kind of safe haven from the persecution of the family. For instance, Peter Tamfu of Wanti, Wat village, who refused to accompany his father to tap palm wine after he was converted, was hated by his parents who often scolded and asked him to go to the Church for food and material belongings. He finally became deeply involved in church activities, distanced himself from the father and enrolled

into the First Baptist Mission School and later became a Baptist school teacher at the primary level (Tamfu, 2020. Personal Communication). He moved from the family house to live around the First Baptist Church, Ndu, premises. Population concentration around the church in most cases was a result of conflicts akin to that of Peter Tawe Tamfu. The individuals became unwilling to participate in communal life and seemed to embrace the idea that salvation is personal. The remaining family members (non - converts), however, continued to perform rituals on their behalf with the hope that the 'new madness' would be eradicated. As a consequence of Christianity, one of the most prized Wimbun value-communalism – was therefore under serious threat. The concept of family life in Mbunland also took into consideration the marriage institution.

The Wimbun from childhood were raised towards managing a home. Marriage was highly valued and preserved and was essentially an arrangement between two families for the good of their children. The coming of the church led to some moderation in this revered institution but the substance of the marriage process was never really altered. The church emphasised freedom of choice (on the part of the man while young women had no such privilege) and thus underscored the fact that the man was free to choose the woman he wanted for a wife. Unfortunately for indigenous Wimbun, the Cameroon public law endorsed this freedom even though customary law compelled ambitious young men to do so in consultation with their parents since traditional marriage is fraught with a lot of intricacies unknown to the children (Nfor, 2006, p. 18). With the influence of church doctrine, many went in search of wives without the simple courtesy of informing their parents thus rendering the latter's role to be merely advisory. This created a problem because young people united by emotional ties with marriage intent always took for a bluff any unveiling reality that could cause them to revisit their marriage engagement.

A typical feature of Wimbun marriage was the dowry system which was conceived from inception to secure the permanence of any marriage. The presence of the gospel in Mbunland for over eight decades has not been able to change this practice. According to Kwast:

The giving of bride price continues to be universally practiced in spite of more than a century of Christian teaching against it. Early Baptist...missionaries attempted to legislate the abolishment of bride price, teaching that by implication this practice degrades the dignity and autonomy of persons created by God in His image and redeemed by Christ, and is in conflict with the highest ideals of the Christian faith and the true Christian concept of marriage (1971, p. 32).

Failure to substitute the bride was indicative of the fact that early missionaries and church leaders failed in their teaching and proselytization to convince Christians of the need to desist from paying bride price and to provide a functional replacement for it. Perhaps, it was a result of this quandary that the CBC in prescribing the requirements for a proper church marriage indicated that, the marriage must be approved by both families, by the native law and custom and also by the civil law (CBC, Hand Book, 1964, p. 72). The endorsement and solemnisation of church weddings after the requirements above were fulfilled should be considered as a congenial phenomenon of culture development.

Be that it may, the church's encouragement of church weddings was regarded by many Christians as an additional burden on the already expensive rituals that characterised the traditional marriage process. In this light many were reluctant to essay church weddings. In fact, Kwast defends this view when he noted that:

Christian marriage in church is too costly... requiring special and expensive clothes in addition to elaborate entertainment of guests. Unfortunately, Christian leaders have done little to remove the financial and social barriers which have discouraged many from having a Christian marriage in the church (Kwast, 1971, p. 32).

This encouragement for church weddings in Mbumland was rather the view of over ambitious or fanatical leaders who wanted to add a tincture of communality to church activities because according to the Baptist Hand Book:

The newly married couple is not to be expected to prepare a feast of entertainment for the people who attend the marriage ceremony. The marriage ceremony should be attended as one attends the Sunday morning worship service (1964, p. 72).

If the principle was practically inscribed in the minds of the Christians through elaborate teaching from the pulpit and during seminars, Baptist Christians in Mbumland would probably have had no reservations about engaging in Church weddings.

Perhaps, the aspect of marriage that received the full brunt of church rejection was polygyny. This system wherein a man was married to more than one wife was common in Mbumland since time immemorial and was largely motivated by social and economic exigencies. The wives understood their roles and usually lived in relative peace. A home riven by internal disputes did not necessarily attract divorce owing to the fact that the payment of the dowry guaranteed a permanent marriage. However, with the coming of the church, the ideas of divorced were advertised when Baptist Church leaders eulogised the idea of one man one wife as recorded in the first letter of Paul to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:2.

Early Missionary policy in Mbumland and Cameroon in general required all converted polygamists to put away (divorce) all wives except the one gotten before baptism. In 1954, prior to the granting of independence to the Baptist Church, the official missionary stances on polygamy were thus:

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

Considering the fact that pre-Christian Mbumland reserved no place for disposed wives in the social strata, the stance of the church on this matter ushered victims of divorce into a life of social ostracism. Although the man kept the children, the practice impacted on him negatively because he had to cater for the children. The divorced wife was in most cases forced into a life of prostitution which the very church preached against. Prostitution thus became a new phenomenon in the social life of Mbumland. The concept of polygyny was however ingrained in the minds of many Mbum men who saw the church's stance on divorce as something inimical and thus refused to abjure from the habit. This attitude was one of the contributing factors that led to poor men's attendance and participation in church activities. This has continued over the years and today, it is still a call for concern in Mbumland. In fact, polygamists' conception of the church was that of a usurper of power (social and economic) since the acquisition of many wives was a symbol of power and wealth as the wives and their children offered the necessary labour for much yield from the farm.

Since the church's stand on divorce was not clear, the issue remained mooted in major church and convention meetings of the CBC. However, in 1966 the consensus among the CBC leaders was that all the wives of a polygamous family should be admitted to membership if they had entered into this relationship before they came in contact with Christian teaching (Kwast, 1971,

p. 35). Following this consensus, polygamists were admitted into the church but this was not still a welcome relief to the men because they were not entitled to posts of responsibility and authority in the church. This was contrary to the traditional milieu where the men led and participated in socio-economic and political departments of life. Many men therefore smothered with the hate of imbalance and social neglect perpetuated by the church.

Births

The church in Mbumland was not indifferent to the celebration of births especially that of twins. Christians were encouraged not only to dedicated new born babies in church but also to give thanks to God for the gift of children since in line with the scriptures, children are a heritage of the Lord and the fruit of the womb is His reward (Kwast, 1971, p. 35). In this light, families that were blessed with children were considered to be bearers of God's blessings. Those blessed with twin children or more than one child in a single birth were considered bearers of double or triple blessings from God. However, Christian teaching did not encourage the idolisation of twin children as obtained in Mbumland. For instance, the church debunked some common traditional beliefs that a bumper harvest was a direct consequence of a twin child planting the first grain in the soil and the believe that success of major ceremonies was determined by the fact that attending twin children were first to be served with food and drinks.

Also, the twin's ability to foretell the future by either announcing victory, or defeat in pending inter-ethnic wars, or a successful hunt was detested by the church as such actions did not carry any tincture of faith in Christ. Faith according to Hebrews 11:1 refers to the belief in things hoped for but not seen and this is supposed to govern the activities of Christians. Converts who had witnessed the effectiveness of twin activities heeded to the church's position lackadaisically or remained indifferent thus fomenting the historical church vice of syncretism. According to the church, some of the activities of twin children were linked to fortune telling which was diametrically opposed to conservative Christianity.

The full brunt of the church's indictment was brought to bear on the various sacrifices and rituals that followed the birth of twins. These were conducted by the parents as a sign of acceptance of the great gift from God locally referred to as *Mboonyu*. The church railed on converts who continued with the practice, reiterating that it was antithetical to the teachings of the Holy Bible which emphasises the fact that animal sacrifices that accompanied twin rituals was a travesty of true worship. In fact, the church used scriptures to dissuade Christians from such activities. For instance, it made constant reference to the book of Isaiah Chapter 1:11-13 which questions the rationale of sacrifices thus:

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifice to me? Says the Lord, I am full of the burnt offering of rams and fat of fed beast: and I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of lambs or of the goat. When you come to appear before me. Who has required this at your hand...? Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination to me (Holy Bible, p. 708).

This assault on indigenous sacrifices by the church was further justified on grounds that the death of Jesus on the cross of Calvary was the last sacrifice God made for the redemption of mankind as recorded in the Book of Hebrews 10:10. Any sacrifice therefore in the name of placating God was not grounded. In this vein, the proliferation of twin rituals and sacrifices was another crucifixion of Christ and in line with Christian erudition, a complete aberration from and adulteration of the faith.

Undoubtedly, the church's stance on sacrifices and rituals rendered the practices chequered in Mbumland as even Christian converts who hitherto, resisted traditional pressure, finally gave in when it was obvious that the absence of the rituals would likely cause the demise of their children. However, the church's denial of the offering of fowls and goats in sacred places was not followed by the refusal of these animals during offering moments in church. Considering the fact that some of these sacrificial items were given alive to the ritualists, the church was viewed as a new "sacred place" for sacrifices. As a result, Wimbun who gave thanks to God in the church with fowls, goats, and food items still had the mentality of sacrifices in sacred places and in most cases, had little or no scruples when situations demanded that ritual and sacrificial animals be given to the twin ritualists. This religio - cultural tussle was replicated in the case of deaths in Mbumland.

Deaths and Burials

With the advent of Christianity, the Wimbun philosophy of death fundamentally remained unchanged. The church embraced the traditional idea that death had a cause and added that one of the reasons was the ultimate decisions of the Almighty God to terminate one's physical existence based on the fact that his/her mission on earth had ended. However, Christianity compelled some indigenous people to accept that when people die, the good ones eventually go to heaven while the bad ones go to hell. In this light the choice of the place of eternity was determined by the quality of life the deceased lived while alive. Another novelty came with the introduction of modern carpentry during colonialism which triggered the burial of the dead in wooden coffins by families which could afford them. Even though the church introduced and endorsed the practice, burying the dead in a wooden coffin became an index of wealth (Kwalar, 2019. Personal Communication). Corpses were not only placed in a coffin but were wrapped in exotic garments such as white cloth, blankets, suits and other forms of clothing and not mats or leaves as before. Churches also designated areas for burials-cemeteries in the church compound, contrary to traditional burials where the type of death determined the place of burial.

Instead of immediate burial, the creation of hospitals with mortuary facilities permitted the corpse to be kept for a determined period. After consultation with the deceased family the corpse was carefully placed in a casket and taken to the church for a funeral service. Non-converts however did not conduct a Christian service but embraced the idea of burying their beloved ones in wooden coffins. The wishes of the family members were considered in planning the Christian funeral service but the officiating pastor was warned, as stated in the Baptist Handbook, to be careful not to permit or include anything opposed to Christian principles and teachings (CBC, Hand Book, 1964, p. 80). The graves of some of the deceased people were cemented and flowers planted to indicate their location and a Christian cross was pinned on the grave in the case of a Christian. Although the colonial authorities banned traditional post-mortems² the ban was not quite effective as even Christians continued to engage in "search activities" with traditional doctors to understand the real cause of the death of their loved ones. Some of the Christian principles informed the brand of education they invented in Mbumland.

Education and Health

The relevance of education in any cultural milieu lies in the preservation of the lives of its members and maintenance of the social structure (Rodney, 1972, p. 261). In Mbumland, Education was largely informal and the entire society learned from the elders at homes, social

² File No AC/1923/24,NAB

gatherings and even in local liquor *shaah*³ and palm wine houses. The content was not esoteric as it was a product of the inhabited environment and thus was very practical and sustainable. The elders gained respect and honour as they instilled into the memories of the indigenous youths, knowledge that was indispensable for community and cultural development.

Before the actual implantation of western education in Mbumland, this manifested respect for elders was waning. Those who were publicly found to be engaged in witchcraft, theft and gross immoral attitudes, lost their respect and honour especially in the side of the youths who did not only inveigh such elders but despised them in social gatherings. Evidence of this behaviour was common all over Mbumland but the example in Njap village in the early 1980s was glaring. A certain elder, Blasius Mpboh was revealed by a bewitched child to be a wizard. The child acknowledged that he was forced to eat *nyanwe* (human flesh) by Mpboh and after some time he could not sleep because Mpboh kept asking for a human substitute of the *nyanwe* he ate. A witch doctor confirmed the allegation and Mpboh became an object of jeers and mockeries in Njap village and other areas in Mbumland where news of the atrocious act reverberated. In fact, a song of derision was composed by the youths of Njap to immortalise Mpboh, albeit in infamy thus:

<i>Me kong a doo ni Njap</i>	I desire a trip to Njap
<i>njoh Blasius a chep mtou ni me</i>	because Blasius sent words to me
<i>Ne te mvu chrcher mbo</i>	That I should come quickly
<i>mvu koo ya Nyanwe</i>	so as to take my share of <i>nyanwe</i>
<i>oh oh te mbo mvu koo</i>	oh oh that I could take
<i>ya Nyanwe si Blasius Mpboh</i> ⁴ my <i>nyanwe</i> from Blasius Mpboh	

With the above in mind it should be noted therefore that the introduction of western education by the Christian missions facilitated the pace with which the power and authority of Wimbun elders was eroded. The acquisition of this kind of education gradually raised the status of the beneficiaries who were mainly youths whose eventual acquaintance and acquisitions of modern techniques of education and administrative skills led to significant elevation of their status. As earlier noted, in Ndu, Nsop and Sina, the Chiefs initially refused the opening of schools but when they were finally created, they constrained the princesses and princes from attending classes, which they considered were a forum of victimisation and torture, not proper for consanguineous royal children. In this light, early Christian education was for the less privileged and considering that civil service and mission jobs favoured the educated class, the social ladder in Mbumland in the long run was titled logically in favour of the people with a western education who had access to paid employment and eventually accumulated wealth and thus attracted attention than ever before.

However, royal imperviousness to mission education with its alleged assimilationist tendencies was not an act of cowardice. Rather, it was the desire to hold tenaciously to a culture they piously believed, determined the course of their lives and made them to better conceptualise and understand their environment. In this light, while the missionary realised that one's faith in God could grow if the individual acquired the skills of reading and writing, the indigenous Chiefs on the other hand reluctantly accepted the schools to go operational but were jealous of

³ *Shaah* is a local drink fabricated from fermented maize. It is a staple drink all over Mbumland.

⁴ The song is an indictment of a certain Blasius Mpboh who bewitched a child by giving him the ritual/spiritual meat or *nyanwe* but was identified and humiliated by the Njap Community. The story of his action is known in many Mbum groups.

their cultural heritage and could not afford to be alienated from their cultural psyche. This unbending attitude made Chiefs, (and even those who later accepted Christianity), to be nominal Christians. Perhaps for this reason, the palaces in Mbumland have remained adamant to the gospel and the conversion of Chiefs and palace officials in Mbumland was one of the major challenges of Baptist Christianity and other Christian denominations today (Ngangeh, 2008. Personal Communication). For the Wimbun in general, mission education was an unnecessary sophistication of the learning process because at the end, individuals who commanded respect within the society were those who engaged and were committed to the communal life: married, had children and showed respect for their elders and mastered their culture, a typical aspect of traditional education.

Denominational rivalry made it difficult to have two denominational schools in one village, thereby making it difficult for Baptist mission schools' impact on indigenous culture to be felt in all domains. Also, there was a shortage of teachers and most lessons were delivered by trained indigenes in the Mbum language called Limbum. Baptist schools were also poorly managed and equipped. This affected proficiency and thus explains why the Baptist lost many of their schools to the government in 1971 (Laye, 1996, p. 3). In fact, till date, Baptist primary schools still lag behind other denominational schools.

In the domain of health, the Baptist increased campaigns on the need for personal hygiene and community health. Respect for God was likened to cleanliness. However, their initial attempts at erecting Health Centres met with resistance in some areas. The Fon of Ndu, the headquarters of Ndu Field for instance, vehemently objected to the construction of a full-fledged hospital in his area of jurisdiction. The chief and his palace attendants' conception of a hospital was that of a "carrier of diseases". This line of thought was against a bitter experience with the colonial administrators who followed the missionaries. Their rule was not only brutal but was also immoral as they raped girls, women and introduced venereal diseases amongst the Wimbun (Geh, 2008. Personal Communication). Given this experience, the Fon of Ndu and his officials were unanimous in their belief that the creation of a hospital could introduce strange and deadly diseases amongst the people (Laye, 1996, p. 6). This initial resistance deterred the creation of health units in Mbumland. For instance, between 1927 and 1963, the Baptist administered only the Ndu Tea Estate Health Centre, a Dispensary and Maternity in Ndu around the Joseph Merick Baptist College (JMBC) campus and a Health Post at Saah. Evidently these few and poorly equipped health units could not meet the need of the Mbum people and thus the majority travelled to neighbouring Bui Division for medical attention where there was the Bansa Baptist Hospital which opened its doors to the public on the 1 May 1949. As of 2008, Ndu Field had only one major Health Centre located in Ndu and five primary healthcare centres located in Mbipgo, Luh, Saah, Sina and Mbabur.

However, the few personnel of the health posts cracked down on traditional methods of healing such as, ritual lacerations on the body, bath prohibition, rituals and sacrifices that were demanded by witch doctors as healing dues. It must be noted that while few Christians stopped visiting traditional healers, many regarded the health centres in Mbumland as a travesty of indigenous healing practices. Traditional doctors had acquired fame due to their ability to heal chronic diseases such as epilepsy, madness, fractures, nightmares, witchcraft oppression, issues which the Baptist Health Unit could not handle very successfully. As such, while the Baptist missionaries referred to traditional healers as using ungodly means to administer healing, many Mbum people viewed the traditional healer's ability to heal some chronic diseases as the major yard-stick in comparing the efficacy of modern medicine. In this light, many did not actually reject Baptist Health Units which served largely as centres for delivery, consultation, advice

and hygiene. Yet, their inability to heal chronic diseases helped to further advertise the potency of traditional healers. Baptist reference to indigenous healing as ungodly thus created only murmuring discontent amongst the Wimbun. Christian involvement in traditional healing was frowned at by the church and hospital but no adequate substitute was presented. With the prevalence of indigenous practices alongside Christian doctrine since 1927 in Mbumbani, it is possible that the former impacted on the latter.

Impact of Indigenous Belief System on the Practice of Baptist Faith in Mbumbani

At the core of indigenous religion is the desire to manipulate and placate the divine powers through ancestors. As such, the spiritual world, it was believed, was accessible to those who commanded respect and obedience by their ability to ward-off the threats of evil spiritual forces. To the church, indigenous religion super-imposed a strange layer of stratification on a believer's relationship with God resulting in what Wirsiy calls - a weakening of the influence of a person's biblical relation to God and the total abandonment of religious and covenant commitment (Wirsiy, 1995, p. 62). This is indicative of the fact that many Wimbun Christians were not really gripped by the word of God which challenges and confirms, persuades and dissuades the people from within their cultural milieu to re-examine their religious virtues in the light of the driving forces behind them (Wirsiy, 1995, p. 63).

Indigenous religiosity was a system that valued definite interpersonal relationships. In its practice, no individual was independent. There existed an observable inter-dependence in society and in all of life, especially when it relates to the worship of the gods. The people valued a vertical relationship with the dead and horizontal relationship within the village, clan and the entire ethnic group. The ethnic solidarity was not wholly transposed into Christian unity. This remained a major challenge to the Christian churches in Mbumbani. As Mbiti puts it,

The question now is, can the church as the body of Christ, take over this consciousness of self-existence, transposing the individual from the tribal solidarity to Christian or church solidarity centred and rooted in Christ (Mbiti, 1972, p. 61).

As noted earlier if the church succeeds in transposing the existing ethnic solidarity into Christian solidarity with its individualistic characteristics, its implications on the Wimbun would be disastrous as the basis for the survival of the society would be destroyed.

It is also important to observe that Mbumbani Christians did not easily identify with the church's perspective on the spirit world as this had no match with the African World view. Most Wimbun could not have access to a translation of the entire Bible into the Limbun. Even where it existed (for instance there is a translation of the New Testament into the Limbun), its understanding was limited only to those who had acquired mission education and mastered the Limbun alphabet. Hence, many indigenous Mbumbani people learned from an interpreter or some literate people who pastored and taught in Limbun. These interpreters used borrowed words to translate scriptural terms like "demons" or they gave a direct translation of the term "evil spirit". These terms were usually not culturally familiar and, in most cases, came across as "bad breath". This gave the Wimbun listener the impression that the spirits mentioned in the Bible were unique to Jewish culture. In other words, Bible doctrine about spirits applied to Jewish society or culture but not their own. As a result, when pastors and Christian teachers, in their Bible lessons, taught the believers that traditional religion and its practices were things of the past and thus urged them to forsake them, it did not have a lasting effect on the Christian converts. The Wimbun were aware of the powerful and fearsome spirits in their land and the "believers" knew very well that the indigenous pastor, who minimised or rejected the power of traditional religion from the pulpit, was in reality very much afraid of those forces active in

their culture. The unconvincing nature of Christian teaching rendered Christianity simply a matter of believing and not living.

Also, the ultimate end of Wimbun indigenous religion was geared towards meeting the needs of the people. Mbum Christians who grew within the traditional religious milieu experienced spiritual attacks in dreams. Hence the constant reminder that they should not put their trust in charms for protection against dangerous spirits did not offer immediate help to them especially if they could not sleep peacefully because the spirit of a witch was perturbing them. Yensi explains that, when the relative or child of a Christian showed signs which indicated that “a god has stolen the child or relatives’ spirit” the Christian was not helped by mere restriction from consulting a sorcerer. In fact, the parents were almost certain that the child or the relative would die if the spirit of the child was not rescued and restored (Kwalar, 2019. Personal Communication). Very few pastors went beyond the prohibition and to actually handle and resolve the problem at hand. The logical conclusion in the minds of most Christians was that the gospel did not really offer answers to their needs. They thus chose to help themselves through the traditional means that previously proved effective. Here, it can be noted that indigenous religion heightened the problem of lack of faith in the gospel teachings which till date is a major hindrance to the qualitative growth of the church in Mbumland.

To many converted Mbum people, the hope in Christ was something for posterity. Believe in Christ was interpreted as a means to go into the kingdom of heaven after the earthly life. The message of salvation from hell was and is still to come and eternity commences only after death. Indigenous Christians with this understanding reverted to traditional practices in the face of present trouble because of the feeling that Christianity and the scriptures were irrelevant to their pending or present predicament. The Christians thus resorted to leading double lives under the excuse that many of the rituals, charms and even gods of their culture were not really evil. Wirsiy recounted a discussion on the topic of healing practices wherein a pastor observed that the person who was sick should be free to look to any source for help without seeking to know what powers a given healer relied on. He related from his own experience, how he had been healed from a prolonged sickness by a traditional healer who used supernatural means to remove objects placed in his body by a witch. He thus concluded that all healing powers come from God and also stressed that whether the powers are given to men, to spirits of objects, God expects man to use what He has provided for the good of all. Therefore, something which can heal cannot be evil, an indication that traditional healing irrespective of the means should not be discouraged if it yields positive results (Wirsiy, 1995, p. 23).

In Tabenken Deacon Daniel Njeba of the Tabenken Baptist Church wondered whether the “good gods” found in Mbumland were not the angels the scriptures talk about. It could be observed that Wimbun Christians were caught up in the dilemma of perspectives. They learned and were made to understand from their culture that everything which could be of help to humanity was good and on the other hand Christian missionaries told them that everything of the indigenous culture was pagan worship and thus not beneficial to their lives as Christians. These bi-polar opinions kept Christian converts in a confused state which was exacerbated by the great social pressure from within the culture to comply with the demands of traditional religion. In fact, while the church in Mbumland advocated for a revival to purge the Christian church of “traditional tendencies” the indigenous population elated themselves in fanning flames of cultural revival aimed at maintaining the pristine nature of Wimbun culture. The result of the cultural tussle was many Christians were forced to live double lives thereby adjusting their Christians beliefs to suit with indigenous cultural demands.

Another major impact of traditional religion on the church was the fact that very few indigenous leaders were bona-fide practising Christians. The local chiefs, quarter heads and family heads were basically traditional religionists. The inability of the church to make the gospel appealing to a large number of this coterie of individuals affected the quantitative composition of the church in Mbumland. These leaders commanded respect and their wish was considered the will of the people. The aura that surrounded them by dint of their position would have served the church positively because where the “Chief is, there the people will be”. Unfortunately, these chiefs were regarded by some Christians as strongholds that must be broken for the gospel to progress since the former were epitomes of traditional religion with all its rituals and sacrifices—something the church loathed. The absence of these custodians of tradition in the church remained a challenge to the church in Mbumland. However, since many could not be converted, they were allowed to attend church services even in that state (with caps on and sitting on a special stool) in anticipation that conversion would take place in due time.

Furthermore, the church entrusted leadership in the society not only to practising traditional religionists but also to compromising Christians. This explains why the men who in most cases were family heads did not take the Christian faith seriously. As noted earlier, rulership in general and specifically in the individual household was largely the function of the men and it meant providing solutions to the problems of life faced by the family. Indigenous culture worked out strategies for dealing with these problems (through religious rituals and sacrifices). The Christian church in Mbumland prevented its adherents from making use of these methods of problem resolution but did not offer new ways of tackling the problems at hand, except through prayers to God. Little wonder that the men who were leaders in society and family, often indicted the Christian faith for being impractical. As a direct result, few homesteads functioned as Christian families in which the father was the spiritual leader but those who did not adhere to this were still allowed in the church. Some unbelieving fathers also prevented their children and wives from attending services making church attendance to constantly fluctuate.

The picture of Christianity in Mbumland was therefore that of syncretism. The Christians knew the potency of the spirit world and feared it but were still to see the power of God demonstrated in Christ. They looked to their Christian faith for final salvation in the world beyond but also to traditional religious practices for now solutions. The Christians faith had little ideological impact on the Wimbun Christians. Many were only conscious of Christianity without any deep conviction of its ability to save. Christianity was not considered a replacement for cultural tenets but was looked upon as something additional to one’s traditional culture and religion. It was popularly identified with some aspects of progress that came in the wake of missionary efforts. Traditional religious ideas, beliefs, and practices found expression in the practice of Christianity in Mbumland and this can be elucidated.

The First Baptist Church in Mbumland was built in 1927 and was made up of mud walls, and thatched. As the gospel penetrated the rest of Mbumland, grass thatched church buildings began to appear everywhere in the area (Laye, 1996, p. 12). The beauty of these churches was kept alive by *ndumbu* and the *nkeng*. Utilisation of these plants to sustain the beauty of the church was reminiscence of the Wimbun cultural heritage. Mud brick was a colonial introduction but the soil was natural component of Wimbun environment and the Mbum people always considered the earth to be sacred. The use of raffia palms in construction was a common practice in Mbumland especially with the emergence of the *mfuh* society, a war club formed for the purpose of arresting the fulbe raids. Members utilised this plant in decorating its buildings and shrines. The plant also had other relevance in Mbumland which is now lost in

antiquity. The *ndumbu* also known as *nkfu ngombe* or king plantains was usually planted in Mbumland to complete the cycle of twin rituals and was indicative of the willingness of the parents to always provide the twin children with food amidst all odds. This was because the roasted form of the plantains is soft and was food for children especially when rubbed in palm oil (Nkeh, 2006, p. 26). Its use for decoration in church coupled with the use of the *nkeng* plant which is associated with royalty and peace were typical of Wimbun culture. Even with the advent of western technology, which led to the construction of homes with cement, the practice of decorating the church with raffia palms was still alive especially during major occasions. The missionaries surely considered this plant as a symbol of peace and prosperity and decided to adapt it to worship so as to attract those who were very much attached to indigenous religious beliefs.

In Mbumland, perhaps with exception of Nkambe, Binju and Ndu Baptist Churches where translations were made during services into English, most services were and still are conducted largely in the Wimbun language. Most pastors of the churches in Mbumland were indigenous or those who had learned the language-limbun. In a bid to render the gospel more real, the New Testament of the Bible was translated into Limbun by the Bible Society of Cameroon in 2003. The Campus Crusade for Christ, an association sanctioned by section 38 of the Baptist Constitution as a partner in evangelism also translated the of Jesus film into Limbun. The film has been projected all over Mbumland to allow every citizen get the gospel in Limbun. This forward step was aimed as Wimbunising the gospel or better still, making the local Christians adapt easily to Christianity. While these represent a significant step forward giving the church a Mbum coloration, it was limited only to the literate few because the majority of the Wimbun were literate in Western education and hence could not read the translated version of Christian literature. Only the pastors and other educated individuals could read and then explain to the indigenous population in their language.

The utilisation of Wimbun traditional instruments, rhythm and dance in the church represented another cultural practice that the church adopted. Indigenous drums and musical instruments such as *mbah* (rattle), *ngem* (gong), *lsong* (flute) animated worship service that was characterised by songs with either the *njuh*, *samba* and *toh* rhythms. This combination of traditional sounds and instruments led to the creation of one of the most popular dances in Mbumland-Juda which usually crannies of Mbum society and is appreciated in almost all churches in Anglophone Cameroon. Also, Christian songs in English were translated into Limbun, making worship in most services to be largely in the vernacular.

It is also striking to note that the siting pattern in most Wimbun churches like what obtains in First Baptist Church, Ndu, Mbanka Baptist Church, Mbuwarr Baptist Church to name a few, is a replay of Wimbun cultural practice. The Wimbun society esteemed the men very highly and as such, during ceremonies such as wake-keeping, burials, family meetings and festivals, the men were always separated and seated apart from the women. In line with this practice, separate organisations emerged for men and women. For instance, the *mfuh*, *samba* and the *nwerong* are purely masculine organisations while the *njuh* and *toh* dances were the preserve of women. This pattern of division still exists in the church in Mbumland today as the men and women sit separately during worship services. In some churches, women could not teach the men's wing or organ of the church. Also, the churches where the chief attended church services he was given a special seat in front of the church and his outfit was not questioned. The option therefore to put his cap on or remove it was personal. The sitting pattern in the church and the respect accorded to the chief during service was thus synonymous to the traditional symmetry

and thus indicative of the extent to which indigenous cultural practices influenced the practice of Christianity in Mbum society.

The church in Mbumland also respected traditional working days and thus most church programmes such as Bible Studies and Prayer Meetings were scheduled on traditional Sundays or public holidays known in Limbum as *Mbomla*. Other programmes such as the Short Term Bible School that usually lasted a week or two were organised in a manner that permitted the Wimbun to continue with their traditional practices without any major stress. In 2008 for example, the classes were to attend the classes and also continue with their subsistence agricultural and other occasions like Baptismal Service, rallies (Youth, Men and Women), Association and Field meetings was usually the traditional corn fufu and vegetables known in Mbumland as *mbaa a njamsfur*. The local Christians prided themselves in preparing this meal and other snacks such as groundnuts and maize. It should be noted that decision making in the church was done by indigenous Christians who were not unaware of their culture. The choice of traditional public holidays for church meetings and traditional dishes during church ceremonies was just a manifestation of their cultural consciousness. It was also common for indigenous Christians to bring *shaah* and palm wine during such meetings despite the fact that the Baptist Church in particular had a stance against alcoholic drinks.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study has shown that before European contacts with African societies, the latter had developed a well-established culture and traditional out look that was difficult to efface. Though the brand of Christianity introduced in Africa and Mbumland in particular by the agents of colonialism (Baptist Mission Missionary Society), had an inherent superiority slant, the impact on the people of Mbumland was different. Instead of indigenous cultural and traditional practices coming under Christianity as a result of the contacts, there was culture sharing as the Wimbun only imbibed aspects of Christianity that were congruent and suitable to the self-concept of their society. In order to function well within the society, the Baptist Faith also had to indigenise and respect traditional injunctions. Hence the syncretism and nominalism experienced in births, death and burial practices, education and health and the actual practice of the Baptist faith in Mbumland, was the result of pressure to adjust to what in their opinion was not practical.

The study on the mutualism between indigenous culture in Mbumland and Christian values as propagated by the Baptist Mission makes quite some revelations. Not only has the study established the corporeality of the effective implantation of the Baptist Mission in Mbumland but the symbiotic relations between indigenous culture and biblical doctrine has been assessed. To a reasonable degree, the study has demonstrated the *modus operandi* of the Baptist Mission in Mbumland which was invariably tailored to respond to local realities. In addition, Christian values began having significant impact on virtually every aspect of the quotidian lifestyles of the people including nuptial and funeral rites plus the indigenous education and health systems. On the other hand, indigenous culture also significantly impacted Christian practices and values including the manner in which church houses were constructed. The study thus reveals that while Mbumland was being Christianised, Christianity itself imbibed indigenous values and adopted a local complexion specially to suit the practical circumstances. Another interesting finding made by the study is that an evitable outcome of the mutualism between Christianity and indigenous culture in Mbumland was the development of syncretism and nominalism in religious practices. These phenomena became entrenched especially within the Baptist Church as the indigenous people struggled to adjust to the realities of the new religion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that the study positions itself within a peculiar academic niche which emphasizes that the advent of the Baptist Mission in Mbumland led to indigenous culture simultaneously affecting and being affected by Christian values as well as the unhealthy outcome of nominalism and syncretism in Christian practices, there is need to make some recommendations. Firstly, stakeholders and the chain of command of the Cameroon Baptist Convention must and quickly recognise the urgent necessity to indigenise many aspects of Christian practices that have not yet been affected by indigenous culture of Mbumland. Some of these aspects include perceptions about indigenous medical practices and other core indigenous values necessary for the growth of the church. In the second place, there is an increasing need not only to introduce the teaching of indigenous cultural values in the training schools for pastors and church leaders but also to ensure that church leaders imbibe basic indigenous cultural practices especially those that are not in opposition to biblical edicts. This would be translated into peaceful coexistence between Christian beliefs and indigenous cultural values.

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